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# From Guild to Union: The Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, In Pre-Independence Ireland

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Dissertation submitted for the degree of Master of Business Studies

under the supervision of

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## Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Masters of Business Studies is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: John W. Hogg

ID No.: 94001464

Date: 18/1/2001

*'I say Labour deserves well of the Irish people; the Labour man  
deserves the best the country can give.'*

Éamon de Valera [1919]

'This trade union is established under the Guild of Saint Bartholomew, and to be called the Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, for the purpose of making regulations between employers and employed, and between workman and workman, and regulating the hours of work, the scale of wages and the taking of apprentices, and to aid its members to obtain a fair daily wage for a fair day's work. The purpose to which its funds are applicable are as follows: - The interment of members and their lawful wives, and to assist members in case they meet with accident at their work, and for the protection of trade interests from encroachments on existing agreements between employers and members of this trade union.'

[Rules and Regulations of the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1888, Rule 1, p. 9].

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## **Abstract**

### **The Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union.**

This dissertation analyses the development of a Dublin bricklayers' trade union, known officially after 1888 as the Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, from its founding until 1921. This was one of the earliest Irish trade unions to come into existence, yet prior to this dissertation its multifarious character had never been thoroughly studied. Based upon extensive research into this union's files, and into other sources of primary materials besides, the dissertation begins by examining the origins of the combination, and thereafter focuses upon its growth. The study offers a historical analysis, within the wider framework of the development of Irish trade unionism, of the evolution of a society of bricklayers from guild, to combination, and in 1888 to registered trade union.

It is necessary to begin in 1670 in order to place the topic in its proper context. In that year the Guild of Bricklayers and Plasterers was established in Dublin by Royal Charter. It is argued here that the AGIBSTU can be looked upon as an offshoot of this guild, that is an organisational evolution from, rather than an organisational innovation upon, the guild. This is not a radical concept, however discovering a direct line of succession from a guild to a trade union is rare.

The dissertation then concentrates primarily upon the evolution of the trade union within the period from 1869 to 1921. Various paramount aspects of the society within that timeframe are analysed thematically. This approach is adopted in order to chart, in detail, the development of what was, and would remain, a wholly Irish based trade union. The study also discusses the influence and impact of other trade unions, both Irish and British, and of social, political, and legislative developments, firstly upon the combination, and thereafter in greater depth, upon the trade union. It is argued that a sense of antiquity, nationalism, and a desire for hegemony over the bricklaying trade in Dublin, led the AGIBSTU to stand alone in its disputes, resolutely self-reliant.

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## **Abbreviations**

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| AGIBSTU | Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonlayers' Trade Union |
| ASCJ    | Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners                   |
| ASE     | Amalgamated Society of Engineers                                |
| BATU    | Building and Allied Trade Union                                 |
| BFSOB   | British Friendly Society of Operative Bricklayers               |
| BTG     | Building Trades Group   |
| DBTEA   | Dublin Building Trades Employers' Association                   |
| DTC     | Dublin Trades Council   |
| DTPU    | Dublin Trades Political Union                                   |
| IEIU    | Irish Engineering Industrial Union                              |
| ILPTUC  | Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress                     |
| IRB     | Irish Republican Brotherhood                                    |
| ITGWU   | Irish Transport and General Workers' Union                      |
| ITUC    | Irish Trades Union Congress                                     |
| ITUCLP  | Irish Trades Union Congress and Labour Party                    |
| NTPU    | National Trades Political Union                                 |
| OPATSI  | Operative Plasterers and Allied Trades Society of Ireland       |
| OPTSD   | Operative Plasterers Trade Society of Dublin                    |
| TPU     | Trades Political Union  |
| TUC     | Trades Union Congress   |

## **Introduction**

This dissertation is an examination of the development of the Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union (AGIBSTU), primarily, however not exclusively, from 1869 to 1921. The bricklayers' union was chosen for examination as it was one of the earliest Irish trade unions to emerge, and yet, prior to this dissertation, had never been the focus of an in depth study. The above timeframe was chosen in order to facilitate an analysis of the origins and evolution of an early Irish trade union within the then evolving industrial relations, social, and political environments. This period permits the setting of the union's development against the backdrop of some of the most turbulent epochs both socially and politically in the history of this island. The study shall also reveal some of the numerous challenges which faced the pioneers of trade unionism in Ireland. Since most of the material used in this dissertation is archival in origin, a necessity was to integrate it within the wider framework of industrial relations and political history. As a result much secondary material, focused on the period under discussion, is used to augment the primary sources. Another reason for concentrating on this specific era was because of the limitations imposed by the fragmented nature of certain of the society's earlier records.

Although neither a famous or particularly large society, the AGIBSTU will be seen to have remained in existence, and independent, throughout the years under discussion. It determinedly stood alone while many of its counterparts either disintegrated, or amalgamated with larger British societies and reduced themselves to mere branches of these. Consequently, the AGIBSTU can be looked upon as a prime example of one of the small number of wholly Irish trade unions in both origin and development from the nineteenth century. The objective here is also to show that

despite having a small membership base, the union's influence, and that of its members, was not insignificant in both its industry and also to an extent in Irish politics. In the time frame discussed in this dissertation, the trade union movement in general transforms from numerous small associations to huge organisations, some with hundreds of thousands of members, and becomes an integral part of our society. This development will be alluded to here as it impacted upon all trade unions to some extent. The social legislation introduced in the fifty two years concentrated on is also examined, as is its impact upon the AGIBSTU.

The approach adopted will in the main be thematic. This is partly due to the constraints imposed by the incompleteness of certain of the union's records. Nevertheless, there are sufficient records in existence to provide an insight into an early Irish craft union in the latter decades of the nineteenth, and early years of the twentieth, century. Although the union is the focus, it is in itself an abstract made up of numerous individual components; its membership. It expressed in its voice their collective longings and aspirations. Hopefully the overview of this society will not miss out on the human element, which is in the end the essence of everything.

This dissertation is divided into five separate yet interconnected chapters:

## **Chapter I**

This chapter consists of two sections. The first will sketch the origins of combinations in general, and the bricklayers' combination in particular, and its relationship with the guild that preceded it, the Guild of Bricklayers and Plasterers. The substance of this section examines the link between the guild and combination, and whether the former can ultimately be considered the primogenitor of the latter. In this regard a brief history of the guild is provided, tracing that body back to when it was founded in 1670 by Royal

Charter. If there was a direct continuum between the two bodies, then the combination would not have been incorrect in claiming its original starting date to have been 1670. This would mean that the combination developed not as a separate entity, but as an offshoot from the guild that preceded it, an organisational development upon that body. In essence complying with Fredrick Tannenbaum's (1964) thesis on the evolution of the combinations from guilds. Proof of a concrete and enduring link between a guild and combination in Dublin is a contradiction of what many authors and authorities, both Irish and British, have written on the subject.

The period from the early 1700s to the repeal of the combination laws in 1824 saw much legislation introduced to suppress the combinations, some will be discussed here. This section also provides a brief account of how the guilds developed, and subsequently disintegrated. It was during this disintegration that the bricklayers' combination, in concert with the plasterers, endeavoured to re-establish the Guild of Bricklayers and Plasterers, and assume both its identity and trading rights. Although this effort did not succeed, some of the better traditions of the guild were incorporated into, and carried on within, the bricklayers' combination. Also discussed will be the meeting places of the guild and the later combination, early financial information concerning the latter society, and the only significant threat to the Dublin bricklayers' society's hegemony over their city.

The latter section of the chapter shall consider the alterations to the governmental structure of the trade union at the turn of the twentieth century. In 1892 a new rule was introduced which permitted the union's executive council to establish branches anywhere in the country except for Dublin. In the years afterwards numerous branches were to be instituted in various cities and towns, or acquired in these by way of amalgamations. This expansion, and the management of these diverse branches,

required a new, and multi-layered, system of governance. The section will examine how a growing Irish trade union facilitated its own development by the altering and adopting its governmental structures as required.

This chapter is the largest in the dissertation in terms of time span, ranging from 1670 until 1912.

## **Chapter II**

This chapter shall focus upon the nationalism of the bricklayers' union and its membership. The official nationalism of the union, and the majority of its membership, was always a constitutional nationalism. However certain individuals within its ranks were not pacifists. They harboured belligerent feelings, and consequently became involved in militant nationalist secret societies.

The chapter shall discuss the union's involvement with the major nationalist issues, movements, events, and figures. The society's support for these figures, and their aims, is reviewed. The chapter will show that in certain instances support was given to particular politicians on a *quid pro quo* basis, and not necessarily out of patriotism alone. However, the chapter will also highlight that whenever a major nationalist demonstration or protest was to take place, the union was always determined to be present.

Two particular individuals in the society, one a prosperous master of the combination from the 1870s, and the other a colourful and much respected general secretary of the union from the early 1900s, shall be discussed in some detail, as both became involved in variations of militant Irish nationalism. The former turned informant and became infamous, while the latter became a martyr when mortally wounded during his participation in the 1916 Easter Rising.

The chapter begins with the combination's advocacy of Daniel O'Connell and his efforts to secure the repeal of the Act of Union. It concludes almost ninety years later with the 1920 general strike, which the society was to endorse resolutely. Although the AGIBSTU was a small union in the scheme of things its role in the struggle for Irish domestic governance, and later for full independence, will be shown to have been not insignificant.

### **Chapter III**

This chapter will concentrate on matters relating to the finances of the combination and later trade union. It is divided into two main sections.

As a consequence of the range of benefits provided to its membership, and the necessity of supporting their strike actions, the acquisition of a steady supply of funds was of critical importance to the society. For this reason the first section shall concentrate on the issue of subscription arrears, and penalties imposed upon members for these. The acquisition of dues was vital to the union. This source of finance essentially constituted its lifeblood. However, there were many members who rarely or never paid their subscriptions. This was a problem to which numerous solutions were applied, all various forms of coercion, ranging from fines to expulsions.

The second section of the chapter will deal with the misappropriations of funds. This problem was not common, but occurred at least once at most levels at which members had responsibility over monies. The greater the quantity of funds coming into the society the greater was the danger of this crime occurring. Things eventually got out of hand when the person ultimately responsible for the trade's finances began to embezzle them.

This is the smallest chapter in the dissertation, but it concentrates on issues of critical importance to the society's existence.

#### **Chapter IV**

This chapter deals with the primary tactics used by the bricklayers' combination, and later trade union, to both enhance and guard its members' rights, and privileges. In essence the chapter highlights how an early Irish trade union fought for, and defended, its membership. The critical legislative and social developments which were to influence the tactics employed by the union, within the period under discussion, shall also be examined.

The chapter is divided into two sections; the first shall provide an overview of the methods used by the early bricklayers' society in fighting for its members' rights in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This was a time when the combination laws were still on the statute books; consequently making any combinations' records incriminating evidence.

The second section, the main section of the chapter, will concentrate on the period from 1869 to 1921. This section is divided into three main subsections; these are strikes and threatened strikes, penalties for breach of rules at work, and the promotion of the combination's status. These three tactics were the primary methods used by the union to advance and defend the rights of its membership, enforce its rules, and promote its public image. Each subsection will provide numerous and insightful examples from the union's history to elucidate the issues discussed.

## **Chapter V**

This chapter, the final chapter of the dissertation, shall discuss eight separate benefits granted by the union. These are not all the benefits that were available, but they are the easiest to identify as distinct, as certain others were one-off grants of assistance. These benefits existed to help members and, in one case in particular, others besides. This chapter will essentially examine the various means by which an early Irish craft union went about assisting, and alleviating the hardships of, its needy members.

As the AGIBSTU was a craft trade union its finances were focused mainly towards the assistance and protection of its membership, and not towards industrial actions. However, it will be shown that the union was not operating all eight of these benefits simultaneously.

This chapter is divided into two separate sections. The first will deal with benefits granted to members mainly, however not exclusively, during the nineteenth century. The second section will concentrate on benefits available during both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The benefits in the second section shall receive the most attention as they were arguably the most important that the union provided for its membership.

Members were not entitled to these benefits as an automatic right, but on the condition that they were fair members of the trade, and had been so for a certain period of time. The impact of other factors on the provision of benefits, such as the loss of funds due to strikes or lockouts, an anaemic intake of subscriptions, alterations to the union's rules, and in the early years of the twentieth century the government's introduction of social legislation, are also discussed here.

The above division of the five chapters along thematic lines is convenient because of certain, already mentioned, fragmentation in the union's records. This



division also suits the topic better as it allows for concentration on the development of particular facets of the society over time, and enables the setting of their development within the wider context of industrial relations history. Throughout the course of the dissertation one shall be able to see how individual factors, seemingly separate, were to impact upon each other. This will highlight the close interconnectivity of the various aspects of the union under discussion here. Ultimately, there were sufficient developments within the period from 1869 to 1921 to justify the choice of the above divisions.

The dissertation ends in 1921, the year the Irish Free State was came into existence. Although the Irish government accepted all legislation which had previously been introduced by Westminster, its foundation was a significant breach in an historical continuum stretching back at least half a millennium. It is for this reason that the dissertation shall trace the society's development up until that epochal year.

Although this dissertation is an examination of a trade union, it will also discuss in some detail the different individuals whose ideals and actions were to impacted upon the evolution of the various bricklayers' societies in Dublin, for good or ill. How they acted with, against, and interacted with, these societies and their membership shall be examined. We will see what motivated these individuals - their sense of justice, brotherhood, or nationalism - to act in the manner in which they did. These people, in most cases members of the guild, combination, or union, were due to birth, circumstance, or chance, to leave their mark on the development of these societies.

The bricklayers' trade union shall not be treated in isolation, as that would be impossible. The combinations and trade unions it interacted with will be discussed in some detail, as will the impact upon the AGIBSTU of developments in the wider sphere of trade unionism at the time. It will also be necessary to sketch the political, and to

some extent the social scene in Ireland during the period outlined, as these were to have a profound influence on the development and actions of the labour movement.

Notwithstanding that this is a review of the development of an Irish trade union, occurrences of significance in England shall also be examined in some detail. This is simply because Ireland was very closely linked to that country, both politically and economically, throughout the years under discussion in this dissertation.

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## Chapter I

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# **The Origins, Emergence, and Structure of the Bricklayers' Trade Union**

'A trade union is a continuous association of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their working lives.'

Sidney and Beatrice Webb [1896]

The bricklayers' trade union had a long and complex history. Its emergence as the AGIBSTU in 1888 was the result of a continuum stretching back to 1670. The controversy surrounding this trade union's lineage goes to the very heart of the origins of the trade union movement in Ireland. There are disputes as to whether there actually was a direct line of succession between the later union and the Guild of Bricklayers and Plasterers, known also as the Guild of Saint Bartholomew. It has been argued that they were in fact two separate and distinct entities. Nevertheless, the first section of this chapter, drawing upon primary union records, argues the opposite.

Evidence in the form of a membership card, entitled the Ancient City Card, dated on the reverse side from 1823, and on the side shown 1802, points to a possible starting time for the combination (1 Appendix A).<sup>1</sup> There were also reports of a combination of bricklayers active in Dublin in the late eighteenth century, however these accounts are sketchy at best.<sup>2</sup> This section, to place the story in its proper context, shall begin with the establishment of the Guild of Bricklayers and Plasterers, and thereafter show how it interacted with the later combination. The fatal flaws inherent in the structure of this guild in particular, and all guilds in general, are also discussed. The purpose here is to chart the origins of the AGIBSTU, and to illustrate that its claims to continuity with the Guild of Bricklayers and Plasterers were founded on firmer ground than simple appropriation of the past of others unto themselves. The first section of the chapter will in essence show that the combination's emergence was an evolution from, and not a revolution against, the guild.

The second section of this chapter will briefly examine the alterations to the governmental structure of the AGIBSTU necessitated by the development of branches

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<sup>1</sup> N[ational] A[rchives], A[ncient] G[uild of] I[ncorporated] B[rick and] S[tonelayers'] T[rade] U[nion], 1034/7, Work cards of John Fitzpatrick 1823 and 1834.

<sup>2</sup> *Dublin Chronicle*, 13 September 1792.

around the country. This expansion began slowly after a change in the union's rules in 1892, but gathered significant momentum in the wake of Richard O'Carroll's election as AGIBSTU general secretary in 1906. Thereafter there was a veritable explosion of branches in the latter years of the first decade, and in the second decade, of the twentieth century. The nationwide expansion of the AGIBSTU was the logical conclusion to an historic process of development which had begun centuries before with the establishment of the Guild of Bricklayers and Plasterers. The altered governmental structure of the union will be seen to have facilitated this expansion.

## **The Origins and Emergence of the Bricklayers' Combination**

### **The Origins of Trade Unions**

The beginning of trade unions, or combinations, in Britain and Ireland can be traced to the turn of the eighteenth century, and the decay of the system of guilds. The combinations were composed of associations of workers with the same skills. Prior to this time it was guilds which had represented the masters, journeymen, and apprentices (Webb, 1929).

Guilds began to appear in Europe from the eleventh century onwards. The earliest were the firth or peace guilds. These guilds consisted essentially of groups of people who came together to offer mutual aid after the breakdown of the protection afforded by the ties of kinship. Merchant guilds, religious guilds, military guilds, and craft or trade guilds constituted the four principal types of guild that were to emerge. Of these, the merchant guild, which regulated commerce, was initially the most powerful and hence important (Clark and Refausse, 1993). In Britain and Europe in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries guilds of merchants and traders emerged, some of which were extremely influential. An example would be the famous Hansa, or Hanseatic League,

based mainly in and around the German and Scandinavian cities of the Baltic Sea. The Hansa was strong enough to impose its will on nations, by military force. It defeated Denmark in 1370 when Danish King Vladmir I tried to seize Visby on the island of Gotland, and end the Hansa's economic control of the south-western Baltic. For a short period the League effectively dominated Denmark.

This form of guild lost its pre-eminence with the emergence of the trade or craft guilds. 'Craft gilds were first mentioned during the reign of Henry I (1100 – 1135) about 50 years after the first appearance of the merchant gild' (Daly, 1950, p. 71). These bodies were associations consisting of master craftsmen, journeymen and apprentices. Their *raison d'être* was to establish and maintain standards of workmanship, and to teach apprentices their art so as to continue it.

Yet this is where the pre eighteenth century craft guilds differed from those that came afterwards. Those of the eighteenth century only had masters as members; master craftsmen who owned capital and often employed several workers. 'Towards the end of the eighteenth century contemporary records show there was in many crafts a striking out by the journeymen for themselves, as against the masters' (Swift, 1948, p. 166). A fissure developed and led the journeymen and apprentices to form their own organisations, to represent and protect themselves. These organisations were the combinations. Consequently, in most cases there is no actual continuous historical connection between these societies and the medieval craft guilds. Webb (1929) states that the Guild of St. Mary Magdalene, which represented the master barbers of Dublin, tried to suppress a union of journeymen barbers, which had formed to seek shorter working hours. The combinations were to fight for the rights which the journeymen and apprentices had once enjoyed when they had been recognised as part of the craft guilds. The Dublin guilds had become the exclusive domain of the employers. However, the

exclusion of the journeymen weakened the guilds' control over industry and commerce in the eighteenth century. Eventually all that remained to them was their political power, and when this authority was ultimately removed in 1840, the guild's membership in general abandoned them.

However, Tannenbaum (1964) argues that the trade unions should be seen as an extension and development on the craft guilds, pre eighteenth century, because of their similarity of concern for industrial and employment matters. He further states that the move from guilds to combinations or unions, was merely a reflection of changes in technology. Trade unions could consequently be seen as an organisational development rather than innovation. Nevertheless, Webb and Webb (1896) state that it is the uniqueness of their membership, confined to employees, which makes trade unions qualitatively different to the guilds, and therefore a distinct organisational category. They strongly criticised the specific claims by Dublin craft unions to great antiquity. Webb and Webb (1896) argued that the use by the unions of the guilds' symbols and patron saints was only an adoption. It was not the result of direct continuity and development. The Webbs in fact accused the Dublin unions of annexing antiquity. D'Arcy (1971, p. 113) remarks that the Webbs 'rightly dismissed the alleged structural connection between guild and trade union in Dublin as a myth.' Although these accusations may not have been incorrect in certain cases, such sweeping assertions cannot possibly encompass the diverse origins of all the different trades operating in that city. Writers, amongst them, Swift (1948), have criticised the Webbs' examination of the trade unions of Dublin, describing it as at best superficial.

These theses on the subject confront any research into the field, and consequently their relevance has to be considered at all times. However, based upon the evidence uncovered, and which is set out in the coming pages, the chapter will show

that the AGIBSTU can be seen as an extension and development upon a trade guild. This was because of cross over of traditions, but far more importantly of personnel. These personnel link the combination in this study to the guild that preceded it. The combination under these circumstances can be seen as an organisational evolution that was better equipped to survive in a new societal environment than its ancestor was. For this reason it is essential to examine the Guild of Bricklayers and Plasterers, the guild to which both the AGIBSTU claimed, and the Operative Plasterers and Allied Trades Society of Ireland (OPATSI) claims, continuity.

### **The Origin of the Guild of Bricklayers and Plasterers**

In Dublin, over almost 350 years 25 separate craft guilds came into existence. The tailors' in the early fifteenth century was the first, while the apothecaries' in 1747 was the twenty-fifth and final guild. Annually elected officials consisting of a master and two wardens governed these organisations, the membership of which was open to both men and women. Throughout their long existence the craft guilds dominated Dublin both commercially, and even more so politically (Clark and Refausse, 1993). Members, known as 'free citizens of Dublin,' possessed the freedom of the city, which, along with trading privileges, entitled them to vote in both municipal and parliamentary elections. Guild membership was consequently a gateway into the world of Dublin civic politics. This made achieving membership of a guild, and admission to freedom of the city, essential for anyone harbouring political ambitions.

The Guild of Bricklayers and Plasterers was established by Royal Charter in 1670.<sup>3</sup> This charter was granted by 'Charles II, by grace of God, of England, Scotland,

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<sup>3</sup> D[ublin] P[ublic] L[ibraries], G[ilbert] L[ibrary], Charter and Documents of the Dublin Guild of Bricklayers, Ms. 81, p. 1.



France and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith,' in the tenth year of his reign.<sup>4</sup> Or as it would have appeared in Latin on the original charter, the whereabouts of which are presently unknown, *Caroli Secundi Dei gratia Angliae, Scotiae, Franciae, et Hiberniae, Regis, Fidei Defensoris &c. decimo quinto, Annoque Domini 1670*. The Guild of Saint Bartholomew was 'twentieth in order of precedence in the Dublin City Assembly' (Clark and Refausse, 1993, p. 16). It was conferred with the right to nominate two councillors to the city's Common Council.<sup>5</sup>

The Royal Charter limited the guild's jurisdiction, or sphere of influence, to the city of Dublin and within three miles thereof.<sup>6</sup> The charter conferred upon the guild the right to make bylaws for the better government of its trade and the protection of what was described as its 'Incorporate Right.'<sup>7</sup> The enforcement of these powers did a great deal to encourage a higher standard of craftsmanship. Persons found guilty of lowering their standards through carelessness, or inefficiency, could be punished. This charter conferred on the master and wardens of the guild the authority to set up a court consisting of the Master, the Wardens, and 12 other members of the guild. The court had the power to hear and determine cases of poor workmanship which had occurred in Dublin, or within the guild's three mile sphere of influence, in the arts and mysteries (from the French word for craft, *metier*) of bricklaying or plastering. The court also had the power to punish the offenders by way of fines, or imprisonment. These fines had to be paid to the guild, and could be used by the guild as it saw fit. The court even had the authority to confiscate the offender's private property, and sell it in order for the fine to

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<sup>4</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/30/1, Typed transcripts of Royal Charter incorporating Guild of Bricklayers and Plasterers.

<sup>5</sup> Appendix to the First Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Municipal Corporations in Ireland: Part I. Report on the City of Dublin. 1835 [25.] xxvii., 79., pt. 1, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> DPL, GL, Charter and Documents of the Dublin Guild of Bricklayers, Ms. 81, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/30/1, Typed transcripts of Royal Charter incorporating Guild of Bricklayers and Plasterers.

be paid. Any surplus after payment would be returned to the offender. The guild could also bring an action for debt in any court of law in the Kingdom of Ireland.<sup>8</sup>

Ostensibly, the guild was established to protect the rights and privileges of the bricklaying and plastering trades. However, after the 1691 Treaty of Limerick, guild membership was strictly confined to Dublin persons of the Protestant Episcopalian faith, and all Protestants, strangers, and foreigners, who were craftsmen knowledgeable in the arts and mysteries of bricklaying. Prior to admission a prospective member would have to take the Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy before the master and wardens of the guild. Thereafter they would be admitted into the corporation, and made free, by paying 20s.<sup>9</sup> Catholics could not take these oaths. This discrimination was in conformity with official policy advocated by Dublin's Common Council since 1652.

