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The Irish Confederation in County Tipperary in 1848

By William Nolan

On the morning of Saturday 29 July 1848 a party of some 50 policemen under the command of Sub-Inspector Thomas Trant of Callan police station was proceeding from Ballingarry in the direction of the Mining Company of Ireland's village of The Commons in order to effect the arrest of William Smith O'Brien M.P. Moving east they spotted a barricade ahead of them defended by armed men and a large crowd. Fearful of the consequences of an engagement in countryside where they could be easily hemmed in, Trant ordered his men to turn sharply to the north and take refuge in a two-storied farmhouse which commanded a strategic position.

The subsequent events of that wet July Saturday at the Widow McCormack's house shaped Irish history. This article is concerned more with the preceding period than with the affray or its consequences. What were the local dimensions of this conflict? Why were O'Brien and his fellow Young Ireland Confederates in South Tipperary? To what extent did their presence reflect support for the radical policies of the Confederation?

In late July 1846 O'Connell's peace resolution "that there are no circumstances in this or any other country to justify the use of physical force for the attainment of political amelioration" was answered by Thomas Francis Meagher in Conciliation Hall. Meagher's reply, earning him the sobriquet "Meagher of the Sword", irrevocably widened the chasm between Young and Old Irishmen.¹

Abhor the sword and stigmatise the sword? No, my lord, for in the cragged passes of the Tyrol it cut in pieces the banner of the Bavarian and won an immortality for the peasant of Innsbruck. (Hear) Abhor the sword and stigmatise the sword? No, my lord, for at its blow a giant nation sprung up from the waters of the far Atlantic and by its redeeming magic the fettered colony became a daring free republic.

John O'Connell silenced Meagher, suggesting bluntly

that the sentiments he has this day avowed are sentiments directly and diametrically opposed to the sentiments of the founder of this Association, and that therefore this Association must cease to exist, or Mr Meagher cease to be a member of it.

The break long signalled was now irrevocable; Meagher's supporters, including William Smith O'Brien, John Mitchel, Rev. Mr Meehan, Gavan Duffy, Captain Bryan and Devin Reilly walked out of Conciliation Hall – the first steps of a journey that would eventually lead to the Widow McCormack's. Although many attempts were made to effect a reconciliation between the moral and physical force factions, both sides remained firm in their convictions.

The secessionists established the Irish Confederation on 13 January 1847 and in many respects it was a mirror image of Repeal.² Its defining difference was the Confederate Clubs, projected as adult schools of nationality for the political education of the Irish people as prescribed by Young Ireland. Richard O'Gorman Jnr proposed the formation of Confederate Clubs at a Confederation meeting on 14 July 1847 as a response to the continued attacks by



Repeal Association supporters at public meetings. Ostensibly established to defend Young Ireland speakers, the idea owed much to the Repeal reading rooms and the more radical artisan societies in France and Germany.

All the prominent Young Irelanders were associated with the formation of Clubs in Dublin and elsewhere. John Kavanagh, wounded in the affray at the Widow McCormack's, exemplifies the young urban political activist drawn inexorably to participate in the heady world of the Confederation.³ Son of a dispossessed Wexford farmer, forced to vacate an ancestral farm because of alleged complicity in 1798, Kavanagh was busy establishing himself in the coal trade in Harold's Cross in early 1848.

Initially he was invited to join the Trades and Citizens Committee established "for the avowed purpose of uniting the Young and Old Ireland parties". At the first major public meeting at the North Wall on 21 March 1848 "all the members of the committee walked two and two, having green ribbons as a mark of nationality in their breasts". The meeting was called to "offer our congratulations to the provisional government [of France] and to enlist their sympathy for our cause".

Although the initial success of the revolution in Paris excited popular feeling in Ireland and lead to a plethora of celebratory meetings, it was Mitchel's arrest, trial and conviction under the Treason Felony Act which galvanised Club activity in Dublin. The failure of the Dublin Clubs, however, to stage any effective protest at Mitchel's transportation, and the interminable wrangling which protracted decision-making, boded ill for the future.

The impact of both the split in the Repeal Association and the subsequent formation of the Irish Confederation on popular politics in County Tipperary is not clear. Neither is it easy to assess the level of support for the Irish Confederation in the county. Rarely in Tipperary, apart from the police informations submitted to the Castle after the events of 29 July 1848, was the term Confederate Club known, and the evidence suggests that the distinction between Repealers and Confederates was very much a paper one.

The description "repealers of the other section" used by the *Tipperary Vindicator* in its report on the formation of the Irish League represents, with some accuracy, the ambiguity which persisted.⁴ An examination of the account book of the Irish Confederation, which lists subscriptions from clubs and individuals from February 1847 to June 1848, indicates the limited financial support forthcoming from county Tipperary.⁵

TABLE 1
Subscriptions from county Tipperary to Irish Confederation

Place	Date of first subscription	Number of subscribers	Amounts subscribed (£)
Templederry	8 Feb. 1847	1	2.12 6
Tipperary Town	15 March 1847	26	4.18.6
Borrisoleigh	22 March 1847	1	5.0
Carrick-on-Suir	7 May 1847	2	1. 2.0
Thurles	17 June 1847	17	5. 8.6
Cashel	1 November 1847	4	11. 9.6
Kilcash	10 January 1848	4	4.0
Clonmel	23 May 1848	26	6.19.0
Roscrea	30 May 1848	2	2. 0.0
		83	34.19.0



This list, when compared to the Tipperary Clubs in Table 2, demonstrates the great gulf between the written word and reality.⁶ The nine subscribing centres suggest an urban bias if one regards Templederry and Kilcash as rural clubs, with the greater number of subscribers coming from the towns of Tipperary (26), Clonmel (26) and Thurles (17). If the subscribers are equated with club numbers, it is obvious that no Tipperary club could have had the organisational structure described by John Kavanagh in respect of Dublin clubs; “clubs were divided into sections or companies of thirty to each section; over every section there was a regular officer and over every four sections there was a vice-president, the President being overall”.

