
Fingal 1900 – 1923

Politics, War and Revolution



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Cultural Nationalism

One of the precursors to the revolutionary years was the growth of cultural nationalism, defined as efforts to promote the Irish language, sports and culture, largely with the objective of emphasising the distinction between Ireland and Britain. The late 19th century saw the establishment of organisations such as the GAA (in 1884) and the Gaelic League (in 1893), while what is now termed the 'literary revival' witnessed a rich outpouring of poetry, drama and fiction which sought to use Irish and Gaelic themes as the foundation for new Irish literature in the English language. This is epitomised by the famous literary works of W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory and Alice Milligan, as well as the opening of the Abbey Theatre in December 1904.

Although archival records are scarce on the subject, contemporary newspaper reports show that the GAA was active in Fingal from the late 1880s and was popular enough to facilitate the organisation of competitions independently of Dublin City. It appears, however, that the use of the Irish language was not taking hold in the county to the satisfaction of some activists. On 15 December 1900, the United Irishman newspaper complained about the low level of engagement with Irish:

“ We have again to ask when does Swords intend to throw its lot in with the movement?...When are they going to join hands with Howth and the Naul? We know the men of Fingal to have always proved themselves true in times of stress, and we shall be disappointed in them if they remain inactive in the work which within our own days must, if continued in, give us back again the individuality of Eireann. ”

By 1902, the Gaelic League had spread throughout the county, with branches in Howth, Swords, Lusk, Skerries and Naul. In addition, a series of Irish-themed events were held throughout the county over the following years, drawing the admiration of the press.

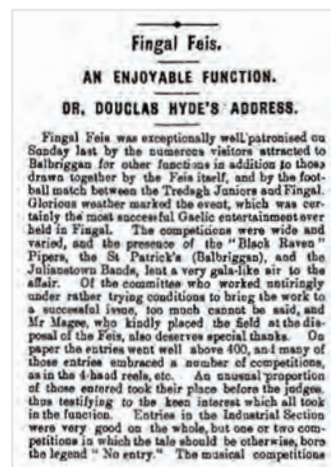
By 1905, matters had proceeded so well that the Drogheda Independent could report of the Donabate Feis that:

“ To go around Donabate on Sunday evening you would imagine you were in some village such as 'Ring' or some other Irish-speaking centre, instead of being within a stone's throw of the Metropolis. ”

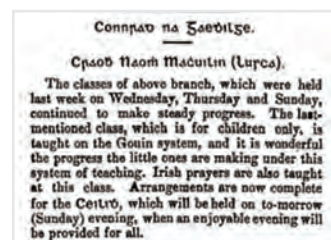
Frank Lawless and Thomas Ashe were leading figures in the cultural nationalist scene in Fingal at the turn of the century. When Lawless was re-elected as vice-president of the local Gaelic League in December 1912, it was Ashe who seconded his nomination. Lawless and his wife Catherine were regular organisers and performers at many of the Gaelic League events in Swords. In addition, Ashe and Lawless often organised and refereed GAA matches across the county. However, cultural nationalism was only one strand of the nationalist movement which was driving Ireland towards independence in the early twentieth century – another was the growth of nationalism in local politics across the country.



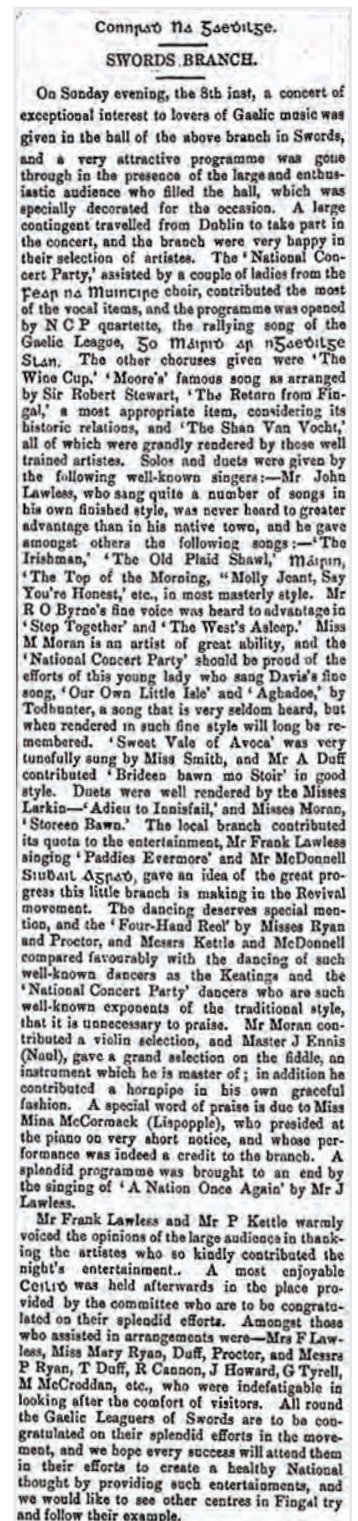
Fingallians Football Team 1909
Courtesy of Fingal Local Studies and Archives