That none shalbee admitted unto the assemblies of any of the corporacions of this cittie unlesse hee bee a Protestant, and that noe freeman take any to bee an apprentice but such as are or wilbee and continue in the Protestant religion (Webb, 1929, p. 202).

This policy was embodied in the Corporation Act of 1661 which sought to exclude in particular Protestant Nonconformists, and by extension Roman Catholics, from holding public office. The act prohibited the election to local government of anyone who would not take the sacrament of Holy Communion at a Church of England service. This 1661 Corporation Act, the 1672 Test Act, and a 1678 Common Council decree, along with the 1691 Treaty, excluded Catholics, and the others, from the political life of society.

Catholics, Jews, and Protestant Nonconformists, unable to become full members of the craft guilds were still technically eligible to become associate members. These members were known as quarter-brothers, because they paid a levy to the guild four

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> DPL, GL, Charter and Documents of the Dublin Guild of Bricklayers, Ms. 81, p. 5.

times a year. Not attaining full guild membership meant that Catholics avoided having to take the oaths they found objectionable (MacGeehin, 1952). However, quarter-brothers could not partake in the management of the guilds.

Catholics were eventually granted the right to full membership of trade guilds by the 1792 and 1793 Relief Acts. At that time the British government was eager to appease Irish Catholic public opinion, as it was preparing for war with Revolutionary France.<sup>10</sup>

The British Government put pressure on the Irish government and the result was the Relief Act of 1793 which swept away most of their disabilities, and gave the Catholics the vote. Nevertheless, the Catholics were still excluded from parliament, the judicial bench, and the higher offices of state (McDowell, 1984, p. 241).

However, most guilds obstinately refused to admit Catholics. Each guild cited various justifications for this discrimination. The normal excuse given was a guild's essentially Protestant character.<sup>11</sup> This is despite the fact that the proportion of Catholics in Dublin had increased from 33 percent of its population in 1715 to constitute about 70 percent by the 1790s (Fagan, 1991). Even by the late 1830s the Guild of Saint Loy had its freemen sign their names to an oath distinctly unacceptable to Catholics (1 Appendix B).<sup>12</sup> The refusal by the guilds to comply with the Relief Acts was a primary factor which ultimately led to their abolition in the 1840s (Hill, 1982).

### **The Background to the Emergence of the Bricklayers' Combination**

The combinations emerging in the early 1700s were mainly organised social clubs, but later concerned themselves with improving the wages and working conditions of their

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<sup>10</sup> *The Times*, 20 January 1793.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 15 April 1793.

<sup>12</sup> NA, M. 2925 – 2927.

members. These clubs, later called trade clubs, were formed on a local basis initially. However, as industrial development progressed, some local associations developed into national and even international trade unions. Trade clubs consisted of tradesmen who had served a recognised apprenticeship. In the early eighteenth century these societies existed in many towns and cities in the United Kingdom. They helped members in need and ensured that apprentices were qualified through a system of regulation. Trade clubs used their collective power to decide how many journeymen and apprentices a master could employ (Robertson, 1965). Robertson (1965) further points out that these clubs could even go so far as to pay members not to work for certain employers who would not agree to the clubs policies on the ratio of apprentices to journeymen. Trade clubs consequently 'operated under a cloud of criminality' (O'Hara, 1981, p. 4). In the years to come trade clubs did not amalgamate. Strong loyalty to a trade, carefully nurtured during the Industrial Revolution, developed in the nineteenth century into the strong craft trade unionism we know today in Ireland.

In 1729 the earliest anti-combination legislation was passed by the Irish Parliament against 'unlawful combinations of workmen, artificers and labourers' (Boyd, 1985, p. 11). This law imposed a penalty of three months hard labour. 'The basis of a restrictive approach towards trade unions was founded on the civil doctrine of restraint of trade (any agreement which restricted trade or competition was void and unenforceable) and the criminal offence of conspiracy' (Salamon, 1998, p. 92). 'The act of combination alone was held to be illegal under Common Law in *R. v Journeymen Tailors of Cambridge* in 1721' (O'Hara, 1981, p. 3). Many more combination laws were to be introduced here throughout the eighteenth century. Each act, in essence, imposed harsher sentences than the ones preceding it.

The French Revolution, which had shown that society could be overthrown by the lower classes, was the incentive for the passing of two further Combination Acts in 1799 and 1800 (Parkinson, 1973). The first, the famous Combination Act whose author was William Wilberforce, outlawed all trade unions in Britain. This legislation was amended slightly by the act of the following year. However, by recognising the problem of combinations, the British and Irish Parliaments were effectively recognising their existence. It was 'in the face of [this] great adversity created by employers, Parliament and the law, the first effective and durable unions were formed by skilled workers who enjoyed relatively high wages and continuity of employment' (Farnham and Pimlott, 1998, p. 107).

The above acts were just some of the anti-combination legislation that was introduced here prior to the dissolution of the Dublin Parliament. Thereafter, the authority for the imposition of laws in Ireland passed to Westminster under the Act of Union, this came into effect on 1 January 1801.

### **The Emergence of the Bricklayers' Combination**

It was in order to evade the combination laws that the nascent combination of journeymen and apprentice bricklayers was known in the late eighteenth century as the 'Body Bricklayers.' They were an underground organisation, existing in the murky world where combinations masqueraded as friendly societies (Pelling, 1969). An 1824 Commons Select Committee inquiring into a number of matters, one of which was combinations, would reveal this form of concealment as not uncommon.<sup>13</sup> This early bricklayer combination did not publicise its activities, nor, far more disappointingly, did it maintain records of private meetings. However, any group of workers known to have

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<sup>13</sup> Reports from the Select Committee appointed to inquire into the State of the Law Regarding Artizans and Machinery, H. C., 1824 (51.), v.

combined for the purpose of seeking increased wages, decreased hours of work, or the prevention of the introduction of machinery, were liable to be convicted under Combination Acts. The British government, the Irish Parliament and later the Dublin Castle administration, and the courts, all enforced these laws with the utmost severity. Upper class society, and the press they controlled, also readily joined in the campaign against the workers.

The first evidence of combinations existing in the building industry comes from the 1760s. At this time:

the men in the building trade in Dublin who worked from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily for 9/- or 10/- a week were combining in fields and other places, and were raising subscriptions under the pretext of being societies for supporting the sick or burying the dead of their own fraternities, but which were actually being used to support them during their absence from work (Nowlan, 1956, p. 102).

In the 1780s employment conditions in the capital were poor, in 1783 it was estimated that 30,000 people were unemployed (Kelly, 1992, p. 47). This figure represented 20 percent of the city's population.<sup>14</sup> Nine years later there was still severe unemployment in Dublin, 1792 'was a year of hardship and industrial unrest in the Liberties (Henry, 1993, p. 28). Swift (1948) tells that there was much combination forming and turn-outs (strikes) at this time, among textile workers, corn porters, and ship carpenters (and apprentices), shoemakers, paper workers and bricklayers. The newspaper the Freeman, in an article entitled 'Combinations,' attacked the combinatory, stating that their actions would destroy trade. It suggested that their demands, if acceded to, would be limitless.<sup>15</sup> The paper urged decisive action to prevent combinations running rampant and destroying the prosperity of Ireland. In Summerhill, bricklayers, calling themselves

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<sup>14</sup> *Dublin Evening Post*, 12 April 1783.

<sup>15</sup> *Freeman*, 29 May 1792, quoted in Swift, *History of the Dublin Bakers and Others*, p. 172.

Body Bricklayers, went out on strike. They then attacked colts who were working for a lower rate of wages.<sup>16</sup> Colts were 'men who had not served a proper apprenticeship' (O'Connor, 1992, p. 2). This is one of the earliest references to bricklayers acting in consort and evidence of, if not a definite combination, a "proto-combination" of bricklayers.

In the 1790s, while many of Dublin's finest buildings were under construction, the Guild of Bricklayers and Plasterers, its power to control trade undermined by internal weaknesses, was slowly degenerating. This was also the case for most of the other Dublin guilds. Decay had not been a sudden occurrence, but rather a gradual fading into the twilight. The exclusion of journeymen, now active in combinations, had turned them against the masters. What had once been inclusive clubs for Masters and journeymen (Protestant), had now become employers' societies exclusively. This placed a fatal strain on the guilds (Clune, 1943).

The exclusion of Catholics, even after the 1793 act, also severely weakened the guilds. By the 1830s all the Dublin guilds had 'shrunk into little cliques of middle-class capitalists, steadfastly refusing to admit any Roman Catholics' (Ryan, 1919, p. 70). The Municipal Corporations Commission's 1835 report on the City of Dublin contains some extraordinary insights into the sectarian nature of the guilds, and by extension sections of the wider society. It described craft guilds as strongly sectarian in outlook and policies.<sup>17</sup> Jordan Lambert, one of the officers of the Goldsmiths, stated, on oath, that the guild "did everything in their power to keep out Catholics and bad Protestants" (Webb, 1929, p. 250). One case in point was that of Bryan Bolger, a quantity surveyor and one of the few catholic quarter brothers in the Guild of Saint Bartholomew. D'Arcy

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<sup>16</sup> *Dublin Chronicle*, 13 September 1792.

<sup>17</sup> First Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Municipal Corporations in Ireland; 1835 [23.] xxvii., 1.

and Hannigan (1988) describe how his attempts in 1793 and 1794 to gain the full membership of the guild, and freedom of the city, were frustrated at every turn by the master and others. This resulted in the recognition of Irish corporations as bulwarks of Protestant reaction that deserved to be swept away (Jupp, 1981). The following, from the 1835 report, is quite astonishing:

since the year 1793, the freedom of the Corporation and the guilds has been by law open to Roman Catholics, yet there is not known to have been, to the present time, a single individual of that persuasion admitted by the common council.<sup>18</sup>

Clune (1943) notes that with so much of society excluded from their ranks, it was extraordinary that the guilds managed to survive as long as they did.

Although full membership of guilds after 1691 was restricted to Protestants who were skilled in a particular trade, by the nineteenth century the policy was not enforced at all. By that time the guilds seem to have been admitting any applicants so long as they were “good” Protestants, and not necessarily skilled practitioners, or even connected in any way with the guilds’ trades.<sup>19</sup> Within the Guild of Bricklayers and Plasterers this situation had become almost farcical. The 1835 report also tells that in 1833 only 39 of that guild's 104 members were actually skilled in the trade. Of these 39 only seven were journeymen. The remaining 65 members of the guild were a heterogeneous hodgepodge of attorneys, architects, and painters, two of whom were not even resident in Ireland, never mind Dublin.<sup>20</sup> In effect ‘all manners of political tricksters were finding their way into the craft guilds in the hope of ascending thence to

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<sup>18</sup> Appendix to the First Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Municipal Corporations in Ireland: Part I. Report on the City of Dublin. 1835 [25.] xxvii., 79., pt. 1, p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> D[ublin] C[ivic] M[useum], D[ublin] C[ity] A[rchives], Roll of Free Citizens of Dublin, roll number 5.

<sup>20</sup> First Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Municipal Corporations in Ireland; 1835 [23.] xxvii., 1.



the municipal assembly or service' (Swift, 1948, p. 198). The number of political adventurers in the Guild of Saint Bartholomew therefore outnumbered bricklayers and plasterers by a ratio of almost two to one. They 'wanted to gain the civic franchise; the most direct road was the freedom of some guild, therefore they joined some guild, which it was did not matter' (Clune, 1943, pp. 160-161). This problem had been developing within the guilds as a whole since the middle of the previous century. Its effects gradually eroded away their trade regulating influence.

As the social status of the Guild of Saint Bartholomew's membership rose, so the quality of the guild itself deteriorated. It ceased to be what it had once been, its focus shifting entirely from trade matters to politics. Although politics had been a part of its essence from inception, it had not been the guild's sole *raison d'être*. When it became so for the majority its diverse membership, the Guild of Bricklayers and Plasterers structure and focus became fatally asymmetrical.

On the other hand, the Bodymen were developing and strengthening their organisation, an organisation whose membership consisted exclusively of men with an intimate interest in their trade.

### **The Bricklayers' Guild and Combination**

The relative positions of the guild, and combination, after the turn of the nineteenth century, a crucial point in the history of both organisations, is worth examining. The majority of the guild were no longer overly concerned with the preservation of their chartered rights and privileges in matters affecting trade. They were determined however to retain the political benefits which membership afforded them. In later years they were to ignore Benjamin Pemberton, their master on a number of occasions, and his urgings for reorganisation and reform.

On the other hand, in the combination there was a large body of tradesmen who were dependent upon the successful operation of the building industry for a living. They were intimately concerned with the preservation of the guild's rights in the regulation of trade. Due to their religion however the majority were prevented by the guild from membership, while all were prohibited by law from forming a combination. Hence they became the enigmatic Body Bricklayers.

A document was discovered in Leixlip in the 1960s which provides evidence that, in the early nineteenth century, the bricklayer's combination was already extending its influence, unlike the guild, beyond Dublin. This document, a set of rules and regulations for members, is dated 3 September 1815 (2 Appendix A).<sup>21</sup> It 'is a bold statement of some of the most basic principles of trade unionism, including minimum rates of pay, limitation of apprentices, and refusal to work with those not qualified by apprenticeship' (D'Arcy and Hannigan, 1988, p. 48). It is interesting to see a printed document such as this, considering that the combination laws were still in force at that time. Nevertheless it proves that a bricklayers' combination was both in existence and active. It was around this time that the Royal Canal was under construction near Leixlip. The project required the attention of a workforce numbering in the thousands. It is likely that Dublin bricklayers travelled to the canal to find work, and brought with them their society's structures. Thereafter they used Leixlip as a base for activities and organisation.

Within ten years all the combination laws had been swept away thanks to the work of Francis Place, a tailor from Charing Cross, London, and his associates in Westminster. It was as a result of Place's lobbying that radical parliamentarians

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<sup>21</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/7, Rules and Regulations of the Bricklayers of City and County of Dublin and Kildare, 3 September 1815.

established a Select Committee of the House of Commons in February 1824. This committee's report, and the subsequent vote in parliament, brought about the repeal of the combination laws that same year (Pelling, 1984). Although Place and his parliamentary associates, Joseph Hume amongst these, did not achieve full and unqualified freedom for trade unions, they 'opened the flood gates' (Hutt, 1975, p. 11).

When Benjamin Pemberton was first elected master of the guild in 1812, his inaugural address displayed the first signs of revolt within the ranks against its institutionalised discrimination and structural defects. He was well placed to recognise these, having been a leading figure in the guild since first elected a free citizen of Dublin in midsummer 1792.<sup>22</sup> He was scathing in his denunciation of the guild's failure to exercise its corporate rights and privileges. In this address Pemberton stated his objective of saving the fallen and degraded corporation from ruin. At this time, as it was to persist in doing to its end, the guild was refusing to admit catholic tradesmen, despite the 1793 act of the now defunct Irish Parliament. Pemberton urged the admission of Catholics, openly condemning the guild's policy on the matter. By 1812 Catholics constituted the majority of tradesmen in the city (Doyle, 1977, p. 10). Pemberton also observed that a motley crowd had come amongst the guild's membership, having joined solely for reasons of political ambition.

What Pemberton had recognised in the early nineteenth century was that the true interests of both the guild and the combination were converging. He felt that in order to protect the interests of both, some effort should be made to bring about a working agreement between them. His later positions notes Boyle (1988, p. 49) '[as] chairman of the bricklayers and plasterers' union, [and Master] of the bricklayers' guild,' placed him in the ideal location for this undertaking. Meanwhile he, and his allies within the guild,

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<sup>22</sup> DCM, DCA, Roll of Free Citizens of Dublin, midsummer 1792, roll number 3.

continued to conduct the affairs of their organisation as best they could. They retained under their control the property of the guild, including the Royal Charter, the seals of office, and all of its other paraphernalia.

However, in the years after his address Pemberton recognised the futility of trying to reorganise such a moribund body as the guild had become. He instead turned his attention to the problems of recruiting properly trained and skilled tradesmen into the combination in order to improve the overall quality of its membership. These were men who depended on the exercise of their trade for a living. This combination was to undertake the tasks which the guild was neglecting. Due to the intermeshing of membership with the guild, the combination was to assume some of the better traditions of that body before it had become moribund. This combination was to be the genesis of the later nineteenth century trade union.

Pemberton was eminently suited to undertaking this task. He had an intimate knowledge of the workings of the guild and its character, its rights, and its privileges. He was able to take the best of these elements and infuse them into the new body he was organising. This he would accomplish without any apparent break in continuity between the two, the combination effectively growing out of the guild. Pemberton engaged in this task for almost the half century that he was involved with the bricklaying trade in Dublin.

This evolution of the combination out of the guild took place against a turbulent backdrop. It began with the passing of the Act of Union, the 1820s saw the emancipation agitation, which was soon followed by the outbreak of the tithe war. Running simultaneous to this revolt was O'Connell's developing campaign for the repeal of the Act of Union. Pemberton, a Protestant, was one of the combination's members

who subscribed to the repeal of the Union fund (2 Appendix B).<sup>23</sup> This act, although seeming rather strange in light of events later in the century, appears not to have been uncommon at the time. 'Though Repeal generally commanded even less support from Protestants than Emancipation, inconclusive evidence suggests that Dublin's Protestant artisans, who comprised about 20 per cent of city tradesmen, favoured the cause' (O'Connor, 1992, p. 20).

In the early nineteenth century guild members granted maiden cards had to swear allegiance to the English King, and to abide by the guild's rules. Thereafter they were given their freedom. However, under the rules of the combination the oaths were dispensed with. Applicants only had to make a simple declaration to abide by the rules of the trade.<sup>24</sup> At this time there were 215 names recorded in the books of the combination, that is excluding apprentices, and members expelled for the non-payment of contributions. Number 41 amongst these names was that of Benjamin Pemberton, he made the above declaration and took out his freedom in the combination on 24 May 1830.<sup>25</sup> Many other members of the Guild of Saint Bartholomew were to join the combination in the following years. Amongst these were William Murray,<sup>26</sup> Leonard Williams,<sup>27</sup> Thomas Browne,<sup>28</sup> John Graham,<sup>29</sup> John Ryan,<sup>30</sup> and John Butler.<sup>31</sup> They had all been elected free citizens of Dublin while members of the guild.<sup>32</sup> As no complete list of guild members exists the roll of free citizens of Dublin is a means of

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<sup>23</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/1/1, Bricklayers' characteristic and charitable record book, 1830 – 1845, 12 December 1830.

<sup>24</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/4, Trade form binding apprentices, with declaration of membership of the guild. No date, c. 1900.

<sup>25</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/1/1, Bricklayers' characteristic and charitable record book, 1830 – 1845, 24 May 1830.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, 17 November 1830

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, 3 April 1843.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 10 April 1843.

<sup>30</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/2/1, Income and Expenditure, 25 August 1844.

<sup>31</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/2/2, Income and Expenditure book, 1846-57, 5 October 1846.

<sup>32</sup> DCM, DCA, Roll of Free Citizens of Dublin, 1780-1840, rolls number 3 and 4.

comparing the membership of both societies. When it is considered that only seven guild members were journeymen bricklayers in 1835,<sup>33</sup> and the seven of the above confirmed guild members joined the combination, it would not be unreasonable to assume that most members of the guild skilled in bricklaying were ultimately to transfer to the combination. This flow of personnel inextricably linked the futures of both organisations.

At the urging of Benjamin Pemberton, twice master of the guild, the Operative Bricklayers and Plasterers in the 1830s formed a "union" of their two trades to enforce the rights of the Guild of Bricklayers and Plasterers as set out in the charter granted to that body by Charles II in 1670 (Ward-Perkins, 1996, p. 25).

No documentary records exists concerning the negotiations involved, however subsequent evidence shows that a form of merger was successfully concluded. Agreement having been reached between the parties they appointed a subcommittee to draw up rules, procedures, and standing orders. Other committees were appointed to inquire and report on certain aspects of the building trade in Dublin. When the preliminaries had been completed it was decided to convene a general meeting of a "union" of bricklayers and plasterers of Dublin. At this meeting, on 13 March 1833, all necessary rules and standing orders were adopted, and Pemberton was appointed master of the "union".<sup>34</sup> This meeting heard a report from the committee inquiring into the state of the trade before and after the passing of the Act of Union. This report also held the hopeless guild up for judgement. At the meeting Pemberton advocated that other workers should form unions in their respective trades, for the purpose of enjoying their

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<sup>33</sup> First Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Municipal Corporations in Ireland, 1835 [23.] xxvii. 1.

<sup>34</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/1/1, Bricklayers' characteristic and charitable record book, 1830 – 1845, 13 March 1833.

corporate rights (3 Appendix B).<sup>35</sup> There exists no record of the members' reaction to his address.

Nevertheless, the guilds remained in existence with little changed. As the Guild of Bricklayers and Plasterers survival, and 'the survival of the trade and craft guilds [in general], depended on retaining political power, when this influence was removed by the Municipal Corporation Reform (Ireland) Act of 1840 their existence was rendered meaningless' (Clark and Refausse, 1993, p. 13). This act, by expanding the municipal franchise, as the 1832 Reform Act did for parliamentary boroughs, and abolishing the guilds' rights to direct representation on municipal authorities, removed from the guilds the role they had played in the government of Dublin, a role stretching back to the middle ages (D'Arcy, 1968). All guild members whose interests were solely of a political nature swiftly abandoned them after this. However, the 1840 act was not necessarily friendly to Catholics, it contained a number of devices for restricting their voting power (Sloan, 1996). Nevertheless, the following year saw elected, for the first time in history, a Nationalist corporation in Dublin Corporation. The Orange stranglehold over Dublin was all but annihilated and replaced by a corporation that was five-sixths Nationalist. Daniel O'Connell was elected the city's first Nationalist Lord Mayor.

In the period immediately after 1840 the bricklayers and plasterers "union" made a concerted effort to revive the dying guilds. This was in order to enforce the rights granted the Guild of Bricklayers and Plasterers over its trade in the charter of 1670. On 12 June 1845 the "union" won a test case in the court of Queen's Bench, which reaffirmed the validity of the guild's 1670 Royal Charter. The court found that there was nothing in this charter that was either inconsistent with, or antagonistic to, the

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<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

operation of the 1840 Municipal Act.<sup>36</sup> The 1840 act had abolished the guild's representational, but not trade regulating rights. As a result the court found that the guild was still in existence and had the right to be protected by bylaws.<sup>37</sup> Soon afterwards combinations of the various trades began trying to revive the guilds and essentially assume both their identity and trading rights. The prospect of a revived, exclusively trade orientated, and potentially far more powerful, guild system shocked the Dublin employers into frenzied action. Under their urgings the Dublin Chamber of Commerce was instrumental in obtaining an Act of Parliament which finally abolished the guilds on 22 August 1846 (D'Arcy and Hannigan, 1988).

### **The Development of the Bricklayers' Combination**

After 1846 the "union" between the bricklayers and plasterers was dissolved, and each combination again became a separate entity. The bricklayers' combination from that time onwards was known under a number of different names. In the 1860s it was called The Regular Operative Brick and Stonelayers. A decade later it had become The Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers of the City of Dublin.<sup>38</sup> In 1888, when the society registered as a trade union, the name was the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union.<sup>39</sup> It is worth noting that 1670 was often given as the date of commencement of the trade union to the Registrar of Friendly Societies.<sup>40</sup>

When the "union" between the bricklayers' and plasterers' combinations dissolved, the bricklayers held onto the original Royal Charter of the guild. A copy of

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<sup>36</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 13 June 1845.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/6, Minutes of monthly and general meetings, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1869 – 17<sup>th</sup> April 1876, 17 October 1872.

<sup>39</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/1. Rules and regulations of the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1888.

<sup>40</sup> NA, R[egistrar of] F[riendly] S[ocieties] R[ecords], T82, Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, A/1, 1888 – 1960, [D].



the charter was made for the plasterers. This can be seen on public view in the Civic Museum, Dublin. Ward-Perkins (1996) states that both the bricklayers' and plasterers' claims to direct descent from the Guild of Saint Bartholomew originate primarily from the 1840s. Nevertheless, to the present day the OPATSI's membership cards give its year of establishment as 1670. When Dublin artist Walter O'Grady designed a banner for the bricklayers' combination to carry in the O'Connell Centenary Celebrations, it proclaimed 'Incorporated by Royal Charter A.D. 1670.'<sup>41</sup> With members such as Pemberton moving between both societies, there was definite and strong cross-pollination from the Guild of Saint Bartholomew to the bricklayers' combination.