TABLE 2
The Tipperary Clubs

Name	President/Officers	Membership
Carrick-on-Suir (eleven clubs)	Anthony O’Ryan	1185
Roscrea United Repealers Club	Richard Egan, E.G. Egan	369
King Cormac Club, Cashel	Michael Doheny	500
John Mitchel Club, Clonmel	William Baily, John Bailey, Anthony Lawless, Thomas Cantwell	280
Fitzgerald Club, Cahir	Mr Ryan	
Marlfield, Clonmel	Robert Mercer	
Tipperary Club	Mr Butler, President Surgeon Thomas Ryan, Mr Matthews	
Harvey Morris Club, Nenagh		
O’Meara & Fulton Club, Nenagh	Matthew Kennedy, Matthew McGrath, Robert Fox, John Cunningham, Mr Crosbie	
Martin Lanigan Repeal Club, Thurles	Patrick Phelan, William Ryan, Jn Mullaney	700
Powerstown, Clonmel	Mr R. O’Connor	700
Hugh O’Neill Club, Clonmel	Mr R. Mercer, James O’Connell, John Browne, Sec.	70
Ballyneale Club	John O’Mahony	
Wolf Tone Club, Borrisoleigh	George Burke	
Nine Mile House	Mr. Coughlan	
Clancassan Club, Kilcash	Patrick O’Hannigan	
Galtamore Club, Aherlow		
Mile Tree		
New Castle		
Clerihan		
Grange		
Dr Keating, Bansha	Mr Ashe, Ashgrove	
The Fontenoy, Clonmel		
Fr Sheehy, Clonmel		
Mullinahone Repeal Club	Thomas Wright	100
Fethard	John Hally	3
Boolagh		
Drum/Templebeg		
Kilshcelan	Mr O’Donnell, Ballyboe	
Ballycahill	Mr Fogarty, Garryvanus, Rev Fr Ryan	

Sources: *The Nation*, *Tipperary Free Press*, *Tipperary Vindicator*.



Significantly, there was only one subscriber (Father John Kenyon) in Templeberry and Michael Doheny paid £10/11/0 of the £11/9/6 collected in Cashel. Subscriptions to the Irish Confederation from the whole country amounted to £916/18/7 in the same period and about £400 of this was paid by 100 members. Kenyon's contributions began soon after the inauguration of the Confederation in January 1847 but neither Roscrea nor Clonmel contributed until May 1848.

Table 2 lists the Tipperary Confederate Clubs recorded in newspaper accounts or in reports transmitted by local informants to Dublin Castle. Most had a short-lived existence and even those with formal structure and recognised affiliation to Confederation headquarters in Dublin rapidly disbanded when the government issued its edict of 26 July 1848. The discussion which follows examines the geographical distribution of Tipperary Clubs, their evolution, activities and their known members, and is organised primarily around the principal towns of the county.

Tipperary Town

Seventy-one of the "middle" citizens of Tipperary town signed a poster requesting a meeting of the inhabitants of the parish of Tipperary on Sunday 9 April 1848 at the "Butter Weigh-house for the purpose of adopting an address to the men of Paris!!! Congratulating them on their independent assertion of the People's Sovereignty."⁸ The poster was quickly dispatched to Dublin by Charles Hunt, the resident magistrate, who classified the signatories according to economic status and political sympathies.

Five town commissioners – Richard Dalton, James Fahey, Richard Scully, Patrick Keating and William Lonergan – were among the organisers. Dalton, a baker, was described as "a leader and an out-and-out republican"; Richard Scully was a spirit dealer on Main Street. William Lonergan was "a relative of the man that was hanged for Mr Roe's murder".

Three Poor Law Guardians – Jeremiah Grant ("formerly a steward, has a farm near the town"); Michael Moloney and John Dwyer also appended their names, as did Michael Hanrahan, "shopkeeper sent to the Relief Committee". The organisers were representative of the retailers of the town and were differentiated generally by Hunt as either "shopkeepers" or "low shopkeepers". Some of them had been active in the Repeal Movement.

Theobald Morrissey, for example, a draper in Main Street, had spoken at a Repeal meeting in 1831 and was subsequently president of Tipperary Mechanics Institute, a non-political debating society established in the 1830s. Apart from singling out Dalton, the magistrate Hunt noted that Patrick Dwyer, a baker, was "a red hot Young Irelander and claims Dundrum estate now Hawardens", and also described Edward Butler as "an out-and-out republican".

"The Temperance Band", Hunt reported, gathered a crowd which marched to the meeting and soon filled the store, but none of the respectable inhabitants of Tipperary was at it. Mr Patrick Dwyer, baker, was called to the chair, and the meeting was addressed in very inflammatory language. "I was courteously received at the meeting and a place was made for me, and I think my presence was of use, as the speakers told the people to retire home quietly."⁹

There is no evidence of any other political activity in Tipperary town until 29 June 1848, when Magistrate Hunt sent a copy of a police report on two meetings held "on Sunday last and Tuesday",¹⁰ noting that the same violent parties alluded to in his report of 9 April "were now the office bearers in a Confederate Club. They had hired a large room over the old butter crane in Bridge Lane from Mr James Hartcourt, shopkeeper, for 12/6 per month."¹¹

The officers recorded were Richard Dalton, President, Edward Butler, Secretary, Dr Thomas



Ryan, surgeon, Treasurer, and James Noonan, a clerk in Mr David Ferguson's pawn office, with five others "whose names I have at present been unable to ascertain are appointed a committee. Several of the lower orders have been enrolled as members."

The police inspector was unable to ascertain whether its members were bound by "oath or known by signs or passwords". "I believe," he wrote, "that the object for which the Club has been formed is to obtain a repeal of the Union by force. Each member must promise to be armed within a fortnight after been [*sic*] admitted. It is currently reported that Mr Meagher [Thomas Francis Meagher] is to attend on Sunday next to give the club its name." Perhaps this is the meeting held in Bridge Lane where "every accommodation was afforded to the constabulary who attended to watch them". There is no reference to Meagher attending.

The records of the Irish Confederation¹² indicate that subscriptions from Tipperary town began on 15 March 1847 when Edward Butler transmitted £3.10.6 for thirteen named members. Subscriptions are further recorded on 13 September 1847 (10/-) to December 1847 (5/-) and 17 June 1847 (7/6). Some of the payees had been organisers of the 9 April meeting.