Fingal Feis
Drogheda Independent 11 July 1914
Courtesy of the Irish Newspaper Archives



Conradh na Gaeilge Irish Classes Lusk
Drogheda Independent 21 February 1903
Courtesy of the Irish Newspaper Archives



Conradh na Gaeilge Swords Branch
Drogheda Independent 21 February 1903
Courtesy of the Irish Newspaper Archives



Frank Lawless c1916
Courtesy of Fingal Local Studies and Archives
Thomas Ashe in the uniform of the Black Raven Pipe Band, Lusk c1911
Courtesy of Fingal Local Studies and Archives

Local Politics

Running in tandem with the rise of cultural nationalism in Ireland was a political struggle against the established order. The most striking example of this was the general election of December 1918, in which the Irish Parliamentary Party was virtually destroyed by the insurgent Sinn Féin party. However, the groundwork for such a spectacular victory had been laid at local level, where the new nationalism had been challenging the traditional power bases for some time.

On 12 August 1898, the Local Government Act was enacted, establishing a system of local government for Ireland, including the creation of county councils. This had an immediate impact on local politics in Fingal. The first elections for Dublin County Council were held in April 1899 and results demonstrated that the old landowning class was beginning to give way to a new generation: eleven Nationalists, six Unionists, two Labour/Land League members and one 'Redmondite' were elected. Those representing North County Dublin were:

Ward	Candidate	Party	Votes Received
Balbriggan	Cumiskey, W. J.	Irish Nationalist	unopposed
Castleknock	Mooney, Joseph	Irish Nationalist	90
Coolock	Flood, James J.	Land & Labour League	429
Howth	McKenna, James	Irish Nationalist	507
Lusk	Rooney, Edward	Irish Nationalist	635
Swords	O'Neill, Patrick J.	Irish Nationalist	528

The first meeting of this new body took place on 2 May 1899 in Kilmainham Courthouse, chaired by Patrick O'Neill, and it passed a resolution calling for either independence or self-governance.

This period was an exciting time in local politics and witnessed a growth in grassroots nationalist activism across the county. On 27 May 1900, a branch of the United Irish League was established in Swords, with P.J. Kettle as president and Frank Lawless as secretary. Another branch was established in Oldtown in April 1902. In addition, the 1903 Land Act accelerated the transfer of political and economic power from the old landlord elites to a new and increasingly prosperous middle class; with large, landed estates being sold off in smaller parcels to tenant farmers, funded by government loans. This led to the founding of the North County Dublin Farmer's Association in 1905, again with P.J. Kettle at its head. This was combined with the expansion of the Gaelic League and the GAA across Fingal to produce an impression of an irresistible nationalist surge.

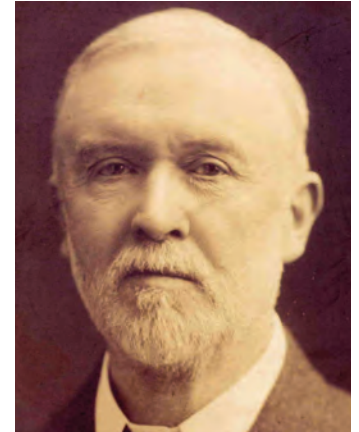
However, external events soon exposed the fissures below the seemingly united surface. It was reported that 52 inhabitants from across North County Dublin signed the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant in September 1912, opposing the introduction of the Home Rule Bill, which had been put before the House of Commons the previous April. The outbreak of the Dublin Lockout in August and September 1913 saw widespread agricultural unrest across Fingal, with The Irish Worker newspaper attacking the North County Dublin Farmer's Association and riots occurring in Swords in October 1913.