The guild's traditions did not die with it in 1846 however. Instead they hung like a shadow over everything the bricklayers' combination did in the years thereafter. These traditions manifested themselves most obviously in the names and conventions the bricklayers' combination would assume. Consequently, certain of the guild's practises and customs were incorporated into the bricklayers' combination. This was due to Pemberton retaining the office of master of the combination for a substantial period of the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The position enabled him to take what he knew from the guild and infuse it into the combination. This was to colour the way everything operated, and was viewed, within the combination thereafter. The text of the following resolution, adopted in 1845, highlights how earnestly the combination embraced some of the guild's traditions.

Resolution:

That in order to prevent any person not duly and lawfully entitled to the Rights and Privileges conferred on us by Royal Charter, from exercising the Arts and Mysteries of Bricklaying, we the bricklayers of Dublin hereby resolve that no person either in this community, or otherwise, shall be admitted as a member or Licentiate, without sending in his

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<sup>41</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/6, Minutes of monthly and general meetings, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1869 – 17<sup>th</sup> April 1876, 5 April 1875.

petition stating where and to whom he had served the full and lawful term of seven years, and to be duly sworn to the truth thereof. And we respectfully request the Masters and the Corporation to give this resolution their most careful consideration.<sup>42</sup>

It is notable that for decades after 1845 the combination's chairman was known as the master. This title was eventually referred to as president by November 1874,<sup>43</sup> however it was not until the twentieth century that the term master was done away with entirely.<sup>44</sup>

While both the bricklayers and plasterers had been working and operating as a single entity under the terms of the charter, they set up two separate bodies. These were called the Faculty of Bricklaying and the Faculty of Plastering. They were each charged with the task of examining the competence of apprentices who had completed their term of apprenticeship. If they were satisfied that such persons were duly qualified they would be awarded with a certificate similar to the copy of original and typed text reproduced in 3 Appendix A.<sup>45</sup> Since their division, although the bricklayers' and plasterers' combinations operated as separate entities, their rules and customs remained very similar. Both combination's scales of benefits were practically analogous. Except for a number of sometimes quite vicious spats, there was relatively close co-operation between the progeny of the Guild of Bricklayers and Plasterers in matters affecting their trade.

In later years when the Faculty of Bricklaying was dispensed with its duties were assumed by the bricklayer's union's executive committee. When this committee

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<sup>42</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/1/1, Bricklayers' characteristic and charitable record book, 1830 – 1845, 5 June 1845.

<sup>43</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/6, Minutes of monthly and general meetings, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1869 – 17<sup>th</sup> April 1876, 17 November 1874.

<sup>44</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/3, Rules of the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1902, Rule 3. – Constitution and Government, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/30/3, Licence granted by Corporation of Bricklayers and Plasterers to Boyle Lynch 8 Plunket St., Dublin, 25 August 1845.

was satisfied that a person was duly qualified, he having served an indenture of seven years to a member of the trade, that person could be proposed and seconded for membership by already established members of the trade. The body of members present at this meeting had the right to vote for or against the admission of the proposed member. If the applicant were successful, in the presence of the executive committee, he would be required to make the simple declaration to abide by the rules of the trade. The new member of the union was then presented with his freedom card. Freedom cards were of great value to members, and some examples still exist in the National Archives of Ireland today. The new member would then be made free on the payment of certain levies. This ceremony was known as the taking out of one's freedom. The similarity of wording with the guild is obvious.

As regards apprenticeships, their control and regulation was one of the chartered rights granted to the guild.<sup>46</sup> This right was later taken up by the combination, which successfully enforced it down through the years (4 and 5 Appendix A).<sup>47</sup> The trade set a limit of one apprentice to every four journeymen. Hence the title, a closed trade. Under exceptional circumstances this ratio was allowed to deviate. 'The skilled workers, much as they appealed to the law, believed that their chief strength lay in controlled entry to the trade, regulated by workshop custom and practice' (Leeson, 1979, p. 92). By sustaining an insufficiency of bricklayers, or at least a control on their numbers, the members of the combination, and later trade union, hoped to escape the impoverishment of the labourers.

The bricklayers were a clannish group, and there was a strong tradition of passing the trade from father to son. An example from the mid-nineteenth century

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<sup>46</sup> CDPL, GL, Charter and Documents of the Dublin Guild of Bricklayers, Ms. 81, pp. 10-11.

<sup>47</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/7 Indenture form (pre 1851).

highlights this. In 1862 a Denis Byrne became secretary of the trade. He had joined the society, according to his membership card, 20 years before. He actually served his apprenticeship to none other than Benjamin Pemberton, noted as a very strict and diligent master. Byrne, as will be seen later, guided the trade over many years of its existence. Upon Denis Byrne's death his son John was appointed to the position of secretary. It was in 1888, during John Byrne's time in office, that the society was registered as a trade union.<sup>48</sup> John Byrne's son, Denis, was elected general president of the union in 1923.<sup>49</sup> A post he held until 26 January 1930.<sup>50</sup> Another son, Edward Byrne, served as a trustee for many years. This example reveals how generation followed generation into the society.

In the late eighteenth century the Guild of Bricklayers and Plasterers used to hold its meetings in Saint Audoen's Arch. This arch, created in 1240 as a gateway cut through the ancient city wall of Dublin, still exists today. It is to be found on Cook Street, however the arch itself has undergone many alterations since the Middle Ages. This location also served as the meeting place for other guilds such as the Smiths, and the Butchers. In the early nineteenth century the bricklayers' combination's general meetings during the summertime were held out of doors, usually in the Phoenix Park. These meetings were referred to as fields (Ward-Perkins, 1996). In the years 'from 1834 to 1841 [the guild met] in Merchants' Hall, 41 Wellington Quay' (Clark and Refausse, 1993, p. 16). However, after this period the guild effectively became defunct.

In the years immediately following the passing of the 1840 Municipal Corporation Reform (Ireland) Act, when the combination was endeavouring to revive

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<sup>48</sup> NA, RFSR, 82 T, Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, A/1, 1888 – 1960, [D], 3 September 1888.

<sup>49</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/2, Minutes of General and Committee meetings, 28<sup>th</sup> February 1918 – 26<sup>th</sup> January 1930, 14 March 1923.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, 26 January 1930.

the guild, its meetings took place at 15 Kennedy's Lane.<sup>51</sup> After this endeavour ended in failure, Saint Peter's Orphan School at 51 Aungier Street was used to host its meetings. Finally in 1860 the trade acquired a lease on premises at 49 Cuffe Street. This eventually became known as the Bricklayers' Hall. The union bought this fine building, once the Cuffe Street Savings Bank, in March 1922 for £500.<sup>52</sup> It remained the AGIBSTU's home until 1988, when the corporation took it down during the widening of Cuffe Street. The address lent itself to the more commonly used name for members of the union, the Cuffe Street bricklayers.

With regard to the financial transactions of the combination in the early nineteenth century, it can only be said that while a record was kept of income and expenditure, there is no evidence of a balance sheet existing from that era. On the many occasions that the expenses of the society were found to exceed its income, the shortfall had to be met with whatever reserves of funds were on hand at that time. The combination's first detailed income and expenditure accounts did not appear until 1844.<sup>53</sup>

In the 1830s the income to the trade consisted of ordinary dues, payments for maiden cards, part payments for freedom, and part payments of fines. Apart from these contributions to the society's funds there was also, as alluded to, a weekly subscription taken from the members and forwarded to the repeal of the Union fund. This collection in support of the repeal cause was maintained over a number of years. According to the trade's lists a sum of £1-10-0 was collected on 13 December 1833.<sup>54</sup> While more than

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<sup>51</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/30/3, Licence granted by Corporation of Bricklayers and Plasterers to Boyle Lynch 8 Plunket St., Dublin, 25 August 1845.

<sup>52</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/2, Minutes of general and committee meetings, 28<sup>th</sup> February 1918 – 26<sup>th</sup> January 1930, 6 March 1922.

<sup>53</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/2/1, Income and expenditure book, 1844 – 1845.

<sup>54</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/1/1, Bricklayers characteristic and charitable record book, 1830 – 1845, 13 December 1833.

nine years later, on 10 April 1843, the amount collected came to £3-8-0. Two members of the trade were appointed to collect the money, and they were each compensated 5s. 8d. for their time spent performing this task.<sup>55</sup>

The bricklayers' society's expenditure on such items as mortality grants did not exceed 20s. at this time. Field expenses were an occasional outlay, while on very rare occasions a payment of 20s. was made to the secretary and the master. The only full time combination official during the 1830s appears to have been the beadle.<sup>56</sup> A field on 7 November 1833 resolved that the beadle of the Bricklayers' Community should receive 3s. 6d. per week for his attendance, without any other charges. It further determined that he was entitled to an outside coat and one pair of shoes per year.<sup>57</sup>

A branch of the Manchester based British Friendly Society of Operative Bricklayers (BFSOB) appeared in Dublin in the 1830s. This society was to be the only challenger to the Dublin bricklayers' hegemony over their city. The secretary of this British based union gave evidence to an 1838 Commons Select Committee on combinations of workmen established due to the urgings of Daniel O'Connell. He told how his society was having difficulty surviving in Dublin. It seems to have been very weak, and unable to enforce its will on any of the employers.<sup>58</sup> The Dublin bricklayers, in an effort to rid themselves of this competitor, had declared its members to be colts. It is notable that, in his answers to questions, the BFSOB's secretary, Luke Seery, felt his society to be at a distinct disadvantage against the Old Body of Bricklayers as the Dublin combination was then called (Boyle, 1988). This was the favoured building union of many Dublin employers as it had contributed to O'Connell's election

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<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, 10 April 1843.

<sup>56</sup> The beadle was an officer of the combination.

<sup>57</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/1/1, Bricklayers characteristic and charitable record book, 1830 – 1845, 7 November 1833.

<sup>58</sup> Second Report from the Select Committee on Combinations of Workmen: Minutes of Evidence, H. C., 1838 (646.), viii, pp. 145-148.

campaign, and also to the repeal fund.<sup>59</sup> 'It may have been because of [this] that the Dublin bricklayers placed themselves very firmly amongst the minority of trade unions who publicly supported O'Connell in his campaign against the combinations' (Ward-Perkins, 1996, p. 24). Some unions therefore had their own best interest at heart when they decided to support O'Connell. The employers seem to have treated the British union, on account of its weak position, with utter disdain, cutting members' wages at a whim and without the least fear of reprisals.

This section ends just as the Great Famine begins to take hold. Little is known of the union between this time and when detailed minutes appear in 1869. One thing is certain however, between 1841 and 1851 the decrease in the numbers employed in the construction industry in Ireland was in the order of 17,100, from 68,400 to 51,300 (Geary, 1996, p. 172).

## **Governmental Structure of the AGIBSTU**

### **Changes in Union Governance**

This section will briefly discuss the impact of the AGIBSTU's expansion on its governmental structure in the years after 1892. This expansion was brought about by the introduction of a rule in that year which permitted the founding of branches anywhere in the country, except in Dublin.<sup>60</sup> In subsequent years branches appeared in all of the major Irish cities and many of the larger towns. The result was that an increasing proportion of the union's membership was based outside of Dublin. Up until this time the Cuffe Street branch had effectively constituted almost the entire of the AGIBSTU's membership. The supervision of numerous branches required the establishment of new

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<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/2, Rules and Regulations of the Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1892, Rule 52. – Branch Lodges, p. 31.

committees of management. The creation of new committees significantly altered the governmental structure of the union – built up over the years since 1845 - as it moved from an almost entirely Dublin based trade union to a nationwide trade union.

A discussion of the branches themselves lies outside the scope of this dissertation, and in light of the fragmented nature of their records would be an enormous undertaking. Nevertheless, a list of the branches is provided in 4 Appendix B so one can discern their geographically diverse nature. It should be noted that not all of these branches existed simultaneously, or for that matter even in the same decade.<sup>61</sup>

As set out in the first printed rules of the union from 1888, quarterly meetings effectively governed the society. These meetings were held on the first Thursday evenings of January, April, July, and October, at the same hours as committee meetings. The first Thursday in January was the annual meeting of the trade. At this meeting balance sheets and quarterly reports were read, and members were nominated for election to the positions on the union's executive. Any member absent from the quarterly meetings, without sending in an apology, would be fined 1s.<sup>62</sup>

The monthly meetings of the trade took place on the first Thursday of every month. These, and the quarterly meetings, were held between 8 PM and 10.30 PM in the evenings during the summertime. In winter the meetings took place in the evening hours from 7 o'clock to 9.30 PM.<sup>63</sup> Any officers of the trade who failed to attend the monthly meetings would be fined 6d., while the president and secretary would each be fined 1s. for their absence.<sup>64</sup> The holding of, and procedures at, monthly and quarterly meetings had evolved over the years from the inception of the combination.

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<sup>61</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/19/1 – 9, Branch record books.

<sup>62</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/1, Rules and Regulations of the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1888, Rule 13. – Quarterly Meetings, pp. 15-16.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*



As of 1888 the entire AGIBSTU consisted of the Dublin branch, along with three other branches in Kingstown, Bray, and Newbridge. These satellite branches were small and weak, and each experienced varying degrees of difficulty in just managing to remain in existence. The Kingstown branch on at least one occasion ceased to exist before it was reconstituted. For a description of this branch's revival see 5 Appendix B.<sup>65</sup> The section of bricklayers which had been active in Leixlip in the early years of the nineteenth century appears to have faded away by the latter decades of that century.

Introduced into the union's rules in 1892 is a section devoted to expanding the society around the country, and establishing branches anywhere the executive effectively saw fit to do so (6 Appendix B).<sup>66</sup> This decision was reached at a special meeting of the trade, chaired by the master James Lyons, on 7 August of that year. This meeting had been called to consider a number of alterations to the rules of the union, one of which concerned the establishment of branch lodges. All the proposed rule changes at this meeting were approved of unanimously by the assemblage.<sup>67</sup> The rule change regarding branch lodges gave the Dublin committee the power to establish branches in all towns, cities, and counties in Ireland, except for Dublin.<sup>68</sup> This one qualification on unlimited expansionism was on account of an earlier dispute which had threatened to see a second branch of the union established on the north side of Dublin. The development of this second Dublin branch, seen by some as the harbinger of a possible AGIBSTU split, had been voted down 'with acclaim' by the membership on 19 May 1892. Consequently

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<sup>65</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/1, Minutes of committee meetings and quarterly meetings, 1892 – 1895, 8 June 1892.

<sup>66</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/2, Rules and Regulations of the Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1892, Rule 52. – Branch Lodges, p. 31.

<sup>67</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/1, Minutes of committee and quarterly meetings, 1892 – 1895, 7 August 1892.

<sup>68</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/2, Rules and Regulations of the Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1892, Rule 52. – Branch Lodges, p. 31.

there was no desire on the part of the executive, or members, to revisit, or reopen, that confrontation.<sup>69</sup>

The expansion in the wake of this rule alteration was slow, but ultimately had the effect of altering the governmental structures previously in place in 49 Cuffe Street. As of 1892 an executive committee consisting of a master, book steward, second steward, secretary, treasurer, two trustees, and six council members governed the union.<sup>70</sup> At this time the master remained in office for three months, then the book steward became the master, and the second steward took up the book stewards vacated position. After three months he too assumed the office of master, his term also of the same duration. Thereafter, in a rather complicated set of procedures, other members of the committee would be elected to the position of steward to await their turn to become master of the trade.<sup>71</sup> At this time the committee, consisting of all thirteen members sitting at weekly and special meetings, were allocated the sum of 3s. to be divided equally amongst them.<sup>72</sup>

By 1902 a Committee of Management consisting of a president (formerly master), first steward, second steward, treasurer, two trustees, and delegates was conducting the business of the trade union. All of these officers were elected annually, save for the trustees. The trustees were allowed to remain in office so long as the union desired, and they gave good service. The president and members of the executive were paid via five percent of all members' subscriptions. This amount was divided amongst the members of the executive as per their attendance.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/1, Minutes of committee meetings and quarterly meetings, 1892 – 1895, 19 May 1892.

<sup>70</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/2, Rules and Regulations of the Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1892, Rule 4. – Constitution and Government, p. 11.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, Rule 5. – Election of Officers, p. 11.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, Rule 39. – Payment of Officers, p. 15.

<sup>73</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/3, Rules of the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1902, Rule 3. – Constitution and Government, p. 6.

In the years after 1900 there was a marked increase in the pace of branch expansion. There was in effect a veritable explosion of new branches popping up all over the country, from Derry in the north to Tralee in the south. This can for the most part be put down to the work of Richard O'Carroll after he became union secretary in 1906. 'He set about rebuilding the union's strength and extending its influence outside Dublin' (Ward-Perkins, 1996, p. 26). The rapid growth in the number of branches necessitated the significant alteration of the management structures at Cuffe Street. The Bricklayers' Hall changed from the head office of a Dublin based union with a few outlying branches, to the headquarters of a nationwide trade union. A general council, altered executive council, and finance committee, all came into existence to manage the more complicated union structure both resulting from, and required by, this development.<sup>74</sup>

The general council of the enlarged union was its supreme government. This council was composed of the representatives from the different branches of the society. Each branch was permitted one delegate per one hundred members, or if the branch was small, one delegate for a branch numbering at least twenty members. The general council held its annual meeting at 3 o'clock every 17 March. However, special general meetings could be convened at the discretion of the general president, general secretary, or executive council. Delegates were paid 7s. for attending at the general council, and were also provided with their railway fares. The general council would review the past year's events and accounts, and the functioning of the union as a whole. It could also act as the final arbiter of the decisions made by the executive council.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/4, Part 1 of the rules: Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1912.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, Rule 13. – General Council, p. 10.

The executive council was a body which met at least quarterly. At this council's meetings the quarterly balance sheets and reports were reviewed. The executive council consisted of three members elected by the general council. These members were the general president, general secretary, and general treasurer. The remaining three members of the executive council were all trustees. Meetings took place at 49 Cuffe Street on the first Tuesdays in January, April, July, and October. However, special meetings could be called whenever the general president, or general secretary, thought necessary. A subcommittee of the executive council met every Wednesday evening between 8 PM and 10 o'clock.<sup>76</sup> Union members dissatisfied with the determinations of this body, which impacted upon them in some manner, had the right to appeal to the general council of the trade.<sup>77</sup>

The finance committee consisted of almost identical membership to the executive council; the general president, general secretary, general treasurer, and three trustees. This committee managed the financial business of the organisation. Its duty was to conduct this business to the satisfaction of the executive council. As a safe guard its rules stated that all cheques issued by this committee had to be signed by two of its trustees and countersigned by the general secretary.<sup>78</sup>

There were also the branch committees which governed each branch, the most important of these committees was the Dublin branch committee. This branch committee consisted of five bricklayers elected by the members of the union in Dublin. The candidate who received the greatest number of votes would become the union's first steward, while the second highest supported candidate would be elevated to the position of second steward. The general president, general secretary, and general treasurer also

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<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, Rule 14. – Executive Council, pp. 10-11.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, Rule 13. – General Council, p. 10.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, Rule 15. – Finance Committee, p. 11.

acted on the Dublin branch committee. The general president and the other five Dublin members of this committee received five percent of the branch's income. This figure was to be divided equally amongst them. The committee's duty was to manage the business of the Dublin branch of the union, the most important branch, and the one from which all of its top officials came.<sup>79</sup> The committee met twice weekly, on Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday evenings.<sup>80</sup> The hours of attendance on Monday and Wednesday evenings were from 7.30pm to 10 o'clock, while on Saturdays from 6pm to 8 o'clock.<sup>81</sup>

The general president, general secretary, and general treasurer sat on each of the above councils and committees, the paramount decision making bodies of the union. This overlapping of control ensured coherent management, and unity of purpose between the different councils and committees. It also facilitated an easy flow of information between the governing bodies. It must be noted that the ultimate power within the AGIBSTU resided with the Dublin branch, the largest branch of the society, the seat of the union's head office, and the branch that always returned the upper echelons of the society. Effectively, as had always been the case, the top officials of this branch were the top officials of the union.

In the two decades from 1892 to 1912 the highest office in the society altered significantly. It changed from a master with a term of office of three months in 1892,<sup>82</sup> to a president of the union with an annual term by 1902.<sup>83</sup> Ten years later the title of the office had become general president, and its holder the head of a nationwide trade

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<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, Rule 16. – Dublin Branch Committee, p. 11.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, Rule 17. – Dublin Branch Committee Meetings, p. 12.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/2, Rules and Regulations of the Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1892, Rule 5. – Election of Officers, p. 11.

<sup>83</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/3, Rules of the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1902, Rule 3. – Constitution and Government, p. 6.

union.<sup>84</sup> The person in the position of general president was, as with the holders of all the other elected offices, eligible for re-election on the completion of his term of office. A member was deemed elected to this position, as with general secretary, and general treasurer, on acquiring the majority of votes of the entire society.<sup>85</sup>

This section has highlighted how the union's expansion at the turn of the twentieth century necessitated the establishment of new layers of government. This enlarged structure comprised of two new councils and one committee. However, ultimate power remained vested in 49 Cuffe Street, seat of all these bodies as well as the Dublin branch committee, which was also presided over by the union's general president, general secretary, and general treasurer.

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In conclusion, it was the 1832 Reform Act's redistribution of the parliamentary seats to favour the growing industrial areas, and its extension of the vote to the upper middle classes, which significantly reduced the importance of the guilds in both the Municipal and Parliamentary elections. This process was completed in 1840 with the passing of the Municipal Corporation Reform (Ireland) Act, which ended guild representation on Dublin City Council (D'Arcy, 1971). However, by that time the guilds had long been in terminal decline. Their internal weaknesses, like a cancer, putrefied them from the inside out, until visibly decaying all that remained was a pale shadow of their former selves. Nevertheless, the 1840 act did not actually abolish the guilds per se, nor their trading rights. The subsequent effort by the "union" of bricklayers and plasterers to revive the Guild of Saint Bartholomew was a notable achievement. It provided hope for a new era of trade orientated guilds. This hope however was to prove ephemeral, in

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<sup>84</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/4, Part 1 of the rules: Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1912, Rule 18. – General President, pp. 12-13.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*

1846 the guilds' final privileges were abruptly removed. They and their trading rights were anathema to the prevailing economic theory of the day, namely *laissez-faire*. Pushing the guilds into an abrupt oblivion saved them from ultimately having had their privileges gradually eroded over time.

The guilds' structure developed within a period of ethnic and religious intolerance. They were in effect a function of that intolerance. So long as society sanctioned such discrimination they could, and did, endure. However, once society altered, and sectarian mindsets became more accommodating, the guilds became an anachronism. They were in the end out of place, and finally out of time.

The first section of this chapter has discussed the transformation from guild to combination, and ultimately the combination's evolution to trade union, the AGIBSTU. In this case the master of the guild was a prime mover behind the development of the combination. His efforts ensured that a viable, and what was to be a wholly Irish based, combination effectively evolved out of the guild. This in essence conforms to Tannenbaum's thesis. Although the Guild of Saint Bartholomew died, not everything died with it. Some of that guild's better traditions, and more importantly members, transferred to the combination, bequeathing to that society an unbroken link to 1670. This ancient link, now 330 years old, endures to this day within the Building and Allied Trade Union (BATU), a society to which the scion of the AGIBSTU became a constituent upon its establishment in 1989.

In essence, the Guild of Bricklayers and Plasterers was the direct primogenitor of the combination that ultimately became the AGIBSTU. The guild's nobler legacy still endures a living and working entity, in both Dublin and Ireland, at the turn of the twenty-first century.

As regards the second section of this chapter, the alteration of the union's governmental structure was a necessary development in order to cope with growth in the number of branches in the years after 1892. Although the general council, executive council, and finance committee were all new bodies, they were still dominated by the men from Cuffe Street. This concentration of power ensured that the expanded AGIBSTU, with its numerous branches around the country and its added layers of management, was at heart the same Dublin trade union as always. The altered governmental structure facilitated what was ultimately a vital chapter in the historic development of the society, nationwide expansion.



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## Chapter II

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# **The Bricklayers' Union and the National Question**

'Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!'

Patrick Henry [1775]

Nationalism always coloured the outlook of Irish trade unionists, save for those of an Orange persuasion who, in the majority, resided in the north-eastern counties. However much trade unionism and socialism were internationalist movements, Irish trade unionists could not ultimately forget who they were, or where they came from. At times of political tension in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries nationalist ideology took precedence over socialist ideology amongst most members of Irish trade unions. 'Irish workers could not ignore the claims of nationality, and when the political temperature rose they rallied in support of national causes, or organisations' (Boyle, 1988, p. 4). However, this is not to discount that fact that economic considerations did influence the combinations' support for certain nationalist movements and leaders.