Clonmel

Clonmel presents an example of the evolution of a Trades Club to a Confederate Club, a process which has striking parallels with that in Dublin. William Ryan, the Clonmel magistrate, was a particularly able correspondent of the Castle. His appointment was, John O'Connell stated in the House of Commons, "specially objectionable to the people of the district with whom he had always been in a state of bitter hostility. Yet the government had not only appointed him in opposition to the wishes of the members for the county and two of the boroughs, but they had actually gone beyond the law to do so, as he was older than the regulations for that office prescribed".¹³

In March 1848 Ryan informed the Lord Lieutenant¹¹ of "three tar barrels placed in Johnson's Street at the Main Guard and at the West Gate and set fire to. After they were burning for some time they commenced rolling them up and down the street very much to the annoyance of the inhabitants. They were lit in consequence of the Revolution in France!" Subsequently on the night of 27 March "the district of Kilsheelan was illuminated with fires and they also extended into the county of Waterford in consequence of a report that reached Carrick-on-Suir that His Excellency had left Dublin through fear".¹⁵

By the end of March formal meetings of the "Young Ireland Party" had taken place at a house near West Gate; "it only comprised of the same persons as the last, a set of Town Tradesmen. The chief Speakers were an apprentice to the editor of *Free Press*, and a shoemaker named Keefe; at this meeting their object was to get subscriptions to buy arms and carry out the principles they read of in the *United Irishman*. The agent to that paper is a Mr Connell, an agent to Mr Bianconi, who has apartments in the military barracks in Bagwell Street".¹⁶

The arrests and trials of O'Brien, Meagher and Mitchel provided the immediate occasion for a "Great Demonstration of the Trades" at "The Ormond Hotel yard" on 2 April.¹⁷ The organisers, affixing the headline of *Fraternity, Liberty, Nationality* to their poster, appealed to the "Trades and Operatives of Clonmel irrespective of party, politics, class or creed to come together to pronounce that Ireland must be free".

According to Magistrate Ryan, who duly dispatched the poster and a detailed report on the meeting to Dublin Castle, about 2,000 people attended. He noted that they chiefly consisted of "tradesmen, and the Chair was taken by James England, a stone mason. Rev Mr Meaney RCC, Thomas Kennedy, a cutler, Barrett, a slater, John Brown, a baker, Thomas Downey and Mr

Peter McKeevy, a soft goods merchant; all addressed the gathering, emphasising in their speeches that "it was not for Young Ireland or Old Ireland, but for All Ireland they were, and recommended sobriety".

The meeting passed four resolutions encompassing sympathy for the prisoners and determination to stand by them; recommending that a petition be passed

once more, and once more only, to the Queen to exercise her prerogative and assemble an Irish Parliament in College Green; that every exertion even at the hazard of life, be determinedly, continuously and constitutionally made by the meeting until Ireland shall have obtained her just rights from an English government; that the resolutions and proceedings of the meeting be published in the Tipperary Free Press and Nation newspapers and on the amendment of the Rev Mr Meany, also in the United Irishman.

Writing to the Castle the following day, 3 April,¹⁸ Ryan added that the party who met yesterday "styled themselves independents". John Brown, the secretary appointed at the meeting, stated that it was the intention of the trades of Clonmel to form a club and observed "for if the Wexford men were sober we would not now be working for independence."¹⁹

Apart from some "illuminations" and "rockets" organised to celebrate the acquittals of O'Brien and Meagher, it was the transportation of Mitchel in June which galvanised club activity in Clonmel. Regretting "the apathy of the Repealers of Clonmel in the present crisis in their country's fate", they resolved that a "club to be called the John Mitchel Club be immediately formed embracing and combining all true United Repealers till we obtain a secure and national parliament for Ireland."²⁰

Ryan duly reported that the meeting on Monday was attended by "a number of clerks, tradesmen, shopkeepers; the chairman was a Mr David Thornton who keeps a general shop for the sale of hardware and is licensed to keep gunpowder and firearms, he being a seller prior to the passing of the Crime and Outrage Act. There is also a meeting to be held this day in the Brewery Concerns in Bagwell Street, I believe lately purchased by Mr Bianconi."²¹

The Club Room was in Bagwell Street and arrangements were made to hold a special meeting on 12 June for the admission and enrolment of members. It was at this stage that the unity negotiations in Dublin impinged on Club procedure. Some members of the John Mitchel Club wanted their subscriptions sent directly to Dublin "so that the members of this body be enrolled as Confederates and recognised as a Confederate Club"; others suggested that the money be held over until the committees of the Irish Confederation and Conciliation Hall be written to concerning the contemplated union between them.²²

This proposal, put as an amendment, was defeated by 9 votes to 27. The money was duly sent and on 21 June 1848 Richard O'Gorman proposed the admission to the Irish Confederation of 95 members of the John Mitchel Club and 17 from the Hugh O'Neill Club.²³ On 24 June subscriptions were taken for the fund for



Terence Bellew McManus

the family of Mitchel and six new members were elected.²⁴ A committee of 24 was appointed on 5 July "to manage the affairs of the Club for the next six months" and a resolution was passed thanking the Irish Confederation for "their efforts in promoting the Irish League".²⁵

The mass gathering on Slicvenamon's summit on 15 July was the major but only public expression of Club numbers. The Club President, John Bailey, commenced the proceedings on that extraordinary day.²⁶ Bailey had been in Dublin the previous week with Wall and Cantwell from the Mitchel Club to speak at the meeting of the Irish League; "the Repealers of the other section according to the *Tipperary Vindicator* are for the most part unaccountably apathetic".²⁷

The intensification of political activity in Clonmel in June was marked by the foundation of a second club, appropriately called the Hugh O'Neill Club, to commemorate Clonmel's defence against Cromwellian forces in 1650. "The Chairman," Magistrate Ryan informed the authorities, "is a Protestant (Robert Mercer) but of no great stability; the secretary John Brown is a barber".²⁸ Ryan despatched to Dublin Castle the elaborate poster calling for a public meeting. It was not equivocal, but proclaimed "the Clonmel Hugh O'Neill Confederate Club", suggesting that the failure of the unity talks in Dublin had hardened divisions locally.