The Irish Citizen Army and the Irish Volunteers, both established in November 1913, competed across the county for public space and recruits as the political temperature rose dramatically.

Ireland seemed to be sliding towards civil war until the outbreak of conflict in Europe in July 1914 changed the trajectory of events completely.

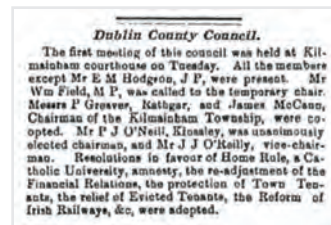


Irish National Volunteers Badge
The Irish National Volunteers were founded on 25 November 1913
Courtesy of Pat Moran



J. J. Clancy, Irish nationalist politician and M. P. for North County Dublin from 1885 to 1918. He was defeated by Frank Lawless, the Sinn Féin candidate in the 1918 elections

Courtesy of Fingal Local Studies and Archives



First Dublin County Council meeting
Drogheda Independent 6 May 1899
Courtesy of the Irish Newspaper Archives



Frank Lawless was elected to represent North County Dublin in the December 1918 and May 1921 elections. He was unable to attend the sitting of the First Dáil on 21 January 1919 due to imprisonment.

Courtesy of the Lawless Family



Establishing the Irish National Volunteers Branch in Lusk
Drogheda Independent 18 July 1914
Courtesy of the Irish Newspaper Archives



Irish Citizen Army
The Irish Worker 2 May 1914
Courtesy of the Irish Newspaper Archives

The First World War

The First World War was one of the transformative events of the 20th century and its impact can be seen on every aspect of Irish life in the period.

The most obvious of these was the determined efforts made by the British government to tap Irish manpower resources through a variety of initiatives to stimulate voluntary enlistments in the military. Ultimately, the authorities were disappointed with the results, even though approximately 210,000 Irish volunteers joined the British forces throughout the duration of the war. This involvement came at a heavy cost. Approximately 25,000 Dubliners joined the forces, of which 6,334 died. On average, one in four of all Dubliners who joined the British forces during the First World War never returned home.

Irish civic society mobilised itself to support the war effort with local community groups throughout Fingal rising to the occasion. For instance, Balbriggan Town Commissioners regularly allowed the use of the town hall for concerts and entertainment to help raise funds for Irish troops. Recruitment rallies were held on a regular basis throughout the county and in the early phase of the First World War, when enthusiasm for the conflict was still in evidence, these meetings were often elaborate affairs with a carnival atmosphere. The Drogheda Independent reported in June 1915 that the band of the 3rd Royal Irish Regiment visited Balbriggan, playing Irish songs which 'stirred up a martial spirit' during a recruitment rally there.

However, these rallies became less and less frequent in the aftermath of the 1916 Rising as public mood moved decisively against the war. This was particularly true by 1918, when war-weariness had clearly set in. According to the Drogheda Independent on 26 October 1918, there was a recruitment rally held outside Balbriggan Courthouse but 'the audience was neither very large nor very enthusiastic'.

Recruitment was also the issue which caused the bitter Volunteer split, after Irish Parliamentary Party leader John Redmond called on Irish Volunteers to join the British forces in September 1914. A small faction of around 10 - 12,000, who were completely opposed to participation in the war, broke away from the movement and formed the core of the 1916 rebels. This division would significantly radicalise the Volunteers and, along with the effects of the First World War, provided more momentum for the decision to stage the Rising in April 1916.



Blimps in the Grounds of Malahide Castle – First World War 1914–18

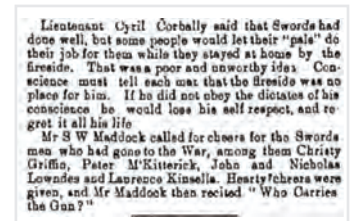
Airships moored at Malahide Castle 1914 – 1918
The airships were used to search for German submarines in the Irish Sea
Courtesy of The Malahide Historical Society