This chapter will analyse the effects of Irish nationalism upon the union, and its reactions to this powerful influence. The chapter will begin by discussing Daniel O'Connell and his struggles for the repeal of the legislative Union between Great Britain and Ireland. The Fenians are then examined, and the Bricklayers contacts with that movement are analysed. The chapter will also discuss the delight and approval which the combination's membership displayed towards the son of one of their number, upon his election to the Imperial Parliament at Westminster. Their advocacy of this man was based upon his espousal of home government for Ireland. The bricklayers' union's, sometimes hectic, preparations to mark the centenary of Daniel O'Connell's birth are examined. In 1882 one of the union's most prominent and respected members was to draw down upon himself, as an indirect result of his nationalist activities, much of the nation's scorn and disapprobation. These activities were also to have serious implications for Parnell, and the cause of Irish Home Rule. The early twentieth century saw a growing impatience in the land with Westminster's seemingly interminable aversion to granting it domestic governance. The outbreak of hostilities in Europe in

1914, further delaying Home Rule, was to ultimately transform this impatience into armed confrontation on the streets of Dublin. The general secretary of the AGIBSTU at the time, Richard O'Carroll, fought in the 1916 Easter Rising. His action, as if it was needed, firmly nailed the union's colours to the nationalist mast. In the time leading up to, and during, the Anglo-Irish War, the union was to comply fully with the Irish Trades Union Congress's (ITUC) nationalist policy of opposition first to conscription, and later to British detention of political prisoners.

## **Nineteenth Century**

A distinctly nationalistic outlook was to be a significant feature of the union down through its history. This sense of nationalism first manifesting itself clearly when members began subscribing to the Repeal of the Union Fund. Their subscriptions continued for as long as the repeal movement remained active. However, as will be discussed later, members did not always adhere to constitutional forms of nationalist agitation. Sometimes they overstepped the bounds of peaceful protest, and moved into the realm of violent physical force nationalism.

### **Daniel O'Connell**

With the repeal of the combination laws in 1824 the embryonic bricklayers' combination emerged into the light of a new dawn. At this tumultuous time Daniel O'Connell's Catholic Association was struggling to finally liberate Irish Catholics from the civil disabilities which had impeded them since the time of Henry VIII. 'To certain observers in England the mass meetings organised by this association seemed the harbingers of an uprising' (Owens, 1997, p. 513). The Times captured the mood in

England when it noted, 'we tremble at every wind that blows from Ireland.'<sup>1</sup> Established in 1823, the Catholic Association finally achieved its objective in 1829, with the passing of the Roman Catholic Relief Act. With this act Catholics had achieved, at long last, their emancipation, and the right as citizens to be elected to parliament.

However, there are no bricklayer combination records documenting either financial or moral support for the Emancipation cause. One can assume that, as most of the combination's members would have been Catholics, they would not have been averse to this development. Nevertheless, there exists financial records confirming the bricklayers' combination's support for the repeal of the Union (2 Appendix B).<sup>2</sup> Repeal advocacy amongst the bricklayers' combination's members, and the Dublin artisans in general, continued after O'Connell's demise, and endure until the achievement of Irish independence. D'Arcy (1968, p. 71) notes that during the first three-quarters of 1844 the Dublin artisans collected £600 for the Repeal Association, or to give it its proper name at this time, the Loyal National Repeal Association. Although nationalism was a significant factor in the combination's support for the repeal of the Union, it does not necessarily account for why Protestant artisans such as Benjamin Pemberton would have advocated this cause. Their support for repeal can only be more fully explained by sketching the economic situation that existed in Ireland at the time, and by referring to Table 2.1.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 29 September 1828.

<sup>2</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/1/1, Bricklayers' characteristic and charitable record book, 1830 - 1845, 12 December 1830.

<sup>3</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 3 November 1840.

Table 2.1

## Employment variations within selected Irish industries, 1800 – 1834

| Occupation  | 1800    |        |       | 1834    |       |        |
|---|---------|--------|-------|---------|-------|--------|
|   | Masters | Men    | Wages | Masters | Men   | Wages  |
| Cotton- operatives                                  | 55      | 14,500 | 40/-  | 12      | 625   | 15/-   |
| Calico Printers and Assistants                      | 14      | 3,977  | 40/-  | 4       | 584   | 40/-   |
| Broadcloth Manufacturers                            | 90      | 5,030  | 22/-  | 11      | 370   | 15/4   |
| Wool Combers  | 3       | 230    | 32/6  | 5       | 66    | 16/-   |
| Carpet Manufacturers                                | 13      | 700    | 32/6  | 1       | 50    | 12/5   |
| Labourers   | -       | 300    | 12/6  | -       | -     | -      |
| Stuff and Serge Operatives                          | 25      | 1550   | 20/-  | 5       | 140   | 6/-    |
| Tanners   | 49      | 300    | 16/-  | 31      | 300   | 12/-   |
| Tobacco Pipe Makers (Men and Boys)                  | 10      | 52     | 26/-  | 4       | 22    | 22/-   |
| Slaters (Men and Boys). Many men petty jobbers      | 41      | 450    | 32/6  | 4       | 100   | 25/-   |
| Housesmiths   | 28      | 213    | 28/-  | 22      | 110   | 20/-   |
| Braziers and Coppersmiths                           | 12      | 100    | 30/-  | 4       | 23    | 15/-   |
| Tinplate Makers (of the men, only 26 employed)      | 33      | 295    | 32/6  | 15      | 50    | 17/6   |
| Stonecutters  | 42      | 600    | 20/-  | 12      | 140   | 18/-   |
| Hatters (37 importers who do not manufacture)       | 31      | 390    | 36/-  | 12      | 100   | 18/-   |
| Glass Manufacturers                                 | 4       | 180    | 32/6  | 2       | 64    | 30/-   |
| Glass Workers (now generally working for shops)     | 5       | 30     | 60/-  | 1       | 35    | 15/-   |
| Shipwrights (men and boys)                          | 11      | 300    | 32/6  | 4       | 144   | 27/-   |
| Spanish and Morocco Leather Overseers               | 10      | 112    | -     | 4       | 39    | -      |
| Smiths (making Hosiers' frames)                     | 4       | 50     | 24/-  | 0       | 1     | uncer. |
| Silk Operatives (Broad and Ribbon)                  | 70      | 6,436  | 26/-  | 32      | 587   | 15/-   |
| Stucco Plasterers (men mostly jobbing)              | 18      | 157    | 26/-  | 14      | 90    | 26/-   |
| Pin Makers  | 4       | 46     | 30/-  | 2       | 33    | 16/-   |
| Pin Makers (Women)                                  | 0       | 900    | 8/-   | 0       | 450   | 4/6    |
| Shoemaker   | -       | 3000   | 25/-  | 0       | 1,300 | 15/-   |
| Shoemakers (Women)                                  | -       | 200    | -     | -       | -     | -      |
| Coopers   | 37      | 370    | 30/-  | 26      | 244   | 25/-   |
| Carpenters (not 300 now constantly employed)        | 160     | 4,500  | 30/-  | 50      | 1,000 | 26/-   |
| Brogue Makers                                       | 16      | 130    | 25/-  | 11      | 94    | 11/-   |
| Paper Stainers                                      | 27      | 110    | 30/-  | 11      | 32    | 20/-   |
| House Painters                                      | 30      | 650    | -     | -       | 300   | -      |
| Curriers  | 50      | 224    | 37/6  | 15      | 37    | 20/-   |
| Glovers   | 20      | 154    | 32/6  | 9       | 28    | 12/-   |
| Female Glovers                                      | -       | 1,050  | 14/-  | -       | 67    | 6/-    |
| Brushmakers   | 8       | 89     | 30/-  | 6       | 49    | 15     |
| Ropemakers  | 16      | 151    | 25/-  | 13      | 100   | 20/-   |
| Cotton and Woollen Hosiers                          | 14      | 529    | -     | 1       | 150   | -      |
| Silk Hosiers (many import-houses not manufacturers) | -       | 373    | 27/6  | 0       | 20    | 11/-   |
| Basket Makers (many of the operatives vendors)      | 4       | 7      | 32/-  | 3       | 140   | 10/-   |
| Skinner (several masters do not employ a man)       | 48      | 179    | 25/-  | 26      | 35    | 13/-   |

|  |    |     |      |    |     |      |
|--|----|-----|------|----|-----|------|
| Tallow Chandlers (only 50 now constantly employed) | 65 | 272 | 26/- | 19 | 140 | 16/- |
| Cutlers  | 14 | 343 | 30/- | 10 | 52  | 15/- |
| Bricklayers  | 35 | 800 | 32/6 | 8  | 600 | 26/- |
| Bricklayers' Labourers                             | -  | 800 | 14/- | -  | 800 | 10/- |
| Parchment Manufacturers                            | 9  | 66  | 25/- | -  | 18  | 15/- |

(Report of Meeting of Loyal National Repeal Association Freeman's Journal, November 3rd, 1840)

This table clearly illustrates the general decrease in the numbers of masters and workers in various trades in Ireland between 1800 and 1834. In the space of merely a generation certain occupations had been driven to the verge of extinction. Two examples taken from the above table are those of carpet manufacturers and cotton-operatives. By 1834 the number of men employed as carpet manufacturers had fallen to seven per cent of their level at the turn of the century. The reduction in the number of people employed as cotton-operatives had been even more severe, decreasing to just over four per cent of its level a generation before. The number of masters employed in both of these industries also fell dramatically, as did operatives' wages. These examples highlight the severe industrial declines experienced within the Irish economy in the period immediately following the Union.

The 1833 report, submitted by the Stucco Plasterers to the National Trades Political Union (NTPU), highlighted the impact of the Union on their trade. Table 2.1 includes the figures from that report. As can clearly be seen for both the Bricklayers and Plasterers, before the Union things had been better. However, their employment woes were nothing like the disastrous declines experienced in both the cotton and the carpet manufacturing industries. Whereas, according to the table, the plasterers had managed to maintain their level of wages, the bricklayers had suffered a quite severe drop in theirs. Ryan (1919, p. 73) notes that the plasterer's employment was in fact irregular, and their wages, despite the table displaying 26s., were actually averaging only 14s. per week.

The most stunning fact that can be ascertained from Table 2.1 is that apart from the basket makers, no other industry had experienced an increase in the number of persons employed. Although the basket makers numbers jumped by a factor of twenty, their wages since the Union had collapsed to less than a third of their former levels.

As can clearly be seen, the Irish economy had not been fairing well since the Union. Supplying the requirements of the British armies during their wars with France had, to an extent, masked this problem. However, after 1815 and the return of peace to Europe, an economic recession took hold (Boyd, 1985). This was followed by a period of economic instability, and another slump in the late 1820s (Clarkson, 1925). A number of factors accounted for this. The national debt of Britain had more than trebled since 1793, and the start of a near quarter of a century of intermittent wars in various coalitions against Revolutionary, and later Napoleonic, France. After 1815, more than 50 per cent of the total annual public revenue was used to service the interest on the national debt. The abolition of income tax a year after Waterloo meant that the burden of servicing and reducing the national debt fell squarely on the shoulders of the consumers and industrialists. This, along with a reduced army and its diminished requirements for materials of every kind, tended to further depress demand, despite a short lived economic boom in 1824-25.

Another result of the political Union had been deindustrilisation, which Ireland experienced from 1825 through to 1850. This occurred in part due to competition from England. After 1824 all tariffs on mainland British goods had been removed, making the British Isles a free trade zone. Irish industry was consequently exposed to vast quantities of cheaper English textiles. The mechanical spinning of flax put an end to the practice of hand spinning. This resulted in the death of the cottage industry here. For example; Bandon in County Cork had over 1,500 hand-loom weavers in 1829.

However, ten years later the number had fallen to 150 (Daly, 1981, p. 153). Deindustrialisation was to ultimately result in the concentration of the linen industry in the factories of the Northeast.

The combination of debt servicing, depressed demand, and floods of cheaper English goods onto the Irish market, was ultimately to lead to the destruction of certain Irish industries. Particularly those industries in which their English counterparts were able to benefit from economies of both scale and scope. This was to severely limit the impact and progress of the industrial revolution in Ireland. Once Ireland fell behind England, the first industrialised nation in the world, catching up competitively became almost impossible. However, a number of Irish industries, concentrated in specific locations, did manage to achieve an industrial niche, such as shipbuilding in Belfast.

‘On 19 August [1831], Dublin tradesmen reconstituted the Liberal Mechanics’ and Trades’ Association, founded in 1830, as the Dublin Trades Political Union (DTPU) to promote the [repeal] cause’ (O’Connor, 1992, p. 21). This body soon came under the control of O’Connell, who decided to make it a national organisation and changed its name to the NTPU. The NTPU worked for the Repeal of the Act of Union, and the reestablishment of a Parliament in Dublin. ‘Attempts [by the authorities] to suppress O’Connell’s campaign for repeal of the Union, first by a series of proclamations against his organisation and then by prosecution of O’Connell himself and sympathetic newspaper editors failed’ (Crossman, 1991, p. 310).

Under the above intimated economic conditions, it is not difficult to see how the Act of Union would come to be recognised by tradesmen of all religious beliefs as a culprit for their woes. It was for these reasons that Dublin’s artisans as a group were to support the moves to try to break, or at least weaken, the legislative bonds (or shackles) between the two islands.



However, the NTPU developed an uncomfortable relationship with the trade union movement in general, this due primarily to 'O'Connell's failure to subsume trade union politics into his movement' (O'Connor, 1992, p. 22). It was also hostile towards the Chartists movement in the 1830s. Boyle (1988) states out that O'Connell opposed the Chartists because he viewed them as subversives, but also because Feargus O'Connor was their leader in England. O'Connor had been a former ally of O'Connell's, but became a vociferous opponent. This animosity stemmed from 'personality and political differences with O'Connell, including O'Connor's suggestions for an alliance of Irish peasants and English industrial workers, [which] led to bitter enmity between the two men' (O'Connor, 1992, p. 24). Feargus O'Connor contemptuously described the NTPU as, 'briefless barristers, pettifogging attorneys, shopkeepers, clerks, and a set of fellows who haunt the public offices like locus' (O'Higgins, 1961, p. 215).

We have seen that although the combinations were at one with O'Connell in demanding the repeal of the Act of Union, O'Connell did not support the unions' own specific aims. These, Davis (1987) notes, would have involved the establishment of an economically protectionist government in Dublin. O'Connell believed in laissez-faire economics, in supporting this policy he allied himself with the Whigs, whom Feargus O'Connor had recognised as probably the greatest enemies of Irish independence (Boyd, 1985). His support for the free market was consequently at odds with the unions' economic objectives. It must also be remembered that O'Connell 'was an ardent monarchist and cherished a romantic attachment for his "darling little Queen" (Victoria)' (Ellis, 1985, p. 100). Accordingly, any government which might have been established under him in Dublin would have strongly retained the link with the English Crown.

The desire for the repeal of the Act of Union, and the earlier achievement of Catholic emancipation, provoked a panic amongst most in the Protestant Ascendancy. The Ascendancy's membership is defined as 'a social elite, professional as well as landed, whose descent could be Norman, Old English, Cromwellian or even (in a very few cases) ancient Gaelic' (Foster, 1988, p. 171). They constituted the most privileged section of Irish society, and the ones in whose interest it was to uphold the status quo. Catholic emancipation, and agitation for the repeal of the Union, were seen by the Ascendancy as significant threats to their position. Although the Anglo-Irish had been living in Ireland for at least 100 years by the turn of the nineteenth century, they identified themselves with the land, but not their Catholic countrymen (FitzGibbon, 1971). Their panic at the dangers posed to them by emancipation and repeal led to the forging of an alliance between Presbyterians and their old oppressors the Protestant Episcopalians, and the fusion of Protestant and Imperial interests, as exemplified in the rise of the Orange Order in the 1830s (Kearney, 1984).

There were more bread riots in Dublin in the summer of 1837, and great deprivation generally. Mokyr (1985, p. 216) states that at this time 'workers in the silk and sailcloth manufacturies were out of work for two to three and a half months a year.' In the winter of 1837–1838 relations between the combinations and O'Connell became decidedly cool. This was brought about by a difference of opinion between him and the unions concerning the extent of their rights. 'O'Connell's views on trade unionism and on working class organisations in general were determined by social and political convictions to which he adhered since early manhood' (Holohan, 1975, p. 11). 'The revolutionary ideas from [Revolutionary] France were too dynamic to be ignored by the established order' (Thomson, 1976, p. 35). As a result, O'Connell, like his rich English counterparts, could not ignore the combinations and was still inclined, even after 1825,

to look on them as subversive, and a threat to his privileged position. His liberalism and pacifism were strongly at odds with the combinations' recourse to restraining trade and employing violence. It became apparent in the late 1830s that he was in fact 'bitterly opposed to the whole idea of trade unionism' (Brown, 1982, p. 93).

In February 1838 he denounced trade unionism in the House of Commons, singling out Irish combinations as being particularly baneful, as against the meritorious societies of Great Britain, and successfully urged the appointment of a select committee to investigate combinations in the whole of the United Kingdom (D'Arcy, 1970, p. 221).

O'Connell was to frequently chair this committee, but to his disappointment it produced no recommendations. The combinations', and O'Connell's, public image was tarnished by this unseemly dispute. The one benefit for the combinations was that they learned the importance of having the public and press behind them. They also sought to resolve future grievances by means that would be legal.

This fear of combinations need not have played upon O'Connell. He would for all the nineteenth century be admired by Irish Catholics, whether in combinations or not, as the man who won for them emancipation, and 'restored to them their long lost dignity as human beings' (O'Higgins, 1961, p. 46). Although sharing the objective of repealing the Act of Union, O'Connell, by attacking the trade unions in the late 1830s and early 1840s and opposing their economic policies, was alienating certain potentially strong and determined allies.

In the dispute between the combinations and O'Connell, the Old Bodymen placed themselves firmly on his side. This put them in the invidious position of advocating the Liberator's moves against their fellow combiners. The reasons for this were not simply blind devotion to the generally accepted leader of the Irish Catholics. The more probable cause, as put forward by Ward-Perkins (1996), was his support in

their struggle against the Manchester based BFSOB which had appeared in Dublin in the 1830s. By contributing financially to O'Connell's election campaigns, the Old Body of Bricklayers achieved favour amongst the building employers of Dublin. This preferential position enabled them to shut out their English opponent. Self interest and self preservation can in this instance be seen to have take precedence over the bricklayers' combination's concerns for either inter union relationships, or nationalism for that matter. There does not seem to have been any interaction between the bricklayers' combination and the Chartist movement, but then O'Connell strongly opposed that movement's presence in Ireland.

When O'Connell 'set up the Repeal Association in 1840 Dublin trade unions were among his earliest supporters' (Hill, 1981, p. 21). In 1842 and 1843 degenerating social conditions, along with the staging of numerous mass meetings, made the repeal agitation a nation wide phenomena. However, the whole cause miscarried in the autumn of 1843 when the London government proscribed a monster meeting planned for Clontarf on 8 October (Sloan, 1996). After this fiasco the campaign disintegrated, eventually into abeyance. Nevertheless, even by September 1845 the bricklayers' combination was still subscribing to the Repeal Association, £12-10-0 in that month.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the above, the Dublin unions in general continued to support O'Connell. In 1845 the Congregated Trades of the City of Dublin took part in a procession to commemorate the Liberator's release from prison. He had been incarcerated for a few months, although he was treated more as a guest than an inmate (Boyle, 1988). However, this procession was to be the last occasion on which the unions of Dublin were to openly support the man while he was alive. Ironically, the following year, during the combinations' campaign to revive the guilds, O'Connell presented two

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<sup>4</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/2/1, Income and expenditure book, 1844 - 1845, 15 September 1845.

petitions to parliament in favour of the bill to abolish the guild's trading privileges (Boyle, 1988).

The bricklayers' support for O'Connell rested upon three separate pillars, self-interest, economic concerns, and lastly the national interest. As a consequence, their support for the man, and for repeal, was not based upon nationalist concerns per se. However, in later years, with the growing sense of patriotism in the country, nationalism would eventually come to the fore as a primary concern of the membership. In this regard the bricklayers and their combination mirrored society's changing attitudes in general.

### **The Fenians**

'The late 1850s were comparatively uneventful for the combinations, the repeal movement was dead, and by 1852 the brief flurry of tenant-right agitation was over' (Boyle, 1988, p. 54). The Great Famine of the late 1840s proved a cataclysmic event in the history of the Irish nation. It coloured everything that went before it, and overshadowed everything that came after. Its effects were to both speed the depopulation of the countryside, through death and emigration, and subdue political and industrial radicalism. In the years after the Great Famine, there are no detailed records on the bricklayer's trade union; the first indication of nationalist support by bricklayers reappears in 1867.

In domestic politics, 1856 saw the establishment of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), or the Fenians, by James Stephens. This society's ultimate goal was far more radical than that of O'Connell, it sought a republic. Ryan (1967) notes artisans, mechanics, farmers' sons, labourers and small shopkeepers, as supporting the Fenians. The list of all those arrested in Dublin after the failed 5 March 1867 Fenian

Rising reveals that people representing almost every occupation in the city were represented in that movement, one of whom was a bricklayer.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that no trade association or union was officially linked to or with the Fenians. These worker organisations in their actions, or more correctly their in-actions, towards Fenianism, displayed an apathy similar to that which they had exhibited towards the Chartists almost thirty years before. O'Connor (1992) states that the reason for this indifference was because the unions were developing interests separate from politics, and that their views were in some senses moderating. This interestingly conforms in part to the liberal theory of industrialism.

On 21 September 1869 a special meeting of the combination was convened.<sup>6</sup> This was in consequence of the Trades of Dublin having decided to hold a great aggregate meeting. The Trades of Dublin had resolved upon staging a vast demonstration in support of the demands for the unconditional release of a number of Fenian prisoners incarcerated at that time. These men were serving their prison terms under the most severe conditions of penal servitude. Marx (1971, p. 163) noted that 'there is no country in Europe where political prisoners are treated like in England and Russia.' This statement, with its Siberian insinuations, gives more than a hint at what these men must have been going through.

These particular Fenian prisoners had been arrested in September 1865 when Dublin Castle had suddenly moved against the organisation (Comerford, 1985). With a strong force of military and police it seized the offices of the Irish People, the Fenian organ founded in 1863 (Ellis, 1985). The editors were taken into custody, as was James Stephens, along with many other leading figures in the movement throughout the

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<sup>5</sup> *Irishman*, 23 March 1867.

<sup>6</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/6, Minutes of monthly and general meetings, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1869 – 17<sup>th</sup> April 1876, 21 September 1869.

country. This was a crippling blow for the Fenians, as it removed from the direction of that organisation some of its most capable figures. The movement never recovered from this, despite Stephens escaping from Richmond prison only a fortnight after his arrest. He was eventually smuggled out of the country, and made his way to America (Kee, 1982). The other Fenian leaders were tried in December 1865, on a charge of high treason, and sentenced to penal servitude.

The meeting the Bricklayers were contemplating attending was part of an amnesty campaign which had begun the year after the men's arrest. By 1868 Isaac Butt, presiding over the Amnesty Association (which later split), was pursuing the release of these prisoners (Thornley, 1964). As time passed numerous trades associations in the different towns and cities joined in the appeals for an amnesty. This campaign was to culminate with a huge demonstration in Dublin.

The objective of the demonstration, it was reported at the bricklayers' combination's meeting on 21 September, was to demand the British government to extend towards these "heroic men" a general amnesty. At this meeting it was proposed by William Foley, and seconded by Alex Kennedy 'that the trade do attend and take its proper position among the trades of Dublin as it had always done.' The assembled members agreed unanimously with the proposal.<sup>7</sup>

A committee of management consisting of twelve members was appointed (1 Appendix C).<sup>8</sup> These, together with the master and council of the trade, were to make all the necessary preparations and arrangements for the attendance of the combination at the meeting. This temporary committee was urged by the Master of the trade to use their utmost exertions for the observance of order and sobriety among the members on the day.