The carefully constructed poster provides evidence of the ideological background to Confederate politics. Buttressed with appropriate quotations stressing Ireland's qualifications for self-government, it linked past struggles to present opportunities. Beginning with the Four Masters, Ireland's last great annalistic compilers, it moved to Hugh O'Neill, defender of Clonmel, and followed through to the contemporary figures of Duffy, Meagher and O'Brien. It appealed then to the "Men of Clonmel" –

the spirit of Hugh O'Neill invokes you to the cause, the destiny of your country is in your hands, join and share in the coming struggle and be participators in its victory ... be free... be no longer slaves of foreign oppression. Rally that another year of famine may not desolate the fields of fatherland ... rally that you may live in the land of your fathers

The venue of the proposed meeting on Sunday 18 June, Mrs Cassin's on Main Street, was a carman's stage and the next recorded meeting of the Hugh O'Neill Club was in late June with Robert Mercer presiding.²⁹ Brown, the secretary, read the rules and spoke on the necessity of local organisation. Some new members were enrolled and, in keeping with the practice adapted by the Dublin Clubs, the committee of the John Mitchel Club attended. Perhaps it was to co-ordinate plans for the Slievenamon meeting. On Saturday 8 July the Hugh O'Neill Club met at its premises in Main Street; the chairman, Robert Mercer, advocated the union of all Repealers.

The Confederation receipts show that Clonmel subscribed 26 shillings and 6 pence on 23 May 1848.³¹ This suggests that the Hugh O'Neill Club was founded then, as the money was subsequently transmitted by John Brown, its secretary. The larger John Mitchel Club returned £4.15.0 on 24 June 1848, when the final payment of 14 shillings and 6 pence was received from the Hugh O'Neill Club.

Carrick-on-Suir

The first subscription to the Irish Confederation from Carrick-on-Suir was received on 7 May 1847; the second and last contribution (one pound) transmitted by Anthony O'Ryan came on 7 April 1848.³² Although there are many references to Club formation and activities in Carrick and its hinterland, evidence confirming the district as a core centre of Confederate politics is difficult to find. We are again faced with the problem of distinguishing locally between Repeal and Confedera.

O'Mahony's retrospective narrative and other details suggest that in early April a Repeal Club had been formed in Carrick and that they wished to propose O'Mahony for the Council of Three Hundred.³³ It also seems that a public banquet was held on St Patrick's Day 1848 to celebrate the revolution in Paris and to call for union between Repealers. John Purcell, apothecary, read an address to the French "hailing the revolution".³⁴

The *Tipperary Free Press* of 1 April carried a report on a meeting in Carrick to "reconciliate both sections of Repealers"³⁵ and had a comprehensive list of those attending which included members of the clergy, Rev Mr Byrne, C.C.; Rev Mr Power, C.C., Ballyneill, Rev Mr Shiel, Guardian of the Franciscan Friary; Rev Mr Mullins; C.C; strong farmers and professional men such as William O'Donnell, James O'Donnell of Ballybo, Dr Anthony O'Ryan, Patrick O'Hanrahan of Tinchogue and Felix O'Neill.

It may have been as a result of this meeting that James Cavanagh wrote asking John O'Mahony to allow his name go forward as the Carrick representative for the Council of Three Hundred. Because Carrick was the venue of Smith O'Brien's first foray, it features largely in post-rebellion intelligence reports co-ordinated by Coulson, the "hardline" magistrate brought from Tyrone to "mop-up". Father Larkin, a curate in a north Kilkenny parish, wrote to Coulson pleading for leniency for his brother, Patrick, who had been a Club President in the town.³⁶ Larkin stated that his brother had been ill advised and brought into the Club system by the influence of Mr Rivers of Tybroughney Castle, agent to Power of Bellvue, county Kilkenny.³⁷

Rivers belonged to a prominent Waterford commercial and banking family who had been involved in the development of Tramore as a tourist resort. He held property and was connected through the marriage of his sister Anne to Dr Anthony O'Ryan, President of the Central Board of the Confederate Clubs in Carrick-on-Suir. Another sister Harriet married into the Briscoe family, local landlords and magistrates.

The O'Ryanes were maternal relatives of John O'Mahony, so that all of the major figures in Confederate politics in Carrick were inter-related. Rivers was a promoter of tenant right; he subscribed to the Mitchel testimonial,³⁸ spoke at a meeting to condemn arrests and Gavan Duffy proposed his admission to the Irish Confederation on 21 June 1848.³⁹ Rivers was the Carrick delegate to the negotiations in Dublin in early June for unification between the two groups of Repealers.

In late July he was again in Dublin at the meeting of the Irish League in Abbey Street, which was also attended by Dr Robert Cane of Kilkenny. Coulson informed the Lord Lieutenant that the local Attorney Hayden told him that the farmers who had joined the Confederates had done so through fear "that the rebellion would be successful and wishing to save their property from destruction."⁴⁰

It seems that there were several clubs in Carrick organised on a sectoral basis and that, as O'Mahony records in his memoir, the Catholic curate, Fr Patrick Byrne, had a role similar – albeit in a more minor way – to that assumed by Kenyon in the Templederry district. On 21 April Fr Byrne admonished the *Evening Post*, the Dublin paper most hostile to Young Ireland and the political priests, and affirmed that:⁴¹

the priests of Ireland are determined to stand by and with the people, come what may; and should insane Whig policy drive them to the adoption of these means which the Milanese so successfully tried, like their sainted and glorious Archbishop, the Irish priest shall be found amid the fight invoking God's blessing on it. May God avert such a crisis! But should it come, may the wrongs of centuries nerve the arm of every Irishman.

The definition of a just war exercised church theologians throughout 1848. Writing to the *Tipperary Vindicator* on 15 July, Fr Byrne, maintaining the rights of priests to be involved, stated



his case:⁴² "To every theological student it is known that to bear arms the canons prohibit a cleric where to find a prohibition against counselling, directing his fellow countrymen in a just war". Such equivocation found no favour with Rev Mr Ryan, curate of Cashel, who strongly asserted in the same edition⁴³ "that any movement outside or against the law is not only rash but self-destructive. I therefore say that I would not feel at liberty to sacrifice the veriest beggar who crawls on the streets of Cashel for the Repeal of the Union. I, or any other right-minded man, could not do so, for life is the gift of God and he alone can recall it".



Michael Doheny

Subsequently Fr. Byrne assisted in calming Carrick "after a few persons were indicted for having spoken some military words on the occasion of the Clubs seeing Mr Doheny out of town on last Sunday week."⁴⁴ The normally sanguine sub-inspector of police, Mr Roche, had attempted the arrests "when not alone Carrick but all Tipperary was in excitement after the vast meeting of Slievenamon of the preceding evening". Those arrested included Mr Maher, secretary of the Repeal Club. Not only did Fr Byrne calm the town but with Richard O'Donnell and James Teehan managed to persuade O'Mahony and "hundreds of stalwart men coming from the country in aid of the townspeople to return home".