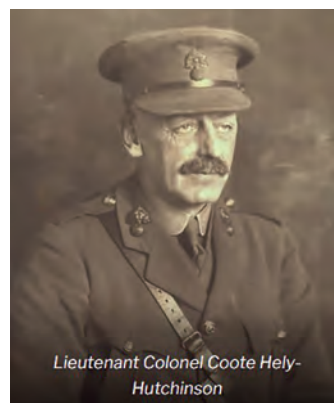
Recruitment Form
The National Volunteer 6 November 1915
Courtesy of The Irish Newspaper Archives



Recruitment Headline
Drogheda Independent 6 November 1915
Courtesy of The Irish Newspaper Archives



Swords Men go to War
Drogheda Independent 6 November 1915
Courtesy of The Irish Newspaper Archives



Coote Hely-Hutchinson
Lissenhall and Seafield, Swords
Served with the Royal Fusiliers during World War 1 as an instructor and reached the rank of Lt. Col.
Courtesy of the Hely-Hutchinson Collection
Fingal Local Studies and Archives



Dick Hely-Hutchinson
Lissenhall and Seafield, Swords
Served with the Royal Fusiliers in France during World War 1. He wrote home to his mother outlining the harrowing conditions of war.
Courtesy of the Hely-Hutchinson Collection
Fingal Local Studies and Archives



Thomas Kettle
St. Margaret's North County Dublin
M. P. for Carlow he died at the Battle of the Somme on 9 September 1916
Courtesy of Fingal Local Studies and Archives



Injured Soldiers play bowls at The Island, Donabate 1915
Courtesy of Malahide Historical Society

Women and the Revolution in Fingal

In an editorial of 4 July 1914, the Irish Citizen newspaper warned Irish women against the Volunteers, Cumann na mBan and the Volunteer Aid Association, pointing out that:

“ the new Association is officered and governed by men; women are to be allowed to join it, to work for it; but not one woman is given a place on the Committee. ”

The fear expressed by the writer that women would be sidelined in the revolutionary movement was well founded and the impact of the revolution on women in Fingal is one of the untold narratives of the period.



Catherine Lawless and her family c1915
Back row left to right: Barney, Kathleen, Colm, Evelyn, Joe, Ita
Front row: Nuala, Frank, Felim, Catherine, Kieran and Aidan in front
Courtesy of The Lawless Family

Catherine Lawless

The story of Frank Lawless and his involvement in the republican movement in North County Dublin has been extensively told. However, what is less well known is how heavy a burden Frank's prominence as a republican placed on his wife Catherine, who was left behind to manage the family butcher's business, an extensive farm and a large family. She regularly auctioned off animals or batches of farm machinery or put parcels of the farm up for rent. The newspaper advertisements for each sale generally coincided with one of Frank's frequent periods of imprisonment. Catherine was often not informed where her husband was imprisoned and was reduced to writing to Dublin Castle to ask for information. She also had to deal with very close scrutiny from the authorities as their home at Saucerstown was raided on several occasions.

Molly Adrien

Mary Ellen (Molly) Adrien joined Cumann na mBan in 1914 and was instrumental in forming a branch in Lusk. On Easter Monday 1916, Molly travelled to Joseph Lawless and Thomas Ashe, leaders of the Fingal Brigade, with orders from Patrick Pearse to begin the fight. She spent Easter Week cycling back and forth between Fingal and Dublin City carrying reports and orders. After the battle of Ashbourne on 28 April 1916, Molly assisted Dr. Richard Hayes with the wounded. Dr. Hayes was the medical officer of the Balrothery Union, where Molly had been a board member since July 1914.

Molly remained a staunch republican and an active member of the IRA throughout the War of Independence and into the Civil War. Like most members of Cumann na mBan she was anti-Treaty. Despite her service and commitment to the cause, Molly had difficulty accessing a service pension once the conflict was over and was forced to launch a hard-fought appeal.

Dot Fleming

Monica (Dot) Fleming was from Drumcondra where her family had a grocery shop and pub at Tolka Bridge which was used as a safe house for Volunteers. Dot, along with her sister Kitty and brother Michael, socialised with the Lawless'. During the Rising, Dot delivered information and supplies to the volunteers throughout North County Dublin as well as first aid to the wounded. She married Joseph V. Lawless in August 1922.