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

The first meeting of the committee of management took place on 23 September.<sup>9</sup> Various tasks concerning the parade were delegated to the membership. A group consisting of William Foley, Dan Larkin, John Queale, and Lawrence Murphy were all dispatched to the Carpenters Asylum the following evening. The naming of the demonstration date took place there, as did the position of the trade in the parade. At a union committee meeting the above delegates reported that the date was set for 10 October, and that the society had been allocated second position in the procession of the amalgamated trades. The location for the amnesty meeting was not decided upon until 28 September, when it was set for Cabra.<sup>10</sup>

Other members from the committee were charged with arranging the union's position in the procession, and monitoring all developments leading up to the actual event. As part of the preparations they also procured a brass band. This band, the Saint James Band, charged £10-0-0 for its participation. The trade's funds at the time were in such an inadequate state that it was necessary to raise a special subscription from members in order to pay for the procession expenses, and the hiring of the band. Every evening between eight and ten o'clock, in the two weeks leading up to the demonstration, contributions from members were accepted. The amount taken in came to £20-4-0, included £3-0-0 donated by the members of the Kingstown branch. Most members donated 2s., however there were exceptions, two members gave 5s. each, while one contributed 10s.<sup>11</sup>

The demonstration at Cabra on October 10 was, according to the police, attended by 200,000 people (Comerford, 1985). 45 different trades paraded on that day.<sup>12</sup> This was the biggest demonstration of the campaign, and was probably the biggest since the

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, 23 September 1869.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, 28 September 1869.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 10 October 1869.

<sup>12</sup> *Irishman*, 12 October 1869.



collapse of the repeal movement. By participating, the union displayed that its sense of nationalism was still strong, if not stronger than, when it had subscribed to the Repeal association. Post rising support for the Fenians would not, unlike pre rising endorsement, lead to any accusations of seditious activity, as that organisation had effectively been emasculated.

Boyle (1988) argues that it was the Fenian's who truly introduced the unions to nationalist republican politics. They were thoroughgoing republicans as opposed to monarchists like O'Connell. The following best sums up the Fenians effects on the country at the time, 'the embers of Irish identity had been subdued, they had not been extinguished; and out of them, as dedicated men blew on the coals, rose once more the deathless phoenix of independent nationality' (Lyons, 1971, p. 21).

Almost four years later, on 7 September 1873 in Clontarf, the trade participated in another amnesty demonstration for some 40 of the Fenian prisoners who had still not been released. 500 members of the combination paraded, and they were accompanied by Father Spratt's band. They carried two banners, one proclaiming 'Labore, Virtute, Gloria.' The other, more significantly, declared 'Erin-go-Bragh.'<sup>13</sup> In a manner this protest highlights the failure, or impotency, of the 1869 protest.

### **Doctor William H. O'Leary MP**

A doctor William H. O'Leary, the son, and grandson of bricklayers, and a close friend of the trade, lectured members on the functioning of the human eye on 4 April 1872.<sup>14</sup> Although his grandfather had died, his father, Thomas O'Leary, was still an active member of the society. The topic of the lecture, which was well received, was a

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<sup>13</sup> *The Drogheda Argus*, 13 September 1873.

<sup>14</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/6, Minutes of monthly and general meetings, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1869 – 17<sup>th</sup> April 1876, 4 April 1872.

relevant subject for members, as a number had lost eyes, and in some cases their complete vision, on account of work related accidents. Doctor O'Leary was a man whose star was in the ascendancy, and who was to come to the assistance of the trade on a number of occasions, as will be discussed.

On 5 February 1874, the master of the trade, Michael Handly, remarked that a great number of members felt it would be fitting to present an address to Doctor O'Leary, who on that day had been returned as the Home Rule League MP for the borough of Drogheda.<sup>15</sup> O'Leary had defeated a Gladstonian Radical named Whitworth in a very close contest, his margin of victory just 10 votes.<sup>16</sup> It was a proud moment for all concerned to see a man they regarded as one of their own go forward to represent Ireland, and try to restore to her a parliament. A great deal of effort went in to preparing the address. It was specially illuminated in artistic style, and a Mr. Lesage of Lower Sackville Street designed a special frame for it.

In early April, a special meeting of the trade was convened at the Bricklayers' Hall for the presentation of this address (2 Appendix C).<sup>17</sup> The politicians present at 49 Cuffe Street that day were John Martin MP, and Alexander M. Sullivan MP. Both Isaac Butt MP, and, as Kee (1993, p. 87) calls him, 'doctrinaire repealer' P. J. Smyth MP, sent on letters of apology for their inability to attend. Isaac Butt's son, Robert Butt, came in his father's stead. Also in attendance was Thomas O'Leary the father of Doctor William O'Leary, John J. Lyons an architect, and several other "popular gentlemen." Master of the trade Edward Costelloe presented the address to Doctor O'Leary, and the secretary of the trade, Denis Byrne, read it aloud for the assemblage.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, 5 February 1874.

<sup>16</sup> *The Irish Times*, 6 February 1874.

<sup>17</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/6, Minutes of monthly and general meetings, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1869 – 17<sup>th</sup> April 1876, 4 April 1874.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

As O'Leary was a member of the Home Rule League, the trade decided to send the League a subscription, and also the names of those members who wished to join it. This was the bricklayers' combination's first real interaction with home rule politicians of substantial standing. As will be seen later however, one of their number was to cause grave problems for Charles Stewart Parnell in the 1880s.

### **The O'Connell Centenary**

At the annual Easter Monday meeting of the society on 29 March in 1875, the members determined that a new banner should be made for the trade. This decision was taken in light of the O'Connell Centenary celebrations which were to be held later in the year. As the trade's funds were low, it was necessary to levy all members 4s. to pay for the banner. On the same day, the trade's recently established band gave its first public performance outside Doctor O'Leary's residence at 38 York Street.<sup>19</sup>

After inviting tenders in early April the members voted for a banner costing £56-0-0 to be designed by the artist Walter O'Grady. The advance on this work was a hefty £15-0-0, but a well to do member of the society, James Carey, lent the money necessary to cover the expense.<sup>20</sup> The other members of the combination held Carey in high regard for the assistance he gave to the society. However, in later years he was to court infamy.

In June, appeals from the Mercy Hospital, and from a number of other organisations for financial assistance, were turned down by the combination on account of a lack of funds.<sup>21</sup> It was channelling all of its financial resources elsewhere.

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, 29 March 1875.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, 5 April 1875.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, 5 June 1875.

The combination's quarterly meeting on 5 July was concerned almost entirely with the costs of the O'Connell Centenary Celebration. The expenditures on preparations for the event in August were becoming not insubstantial. The hiring of a brake and four horses to convey the banner cost £10, while the trade also paid £36 for rosettes and scarves, with other incidental expenses coming to £5. As this meeting was Michael Ennis's last night in office as master of the trade, refreshments were sent for and the band played for him. The minutes note that a large number of members spent the night singing and drinking until the advanced hours of the following morning.<sup>22</sup>

In July most meetings of the committee under the newly elected Master James Carey, an ardent nationalist, were devoted to all the necessary particulars for the O'Connell parade. These included the position of the trade in the procession and the position of the members in their groups. However, by early August, just days prior to the centenary, Walter O'Grady still had not completed the banner. Expenses were ravaging the combination's funds, but Carey again stepped in and provided a further loan of £20-0-0.<sup>23</sup> A replacement banner was hastily done up and made ready.

All the efforts made by the society to take part in the celebrations in memory of O'Connell initially seem somewhat ironic. He a man who cared little for the combinations. However, the bricklayers' trade's attitude towards the Liberator must be viewed in light of their rather special relationship with him in the 1830s and 1840s. Even after more than thirty years, his support in their struggle against their Manchester based rival union had not been forgotten.

The day of the pageant was Friday 6 August 1875. The procession was enormous, it is estimated that anything up to 100,000 took part, with most trades displaying new banners which had been specially made for the event. 'The frequent

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, 5 July 1875.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, 3 August 1875.

parades developed a friendly, but intense rivalry among the various societies, each trade seeking to out-do the rest in the opulence of its pageantry' (Swift, 1948, p. 263). This display, and the vast crowds that attended, thought to have been in the region of 200,000, many coming from the provinces, created a great brilliance never equalled in the annals of Dublin's public commemorations.<sup>24</sup> The day 'provided an opportunity for the trades to meet and take stock. It was, too, an occasion to remember a man who once clashed bitterly with trade unionists, and yet promised them the thing they wanted most' (O'Connor, 1992, p. 32). The day marked the laying of the foundation for the O'Connell monument in Sackville Street, a street later to bare his name (D'Arcy and Hannigan, 1988).

The evening after the procession a Trades Banquet was held. This passed off quietly compared to the bedlam at the banquet for the social elite in the Exhibition Palace. John Keegan, a bricklayer, and Secretary of Associated Trades was in the Chair at the Trades Banquet. Swift (1948) notes that he was seated between the Lord Mayor of Dublin and Doctor William O'Leary MP. Many toasts were given that evening, some to the Queen, but other sentiments lurked, as they always had, just beneath the surface. Swift (1948, p. 287) goes on to state that Keegan gave the concluding toast of the evening to "our Exiled Brothers in United States, Australia and Canada." By this he was referring to exiled Fenian rebels.

In the Freeman's Journal, published following the parade, the report of the bricklayers' combination's participation in the procession of trades did not meet with the members' approval.<sup>25</sup> It in fact led to a general mood of fury amongst the membership. After an apology from the papers the paper's editor, Edward Dwyer,

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<sup>24</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 7 August 1875.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, 7 August 1875.

tempers at Cuffe Street calmed somewhat.<sup>26</sup> The society's minutes note that the Journal's report was garbled and illegible, yet upon examination the author found there were not typographical errors whatsoever in that issue of the Freeman's Journal.

The society's quarterly meeting in early October recorded the expenses it had incurred to partake in the O'Connell procession. Yet never once, throughout the minutes, is there the slightest suggestion that it was neither worth the cost or effort involved.

### **Murder in the Phoenix Park**

In April 1880 Charles S. Parnell, President of the Irish National Land League since the previous October, was elected to Parliament for the first time, as a Home Rule Party MP for Cork City (Kee, 1993). This general election also saw Gladstone returned to power in England. Thereafter he dispatched William Edward Forster to Ireland as its new Chief Secretary. However, Forster's efforts to help the Irish tenants were frustrated by the House of Lords. The result was that the existing legislation against tenants had to be enforced. This was to gain Forster a notoriously bad reputation and elevate the land war to new heights (Moody, 1984).

In response, the government applied exceptional powers of coercion vigorously. The Liberals also introduced a new land bill based on the three Fs. This was not what the Land League had desired, but was certainly an improvement on the way things stood. Nevertheless, Parnell, at the time a prisoner to the extremists, had to show greater opposition to the bill than it merited (Kee, 1982). It was then that Gladstone had the principal leaders of the League, Parnell, Dillon, O'Brien, Brennan, Sexton, and Kettle arrested, and eventually had the League itself suppressed.

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<sup>26</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/6, Minutes of monthly and general meetings, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1869 – 17<sup>th</sup> April 1876, 19 August 1875.

Amidst these tumultuous events, a new secret society, the Irish National Invincibles, came into spectral existence. As the Invincibles were a shadowy organisation the evidence regarding them, although not insignificant, is indeterminate. At a meeting of members in London in late 1881, soon after the arrest and confining of Parnell, discussions focused on striking a blow to raise nationalist moral. Corfe (1968, p.138) suggests that the three principles present were Patrick Egan of the Land League, J. G. Biggar, and John Barry. Kee (1993, p. 67) states that Egan was also a member of the IRB. A directory of three was formed, with Egan, Patrick Joseph Sheridan, also of the Land League, and Frank Byrne, Secretary of the Land League of Great Britain. P. J. Sheridan besides his Land League activities had been a Fenian organiser in Connaught, and IRB county centre in Sligo for a time in the 1870s (Maume, 1995).

Our interest however focuses on a lower level in the organisation, and on James Carey in particular. Carey was a well known and respected member of The Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers of the City of Dublin. He had risen from a bricklayer, to a foreman, and finally property owner and builder. He was in the business of purchasing tenement buildings and then sub-letting them (Ward-Perkins, 1996). On quite a number of occasions over the years of his membership he had financially aided the combination through difficult fiscal situations. He was master of the trade for a time in the 1870s, and again in 1880, his last term in that position concluded on 11 October that year.<sup>27</sup> One could not but get the impression from the union's minutes that there was about him the air of an exhibitionist. By the 1880s Carey had become a prosperous builder. He was an ardent nationalist, and 'was certainly closely involved with the Fenians, and had at various times acted as their treasurer in Dublin, [and] as head of a vigilance committee formed to eliminate suspected informers' (Corfe, 1968, p. 139).

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<sup>27</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/2/5, Income and expenditure book, 1878 – 1884, 11 October 1880.

His nationalism was both economic and political, he obstinately opposed the granting of a Corporation sewerage contract to a builder from Scotland. In 1880 Carey addressed a session of the City Council on the state of the trade, and 'urged the Councillors to ensure, among other things, that the intended contract for an addition to the Mansion House of a supper room be given to a Dublin employer who would employ Dublin labour' (D'Arcy, 1992, p. 17). However, he was defeated when he ran for election to the Dublin Municipal Council in 1881.

A short time after the meeting in London a veteran Fenian, John Walsh, was dispatched to Dublin. Soon after his arrival the Dublin directory of the Invincibles was founded at Carey's home. Carey afterwards brought a number of his workmen along with his brother Peter, also a member of the combination, into the organisation.

Weapons, twelve-inch long surgical knives, were smuggled into the country in the skirts of Frank Byrne's heavily pregnant wife. These silent killers were regarded as more suitable for assassinations. Corfe (1968) describes the Weiss blades as fearsome instruments, designed specifically for amputations.

The intended target of all their preparations was William Edward Forester. However, his would be assassins proved less than able to the task they set themselves. On a number of occasions in early 1882 Forester, through sheer luck, or more often Invincible incompetence, narrowly evaded an attempt on his life. However on 19 April, Forester, after resigning over the Kilmainham Treaty, departed Ireland blissfully unaware that any group of men had for months plotted his untimely demise. It was in the wake of these debacles that Patrick J. P. Tynan, the so called "number one," had Carey removed from his consultative position on the committee of the Invincibles' Dublin directory. Tynan (1894) states that Carey, after earlier bungles, seemed to the members of the group to be a man of very weak nerves. "Number one," speaking from



a position of enmity, went on to say of Carey 'that nothing of a nature requiring desperate courage was entrusted to him' (Tynan, 1894, p. 461).

Prime Minister Gladstone appointed Lord Fredrick Cavendish as the new Chief Secretary of Ireland. His brother Spencer Compton Cavendish, Marquess of Hartington, had, a decade earlier, also held this office. Lord Fredrick arrived in Dublin just before noon on 6 May with the new Lord Lieutenant, Lord John Poyntz, 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Spencer.<sup>28</sup> Earlier that morning the Invincibles had made an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate the catholic Under Secretary of Ireland, T. H. Burke (Corfe, 1968).

In the afternoon, following the conclusion of ceremonies at Dublin Castle, Cavendish decided to walk to the Viceregal Lodge in the Phoenix Park. Burke, also on his way there, met him, and the two men, the holders of the highest executive offices in the country, proceeded to stroll together. It was seven o'clock, on a lovely late spring evening in Dublin (Corfe, 1968). On the same day in England, Parnell had met with Davitt who had just been released from prison. To them home rule finally, at long last, seemed within reach. In the Phoenix Park people strolled, or watched the cricket or polo. Others were also watching, and waiting.

Carey, along with a man named Joe Smith, was posted as a lookout, and upon seeing their targets approach they warned their co-conspirators. Carey and Smith were then told by Joseph Brady that they were not needed (Corfe, 1968). As they departed the scene Cavendish and Burke were 'hacked to death in the roadway [with the] surgical knives' (Kee, 1993, p. 437).

The ramifications of the murders were far reaching. The incident horrified British public opinion and forced Gladstone to maintain coercion in Ireland at a time when, following the Kilmainham Treaty, it was about to be discontinued. It also

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<sup>28</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 6 May 1882.

impelled a depressed Parnell to momentarily consider resigning from parliament. 'He was persuaded to stay, and in the end matters turned out to his advantage, for his opposition to the coercion legislation that inevitably followed the murders rehabilitated his reputation in nationalist Ireland' (Boyce, 1992, p. 51).

There was a large police investigation into the matter and within a week the name James Carey was marked down as a prime suspect. The police took Carey into custody on 6 July. Corfe (1968) states that Carey was both verbally and physically abusive to the officers before he was taken away. He was held for three months, but eventually released. In November 1882 he was elected as a city councillor for the Trinity Ward. His incumbent opponent had held the post for two decades, however Carey's growing reputation stood him in good stead.

On 13 January 1883 Carey, along with 16 others, was arrested again, and all were deposited in Kilmainham Gaol.<sup>29</sup> On account of his holding public office James Carey attracted most of the attention when he and the now 21 other suspects appeared at a hearing at Green Street the following week (3 Appendix C). On 3 February Carey and seven other men were charged with the Phoenix Park murders. Almost two weeks later a Michael Glynn, Carey's former master when he had been an apprentice bricklayer, gave testimony that they had met in the Phoenix Park on the day of the killings. This was to prove an unfortunate encounter for James Carey. On 17 February, in order to save himself, Carey turned Queen's evidence against his co-conspirators in return for safe passage out of the country.<sup>30</sup>

His evidence at the trials, which began on 9 April, led to the execution of five of his associates, and the imprisonment of numerous others for terms of varying duration. The five upon whom the sentence of death was carried out were, Joseph Brady who had

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<sup>29</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 20 January 1883.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, 17 February 1883.

stabbed Burke, Daniel Curley, Michael Fagan, Thomas Caffrey, and Timothy Kelly the killer of Cavendish. The executions began on 14 May with Brady, and ended on 9 June with Kelly. This act of betrayal, states Tynan (1894), led a revolutionary court-martial to sentence Carey to death.

Although many in the public had initially supported the prisoners, as the certainty of their guilt in the gruesome crimes became evident this support began to wane. However, after Carey turned informer the popularity of the others soared once more. Whatever about committing murder, and the appalling deaths of the two victims, there was no greater a crime in Irish nationalist eyes than siding with the occupiers of your country and informing against your own. All the public's scorn became focused on James Carey. 'In the eye of public opinion the prisoners in the dock became victims of English justice abetted by the arch-villain Carey' (Corfe, 1968, p. 247). As Carey's public image deteriorated, those of his former associates appreciated. They were elevated to the level of martyrs upon execution, the brutality of their crimes all but forgotten.

The combination cut all links with Carey once his involvement in the murders became public knowledge. It also began to play down the level of importance he had held within the society. It is worth noting that although all references to him were not erased from the minutes books of the trade, there is no reference anywhere in the society's documentation to the murders, his informing, or the executions. While his indictment for murder had been worrying, his turning informer was downright humiliating. It was after he turned informer, and not before, that Dublin City Council expelled him. This man, who had courted popularity all his life, was reduced to a pariah.

Carey and his family were taken from Ireland under police protection. Assuming the name Power, he sailed with his wife and children for South Africa aboard the Kinfauns Castle. On 27 July they reached Cape Town, there they transferred to a second vessel, the Melrose Castle, bound for Port Elizabeth and Natal. However, Carey had revealed to a number of his fellow passengers aboard the Kinfauns Castle who he really was. On transferring to the Melrose Castle Patrick O'Donnell from Donegal, who had been living in America, realised that he was on the same ship as the notorious informer (Hickey and Doherty, 1981). The day after departing Cape Town, 29 July 1883, O'Donnell, a Fenian exile since the rising of 1867, shot Carey dead.<sup>31</sup> For this act O'Donnell was brought back to England for trial at the Old Bailey. 'The American Congress and President tried to persuade the British Government to leniency' (Corfe, 1968, p. 258). Nevertheless, O'Donnell was sentenced to death, and executed on 17 December.<sup>32</sup> A monument was erected to his memory in Glasnevin cemetery.

The remains of James Carey of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers of the City of Dublin lie in prison burial grounds in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, a bitter irony.

## Twentieth Century

The first two decades of the twentieth century were the most turbulent for Ireland politically. Although the country at last seemed settled within the United Kingdom, the problems of land ownership resolved, and dangers of famine vanished, the undying sense of national identity endured. With the other issues resolved, the national question was to receive such undivided attention as never before. The first momentous decade of

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<sup>31</sup> *The Weekly News*, 4 August 1883.

<sup>32</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 23 December 1883.

the century was to witness the formation of the Gaelic League, the final settlement of the land question, the Irish Literary Revival, and the gestation of Sinn Féin (West, 1983).

### **The Emmet Centenary**

A special meeting of the union was convened on 6 September 1903 to consider its participation in the Emmet centenary demonstration. This matter was considered of the utmost importance by the executive committee, and had already been discussed on a previous evening. However, that meeting had to be adjourned on account of poor attendance by the members. General President Thomas Garland took the chair for the consideration of the issue. When he put the motion to the assemblage that they should attend the coming Emmet demonstration, it was carried. All members were asked to contribute 1s. towards the cost of the union's participation. This amount was considered sufficient as neither bands nor banners were to be acquired for the day. The shop stewards were instructed to collect the money from the members on the Saturday prior to the event. Union members were not specifically asked to attend, but simply told that they were at liberty to do as they saw fit.<sup>33</sup> The procession was held in Dublin on 20 September.<sup>34</sup>

It is notable that in March 1906 the question arose as to whether the union should take part in an upcoming language demonstration. In answering this question, the then president of the union, Michael McCabe, best summed up the true nationalist feelings of the membership. The minutes record him as having remarked to the effect

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<sup>33</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/2, Minutes of committee and general meetings, April – December 1903, 6 September 1903.

<sup>34</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 21 September 1903.

that, the union took part in every national demonstration, and that there were no exceptions to this rule.<sup>35</sup>

### **1916 Rising**

In April 1912, armed with the new powers of the Parliamentary Act of 1911 which severely restricted the authority of the House of Lords, British Prime Minister Herbert Asquith introduced the third Home Rule Bill for Ireland. The Bill's passage was not straightforward however. Disputes concerning Irish Home Rule were to persist in the House of Commons until 1914. By that year Ireland looked to be on the slippery slope to civil war. The Unionists were threatening rebellion in the North over Home Rule, while both the Ulster and Irish Volunteers were building up their numbers, and importing arms from Germany. All these ominous developments, and European "civilisation" and "culture" developed over the previous one hundred years, were swept away in the late summer of 1914 as the clouds of war gathered over the continent. Nevertheless, in September the Home Rule Bill was placed on the statute book, albeit suspended until the end of the European conflict.

The subsequent months and years saw the suspended Home Rule Bill gather dust, as the Empires of Europe slaughtered each others armies, and populations, without abatement. This suspension passed the initiative over to the militant Irish nationalists who demanded complete separation from Britain. They made their demands heard around the world during the Easter Rising of 1916, in which the Irish Citizen Army, created during the 1913-14 lockout to protect workers attending union meetings, was to play a part.

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<sup>35</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/4, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1906 – 1911, 6 March 1906.

During the Rising Richard O'Carroll, AGIBSTU general secretary, was stationed in a Messrs. Delahunt's on Camden Street. A second party of Irish Volunteers occupied Messrs. Byrne's premises on the opposite side of the street. Both groups were tasked with defending the line of approach to Jacob's Factory (now the National Archives of Ireland). After a firefight with British troops on Wednesday 26 April both positions were overrun. O'Carroll was captured by the soldiers under the command of Captain J. C. Bowen-Colthurst (Ryan, 1966). Asked if he was a Sinn Feiner, O'Carroll, the leader of the Labour Party in Dublin Corporation, replied that he was 'from the backbone out' (Caulfield, 1995, p. 187). This army captain, whom Greaves (1982, p. 167) describes as 'the young sprig of a Co. Cork landlord family' and a Boer War veteran, took O'Carroll into the premises backyard and shot him through the lung. His soldiers then threw the wounded man into a gutter in the street. It took Richard O'Carroll ten days to die from the wound. Two weeks after his death his wife gave birth to a child. Bowen-Colthurst also ordered the execution of Francis Sheehy-Skeffington on the same day (Ward, 1997). Sheehy-Skeffington, a colourful figure in Dublin, had been arrested while returning home on Tuesday evening 25 April, after a day spent trying to prevent looting around the city center (Sheehy-Skeffington, 1968).

A special meeting of the AGIBSTU took place on 11 May. In opening the proceedings the chairman, union general president James Cox, referred in feeling terms to the death of Richard O'Carroll. This meeting elected Owen Hynes to the post of general secretary. After thanking the membership for the honor bestowed upon him, he expressed regret at the circumstances which rendered it necessary to hold an election for the position so long, and so honorably, occupied by Richard O'Carroll. Hynes had

defeated his nearest rival for the post, the union's treasurer John Long, by five votes, 65 to 60.<sup>36</sup>

On 13 May a Reverend Thomas F. Duggan handed in a statement to the Bricklayers' Hall. A man by the name of Gibson had asked the priest to deliver this. Gibson, from Lower Kevin Street, was unable to attend in person on account of his detention in what was at the time referred to as the "Sinn Fein Ward" of Dublin Castle hospital. The secretary read the statement to the assembled members. It declared that Richard O'Carroll had been shot in the fashion described.