The *Evening Post* reported that Byrne had been arrested for sedition and was in prison, and he wrote, putting the record straight. His letter elaborates on his personal role in relation to the Clubs in Carrick and is totally at variance with that attributed to him by O'Mahony.

"I am not," Byrne stated, "a member of a Confederate Club. I have not assisted at their formation, but deeply concerned of the incalculable benefit a priest's presence would be to them, I am and will be (except prevented by my bishop) in the habit of visiting their rooms, and of affording my counsel together with my approbation; and I tell you the advice I used to give them and will give is this – in the first place for them to pray to Heaven to bring Ireland triumphant out of the ordeal through which she is now passing; and in the second place above all things not to tarnish their exertions in her cause by the violation of the rights of property or person".

Byrne's subsequent withdrawal was particularly resented by the Young Irelanders/Confederates. O'Mahony, his most vehement critic, placed him in the same category as Kenyon and the numerous others whose "*esprit du corps* was too strong for their feelings as patriots, and their duty as honest and consistent men."⁴⁵

There are conflicting estimates of the numbers of Clubs and their strength in Carrick. It appears to have been the only Tipperary town with a central committee (or Board as O'Mahony terms it) to act as a kind of forum for the Clubs. Duffy recalled that the banquet to com-

memorate the French revolution brought the Young and Old Irelanders together and in a short time eight clubs of United Repealers were enrolled and "it was estimated that they contained more than a thousand men fit to bear arms".⁴⁶

Eight other clubs were soon formed in the rural districts, bringing "the available men to about three thousand". Carrick Clubs may have represented sectoral interests in the town's artisan population, but it is clear that the leadership roles were filled by professional men such as Anthony O'Ryan, Joseph Rivers and John Purcell. The John Mitchel Club, for example, comprised the boatmen of the Lower Quay or Strand "with Mr N. Kenny as President and Mr Thomas Morrissey as Treasurer", and we can surmise that the St Nicholas Club, Lough Street, consisted of fishermen who harvested Suir waters.

Apart from the influence of Doheny and O'Mahony, both Thomas Francis Meagher and Gavan Duffy visited Carrick on 7 May.⁴⁷ After attending Mass they proceeded to a local hotel where Fr Byrne addressed them on behalf of the "United Repealers of Carrick". Byrne condemned the treatment by the authorities of the "persecuted patriots" and "breathed the most fixed determination to aid them in their struggle against the British government". Meagher's influence in Carrick was considerable and it is significant that when later O'Mahony offered either Meagher or Doheny to the Carrick men as leaders they choose Meagher.⁴⁸

July, as elsewhere in Tipperary, was the fateful month. The Central Committee of Repeal Clubs in the town met on Sunday 2 July, and adopted a resolution for presentation to the "different Clubs for their adoption", expressing "extreme dissatisfaction" at the obstacles presented by John O'Connell and other Repealers to the formation of the Irish League. They pledged themselves to support the "principles and carry out the policy of the League for the speedy Repeal of the Act of Union".⁴⁹ Subsequently the Club members assembled and re-affirmed their support for repeal of the Act of Union by peaceful means.

Such affirmation and confidence in its eventual realisation was largely based on the presumption that the British government would concede Repeal when it realised how well prepared and organised towns such as Carrick were. On Friday evening 7 July

*the ten Clubs drew up in one vast mass on the Green – a large plain of fifty acres in extent at the north of the town, and having marshalled themselves in military array, proceeding up New Street, groaning lustily as they filed past the police barracks and military barrack, both of which are in the same street, and cheering as loudly before the Club rooms – there could not be less than two thousand men in the procession.*⁵⁰

But amid the great show of strength there were ominous portents that the unity heralded by the news from France in March was breaking. "Several Repealers", the *Tipperary Vindicator* reported, "of the moral force school who joined the Clubs here under the impression that the members of Conciliation Hall and the Confederates would unite and form the League, seeing now no prospects of their expectations in the latter respect being realised, are beginning to stay away from the meetings".⁵¹

Doheny visited Carrick on 9 July to canvas support for his mass rally on Slievenamon, but it is apparent that both the failure of the unity talks and the silencing of young radical priests such as Fr Byrne by the Catholic hierarchy resulted in a smaller than expected attendance from Carrick at the mountain meeting. The heady rhetoric of early 1848 was suddenly silenced, and the almost laconic report in the *Waterford Chronicle* on 5 August subsequent to the proclamation suppressing Clubs of 26 July speaks volumes:⁵²

all the Clubs, which were established in Carrick-on-Suir, have been dissolved. The dissolution took place even previously to the issuing of the government proclamation.



Cashel

Apart from Doheny's involvement there is little information concerning political activity in Cashel during early 1848. Doheny had personally paid the subscriptions to the Confederation in November 1847 and the subscription of 2 December 1847 was attributed to three people.⁵³ There is a reference to the citizens meeting in the Chapel Yard to congratulate the Parisians, as well as various reports of Repeal meetings.⁵⁴ On 26 June William B. Upton, one of the many informants to the Castle scattered around Tipperary,⁵⁵ wrote that

Doheny, of whom Your Excellency may have heard, has just now organised a Club in this town – only one Protestant has joined them and he is an attorney. One of his colleagues is a young man named Ryan, who was some time ago accused by his father of criminal conversation with his wife – his father fired and wounded him in the eye, the sight of which he has lost. The field in which the Club met last evening belongs to a person named Power, who is a distiller and whose two sons have joined the Club. It appears that on Thursday next they are ostensibly to be occupied at football.

The failure of Cashel to respond to the visit of O'Brien and his companions in late July suggests that Doheny's efforts to establish Clubs in his adopted town were unsuccessful.