Molly Adrien
Courtesy of Fingal Local Studies and Archives



Dot Fleming with the Lawless Women
Back row left to right: Kathleen Lawless, Dot Fleming
Front row left to right: Eibhlin Lawless, Catherine Lawless
Courtesy of Fingal Local Studies and Archives

Bridget Connolly

Bridget Connolly was born in Carlow but by 1911 was living in Artane, Dublin. She joined Cumann na mBan in 1914 and in advance of the Easter Rising stored over a dozen 900 Mauser rifles in her home. She served in the GPO where she carried dispatches from James Connolly to Ned Daly in Church Street. When Pearse realised that surrender was inevitable, Bridget led thirty to forty women out of the building under a white flag. The group were arrested but released later that day.

During the War of Independence, she collected and stored arms, and secured safe houses for men on the run. She was the secretary of the District Council of Fingal Cumann na mBan in 1921. In 1922, Bridget travelled to Manchester and Liverpool to relay cables to the United States and await the replies. She did not support the Treaty and was imprisoned after the destruction of the Four Courts in 1922, with Richard Mulcahy saying that she was a danger to public safety. She was finally released in November 1923.



Bridget Connolly
Courtesy of Fingal Local Studies and Archives

The Lawless and Lyons Women

Mary Lawless, Frank Lawless' sister established the Swords Cumann na mBan branch in 1914. She built up a strong group of members who provided medical assistance, food and clothes, transportation of vital information between branches of the Fingal Brigade as well as finding safe places to hide men and ammunition.

Frank Lawless' daughters Kathleen and Eibhlin also joined Cumann na mBan. Both carried messages between the members of the Fingal Brigade during the 1916 Rising and helped with the wounded after the Battle of Ashbourne. Eibhlin subsequently worked as a confidential typist for Michael Collins in the Department of Finance. When she decided to enter religious life in August 1920, her father suggested two of her cousins, Ellie and Alice Lyons, both trained stenographers, to replace her. Working with Michael Collins, they proved that they were able to work under pressure, having to contend with the military constantly raiding their office. When Collins went to London to negotiate the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921, both Ellie and Alice were among the four women chosen to accompany the Irish delegates.



Alice Lyons, Kathleen McKenna and Ellie Lyons in London 1921
Courtesy of the Military Archives

Cycles of Violence

Throughout the revolutionary period, Fingal was the scene of repeated cycles of violence and bloodshed. During the Rising, the 5th Battalion/Fingal Brigade was one of the most active units in the country and its engagement with Royal Irish Constabulary at Ashbourne on 28 April 1916 was one of the deadliest single-action battles of Easter Week. Eight police officers, three civilians and two Volunteers were killed over the course of the five-hour firefight. The Battle of Ashbourne was the biggest engagement outside Dublin City during the Easter Rising and the only battle won by the Volunteers.

Throughout the War of Independence, Fingal was the scene of some of the most dramatic incidents of the conflict. The raid on Collinstown Aerodrome in March 1919, in which Volunteers from across the Dublin Brigade captured 75 rifles and around 5,000 rounds of ammunition, was the largest number of weapons captured from the British during the conflict. The 5th Battalion provided drivers for the raid and some of the weapons were hidden around Naul before being distributed. The captured guns and ammunition provided the Dublin IRA with arms for the bulk of the war against British rule.

There was a significant upsurge in violence in Fingal during 1920, as the IRA campaign provoked a heavy-handed response from the authorities. RIC Sergeant Patrick Finnerty was shot in Balbriggan on 14 April and the IRA attacked Rush Barracks on 29 April, which resulted in the death of RIC Sergeant John Brady. Frequent house raids occurred in July and August - on 6 August 1920, Swords was blocked off and systematically searched by a mixed force of cavalry and infantry, causing severe disruption. However, the most traumatic incident of the war, which made international headlines, was the Sack of Balbriggan on 20 September 1920. Following the shooting of Head Constable Peter Burke by local IRA, 200 Auxiliaries from Gormanston camp attacked the town, burning 54 homes, 4 pubs and a factory, while local men James Lawless and John Gibbons were killed. This was followed by the shooting dead of John 'Terry' Sherlock by police at his Skerries home on 27 October.