General secretary Hynes was instructed by the members and executive of the union to send copies of Gibson's statement to the members of Parliament for the city of Dublin. It was hoped that they could raise the issue in the House of Commons, and 'have justice meted out to the parties concerned.' When the matter of Bowen-Colthurst eventually came to the attention of Prime Minister H. H. Asquith, through the campaigning of Sheehy-Skeffington's widow, he was shocked (Caulfield, 1995).

Duff (1966) states that on 6 June Captain Bowen-Colthurst was brought before a court-martial. This found him guilty but insane in the case of the above killings, and also in other unmentioned acts which can only be described as cold blooded murders.<sup>37</sup> The court-martial sentenced him to Broadmoor Criminal Asylum where he was detained for twenty months. After release he moved to Canada where he resided until his death in 1965 (Sheehy-Skeffington, 1968).

Ryan (1966, p. 180) notes that when Lord Kitchener heard of what Bowen-Colthurst had been doing he remarked "this Colthurst ought to be shot!"

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<sup>36</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/1, Minutes of general and committee meetings, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1911 – 4<sup>th</sup> March, 1918, 11 May 1916.

<sup>37</sup> *Irish Independent*, 8 June 1916.



Although Richard O'Carroll was the most famous, he was not the only member of the union to take part in the Rising. In early June five other members of the AGIBSTU were deported to England for their part in the activities of Easter week. The union decided to grant these members' families 10s. per week to compensate them for the loss of their wage earners.<sup>38</sup>

### **1918 General Strike**

At 4 AM on 21 March 1918 Imperial Germany launched its great spring offensive against the Allied forces on the Western Front in France (Herwig, 1997). For the first time since 1914 the deadlock in northern France was broken, as the Allied lines ruptured. The British Empire, with numerous armies operating in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa 'searched desperately for more troops to send to the battle-field' (Laffan, 1983, p. 57). It looked to Ireland, where conscription had not yet been imposed, to ease some of its over stretched manpower requirements. However, some within the war cabinet expressed grave doubts about the policy (Turner, 1980). Many other commentators observed that it would be next to impossible to enforce conscription in Ireland, and that such a move would serve only to aggravate the 'Irish problems.'<sup>39</sup>

An AGIBSTU council meeting was called on 17 April 1918 to consider correspondence received from the Executive Council of the Irish Trades Union Congress and Labour Party (ITUCLP) (4 Appendix C).<sup>40</sup> The ITUCLP was inviting representatives from all trade unions to attend Congress in the Mansion House on Saturday 20 April. The meeting was called due to what became known as the

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<sup>38</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/1, Minutes of general and committee meetings, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1911 – 4<sup>th</sup> March, 1918, 3 June 1916.

<sup>39</sup> *The Kerryman*, 6 April 1918.

<sup>40</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/2, Minutes of general and committee meetings, 28<sup>th</sup> February 1918 – 26<sup>th</sup> January 1930, 17 April 1918.

conscription crisis, that was the extension of conscription into the British military to Ireland. The crisis had been brought about by the introduction to the House of Commons on 9 April of the Military Service Bill, and its passing a week later. This Amendment Act, while not imposing immediate conscription, permitted its extension to Ireland by Order in Council (Greaves, 1982). In effect, it gave the government the discretion to impose conscription when it deemed necessary. This notes Lee (1989) was to prove a counter productive move on the part of the British government. To fight conscription the ITUCLP was urging that a one-day general strike take place on 23 April.

The 17 April AGIBSTU council meeting, James Litholder general president presiding, decided that the whole of the union's executive council would attend at the appointed hour. The gravity of the situation was emphasised by the fact that permission was also granted to the Derry, Waterford, and Wexford branches of the union to dispatch delegates to this conference. It was further determined to convene a general meeting of the union directly after the Mansion House conference, this to consider how best to implement the conference's decision.<sup>41</sup> The ITUCLP conference, attended by over 1,500 trade union delegates, moved for a general strike on 23 April (O'Connor, 1992).

At the subsequent AGIBSTU general meeting on Sunday 21 April, the day after the Mansion House conference, the members of the union resolved unanimously to comply with its call to abstain from work on 23 April. The members also decided to institute a special levy for "defence purposes." The levy was fixed at 3d. per member, per week. The monies raised were to be handed over to the Executive Committee of the ITUCLP, to use as it saw fit.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, 17 April 1918.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, 21 April 1918.

On Tuesday 23 April all members of the bricklayers' union duly ceased work in Dublin, and all around the country. Three hundred members attended at Cuffe Street to sign their names to the below pledge.

### **The Pledge**

Denying the right of the British Government to enforce compulsory service in this country, we pledge ourselves solemnly to one another to resist Conscription by the most effective means at our disposal.<sup>43</sup>

Collections were also made at this meeting for the Dublin Labour Party.

The day following the general strike the AGIBSTU's executive expressed its satisfaction with the manner in which the members in Dublin, and in the provinces, had responded. However, it came to the executive's attention that one Dublin member, Daniel Hill, had worked on Tuesday. For this breach he was fined severely.<sup>44</sup>

Macardle (1938) states that on 23 April the whole country, outside of Belfast, shut down. Shops, factories, newspapers, and public houses, were all closed, while public transport did not operate.<sup>45</sup> Greaves (1982) notes that many employers paid wages to their workers for the day lost, a rarity indeed. For one day almost the whole of the country came to a complete stop, and for the British government the silence was deafening. Conscription was never extended to Ireland, each week its imposition was pushed back as Westminster tried, without success, to find some solution to, some way around, Irish opposition. By June the danger for the Allies on the Western Front had passed, and with the monthly infusion of tens of thousands of fresh and well-equipped American doughboys the British necessity for conscription in Ireland faded away.

When the Great War ended in November 1918 a general election was called in the United Kingdom for the following month. By this stage, tension between Irish

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, 23 April 1918.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, 24 April 1918.

<sup>45</sup> *The Cork Examiner*, 24 April 1918.

nationalists and the authorities in Dublin Castle was mounting. The union's minutes on 13 November note that the committee meeting for that evening was suspended on account of British soldiers attacking nearby premises. Members felt that it would have been unduly dangerous to remain at the Bricklayers' Hall on account of this. They decided instead to hold over their work until their next meeting the following week.<sup>46</sup>

A grievous tactical error was committed by the Trade Union and Labour movement in the [December] 1918 election [the first in the United Kingdom to be held under universal adult suffrage], when the National Executive of the ITUC and the Labour Party withdrew its candidates, and this resulted in its marginalisation (Merrigan, 1989, p. 29).

This withdrawal was on account of the revolutionary leaders of the struggle for independence wishing to avoid class conflict as much as possible, and more importantly wanting to present a united front to the enemy. The labour leaders helped during the years 1917-1920 by drawing back from encouraging rank and file militancy. Instead they focused their efforts on building and consolidating the trade union organisation (Roche, 1994).

### **1920 General Strike**

The actions of James Connolly in the 1916 Rising challenged the traditional avoidance of matters of a political nature, which the ITUC had until then espoused. As a consequence of his actions, members who were markedly nationalistic in outlook came to dominate that body. Its traditional avoidance of politics, and political matters, in the face of the struggle for national independence, faded away. Whilst socialism and capitalism may have differentiated the different strata in Irish nationalist society, the celestial cause of an independent Ireland, as always, united all. 'In Ireland itself the

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<sup>46</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/2, Minutes of general and committee meetings, 28<sup>th</sup> February 1918 – 26<sup>th</sup> January 1930, 13 November 1918.

[labour] movement played a wholehearted supporting role in the national struggle (Rumpf and Hepburn, 1977, p. 25).

At an AGIBSTU council meeting on 12 April 1920 the members present endorsed a call from the National Executive of the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress (ILPTUC), it had changed its name again, for another general strike. Thomas Farren, Chairman, and Thomas Johnson, acting Secretary, of the National Executive of the ILPTUC had signed this appeal to the workers of Ireland.<sup>47</sup> The strike was to take place on the following day, 13 April.<sup>48</sup> At issue was the detention without either charge or trial of over 100 prisoners in Mountjoy. The cause was made all the more earnest as some of these inmates had gone on hunger strike. 'Workers in many towns came out on strike and stayed out for three days' (Boyd, 1985, p. 106). Apart from the North East, everything in the country came to a standstill again. Great crowds attended demonstrations staged in the provincial cities and towns. Greaves (1982) argues that this event marked the highest point in the country's struggle for freedom. It was another example of the trade unions using their considerable influence in the national interest, just as had happened almost two years previously. All the healthy prisoners were released on 15 April, while a remainder had to be taken care of in hospital.<sup>49</sup>

The labour movement rowed in behind, and consequently became clearly identified with, the republican cause. In thanking the labour movement for its assistance in the struggle for independence, Éamon de Valera said "I say Labour deserves well of the Irish people; the Labour man deserves the best the country can give" (Macardle, 1965, p. 286).

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<sup>47</sup> *The Limerick Chronicle*, 15 April 1920.

<sup>48</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/2, Minutes of general and committee meetings, 28<sup>th</sup> February 1918 – 26<sup>th</sup> January 1930, 13 April 1920.

<sup>49</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 15 April 1920.

In June there was a strike by workers at the North Wall over the issue of handling munitions for the British army in Ireland. This, says Townshend (1979), was part of a seven-month selective stoppage by railwaymen who refused to convey British munitions during the Anglo-Irish war. Dockers likewise had refused to handle any British munitions. These workers were in dire need of assistance. At a general meeting of the AGIBSTU in early June, general president James Litholder brought the railwaymen's plight to the attention of the membership. The bricklayers, after considering the case, sent the railwaymen £50-0-0 out of their trade's fund. The money was to be recouped by way of a levy of 2s. 6d. per member.<sup>50</sup>

The AGIBSTU minutes on 25 July mention a 'munitions of war fund' of £103-9-4, and a payment of £100 out of this.<sup>51</sup> No reason is provided for the existence of this fund. The amounts paid into the fund were kept separate from the general finances of the union. Interestingly, this account had the same name as a larger fund established to support the striking workers at the North Wall, and into which numerous unions contributed monies.<sup>52</sup> At the time the British Government was threatening that it would commandeer the funds of any union found to be financing the strike by the railwaymen.<sup>53</sup> By September £350 had been forwarded by the AGIBSTU to the munitions of war fund, however another £150 was still on hand. It was decided to send £100 to the expelled Belfast workers, whilst the remainder went to the munitions of war fund.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/2, Minutes of general and committee meetings, 28<sup>th</sup> February 1918 – 26<sup>th</sup> January 1930, 10 June 1920.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, Statement of Accounts & Auditors Report for half year ended 30/6/20, 25 July 1920.

<sup>52</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 2 September 1920.

<sup>53</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/2, Minutes of general and committee meetings, 28<sup>th</sup> February 1918 – 26<sup>th</sup> January 1930, 25 July 1920.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, 19 September 1920.

'The potency of nationalism among rank-and-file trade unionists was apparent in a wave of breakaway activity by the Irish branches of British trade unions during and after the Anglo-Irish War' (Roche, 1994, p. 23). For example, the Irish Engineering Industrial Union (IEIU) was a breakaway from the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE).

Nineteen of the thirty-seven affiliates to the 1916 congress were British. Five years later, the number of Congress unions had risen to forty-two, but the amalgamateds had dropped to thirteen, and now represented under 25 per cent of total membership (O'Connor, 1992, p. 98).

This chapter began by discussing developments in Ireland during the early decades of the nineteenth century. The chapter concludes by mentioning the event that defined the historical dimensions of this dissertation. On 6 December 1921 the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed in London, bringing the Anglo-Irish War to a conclusion.<sup>55</sup> The Free State Government adopted all British laws, including labour laws, which had previously applied to Ireland, unless they were found to be repugnant to the Constitution of the new Irish state.

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In conclusion, one can simply say that the Bricklayer's union, through its activities, voiced the entire nationalist aspirations and longings of its membership. Throughout most of its history since Catholic Emancipation the combination, and later trade union, ardently supported every constitutional nationalist leader who had endeavoured to bring some measure of government of the people, by the people, home to Ireland. This support was sometimes rendered for reasons other than nationalism specifically, as was seen in the combination's advocacy of Daniel O'Connell. In this case the economic considerations of the combination's membership took primacy over their nationalist

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<sup>55</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 6 December 1921.

concerns. Supporting O'Connell was primarily a means to ridding themselves of a rival.

On a number of occasions certain union members did overstep the constitutional boundary into the realm of violent revolutionary nationalism. However, these were always either individual cases, or a small number of members, and not representative of the attitudes of the membership in general. Non violent protest, as during the conscription crises of 1918, and the 1920 general strike, was the society's main action in support of the nationalist cause in the time leading up to, and during, the War of Independence. Throughout that war the AGIBSTU readily supported the ITUC's nationalist orientated agenda, and other unions that, on account of their memberships' employ, were to openly confront British militarism.

When the Anglo-Irish War ended in 1921 the 26 counties of "southern" Ireland were effectively independent. The aspirations of centuries realised at last.



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## Chapter III

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# **The Acquisition of Finances and their Misappropriation**

'And savings, that are meanly scraped from wages of the workmen, cry shame against the nation in a parsimonious age.'

Martin J. Tupper [1898]

Finances were ultimately the most important and contentious of considerations for the society. Without an adequate supply of funds all else would have ceased to have any significance, as the society itself would have ceased to exist. As the AGIBSTU was a craft trade union, the provision of benefits to its membership was its primary focus, rather than confrontations with employers. Consequently the finances it required were not insubstantial. Even at the best of times benefit provision placed a significant strain on the union's resources. Members' subscriptions were consequently higher than those charged by the unions' for unskilled workers which began to appear in Ireland in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. However, without an adequate inflow of these subscriptions the society would have been unable to provide many, or all, of the benefits it offered to its membership, or to engage in strike action. The strains which strike actions, and the provision of benefits, placed on the AGIBSTU, will be dealt with in detail in chapters IV and V respectively.

The chapter is divided into two main subsections, each of which deals thematically with what were important, and yet problematic, aspects of the union's finances. The two sections are entitled arrears and penalties, and misappropriation of funds. The topics discussed in these sections are closely linked to each other, however by examining them separately the intention is to provide a clearer picture of each.

### **Arrears and Penalties**

Towards the upkeep of the combination, and the later trade union, each member paid a weekly levy, their dues. Members in arrears with their contributions were a constant problem for the society, stretching back to its origins. There always seemed to be those members who would not, or could not, pay their contributions either on time, or ever. Once a member fell significantly behind with their dues, or stopped paying them

altogether, that member could not continue to work with others from the union. Fair members working with those in substantial arrears were supposed to withdraw in protest at their presence on a building sight. The non-subscribing member would have to pay a fine, in addition to what they owed in dues, before they would be eligible to work with members of the union again. Non-subscribing members also became ineligible for some, or all of the benefits that the union offered as they fell deeper into arrears. These penalties existed to induce members to pay their contributions on time, and in the correct amounts. The ultimate sanction for continual non-payment of dues was the striking of the offender's name off the list of members, that is expulsion from the union. However, expulsion was a penalty more of the nineteenth than twentieth century.

The first item recorded in the earliest existing minutes book of the combination, dating from 7 January 1869, concerns members who were in arrears with their contributions. This was to be a persistent problem for most of the history of the trade discussed in this dissertation. The decision reached at the 7 January meeting was that all members over £1-0-0 in arrears would, after Easter Monday, have their names erased from the society's books, if in the intervening period they did not clear their dues.<sup>1</sup> The practice of striking off names was more of a temporary penalty than a permanent expulsion. Nevertheless, it forced members to pay a fee to rejoin the society, and also a fine for having fallen into arrears in the first instance. They would further have to give an undertaking to start clearing the amount of arrears which had brought about their expulsion.

Almost three months later, at 6.30 AM on 29 March, the combination's Easter Monday meeting was held. The society's roll of members at the meeting contained 333 names. However, between 1863 and 1869 174 of these members had either died, or

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<sup>1</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/6, Minutes of monthly and general meetings, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1869 – 17<sup>th</sup> April 1876, 7 January 1869.

emigrated to America or England. A reduced membership of 159 remained, less than half the original total. This number was further depleted when the names of members still in arrears, despite the January warning, were erased from the books of the trade.<sup>2</sup>

The action in March however did not solve the problem. Many members continued to avoid paying their dues if possible. In August 1869 the problem of arrears arose again. The trade's executive decided to appoint two men to ensure that each member working in the city had their working cards, and that their dues were fully paid up. These men's duty was to send those who had neither their working cards nor papers to the master of the trade. Before the master the non-subscribing members would have to clear their arrears if they wished to continue working with fair members of the combination. If any members ordered to attend before the master refused, their names could be struck from the books.<sup>3</sup>

In early March 1870 the trade began to appoint shop stewards to specific locations where members were employed. This was in order to facilitate the collection of dues on Saturday evenings. The names of members who refused to pay their dues would be supplied to the executive council of the trade by the shop stewards. A fine of 10s. was introduced against any member who, by not paying his dues, became unworkable with and caused others to withdraw in protest. Any fair member who refused to strike against a non-due paying member would be fined one day's wages. However, the trade would compensate the striking members.<sup>4</sup>

At the annual meeting of the trade on 18 April 1870 the problem with members in arrears arose again. The amount owed to the society in unpaid subscriptions came to £113-13-1, a huge sum of money at that time. This grand figure was owed by a total of

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 29 March 1869.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, 5 August 1869.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, 3 March 1870.

158 parsimonious members. Although obviously not a critical loss to the society, an absence of this magnitude from the funds must certainly have restricted some of the union's undertakings.<sup>5</sup>

However bad the situation was with regard to dues in Dublin, it was far worse in the union's branch in Kingstown. By early November 1870 most members there were not paying any dues at all. Many were also refusing to comply with the trade's regulations. Their arrears situation was so dire in fact that the branch was obliged to give up its meeting room as it had not enough money to pay the rent. Effectively, the bricklayers' branch in Kingstown existed in name only. A Michael Cummins moved that, in light of this fact, the connection between Dublin and Kingstown should be dissolved.<sup>6</sup> This is an example of another common theme running through the union's history, branches fading in and out. It was not uncommon for a branch to be dissolved and reformed in certain towns once a decade.

By 1874, despite the possible solutions and threats already employed, problems with members' non-payment of their contributions persisted. At the annual Easter Monday meeting of that year, on 6 April, the central issue under consideration was again members' dues. It was noted at this meeting that many of those on the books of the trade only ever paid their dues under compulsion, never willingly. The meeting introduced a new standing rule, that any member owing more than £1-0-0, excluding levies, had four months to clear their arrears under pain of expulsion. This annual meeting also decided that apprentice boys with three years to serve should pay into the trade's funds half the amount of subscriptions paid by journeymen. In return the boys would be entitled to half

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, 18 April 1870.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, 3 November 1870.

the benefits of a journeyman. However, any boys in arrears would not receive their freedom cards until they paid off their dues.<sup>7</sup>

Interestingly, at a monthly meeting of the trade on 4 June there was one comment deserving of mention here. Thomas Connor a member of the council for the month made the observation, 'that it is hard to expect men to pay their dues so long as men in arrears themselves were striving to compel others to do what they were not doing.'<sup>8</sup> He was speaking in relation to the election of members onto the trade's committee, and of preventing those in arrears from holding office. However, his comment suggests, in not very subtle terms, that some of those sitting on the combination's executive were not paying their subscriptions. This suggests high levels of hypocrisy at the highest levels of the society.

At the combination's monthly meeting on 5 November 1874, in belated compliance with the standing rule of 6 April, the names of members whose arrears exceeded £1-0-0 were read aloud for all to know. This was apparently in preparation for the striking off of those names. However, these members' names were not erased from the books of the society.<sup>9</sup> A committee meeting on 10 November decided that any member in arrears of £2-0-0, who did not try to clear his debts within one month, would have his name "finally" erased from the books. It was determined that these members should pay 5s. per week until they reduced their arrears to £1-0-0. Thereafter they should pay 2s. 6d. until the debt was cleared completely. The secretary was instructed by the executive to visit the different building sights in Dublin and inform the members working at these of the decision.<sup>10</sup> However, one is left with the distinct impression that the society was ultimately reluctant to follow through on its warnings.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 6 April 1874.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 4 June 1874.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 5 November 1874.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 10 November 1874.

The following week, in a rather sudden development, a meeting of the executive committee decided to erase the names of those members whose arrears still exceeded £2-0-0. A list of these names was drawn up so that members could know them and not work with them.<sup>11</sup> At the start of December the secretary wrote to the fair members working on various building sights in Dublin, informing them of whom had been removed from the society's books, and consequently could not be worked with. The names of a few of these men are included in the minutes, Patrick Toole and Michael Nolan at a Mr. Bradigan's job on Sackville Street, and Edward Loughlan working at a Mr. Mead's job on Gloucester Street.<sup>12</sup> By taking this action the trade's executive displayed the credibility of its threats, and that it was not simply engaged in idle prevarication.

On 8 December a W. Grahan from Kingstown came before the master and council of the trade to clear part of his arrears. However, he was too late, his name had already been erased from the combination's books. Instead he had to rejoin as a new member, and had to pay his first instalment again. At this meeting the council also instructed the secretary to write to the members of the trade in the gas works informing them that the name of Michael Hughes had been erased from the books, and that consequently he could not be worked with.<sup>13</sup> The above case of Grahan was the first positive sign that the erasing of members' names had some effect. At least it forced the man to go to Cuffe Street and pay over some of what he owed.

On 11 May 1875 further direct action was taken against members heavily in arrears. The secretary gave notice to both A. Kennedy and Michael Glynn, to take strike action against James Salmon and Charles Glynn. All had been working for a Mr. Monks at the Loretto Convent, Stephen's Green. However, Salmon and Charles Glynn had

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 17 November 1874.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, 1 December 1874.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, 8 December 1874.

ceased to be workable with on account of the amounts of subscriptions they owed to the trade. Members of the society could not work with them until they received a pass from the master.<sup>14</sup> This pass would only be forthcoming when they cleared their arrears, and the fines of 10s. each for causing other members of the trade to strike against them.

On 4 November 1875 the fascinating case of one Thomas Martin came before the council for the month. Another member of the union, Joseph O'Toole, had accused him of working with colts in Rathgar. However, this transgression is not what is of interest here. It is the examination of Martin's record that day, by the council for the month, which is extraordinary. Thomas Martin was admitted to the trade in September 1865. He paid his dues for seven weeks, then vanished until January of the following year when he made one payment of just 5s. He then disappeared again until June 1871, when he came before a meeting of the trade and promised to clear his arrears. He again only made one payment of 5s. This incident was repeated in 1873. At the 1874 annual meeting, on 6 April, his name was finally erased from the books of the trade. However, the following May Thomas Martin applied for, and was granted, readmission. Again he made only seven payments of dues, then disappeared until June 1875 when he was informed that he had been expelled for a second time. Nevertheless, he was given a third chance and readmitted on the payment of £1-0-0, but once more left a mountain of accumulating arrears in his wake. The November council considering the case against him, and his less than exemplary record, was lenient in the extreme when it fined him only £2-10-0 for working with colts and his negligence in the payment of his dues.<sup>15</sup> Nowhere is there any reason given for this leniency. One could assume that, at the time, the union was simply determined to hold on to as many members as it could.

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, 11 May 1875.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, 4 November 1875.



The first printed rules of the union, from 1888, set members' contributions at 2d. per week, plus an additional 3d. per quarter in order to defray the expenses of the band.<sup>16</sup> Members over twelve months in arrears with contributions were to have their names erased from the books of the trade if two weeks after they were given notice of such they had done nothing to clear their arrears. If they wished to become a member of the union again they would have to rejoin as new members.<sup>17</sup>

The trade's 1892 rulebook states that, members' contributions were to be set at 4s. 1d. per quarter. The fine for non-payment of subscriptions was fixed at 6d. per quarter, and was to be struck the Monday after each Quarterly Meeting of the trade.<sup>18</sup> A further rule clearly stated that any member twelve months in arrears with their dues would have their name erased from the trade's books.<sup>19</sup> As of 1902 the rules state that each member would have to pay a contribution of 1s. per week. This would entitle them to pension, strike or lock-out, accident, sickness, unemployment, and funeral benefits.<sup>20</sup> Any member owing 13 weeks worth of contributions would be out of all benefit for three weeks after these arrears were cleared.<sup>21</sup> Of course they would be entitled to no benefits whatsoever so long as they did not clear the 13 weeks owed.