Thurles

Subscriptions from Thurles were sent to the Irish Confederation as early as 17 June 1847 and subsequently on 5 February and 7 April 1848. Fifteen members was the maximum paper strength of the Club, known as the Martin Lanigan Repeal Club.⁵⁶ The two principal "agitators" identified in police reports were Thomas Mullaney, a shopkeeper, also described as a "drunken shopkeeper", and Dan Daly, a carpenter.⁵⁷ Meetings were held at Mr Callanan's store in Fethard Street; Patrick Phelan, a shopkeeper, is returned as Club President.⁵⁸

Thomas Mullaney "induced a riotous mob after the news arrived of the French Revolution to call for illuminations and the military had to be called to protect the well-disposed". In a post-rebellion attempt to indict Mullaney, Constable Bracken told the Castle authorities that on the occasion of "His Excellency, the Lord Lieutenant's visit to Dundrum [Hawarden's property] a groan was called for him by a person in the crowd which I heard and believe to have been said by Thomas Mullaney".

Daly was accused of articulating violent opinions on the "occasion of Mr Doheny's transmission to Nenagh as a prisoner".⁵⁹ Apart from calling a policeman an "officer of the Bloody and Brutal Whigs" and shoving him through an open window, Thurles Club members were relatively peaceful.

Roscrea

It was not until 30 May 1848 that a subscription of two pounds from Roscrea was received by the Irish Confederation.⁶⁰ The primary figure in the United Repealers Club Roscrea was Edward Egan, a local distiller and secretary of the Famine Relief Committee. Egan attended the unity negotiations in Dublin, but does not otherwise feature in police reports until the post-rising period.

Two occurrences in Roscrea highlight both the nervousness of local loyalists and the determination of the administration to enforce the full rigour of the law. Postmistress Eleanor Shortt wrote the Lord Lieutenant on 28 February 1848,⁶¹ stating that

the town bellboy went about announcing that there would be a bonfire and illuminations for the **Great Victory had in Paris** – he did not say of what the victory consisted. The bonfire is now lighted on the land of a Roman Catholic of respectability [Egan] overlooking the *whole* town opposite my house. From the spirit I see abroad I feel little doubt but that the Post Office will be sacked before morning. However, *tho I am a woman it will not be done quietly; I will never light a candle even if they take my life.*

The conviction of Michael Guilfoyle, a cooper, for having in his possession a pistol barrel and a pike contrary to the Arms Act, by a jury “on which there were several Repealers and which was pretty evenly divided as to religion”, was considered as a significant victory by the local magistrates.⁶² In a search of Guilfoyle’s house “part of an old pistol barrel and a pike made in the form of a long fork squared like a bayonet and topped with steel at the points” was found.

The defence argued that the instrument was for agricultural purposes, to wit, a pitchfork, and the jury deliberated as to whether “an instrument with two prongs could be called a pike”. Kennedy, the smith who made the instrument, was produced as a witness for Guilfoyle.

But during cross-examination he admitted making it “as accurately as he could according to the instructions in a letter in the United Irishman Newspaper, of which a copy was found by the police in Guilfoyle’s house”. Guilfoyle was sentenced to twelve months’ imprisonment, whereupon Kenyon organised a public fund named “the pitchfork fund” for the support of Guilfoyle’s wife and their five children.⁶³

Nenagh

The newly recognised administrative and legal centre of Tipperary North Riding provides slim evidence for political activity. Nenagh, like Roscrea, was in the diocese of Killaloe, where Bishop Kennedy kept a tight rein on the political priests. No subscriptions from the town are recorded in the Irish Confederation accounts, but there were two clubs established here in 1848. Both, the Fulton and O’Meara and the Harvey Morris clubs, commemorated local activists in the 1798 rebellion. Significantly, in the context of Young Ireland’s attempts to span the sectarian divide, Fulton was a Protestant rector and O’Meara a Catholic priest.

We know that the President of the Fulton and O’Meara Club was Matthew Kennedy from Ballyhane, Templederry, close to Fr Kenyon’s house, and the committee comprised Martin Fox, a tailor, Richard Cunningham, a publican, Patrick McGrath, a pawnbroker and Martin McGrath, a blacksmith. Poppins, the printer referred to, may have worked in either the *Nenagh Guardian* or *Tipperary Vindicator* newspapers, both of which were printed in the town. Apart from a public meeting (reported to the Castle authorities on 4 June) held to protest at the packing of juries at the state trials, Nenagh was relatively quiescent in 1848.⁶⁴

The Irish Confederation had encouraged Clubs to adopt names which were commemorative of either epic national events or great political or military leaders. Andrew English, in proposing the name “98” for his Dublin Club, enunciated Confederate policy:⁶⁵ “When baptising a Club it was generally intended to bring to mind some glorious recollection of bygone days, and what a host of national feelings were aroused by the memory of the dead at the mention of that holy period in our country’s history”.

Tipperary’s Club names elaborated a similar hagiography and may suggest rather than prove Confederation sympathies. Carrick with its assumed eleven Clubs proudly proclaimed its past history. St Moleran was a holy man who founded an early Christian foundation;



St Nicholas of Myra, patron-saint of fishermen and of Carrick-on-Suir parish, was an appropriate title for the fishermen of the Suir.

Sarsfield maintained a link with the break of the Boyne. Lord Edward Fitzgerald evoked the United Irishmen. Robert Emmet kept the cause alive in 1803, and the dead Thomas Davis and deported John Mitchel suggested affiliations with the Young Irelanders. Elsewhere Tipperary's pantheon of past heroes included the tenth-century Bishop King, Cormac Mac Cuilleanan (Cashel), the seventeenth-century historian priest, Geoffrey Keating (Bansha), Hugh O'Neill, defender of the town against the hated Cromwell, and Fr Nicholas Sheehy (Clonmel), executed in 1776 at the behest of the anti-Catholic ascendancy in South Tipperary.