Events became even more extreme in the aftermath of Bloody Sunday in Dublin City on 21 November 1920, in which 35 people died - 16 from the British forces, 16 civilians and 3 IRA - in 24 hours of unprecedented violence. The consequences of Bloody Sunday were felt across the country and the period between 21 November and 25 December 1920 witnessed a huge surge of police and military activity in Fingal. Raids and searches on homes and other premises were stepped up, leading to complaints from locals of damage and theft, while 29 men were arrested and imprisoned. During the same period, British forces killed three people - John 'Rover' McCann was shot dead in Rush on 22 November, Thomas Hand was killed outside his brother's home in Skerries on 5 December and William Hayes, a military bandsman, was accidentally shot by sentries at Collinstown camp on 9 December. In addition, Patrick Matthews was shot and wounded by police in Skerries on 21 November.

This intense period of activity was followed by relative calm until the IRA staged a series of attacks on coastguard stations across the county during June 1921. The last house searches by police occurred in Swords on 28 June, while the last major shooting incident occurred on 2 July, when Michael Rock of Naul IRA was badly wounded and captured by police. On 8 July, Lusk Remount depot, used by British military cavalry, was destroyed by the IRA. This was the final act of the War of Independence in Fingal, as the Truce came into effect two days later.



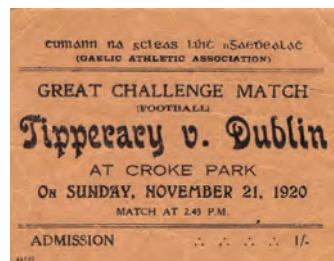
John Terry Sherlock

A member of the Skerries Irish Volunteer Company he was taken by Crown Forces from his home in the early hours of 27th October 1920 and shot dead. He was only 22 years of age. Courtesy of Peter F. Whearity



Thomas Hand

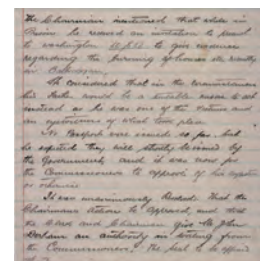
A member of the Skerries Irish Volunteer Company he was shot by Crown Forces while trying to escape from his brother's home on 5th December 1920. He was only 42 years of age. Courtesy of Peter F. Whearity



Admission Ticket for Tipperary v Dublin at Croke Park 22 November 1920.

It was at this match that Crown Forces opened fire on the crowd and players. Fourteen people died among them a 10 year old boy Jerome O Leary.

Courtesy of Fingal Local Studies and Archives



Balbriggan Town Commissioners at their meeting of 3 November 1920 decide to send John Derham, father of the Chairman Michael James Derham, to the USA to recount the details of the Sack of Balbriggan on the night of 20 September 1920. The chairman himself could not make the trip as he was currently in prison.

Minutes of the meetings of Balbriggan Town Commissioners
Courtesy of Fingal Local Studies and Archives



Swords and Skerries Night of Terror Evening Herald 22 November 1920
Courtesy of the Irish Newspaper Archives



The destroyed cottages on Clonard Street after the Sack of Balbriggan 20 September 1920
Courtesy of Fingal Local Studies and Archives

Return to Peace

Fingal did not see any sustained fighting during the civil war between June 1922 and April 1923, and largely escaped the destruction that was seen in other parts of the country. Dublin, the midlands, Clare and Limerick provided the bulk of the Treaty support and Fingal was a part of a large swathe of pro-Treaty territory, with its neighbouring IRA Divisions – 5th Northern and 1st Midland – opting in favour of the settlement.

There were a number of scattered outbreaks in the county throughout the period including the shooting of Harry Boland in Skerries on 31 July 1922, the IRA bombing attack on Malahide railway bridge and the Balbriggan Coastguard Station in January 1923 along with the kidnapping of Senator John Bagwell in Howth on 2 March 1923.

In addition, a number of Fingallians died in combat during the Civil War. 12 men were killed while fighting in the pro-Treaty Free State National Army. John McGowan from Skerries, who was anti-Treaty, was killed in action while fighting against the Free State forces at Stephen's Green in July 1922. However, overall, the county was quiet during 1922 – 1923.

The return to peace undoubtedly came as a relief to the inhabitants of Fingal and offered many men and women whose lives had been disrupted by conflict, arrest and imprisonment the chance to restore some normality by finding employment or setting up homes. Some found it difficult to adjust to peace after several years of conflict, as James Crenigan, adjutant of the Fingal Brigade, put it:

“ It was strange to go home and sleep there in peace again... It was likewise strange to walk on the street or road and pass Tans and RIC without being stuck up or putting one's hand to one's gun. ”

For others, the focus was on reconstruction. For instance, the Balbriggan Town Commissioners sought central government help to rebuild the town, parts of which still stood in ruins following the destruction of September 1920.