In the wake of a disastrous lockout which occurred in 1905, and the enormous expenses incurred by the union due to this, a sense of panic regarding finances pervaded throughout the organisation. Contributions were desperately needed, and any feasible means of acquiring this money was essentially deemed right and proper. At an executive council meeting of the trade on 5 September of that year an addendum was added to the

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<sup>16</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/1, Rules and Regulations of the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1888, Rule 11. – Contributions, p. 13 – 14.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, Rule 3. – Fines and Forfeitures, p. 10 – 11.

<sup>18</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/2, Rules and Regulations of the Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1892, Rule 3. – Fines and Forfeitures, pp. 10 – 11.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, Rule 24. – Members in Arrears, p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/3, Rules of the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1902, Rule 38. – Contributions, pp. 26-27.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, Rule 39. – Arrears, p. 27.

union's rule 39. The addendum stated that no members over twelve months in arrears with their contributions would be eligible to vote at union meetings.<sup>22</sup> It was hoped that the introduction of this prerequisite on democracy would encourage members to contribute more often.

However, the above hard approach to the acquisition of dues seems to have achieved very little. In fact most members appear to have been quite dissatisfied, and believed that they were already taxed far too heavily in the wake of the lockout. At a special meeting of the union in November 1905 another attempt was made to acquire the desperately needed funds which so far had not been forthcoming. This money was required in order to satisfy the increasing demands of the creditors who had lent the union money during the lockout. A Mr. Morkhan, a publican on Queen Street, was seeking the return of the £10-0-0 he had lent the society, while a Mr. Cahill from Aungier Street was also demanding £20-0-0 he had given. Cahill actually threatened to go to law if he was not promptly returned his money. At this special meeting on 26 November, chaired by president Richard O'Carroll, it was proposed that all members of the union who were less than £2-0-0 in contribution arrears should start clean of all dues from the previous 1 November. The same wiping of the slate was to apply to members who were over £2-0-0 in arrears. However, in their case they would be out of benefit for six months. The unanimous adoption of this proposal, with only Michael Doyle of the executive dissenting, conceded that the previously adopted approach towards members in arrears had been ineffectual at best.<sup>23</sup> Yet income, by way of subscriptions, fell rather than rose in the wake of this decision. However, the coming of winter could possibly, or at least partially, account for this anomaly. By the following year subscription income

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<sup>22</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/3, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1904 – 1905, 5 September 1905.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, 26 November 1905.

had returned to the levels it had been at before the November decision.<sup>24</sup> This suggests that those members who did not wish to pay their dues were in no way influenced by the clearing of their arrears.

At the first executive meeting of the union in 1909, despite the society's financial situation having improved enormously, it was noted that members in arrears were still proving to be a persistent problem. A number of amendments to the union's rule 39 were adopted at this meeting, all subject to approval by a general meeting of the society. Any member owing over 13 weeks contributions would be out of benefit for three weeks after their arrears had been paid up. Members over 12 months in arrears with their contributions would not be in benefit for three months after clearing these. It was further decided that no members' names would be retained on the roll of the trade if they owed over eighteen months in contributions.<sup>25</sup> In order to be workable with again these people would be obliged to rejoin the union under its rule 15.<sup>26</sup>

The effects of arrears, on occasion, impacted upon the selection of the union's executive. At the election of the executive committee on 3 February 1910, attended by one hundred and thirty members, James Cox was elevated from his previous position of second steward to that of general president. He defeated the incumbent, and his sometime rival, James King by 6 votes, 68 to 62. King became the union's first steward and John Ledwidge second steward. Redmond Martin and John McIvors were both also elected onto the executive committee.<sup>27</sup> For the sixth and final place there was a tie between Thomas Garland and John Meehan, each with 50 votes.<sup>28</sup> The casting vote in

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<sup>24</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/2/13, First Steward's expense book (records income and expenditure), 1904 – 1909, December 1905 – June 1906.

<sup>25</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/4, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1906 – 1911, 5 January 1909.

<sup>26</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/3, Rules of the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1902, Rule 15. – Admission of New Members, p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> Each member was entitled to vote for up to six candidates.

<sup>28</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/4, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1906 – 1911, 3 February 1910.

this situation resided with the treasurer, as he had acted as the presiding officer for the election. John Long went back over both men's records and discovered that Garland's arrears, £3-7-6½, more than twice exceeded those of Meehan. On 5 February he consequently gave his decisive vote in favour of John Meehan. Thomas Garland objected strenuously to the result, but to no avail.<sup>29</sup> This highlights two important points, that certain members of the executive were just as lethargic in the payment of their dues as ordinary members, and that for those in search of position within the society running up arrears could prove costly.

According to the new rules introduced in 1912 members' weekly contributions were reduced from 1s. to 6½d.<sup>30</sup> However, the 1912 rulebook adds nothing new to the penalties set out in 1902 concerning members in arrears.<sup>31</sup> An interesting happening occurred in late September of that year. A member by the name of Joseph Taylor was in substantial arrears to the society. He was instructed by general secretary Richard O'Carroll to reduce these. Within two weeks he had complied in full with the instruction, clearing the entire of his debts.<sup>32</sup> This is not a unique case, but there are few like it in the records of the trade. Usually, as has already been discussed above, members seem to have more often than not ignored orders, requests, and even threats, to clear their arrears. Unless that is they were looking for something, such as readmission after expulsion. At those times they had no options other than to promise to pay what they owed, whether they did or not is another issue.

Two years later the union was still casting about for the ultimate solution to the problem of arrears. At the society's general meeting of 1914, held on 12 April, the

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 5 February 1910.

<sup>30</sup> 1097/21/4, Part 1 of the rules: Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1912, Rule 3. – Contributions, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, Rule 4. – Arrears, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/1, Minutes of general and committee meetings, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1911 – 4<sup>th</sup> March 1918, 30 September 1912.

decision was taken to demand members' contributions every week, rather than permitting some of them to slip ever deeper into an arrears morass. It was hoped that this cohesive approach would prove to be the ultimate silver bullet to an enduring problem. The general meeting also moved that members' weekly contributions should be increased again to 1s. As a consequence, the benefits to members were expanded.<sup>33</sup> The result was that annual expenditure on benefits between 1915 and 1917 increased to just above £1,000.<sup>34</sup>

In the years after the introduction of the weekly monitoring of members' contributions, the recordings of confrontations with members in arrears slackened enormously. Although keeping a careful watch on members might seem quite authoritarian, and even if it did not solve the problem completely, it went quite a ways towards a viable solution.

Contributions were the lifeblood of the AGIBSTU, as they are for any trade union. At times of good employment, and a steady inflow of subscriptions, the issue of members' arrears essentially lay dormant. However, once industrial disputes began erupting, and financial resources ebbing, the question of non-subscribing members once more came to the top of the agenda. Various forms of encouragement, and coercion, were introduced by the AGIBSTU over the years to get members to contribute, but usually to no avail. Eventually the trade turned to continuous monitoring, or one could say an approach of eternal vigilance, to solve this most intractable of problems.

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, 12 April 1914.

<sup>34</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/2, Minutes of General and Committee meetings, 28<sup>th</sup> February 1918 – 26<sup>th</sup> January 1930, 24 November 1918.

## **Misappropriation of Funds**

As this chapter concentrates on finances, it would be wrong not to discuss their misappropriation. This crime occurred on various occasions between 1869 and 1921. Theft was always a serious issue, even more so when those involved were senior members of the society, occupying positions of trust and responsibility. These members, by their actions, were setting a bad example for those beneath them, and who came after them. This created at times a culture within the upper echelons of the society, which it could well have done without. Each case, involving a different individual, usually at a different level of seniority, and occurring under a different set of circumstances, was quite distinct from the ones that preceded it. When discovered each was usually dealt with on an individual basis, first by the combination's, and later union's, executive. However, in later years misappropriation of funds occurred often enough to warrant a set of clearly defined rules. Not that these rules were always applied to their full rigor.

The first incident of serious theft recorded in the minutes of the trade occurred in early March 1875. The society's cash box, which had been stored in the executive council's meeting room in the Bricklayers' Hall, was burgled of its contents. The amount taken was the then not insubstantial sum of £6-0-5. It was afterwards deduced that the theft had been conducted by breaking into the room, and through the bottom of the old and weakened wooden chest which had contained the box.<sup>35</sup> Immediately the council of the trade attempted to discover the identities of those responsible. Although many names were mentioned, it nevertheless proved impossible to ascertain the true identity of the culprits. This is not to say that they were unknown to the general membership, the problem seems to have been that most members, for fear of the stigma that would have accompanied informing, remained silent on the matter.

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<sup>35</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/6, Minutes of monthly and general meetings, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1869 – 17 April 1876, 4 March 1875.

Secretary Denis Byrne, greatly saddened by the occurrence, offered to repay to the amount taken. He would compensate the society he said, even if it ruined himself and his family financially.<sup>36</sup> His feeling of ultimate responsibility stemmed from his rank, which made him responsible for the Hall and all that was in it. At the annual Easter Monday meeting of the trade, on 29 March, Byrne formally offered to the assemblage to repay the £6-0-5. The members would not hear of it, and insisted that he kept his money.<sup>37</sup>

Afterwards Thomas Garland came before the committee and informed it that the stolen money was to be refunded to the society by way of a third party, 'the reverend gentlemen of Mount Argus,' Harold's Cross.<sup>38</sup> Although appreciated, what Garland said did nothing to satisfy the desire of the executive to discover the identity of the culprit or culprits. By early June it was still carrying out investigations into the matter. A number of possible suspects' names kept coming to the executive committee's attention. However, none of the ordinary members of the trade would furnish any definite information upon what they had heard, seen, or knew.

One interesting example of complicity in this conspiracy of silence occurred when a Patrick Smyth was called before a committee meeting, chaired by James Carey, in early June 1875. Members of the executive had received information that he had overheard some of the thieves arguing in a public house on the division of their loot. When Smyth appeared before the committee he proceeded to deny knowledge of everything. One gets the distinct impression from the minutes that if he had been asked to give his own name he would have been unable to remember it. Tellingly however, he finished by asking the members of the executive committee that if he did know anything,

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, 29 March 1875.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*

which he further insisted he did not, would they have wanted him to turn informer.<sup>39</sup> This fear of being branded an informer, a fear lodged deep in the Irish psyche, although under completely different circumstances from ironically James Carey, was a legitimate concern for any member nonetheless. No members informed despite the fact that the thieves had essentially, by stealing from the society, stolen from them. In the face of this wall of silence, and with attention turning to the upcoming O'Connell Centenary celebrations, the matter was reluctantly allowed to drop.

When the union began to produce printed rulebooks from 1888 onwards each devoted a section to theft by members.<sup>40</sup> The rulebook from 1892 states clearly that any member convicted in a court of law on a charge of theft would be expelled from the trade.<sup>41</sup> However, rule 3 in the 1892 rulebook states that a fine not exceeding £1-0-0 would be the penalty for misapplying any of the monies collected in the name of the society.<sup>42</sup>

In the early 1890s there was controversy over the state of the trade's finances. At the 4 February monthly night meeting of the union in 1892, John Keegan, one of the auditors, refused to sign the previous quarter's financial report. The reason was the substantial deficits the last two masters had incurred while holding office. At this meeting Keegan suggested that a diligent treasurer and trustee be appointed to watch over the funds of the society in future. The treasurer would take charge of all the cash that came into the union, and consequently prevent future masters from liberating it as they saw fit. With a trustworthy person in the position, Keegan could foresee only good coming of his suggestion.

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<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, 1 June 1875.

<sup>40</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/1, Rules and Regulations of the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1888, Rule 47. – Members Convicted of Theft, p. 29.

<sup>41</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/2, Rules and Regulations of the Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1892, Rule 46. – Members Convicted of Theft, p. 28.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, Rule 3. – Fines and Forfeitures, p. 10.



Lawrence Mulhall commented at this meeting to the effect that the current situation tended to make members unwilling to pay their dues. He said that he would pay no more dues until there was a reformation in the governing of the society. He noted that the previous three masters (names unavailable) had defrauded the trade, and made no attempt at all to pay back any of the monies they had taken. It was also revealed at this February meeting that none of these controversial masters had paid any dues after assuming office, nor had they made any appearances at Cuffe Street since leaving office.<sup>43</sup>

At a special meeting of the union a week later Keegan commented that the last master had 'robbed it [the union] barefaced.' However, he observed that it was a wholly unacceptable situation that the post of master was vacant, as it was far too important an office to be left unattended. He blamed the secretary, Michael Ennis, for the whole problem, accusing him of not attending to his duties properly. Keegan said that Ennis should have put a stop to the practice by the masters of flitting away the funds of the society. The cool headed James Lyons seconded Keegan's proposal for the appointment of a diligent treasurer and trustee. He felt that these officers would be necessary in order to restore the confidence of the union's members out on building sights, as regards the security of their contributions. Laurence Mulhall observed 'it would be a wise move to elect a treasurer that would do his duty and not give a vote of thanks to a master who left office with a heavy deficit.'<sup>44</sup>

The above suggestions of the conscientious Keegan were all implemented. From the 1890s onwards they bestowed upon the trade a greater internal financial stability than it had heretofore experienced. Over the coming years those holding the offices of

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<sup>43</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/1, Minutes of committee meetings and quarterly meetings, 1892 – 1895, 4 February 1892.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, 11 February 1892.

treasurer and trustee proved in every respect to be honest and honourable men, save for one.

In early 1892 the name James McLarrify appears in the minutes of the society. He was acting as a shop steward when the union's members went back to work in New Fishmarket Street for a Messrs. Connelly following a dispute. In late April McLarrify failed to hand over to the secretary the dues he had collected from the other members of the union working for Messers. Connolly. The union's executive committee, under the chairmanship of Richard Sherlock, considered the McLarrify matter in early May. They decided against some form of fine or internal penalty, and instead opted to go to law in order to retrieve the stolen monies.<sup>45</sup> Sherlock effectively made an example of McLarrify. This action sent out a very clear signal to any other members in positions with responsibility over funds. In the years after this decision there were few if any problems with shop stewards taking liberty with the subscriptions they had collected. By taking a firm stance on the matter Sherlock effectively solved the problem once and for all.

In early February 1895 a problem arose in the reconstituted Kingstown branch, and chartered accountants had to be called in to examine its books. On conclusion of their examination they submitted a report to the Dublin executive council. The report described how there was a deficiency in the Kingstown branch's books due to the employment of "dubious accounting methods." The report found that the branch's secretary, a James Byrne, had taken cash from the funds of the branch. On learning of this transgression the Dublin executive ordered him to refund all the monies that he had taken.<sup>46</sup> Byrne returned the monies, but curiously remained on as branch secretary in

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<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, 9 May 1892.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, 4 February 1895.

Kingstown until his death in August 1906.<sup>47</sup> There is no information as to why Byrne was not removed from his position. However, one could presume that the reasons behind the misappropriation were of some benign nature or other.

By 1902 the union's rule concerning the misapplication of funds stated, 'any officer or other members misapplying any of the funds or moneys collected or received in the name of this Society, shall be fined £1-0-0.'<sup>48</sup> Such members would also be out of benefit until they had repaid what they had taken. If the misappropriated funds were not returned within seven days the union's executive committee could take whatever legal steps were necessary to recover them.<sup>49</sup> For the rest of the period under discussion here this rule remained unaltered.

The worst case of embezzlement the union was to experience in the years covered in this dissertation was to be at the hands of a long serving and trusted treasurer, the already mentioned John Long. Long first came to prominence during the 1905 lockout. At that time he had been placed in charge of monitoring the union's finances. When the lockout finally ended in July 1905 the executive decided to keep him on in his position until all the expenses incurred had been accounted for.<sup>50</sup>

At the election of the executive committee on 1 February 1906, Long defeated Redmond Martin for the position of treasurer.<sup>51</sup> He was noted as very careful with the funds at a time when frugality was essential. For example, in early September of that year Michael Ennis, recently toppled from the position of union general secretary, came to a meeting looking for £2-0-0 to pay for "stuff" he needed for a "little job" he had been

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<sup>47</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/4, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1906 – 1911, 23 August 1906.

<sup>48</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/3 Rules of the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1902, Rule 48. – Misapplying Funds, p. 31.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/3, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1904 – 1905, 1 July 1905.

<sup>51</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/4, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1906 – 1911, 1 February 1906.

doing. By this time Ennis was an old man and in failing health. He was not looking for a grant but simply a loan, or if need be an advance on his pension. Long however tried to avoid the matter by commenting on the union's rent and gas bills, and the general lack of funds. Nevertheless, the meeting eventually decided to give Ennis the money as a two-week loan.<sup>52</sup>

At the general meeting of the trade on 4 February 1907, based on his performance over the previous year, Long was returned to the office of treasure unopposed.<sup>53</sup> James Cox actually refused a proposal to stand against him.<sup>54</sup> This effectively signalled Long's entrenchment in the position of treasurer.

Little signs that all was not well in the finances of the union began to appear as early as 16 February 1910. At a meeting on that date there was a question concerning £2-2-6 received from the Athenry branch. When looked for the amount could not be discovered anywhere in the accounts. However, John Long assured everyone that everything was fine and that he would investigate the matter.<sup>55</sup> Nothing ever seems to have been heard again concerning the £2-2-6 from Athenry. Significantly it does not appear anywhere in the various accounts of the trade from February 1910. One could assume that Long "discovered" the "missing" funds. By the middle of the second decade of the twentieth century treasurer Long had become one of the most respected members of the union. He acted as a union delegate, along with another rising star in the society named Owen Hynes, at numerous meetings with the Dublin Building Trades Employers' Association (DBTEA) and with other trade unions.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, 4 September 1906.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, 4 February, 1907.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, 16 February, 1910.

<sup>56</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/1, Minutes of general and committee meetings, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1911 – 4<sup>th</sup> March 1918, 3 February 1915.

At the first meeting of the society after the 1916 Rising, and the death of Richard O'Carroll, an election was held for the post of general secretary. John Long went forward as a candidate, but was defeated by his rival Owen Hynes. Hynes margin of victory was just five votes.<sup>57</sup> Whether this defeat engendered some deep resentment within Long against the membership in general is impossible to say.

On 2 December 1917 the union's accounts from 1 January 1915 to 23 November 1917 were presented to a meeting of the membership. D. O'Connor & Co., chartered accountants, had drawn up these accounts, and discovered something gravely amiss within them. Members were first of all shocked to learn that first steward James Cox owed the society £7-11-0 for monies received for no apparent purpose. Much worse was to come however. It was then revealed that treasurer Long had removed over £300 from the society's funds. Upon this revelation he was immediately dismissed from his post and replaced by James Mitchell.<sup>58</sup> In the middle of December the accountants submitted a supplementary report on the period from 23 November to 2 December, the date of Long's dismissal. This report found that a further deficiency of £6-5-2 had appeared in the society's funds. The accountants noted that Long had been less than helpful to them during the compiling of the report.<sup>59</sup>

At a union meeting on 20 December John Long made a statement to the effect that he had no knowledge concerning the most recently missing monies. As for the vanished £300-0-0 he attempted to give a muddled explanation, of a sort. He went as far as suggesting that, if money was missing, the late Richard O'Carroll might have stolen it. These insinuations were not received well by the assemblage. Everything Long said was repudiated by Owen Hynes as utterly untrue. From the minutes one gets the impression

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<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, 11 May 1916.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, 5 December 1917.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, 13 December 1917.

that the former treasurer wanted to do anything other than tell the truth. A motion was adopted that he should give the union's solicitors an undertaking to refund the missing money, and that he could not hold any position of trust within the society until he gave that undertaking. The motion further demanded a written apology from him for slandering the late Richard O'Carroll's good name.<sup>60</sup>

In January 1918, the general secretary, on the advice of the union's solicitors and auditors, fixed the amount Long would have to repay at £375-18-6. This huge figure would take almost fifteen years to clear if serviced with the suggested weekly installments of 10s.<sup>61</sup> However, by February Long had neither agreed to pay back the stolen funds, nor apologized for his remarks regarding Richard O'Carroll.<sup>62</sup>

A general meeting of the union on 21 July, attended by over 200 members, decided to write off Long's debt. This meeting also presented the balance sheet from January to June. The auditors, D. O'Connor & Co., congratulated the society on the healthy state of its funds in spite of all that had happened.<sup>63</sup>

One wonders why John Long was not taken to law as was James McLarrify, considering that his crime was far more serious in terms of both the monies involved, and the level of trust he betrayed. On the other hand his actions put the union in an invidious position. If he went to prison on account of what he had done, then the union would certainly never see any of the money. At least while he was free there was a chance, albeit a slim one, that he might pay back what he had taken. However, there is no indication whatsoever that Long ever paid back any of the stolen monies.

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<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, 20 December 1917.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, 12 January 1918.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, 17 February 1918.

<sup>63</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/2, Minutes of General and Committee meetings, 28<sup>th</sup> February 1918 – 26<sup>th</sup> January 1930, 21 July 1918.

The misappropriation issue, although important and one requiring to be watched carefully, was never critical until the John Long incident occurred. This was mainly because, in the years prior to his appointment as treasurer, although masters might take from the funds they were usually in office for only a limited period, originally three months. Consequently the amount of damage they could inflict, although leading to controversy, would not endanger the existence of the society. Members beneath the executive level and in positions of responsibility over funds, such as shop stewards, could engage in extremely limited embezzlement. In their case it was very difficult to avoid getting caught, as union members whose subscriptions they could steal would quickly realise something was wrong when the executive informed them that they were in arrears. However, the bitterest irony of all was that certain of the treasurers' responsibilities were to prevent masters, and later general presidents, and other members of the union besides, from liberating its funds. By maintaining the office of treasurer without any effective oversight protection, the three trustees on the finance committee proving woefully inadequate in this case, the society effectively created a time bomb.

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This chapter concerned itself with financial matters. It highlighted the importance of funds to the union, and its difficulties in acquiring them. However, the essential fact that was never lost sight of was the rudimentary necessity of ensuring that income always exceeded expenditure. In this regard the regular collection of contributions was of vital importance. However, this never proved the easiest, and there always seems to have been a section within the trade strongly disinclined towards paying their subscriptions. In an effort to ensure that members paid their dues, and on time, various fines and penalties were introduced. Yet coercive measures, apart from generating resentment, in the main appear to have achieved very little. The ultimate solution adopted towards the problem was the continuous monitoring of members to ensure that they did not fall into

arrears. This approach admitted the essential futility of trying, through penalties, to force members to do what was not in their inclination, and the necessity of maintaining a continuous watch on them, never giving members the opportunity to fall into arrears in the first instance.

With the presence of money came the danger that some of those with responsibility over it would try to steal it. On the various occasions this crime was committed not all the offenders were punished in a similar manner, nor necessarily according to the penalties set out in the union's rules. The reasons for this inconsistency are unclear. The John Long situation proved that no matter who the member was, nor what their record of service to the union, no one could ultimately be trusted when it came to the issue of funds. His actions also pointed up the deficiencies within the union's safeguards against perfidious treasurers. Although the embezzlement of the monies was in itself a crime, Long's greatest infraction was his betrayal of the trust placed in both himself and his office by the membership.



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## Chapter IV

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# **Defending their realm. Bricklayers' Strikes, Discipline, and Status**

'For to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.'

Sun Tzu [c. 400 BC]

This chapter will discuss some of the basic tactics employed by the trade to ensure that it both advanced and protected the privileges of its membership, that it both advanced and defended its realm.

The chapter begins by giving a brief overview, from the fragmented early records available, of how the trade battled for member's rights in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. At that time, on account of the combination laws, discretion was often the better part of valour.

This chapter then adopts a thematic approach to the information available from the latter quarter of the nineteenth and first two decades of the twentieth centuries. This is because there is much more primary material available from that period, and setting it out thematically allows one to identify clearly the developments and results achieved from a particular tactic over time. This approach also provides one with views of the union, its membership, and their environment, at specific points in time.

The focus of this chapter is primarily on incidents of strikes (turn outs) and threatened strikes. These were the most obvious displays of union actions in either defence or advance of members' rights. Strikes, and often only the ability to credibly threaten strike action, were used to ensure that an employer came to see things from the trade's point of view. Penalties imposed on the membership, fines and expulsions, are discussed. The employment of penalties guaranteed that members conformed to the society's rules as laid down, and did not, by either their actions or omissions, in any way harm the trade. The expulsions and fines dealt with here are those relating to incidents that occurred on or about jobs, that is to say, they do not involve issues relating to the non-payment of dues. The promotion of the status of the trade is also examined, this was intended to maintain and further its respectable public image. The

trade's defence of its status was at times almost fanatical. Anything that could tarnish its long built up, responsible, image was immediately either corrected or ejected. In an age before it became an art form this society did not suffer public relations liabilities lightly.

Specific instances of the above will highlight how the union fought for, guarded, and promoted, its members rights and privileges.