Conclusions

Club names were seen by critics of Young Ireland as manifest evidence of their intention to denigrate the memory and repudiate the political philosophy of Daniel O'Connell. Fr Burke, the parish priest of St Mary's, Clonmel strongly suggested this in a letter condemning the proposed Irish League to T.M. Ray, Secretary of the Repeal Association:⁶⁵

*It is notorious that the great man who sleeps in Glasnevin and who on account of the mighty things he achieved for our country is justly enshrined in the hearts of the Irish people, some of the people who will be prominent in this League have zealously laboured to blacken and depreciate. This feeling they have carried so far that in the different clubs they have established throughout the country, whilst they call some of them by the Emmet Club, the Mitchel Club, the General Quinn Club, the Desmond Club and other names (every one of them by the bye a *nomme de guerre*) they have not called one of them by the name of the Daniel O'Connell Club, just as if it was their wish to efface his illustrious name and blot out his mighty deeds and his pacific teachings from the hearts and memories of the Irish people.*

Although many of the smaller towns such as Borrisokane, Newport, Cahir and Mullinahone marked events such as the Paris Revolution, the state trials and the deportation of Mitchel with some form of public display, there is no coherent evidence of formal Confederate Clubs. Ballingarry, Mullinahone and Killenaule, soon to be the focus of national attention, have left little traces of either Repeal or Confederate activity. Rev Phillip Fitzgerald, author-curate of Ballingarry, gave some explanation for the lack of political activity in his area:⁶⁶

It may seem strange that in this part of the kingdom the peasantry could be so ignorant of the storm which continually threatened them for the last three years; and yet such was the case in this peculiar district, about 12 miles distant from the nearest market town, where the people were too much occupied with farming business and the collieries to have much time to devote to political subjects, in which they took less interest than others. Some who read newspapers or visited neighbouring towns had an idea of the disturbed state of the country, but the great body of the people seldom thought of it and least of all did they imagine that the commencement of the outbreak would be amongst themselves.

Fr Fitzgerald has an unlikely corroborator, John O'Mahony, who observed in his narrative that O'Brien⁶⁸

could not have commenced in a worse place [than Ballingarry]. Strangers up to that to the action and resolutions of the party, they could not well understand what was it about, nor I believe, did anyone else. Not one in the hundred of those thousands assembled had ever seen O'Brien's face before, nor that of any one of the companions then with him.

Although "Thomas Wright, gentleman of Mullinahone" was cited by the Clonmel magistrate

Ryan as among the parties “most active in the Club movement in South Tipperary”,⁶⁹ there is little evidence that the activities of the young student at Trinity College, Dublin had borne fruit. Wright had represented the *Fág-a-Bealach* Club, Mullinahone at the Slievenamon meeting, which he addressed,⁷⁰ and William Smith O’Brien and his revolutionary companions breakfasted at the house of Wright’s father, local land agent Benjamin Wright, on the morning of 25 July.⁷¹

Witnesses at the State trials in Clonmel implicated Wright in drilling and marching. Charles Kickham, writing some years later of the events of 1848 in Mullahone, recounted his own meeting with William Smith O’Brien and John Dillon.⁷² O’Brien sternly admonished the nineteen-year-old Kickham: “Don’t go like a rabble, put your Club in order”, to which Kickham replied, “there are only three members in the Club here”.

Writing to Dublin Castle to inform the lord lieutenant of the formation of the Wolfe Tone Club in his locality, George Ryan, the Catholic landlord of Inch estate north-west of Thurles, observed that their object was more⁷³ “the sacrifice of the lives of some armed individuals and the wholesale destruction of every species of property than any idea of being able to subvert the government”. The imputation that the Clubs had an agenda other than some form of self-government which they believed would address the problems of famine and military oppression is also hinted at in police reports.

Clubs, however, were uncertain of their own political affiliation, and the majority of Tipperary’s Clubs during their hurried existence wished for some form of unity between Repealers and Confederates. The shadow of the Repeal Association pervaded Club membership and Club activities, and although the towns such as Carrick and Clonmel had strong professional and artisan representatives the leadership core was drawn very much from the more conservative elements. O’Mahony makes this very clear and because of his proximity to the situation he should have known.⁷⁴

He categorised the Club’s leadership in Carrick as “professional men, comfortable farmers and shopkeepers who would do nothing without his Reverend’s [Fr Patrick Byrne] sanction”. Likewise, castigating the rural Clubs for lack of action, he referred to the leaders as “the buck farmers – mere puppets in the hands of the priests” and “the village ‘Buddocks’ who being from the class from which the priests had sprung, were most obnoxious to their influence. The mere working men were always willing and ready”. O’Mahony’s incisive analysis is supported by events; when the dilemma was presented to the Clubmen of Carrick on Monday evening 25 May, they opted for moral rather than physical force.

Perhaps Gavan Duffy’s postscript⁷⁵ to the narrative of Thomas Francis Meagher can as well be applied to county Tipperary as to Kilkenny city to which it refers:

Kilkenny was ill prepared to begin so important a struggle, and one wherein it was of the most paramount consequence that the first blow should not be a failure. There were four clubs, one in each of the parishes of Kilkenny but they were not Confederate Clubs, and had never been in union with the Confederation. They were Clubs of what were called ‘United Repealers’. That is Young and Old Irelanders blended under a new name; and the officers of some of them were strictly Old Irelanders. These Clubs were only newly formed, and, as Clubs, were neither drilled nor armed. Within the previous week they had given in their adhesion to the ‘Irish League’, then formed which they joined in a body, numbering seventeen hundred.

In essence the Tipperary Clubs did not have the time to formulate a coherent strategy which would distinguish them from the Repeal Association. All their public manifestations had the trappings of the great Repeal Meetings with which most of the Tipperary Clubmen would have been familiar. Temperance Bands were almost everywhere in evidence and, harking back to the



great anti-tithe hurlings, some of the meetings were held under the guise of football matches.

Club leaders, apart from Doheny who expressed opposition, and O'Mahony who preferred the role of partisan, supported the Irish League. Many of the leading figures in the Club movement in Tipperary such as Joseph Rivers (Carrick), John Bailey, William Cantwell (John Mitchel Club, Clonmel), Edward Egan (Roscrea United Repealers Club) and William Ryan (Martin Lanigan Repeal Club, Thurles) attended meetings in Dublin to help establish it.

The majority of Tipperary's Clubs had a short-lived existence. In many instances, apart from uncorroborated newspaper references, there is no evidence that they ever had a formal organisation. Even the Clubs (such as those of Carrick and Clonmel) which had a formal structure and public identity rapidly dissolved when Dublin Castle issued the edict banning them. The impetus to the Irish Confederation provided initially by the events in Paris in March 1848, and subsequently by the trials of Meagher and O'Brien and the transportation of Mitchel, was dissipated in the confusion which characterised the unity negotiations.

The shooting of an archbishop at the Paris barricades was cleverly used by Clarendon and the Castle press to exacerbate tensions between Young and Old Irelanders and alienate the clergy further. Geographically, the spread of the Clubs was very uneven in Tipperary. The towns were more obviously the core areas, and the urban centres along the Suir corridor such as Carrick and Clonmel had significant cachets of Young Ireland sympathisers among their artisan and professional classes. The leadership qualities of John O'Mahony are attested by the density of rural clubs in the hinterland of Carrick and along the Tipperary-Kilkenny borderlands.