The desire for peace and normality was most dramatically illustrated in the steep decline in IRA membership once the Truce came into effect. The Fingal Brigade fell from 594 members on 11 July 1921 to 140 on 1 July 1922. The remaining Volunteers used the opportunity to solidify their intelligence network, reporting that they had people passing them information from inside Finglas, Garristown and Duleek post offices. The station masters of Laytown, Balbriggan, Skerries, Rush & Lusk, Donabate and Malahide railway stations were identified as being particularly pro-British.

Fingal at the end of the revolutionary period was a microcosm of the rest of the country – the cessation of hostilities was certainly welcomed by the population, who were weary of the constant turmoil from 1916 onwards. It must not be forgotten either than Ireland had actually been at war since 1914 as part of the UK and had suffered at least 30,000 deaths in the First World War. This, added to the upheaval caused by the revolution, likely meant that the end of the Civil War was seen as a long-overdue return to some semblance of normality, albeit in a country which had changed completely between 1900 and 1923.



Civic Guard seen marching for the first time at the funeral of Frank Lawless on 18th April 1922

Courtesy of An Garda Síochána Museum



Harry Boland shot in Skerries

Evening Herald 31 July 1922

Courtesy of the Irish Newspaper Archives



John McGowan

Killed at St. Stephen's Green, Dublin City by Free State forces on 28 June 1922

Courtesy of Peter F. Whearity



Balbriggan Coastguard Station 1923

The station was damaged by the IRA in the early hours of the morning 31 January 1923

The Benton/Curtis Collection

Courtesy of Fingal Local Studies and Archives



Repairing the viaduct bridge at Malahide after damage caused by the IRA in January 1923

Courtesy of the Malahide Historical Society



Senator John Bagwell

Kidnapped by anti-Treaty supporters from his home in Howth on 2 March 1923

Courtesy of the Bibliotheque Nationale de France (Public Domain) Newspaper Archives



List of Dublin County TDs and their vote on the Treaty 1921. Only Mrs. Pearse votes against the Treaty.

Courtesy of the National Archives of Ireland

Fingal Local Studies and Archives

Fingal Local Studies & Archives collect, preserve and make available historic records relating to Fingal and Dublin generally. The collections are an important resource for the study of local history comprising photographs, postcards, ephemera, maps, artwork and an extensive printed collection of local history books, periodicals, directories and reference works.

The Archives contains records of local government in County Dublin from 1775 to the present day along with a variety of private and estate papers. The service is available to anyone interested in local, social or family history.

All researchers are welcome and queries can be made by phone, post or e-mail.

Address: 46 North Street, Swords, Co. Dublin, K67 F6Y3

Contact: archives@fingal.ie / local.studies@fingal.ie / (01) 8704486

Opening Hours (by appointment): Monday – Friday, 10am-1pm, 2pm-5pm

Acknowledgements

Fingal Local Studies and Archives are indebted to the many writers of Fingal history throughout the Revolutionary Years including Peter F. Whearity, Jim Walsh, Bairbre Curtis and Una O'Brien and to all of those who kindly supplied us with images including Pat Moran, Paddy Finnegan, Peter Rooney, Brian Dooley, Joe Curtis, Malahide Historical Society and the Fingal Old IRA Commemorative Society.



A THOUSAND LABOURERS IDLE.

A thousand farm labourers in North Co. Dublin are at present out of work in obedience to the mandate of the strike-leaders at Liberty Hall.

The chief districts involved in the present labour unrest in North Dublin include—

Malahide and Kinsealy	100
Swords	300
Raheny and Coolock	150
Santry and Glasnevin	160
Finglas and St. Margaret's ...	140
Baldoyle	50
Donabate	60

Total 960

These unfortunate men are too much blinded by the empty promises and intimation of the strike-mongers to see that they are already beaten. Another week or two will find them utterly routed; a month hence and they will be craving for work and for food and shelter. Most of them know this already, but for the moment they are brow-beaten by the malco tenants.