Doheny's influence is evident around Cashel and Fethard, but the absence of any major public manifestation of Confederate sympathies in these two towns may have much to do with Doheny's involvement in Dublin and England. Kenyon's withdrawal effectively terminated Club strength in west Tipperary and disrupted the geographical connection between the strong Suir towns from Waterford north across the Keeper Hills to Limerick city.

Perceptions rather than realities are often the agents of revolution, and it was the fatal perception of Confederate leaders that Tipperary and Kilkenny were the cockpits from where the revolution would spread to engulf the country that led the leaders to Ballingarry in July 1848.

FOOTNOTES

1. *The Nation*, 1 Aug. 1846.
2. For the complex story of the Irish Confederation see, R. Davis, *The Young Ireland Movement* (Dublin, 1987); D. Gwynn, *Young Ireland and 1848* (Cork, 1849) is still the best account of events in Tipperary in 1848.
3. NLI, MS 5866, Narratives of the rising of 1848 by R. O'Gorman, T.B. MacManus and John Kavanagh. For Kavanagh's family background and analysis of his memoirs see, E. Culleton, 'John Kavanagh the Young Irelander' in *Journal of the Old Wexford Society*, no. 4 (1972-3), pp 25-39 and *ibid.*, no. 5 (1974-5), pp 64-71.
4. *Tipperary Vindicator*, 15 July 1848.
5. RIA, MS 23 H 62, Subscription book of the Irish Confederation, 23 Jan. 1847 – 24 June 1848.
6. *The Nation*, various issues 1848.
7. Kavanagh's narrative.
8. NAI, O.P., 27/569, Report of Charles Hunt, R.M.
9. NAI, O.P., 27/617, Report of Charles Hunt, R.M., 10 April 1848.
10. NAI, O.P., 27/1721, Report of Charles Hunt, R.M., with report of sub-inspector William Lavilly appended, 30 June 1848.



11. Subscription book of the Irish Confederation.
12. *Hansard*, 9 Dec. 1847 (Commons), p. 871.
13. NAI, O.P. 27/378, Report of William Ryan, R.M., 1 March 1848.
14. *Ibid.*, 27/527, Report of William Ryan, R.M., 28 March 1848.
15. *Ibid.*, 27/554, Report of William Ryan, R.M., 31 March 1848.
16. NAI, O.P., 27/561, Report of William Ryan, R.M., 2 April 1848; *TFP*, 5 April 1848.
17. NAI, O.P., 27/561, Report of William Ryan, R.M., 2 April 1848.
18. *Ibid.*, 27/567, Report of William Ryan, R.M., 3 April 1848.
19. *Tipperary Free Press*, 5 April 1848.
20. *Ibid.*, 10 June 1848.
21. NAI, O.P., 27/983, report of William Ryan, R.M., 10 June 1848.
22. *TFP*, 17 June 1848.
23. *Irish Felon*, 24 June 1848.
24. *TFP*, 24 June 1848.
25. *Ibid.*, 5 July 1848.
26. *Ibid.*, 19 July 1848.
27. *TV*, 15 July 1848; *TFP*, 15 July 1848.
28. NAI, O.P., 27/1047, report of William Ryan, R.M., 18 June 1848.
29. *TFP*, 1 July 1848.
30. *Ibid.*, 6 July 1848.
31. Subscription book, Irish Confederation.
32. *Ibid.*
33. NAI, O.P., 27/1635 letter from James W. O'Cavanagh to John O'Mahony.
34. *TFP*, 22 March 1848.
35. *Ibid.*, 1 April 1848.
36. NAI, O.P., 27/1639, Report of R.D. Coulson, R.M., Sept. 1848.
37. *Ibid.*
38. NLI, MS 9503, Matthew Butler notebooks on Waterford history.
39. *IF*, 24 June 1848.
40. Coulson report.
41. *Freeman's Journal*, 21 April 1848.
42. *TV*, 19 July 1848.
43. *Ibid.*
44. *FJ*, 21 July 1848.
45. NLI, MS 868, *Personal narrative of my connection with the attempted rising of 1848 by John O'Mahony* (Box 58 of Father Michael O'Hickey's papers).
46. Charles Gavan Duffy, *Young Ireland, Part 2: Four Years of Irish History* (Dublin, 1887), p. 233.
47. *TV*, 10 May 1848.
48. John O'Mahony's narrative.
49. *Cork Examiner*, 3 July 1848.
50. *Ibid.*, 10 July 1848.
51. *TV*, 12 July 1848.
52. *Waterford Chronicle*, 7 April 1848.
53. Subscription book, Irish Confederation.
54. *TFP*, 22 March 1848.
55. NAI, O.P., 27/1109, letter from William B. Upton.
56. Subscription book, Irish Confederation.
57. *TV*, 19 July 1848.
59. Informations of Bracken and Price.
60. Subscription book, Irish Confederation.
61. NAI, O.P., 27/387, letter from Eleanor Shortt, postmistress in Roscrea, 28 July 1848.
62. NAI, O.P., 27/792, letter from John Cahill, Llandaff Lodge, Thurles, 5 May 1848.



63. L. Fogarty, *Fr John Kenyon, a patriot priest of forty-eight* (Dublin, n.d.), p. 175.
64. NAI, O.P., 27/938, poster advertising meeting at Nenagh.
65. *IF*, 24 June 1848.
66. *TFP*, 22 July 1848.
67. P. Fitzgerald, *A narrative of the proceedings of the confederates of '48 from the suspension of the Habeus Corpus Act to their final dispersion at Ballingarry* (Dublin & London, 1868), p. 23.
68. John O'Mahony's narrative.
69. NAI, O.P., 27/1723, report of William Ryan, R.M., 29 July 1848.
70. *TFP*, 19 July 1848.
71. Fitzgerald, *Narrative*, p. 6.
72. Quoted in Duffy, *Young Ireland, Part 2*, p. 236.
73. NAI, O.P., 27/1094, report of George Ryan, Inch House.
74. John O'Mahony's narrative.
75. Quoted in Gwynn, *Young Ireland*, pp. 297-8.