## **1792-1869**

### **Out of the Shadows**

Down through its long history the society was involved in many actions in the defence of its membership. Here will be discussed the most important of these, important not necessarily from a national point of view, but from the point of view of the union and its membership. The details in the accounts concerning the bricklayers' earliest strikes, or turn outs as they were called at the close of the eighteenth century, are sketchy at best. However, these accounts were nevertheless proof of the existence of a combination of bricklayers in Dublin in the years before the Act of Union. In later times, instances of bricklayer actions become easier to discern, as one is provided with richer sources of information. Nevertheless, what all these disputes have in common, irrespective of the time, was that they were never entered into lightly by members, but always as a last resort when all other avenues to resolution had been closed off. When the opportunity of threatening, rather than taking, industrial action presented itself it was readily grasped. Information on expulsions and the imposition of fines is almost non-existent from the turn of the nineteenth century. Any material on the union's promotion of itself, or its status, is fairly obviously a non-starter.

It was in 1792, as mentioned in chapter I, that the first evidence of what was referred to as a "proto-combination" of bricklayers emerged. There was high unemployment in Dublin at that time, and many strikes. In early September an organisation of bricklayers, calling themselves Body Bricklayers, went out on strike in Summerhill. The reason for this action was the presents of colts. Afterwards the Body Bricklayers attacked the colts in order to defend their level of wages.<sup>1</sup> This striking over the presence of, or the threatened presence of, men willing to do the bricklayers' work for less will be seen to be a common theme down through the combination's and later union's history.

Although the Act of Union of 1801 brought Britain and Ireland under unified legislative control, the economies of the two countries were to spin off on completely different trajectories (Boyle, 1988). England was to become the "workshop of the world", while Ireland, except for a small area in the north-east, was to remain an agriculturally based economy.

The bricklayers' document from 1815 clearly prohibits members from working with anyone who could not prove that they had served a full and 'lawful' apprenticeship (2 Appendix A).<sup>2</sup> This prohibition was intended to ensure that both quality of workmanship was maintained and, far more importantly, that no one who was not a bricklayer could do bricklayers' work. The rule was, in effect, a protection against the danger that colts could undercut members' wages. However, 'nationally 1815 marked the beginning of a period of economic depression as the Napoleonic Wars came to an end' (D'Arcy and Hannigan, 1988, p. 49). Read in light of this fact, the document could

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<sup>1</sup> *Dublin Chronicle*, 13 September 1792, quoted in Swift, *History of the Dublin Bakers and Others*, p. 172.

<sup>2</sup>NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/7, Rules and Regulations of the Bricklayers of City and County of Dublin and Kildare, 3 September 1815.

well be setting out the rules for members on how to defend their conditions of employment in a contracting economy.

In the years after 1815, and the end of the conflict in Europe, people organised into unions to try to resist the economic decline that was taking grip of the country. The struggle was at times violent, and in the cities took on the proportions of a class war. This resistance in turn created an erroneous mind-set amongst the upper classes that the nation's economic deterioration was due to the actions of the combinations. As was seen in Table 2.1 bricklayers' wages declined from 32s. 6d. per week in 1800 to 26s. per week by 1834.<sup>3</sup> This was, considering that bricklayers were skilled artisans, a worrying contraction in earnings. Even more serious was the decrease in the number of masters from 35 to just 10, a more than 70 percent reduction in the space of just 34 years. 'Average [weekly wage] rates for other Dublin trades declined from 30s. 2d. in the 1820s to 24s. 6d. in the 1840s' (O'Connor, 1992, p. 8). Outside the city the reductions in workers wages were more severe. Labourers in the 1820s, without any combinations of their own for protection, were receiving weekly wages of beneath 10s.

William Hall, a Dublin solicitor who defended combinators, gave interesting evidence on 8 April 1824 to the Commons Select Committee inquiring into the combination laws. He told how the trades in Dublin entered into arrangements with each other in order to deal with their non-compliant members. One trade's members would attack a recalcitrant member of the other, consequently solving the other's problems without any suspicion falling upon it.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 3 November 1840.

<sup>4</sup> Fifth Report from the Select Committee appointed to inquire into the State of the Law Regarding Artizans and Machinery, H. C., 1824 (51.), v, pp. 460 – 470.

The years following 1825 were difficult for the Irish trade union movement. The Dublin branch of the General Union of Carpenters and Joiners of Great Britain and Ireland was one of the many experiencing problems at the time. J. O'Neill, a member, stated in evidence to an 1838 Commons Select Committee, established due to Daniel O'Connell's urgings, that his society was powerless to limit the number of apprentices that their employers took on.<sup>5</sup>

Bricklayers who broke the rules of the trade by working with non-members were by the 1830s subject to heavy financial penalties. The refractory list from November 1830 gives the names of members, and the employment's in which they broke the trade's rules (1 Appendix D).<sup>6</sup> Members at this time were very heavily fined when they worked on struck jobs, that is jobs the combination had withdrawn from.

When the Manchester based union, the BFSOB, appeared in Dublin in the 1830s, it is likely that the Old Body of Bricklayers severe reaction to its presence was at least partly based upon a fear that its members' wages would be undercut and jobs taken. By declaring the members of the British union to be colts, the Dublin trade ensured that none of its own members could work with them. Everyone had to battle for their own portion of, what was at the time, a shrinking economic pie.

As was mentioned, there is very little information concerning the union from the 1840s until the late 1860s when detailed minutes books appear for the first time.

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<sup>5</sup> Second Report from the Select Committee on Combinations of Workmen: Minutes of Evidence, H. C., 1838 (646.), viii, pp. 145-148.

<sup>6</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/1/1, Bricklayers' characteristic and charitable record book, 1830-1845, 17 November 1830.

## **1869-1921**

This section is divided into three main subsections:

- Strikes and threatened strikes,
- Penalties for breach of rules at work,
- Status, the image the trade projected of itself.

Each of these subsections is further divided, into events in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

### **Strikes and Threatened Strikes**

This section discusses four separate strikes, two threatened strikes, and one lockout, in which the union was engaged over a fifty-year period. The most noticeable detail here will be the vast differences in scale and duration between the actions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The cases below will highlight the rewards and costs, of victory and defeat, for the membership in seeking to both defend and improve their wages, conditions of work, and rights. Both of the below subsection shall initially provide brief backgrounds to the periods under discussion. This is in order to give a clearer picture of the major national developments which were to impact upon the topic.

#### **Nineteenth Century**

In Ireland in the 1860s a process not to be seen in England until the mid 1880s was already underway, the establishment of trade unions made up of unskilled workmen.

These organisations were less inclined towards the conservatism of the New Model Unions, and were more militant.

In 1871 Gladstone's Liberal Government passed a new Trade Union Act. This act both recognised the legal status of trade unions, and granted them the protection of the courts. It also made most strikes lawful and enabled unions to protect their funds by registering under the Friendly Societies Act. It did not however provide a positive right to strike, instead it granted immunities from action through the courts to prevent certain strikes (Rogaly, 1977). When the Tories were returned to power in 1875 they established a Royal Commission on Labour Laws, with Chief Justice Cockburn as chairman (O'Hara, 1981, p. 17). Following the recommendations of the Cockburn Commission, the government introduced the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act of 1875. A year later it amended the Trade Union Act of 1871, removing the requirement for a union to openly show that its rules were in restraint of trade in order to become registered.

The years after 1875 were to witness the decline of landlordism, the rise and fall of Parnell, and the continuing growth in trade union membership. The closing years of the nineteenth century would also witness the rapid industrialisation of America and Germany, which were to rise to challenge Britain's dominant economic position in the world.

The arrival of the amalgamated unions in Ireland lead in some circumstances to inter union rivalry, as domestic and British based unions vied for members. There were some fierce struggles in the building trade between rival unions. In 1899 the National Association of Operative Plasterers challenged the position of the bastard sibling of the Guild of Saint Bartholomew, the Regular Operative Stucco Plasterers, in Dublin



(Keogh, 1982, p. 23). This rivalry created difficulties for employers, as they were caught between feuding unions. However, as will be seen later, it also presented them with certain opportunities.

During the late 1880s assertive New Unions emerged in Britain. In 1889 there was a strike by dock workers in London which paralysed the port (Vincent, 1983). This strike, above all others in the period, is seen by many writers as representing the culmination of union activity in the wake of the passing of the Trade Union Acts in the 1870s (Clegg et al., 1964). By 1900 there were estimated to be two million trade unionists in both skilled and unskilled unions in Britain and Ireland (Boyle, 1988). Their new assertiveness would ultimately lead to a legal and employer backlash, examples of the former were the decisions in the Taff Vale case in Wales, and Quinn v Leatham in Belfast, both in 1901.

A special meeting of the bricklayers' combination in mid 1871 was called to consider whether an increase in wages ought to be sought. After due reflection it decided against the move at the time. However, the membership did not rule out future demands if the opportunities presented themselves. The union did determine however to maintain the members' present rate of wages throughout the winter of 1871-72.<sup>7</sup>

The Bricklayers' quarterly meeting in early July 1871 resolved that up until 20 February 1872 no advance in wages would be sought. Thereafter, it decided, members' wages should increase to 33s. per week. It was remarked on by a number of members present at the meeting that the trade was not taking advantage of the situation some

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<sup>7</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/6, Minutes of monthly and general meetings, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1869 – 17<sup>th</sup> April 1876, 8 June 1871.

employers were in.<sup>8</sup> The contractors had large numbers of jobs to fulfil, and were consequently vulnerable to industrial action. The resolution by the membership concerning wages was published in the Daily Express, Saunders Newsletter, Morning Mail, Freeman's Journal, and The Irish Times, and also forwarded to the employers.

On 10 July 1871 Samuel H. Bolton, secretary of the Builders Association, wrote to the trade saying that the builders might, if conditions were right, grant the increase demanded. However, he warned that the increase in wages could render many contractors un-competitive when tendering for jobs against employers who did not recognise the Bodymen.<sup>9</sup>

The meeting convened to consider a reply to Bolton was a fiasco. At issue was whether during the winter members would be willing to work under artificial lights, something they had not previously done. However an ordinary member, Thomas Kent, threw everything into confusion with his erratic and aggressive behaviour. He stood up and addressed the meeting, but would not permit anyone who disagreed with his views to speak. He was personally for working under artificial lighting. Eventually, in a state of absolute uproar, the meeting was adjourned.<sup>10</sup>

At the end of July the employers became suddenly aggressive, informing the trade that they wanted its members to continue working for 30s. per week, and under artificial lights during winter. This demand was totally unacceptable to the bricklayers, as it constituted a complete turning of the tables on them. The trade's response was, no working under artificial lights and, from 20 February 1872, wages to be 33s. per week. This, they warned the Committee of Employers, was their final position.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, 6 July 1871.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, 10 July 1871.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, 21 July 1871.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 25 July 1871.

It appears that over the following seven months, into 1872, nothing transpired between the bricklayers and employers. Many builders, with numerous contracts to fulfil, seem to have quietly acquiesced to the nub of the bricklayers' demands, their aggressiveness proving merely to have been bluster. By the end of February 1872, the combination's members' wages were ranging from 30s. to 33s. per week. Most were receiving equivalent to the level the carpenters had won in a dispute the previous year, 32s. At a meeting of the trade in late February 1872 it was proposed, rather than fighting the employers for 33s. per week, to accept 32s. quietly. A vote was taken, 33 members voted for 33s., while 46 for 32s. per week.<sup>12</sup> Discretion won the day. The trade had achieved a 2s. wage increase without either a strike, or members having to compromise by working under artificial lights. It had tactfully and tactically exploited the employers' transitory weakness.

By early May 1873 work was plentiful for the bricklayers. Demands for their services were so high that a member named Patrick Byrne proposed, at a monthly meeting, that the time had come to claim a further increase in wages. This meeting on 6 May, after giving the proposal due consideration, voted unanimously to pursue a wage increase. The decision was 'received with applause,' by all the members attending at Cuffe Street that day. The secretary was accordingly instructed to give notice to the employers that from 12 May members' wages were increasing from 32s. to 34s. per week.<sup>13</sup> All members were aware that if the employers did not accede to what was effectively an ultimatum they would be on strike within a week. However, a short time later the wage increase was granted.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, 25 February 1872.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, 6 May 1873.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, 12 May 1873.

At the second quarterly meeting of the year on 3 July 1873, after quickly concluding other business, half a barrel of XX Porter and half a gallon of whisky was ordered. This was to celebrate the increase in wages. The remainder of that meeting, the minutes record, 'was spent in singing and dancing and chorusing until advanced hours in the morning.'<sup>15</sup>

At a meeting in mid October 1873 the trade resolved that members' wages should not be reduced during the coming winter, as was tradition, and anticipated by the contractors. This decision was reached without a single dissenting voice. The meeting actually noted that employment prospects were so promising for the coming year that by late February 1874 members could possibly achieve a wage increase, from their current rate of 5s. 8d., to 6s per day.<sup>16</sup> The trade reconsidered the decision in early November, after the employers gave notice that, from 1 November until the following March, they intended to reduce the wages paid to bricklayers to 32s. per week. The winter reduction in bricklayers' wages had been the normal practice as far back as anyone could remember. After careful re-evaluation, the trade's members still voted 62 to 15 in favour of their demand. They resolved that wages would be maintained, and that they would break the tradition of the winter time reduction once and for all. There is no suggestion of aggressive jubilation to be found in the trade's records upon the taking of this decision. One can however detect a sense of grim determination permeating through the mood of the November meeting. After the taking of the vote the secretary read to the assemblage the rules concerning strike actions.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, 3 July 1873.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, 16 October 1873.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, 3 November 1873.

Three days later most members of the combination were out on strike. Some, still working on certain building sights contrary to the rules of the trade, had their names recorded. Patrick Ried moved, at the 6 November monthly meeting, that these working members should pay 2s. 6d. per week to the trade.<sup>18</sup> This money to be used to defray the costs of drink to the members on strike! On 12 November a 21 member committee was elected to consider how best to resolve the dispute.<sup>19</sup> A deputation from this committee met with the employers the following day, however nothing came of the meeting.<sup>20</sup>

The society received help from James Carey, and his brother Francis. They advanced loans of £40 and £50 respectively, this ensured that the strike could be maintained. The enthusiastic acclimation of the membership greeted the assistance.<sup>21</sup> Later in November the Carey brothers, between them, offered a further £100 to the trade. This support was fondly regarded, and all members of the trade held James Carey in high esteem until his infamous behaviour in 1883.

On 17 November a delegation consisting of Michael Smyth, Michael Handly, and Denis Byrne, met with the employers. They informed the builders of the reasons for their members' seeking the same wages in winter as in summer. The bricklayers' primary grievance was that they worked almost identical hours in both seasons, and in winter endured many more hardships on account of the cold and the wet.<sup>22</sup>

The agreement reached at the meeting was to put the matter to arbitration. The employers and the trade each appointed an arbitrator. Doctor William O'Leary was asked to act on behalf of the trade. The arbitrators would then appoint a third party to

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<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, 6 November 1873.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, 12 November 1873.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, 13 November 1873.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, 17 November 1873.

act as umpire. Part of the agreement was that the men would resume work at the 34s. per week rate until the question of the winter reduction in their wages, and the issue of working under artificial lights during that season, were resolved.<sup>23</sup>

A committee meeting of the trade on 25 November decided to impose a levy of 4s. on journeymen and 2s. on all apprentices. This levy was introduced in order to meet the expenses incurred by the trade during the strike. The members who had not been on strike were demanded, in addition to the levy of 4s., to pay an additional 2s. 6d. for the first and second weeks of the strike. Shop stewards were appointed in the different construction sights to collect the levy.<sup>24</sup>

By early January 1874 there had been no further contacts between the trade and the employers. The preparations for arbitration, despite the appointment of arbitrators, had about them an air of uncertainty. Nobody within the trade, from the secretary down, seemed to know when the actual arbitration was to take place.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, the bricklayers were still earning 34s. per week, as they had been throughout November and December. Whether the arbitration did not come off on account of employer apathy, or because they were just too busy with other tasks that winter to deal with prolonged arbitration, is difficult to say. One thing is certain however, by the employers not facing up to the bricklayers' trade's challenge on the issue of the winter wage reductions, the tradition became extinct. The combination's members had now, at very little cost in terms of industrial actions, secured for themselves a wage of 34s. per week.

On 27 January 1875 it came to the trade's attention that the builder Samuel Bolton had eight non-trade men working as bricklayers at Belview, the residence of Sir

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, 25 November 1873.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, 7 January 1874.

Ralph Cusick, in Raheny. The new master of the bricklayers' trade, William Keogh, and the secretary, Denis Byrne, were dispatched to confront the builder on his employment of these colts. When both men encountered Bolton he first treated them with utter contempt. They had waited at his office on the Rathmines road to speak with him, but he came and went from there, ignoring them completely. When, after many hours of tedious waiting, they eventually got to exchange words with the builder, he informed them that he had hired the other men because they were cheaper. Cheaper than any of their bricklayers he informed them. When asked by the master if they were better, he replied they were that too. The exchange ended there, with Bolton driving away in his trap from the two delegates.<sup>26</sup>

The Master and secretary returned to Cuffe Street that evening to report, to the executive and membership, on their less than satisfactory encounter. When the behaviour of Bolton was recounted it put the assemblage in a militant humour. Members demanded action, Samuel Bolton could not be permitted to get away unpunished with such supercilious behaviour towards the trade's highest officials. The general consensus was that he had to be taught a lesson!<sup>27</sup>

The executive instructed Denis Byrne to notify Bolton, which he did on 5 February, that if the colts remained on in Raheny he could expect a general strike on 8 February by the 26 members of the trade currently in his employ.<sup>28</sup> The union was shifting into attack position with this effective ultimatum.

By 11 February the brief strike against Bolton was over. He had offered to discharge the men working in Raheny, and his offer had been readily accepted. The

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, 27 January 1875.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, 5 February 1875.

trade's members duly returned to work the following day, satisfied in the knowledge that they had humbled one haughty individual. Again, James Carey had helped by lending money to pay the strikers. This was the second major occasion in which he had come to the trade's assistance, and their fourth virtually cost free victory in the space of just under three years. The money, £7-15-0, was as usual repaid promptly to Carey after the strike concluded.<sup>29</sup>

In mid October 1892 trouble began looming amongst the bricklayers of Dublin over the issue of wiggers. Wiggers had been given permission to work on a job that bricklayers had left unfinished. When the AGIBSTU took the wiggers society to the Dublin Trades Council (DTC) over this issue the council found against the bricklayers. The union could not accept this; it dispatched the master of the trade to consult with builders in the city, and urge them not to employ wiggers to finish work done by bricklayers.<sup>30</sup>

By the end of the month members of the union working for a builder named Worthington went out on strike. Worthington had permitted wiggers to finish work which had been started by AGIBSTU men. Working members were levied 2s. per-week to support their out of work colleagues. The union's secretary, Michael Ennis, was instructed to contact all United Kingdom bricklaying societies, asking them to keep their members out of Dublin for the duration of the dispute.<sup>31</sup>

In mid November, at a specially convened meeting of the union concerning the strike at Worthington's job, the master of the trade, Peter Murphy, explained that he had received two letters from the Royal Irish Architects Society. These, along with a report

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 16 February 1875.

<sup>30</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/1, Minutes of committee meetings and quarterly meetings, 1892 – 1895, 18 October 1892.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, 28 October 1892.



from James Lyons of the union's executive, explained that Worthington was in serious difficulties due to the strike and desperate for a solution. Members seem to have adopted a highly belligerent stance once Worthington's weak position was revealed. They started urging the union's executive to order Worthington to dispense with the wiggers he had pointing the work which bricklayers had begun. Some members even talked of trying to wipe both Worthington, and the wiggers society, out of existence.

At this meeting Laurence Mulhall, of the executive, suggested that if Worthington made any overtures to the trade, without giving a stamped guarantee that he would not in future employ wiggers to finish work done by AGIBSTU members, his advances should be treated with silent contempt.<sup>32</sup>

Another special meeting of the union took place on 17 November. Delegates reported on a meeting with members of the Architects Institute. The architects had urged them to resolve their differences with Worthington. They also informed the delegates that the wiggers society was dying, and that the bricklayers' union would have all of its business in future. Michael Doyle, who had been one of the delegates, cautioned members that they did not want to bankrupt Worthington. If that happened, he warned, everyone would loose. This pragmatic advice from Doyle seemed to somewhat pacify the belligerence of the membership.<sup>33</sup>

On 23 November Michael Doyle exposed that certain unnamed members on the union's executive had been acting underhandedly. They had not forwarded the AGIBSTU's demands to Worthington, keeping him totally in the dark as to what the union wanted of him. Lawrence Mulhall urged the members to start acting honourably,

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<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, 14 November 1892.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, 17 November 1892.

and seek a viable solution to speedily conclude the issue.<sup>34</sup> The minutes give the impression that some members really did want to see a builder bankrupted for that pointless reason in itself.

Soon afterwards correspondence was exchanged with Worthington, and he guaranteed that members of the union could point all the work he had available. The executive deemed Worthington's response acceptable and the strike concluded.

Although this was a brief, localised, and relatively unimportant strike in the scheme of things, it revealed a darker side to the union, yet a side which remained largely concealed. The AGIBSTU was in a powerful position in relation to the seemingly pitiful Worthington, who could do little to combat its tactics. The builder was brought to the edge of bankruptcy, by an apparently indifferent trade union. Some of the union's members seem to have taken delight in humbling the employer, and in the prospect of putting him out of business. This nihilism, which would have rebounded negatively upon the union, was avoided thanks to the cool heads of both Michael Doyle and Laurence Mulhall. Nevertheless, the incident gives the impression of a union drunk on its own sense of power and importance.

Concerning the contempt displayed towards the wiggers, at this time a great psychological and pecuniary gulf divided the skilled from the unskilled workers. The craftsmen looked down upon their unskilled brethren with similar ambivalence to that which they displayed towards their employers. In Ireland the unskilled workers consisted of small farmers who, through economic circumstances, had left the land. Displaced, they were gradually assimilated into urban society and the unions for the unskilled, the popularly however erroneously named new unions (Hawkins, 1981).

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<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, 23 November 1892.

## **Twentieth Century**

The first twenty years of the twentieth century were the most turbulent for Ireland in terms of both industrial actions and political developments. On the industrial relations front, legal cases in the first year of the century threatened to take away from trade unions all for which they had fought and suffered. The workers struck back against the decisions in the Taff Vale and Quinn v Leatham cases in the 1906 election, sweeping the Tory government from power in the biggest Liberal landslide of all time. In that year a Royal Commission, headed by Lord Dunedin, presented its report to the new government under Prime Minister Henry Campbell-Bannerman. The Dunedin Commission's report led the Liberals to introduce the 1906 Trade Disputes Act. This act granted trade unions the freedom to strike with immunity, and to engage in peaceful picketing (McCarthy, 1977). 'The legislators' intention was to give the unions comprehensive immunity from judge-made liabilities' (Hawkins, 1981, p. 43). Trade unions were now absolved of any legal responsibility for civil damage in respect of actions by their members in contemplation or furtherance of a trade dispute (Kerr, 1985). The Trade Disputes Act of 1906 was to become the definitive piece of trade union legislation in Ireland in the last century (Hillery, 1994).

Many new union leaders, including those in the bricklayers' trade union, were confessed socialists, anxious to use politics as well as economic power to secure their objectives. James Larkin arrived in Belfast in 1907, and was to have a profound influence on Irish industrial relations. The Irish Labour Party emerged in the second decade of the twentieth century, and offered political representation for the working class. The opening decades of the twentieth century were to witness gradual trade union

advance in the face of severe capitalist opposition. This led to confrontations brimming with enmity and rancour, the great lockout of 1913 their supreme personification.

It must be clearly stated here that the bricklayers' union was not always victorious in its disputes. It was sometimes defeated, had to bind its wounds, and build again. But the AGIBSTU was never so thoroughly crushed as when in 1905 its membership was locked out. A lockout is technically the reverse of a strike, but worth discussing here nonetheless.

From the turn of the century up until 1905 the bricklayers' trade union had been making steady progress on numerous fronts. Members' hours of work had been decreasing, their wages increasing, and the number of branches expanding. The future seemed bright, but the union was rising for a fall. Here will be dealt with the story of its worst defeat ever. The ramifications of this defeat on the union's benefits to its members will be dealt with in chapter V.

A special meeting of the union was convened on 23 February 1905, with first steward Richard O'Carroll in the chair. This meeting was called to consider a request which had been received from the Master Builders. They had asked that the addenda to rule 7, marked 7a, its status not fully settled in an agreement reached on 21 August 1896, be incorporated into the union's rules.<sup>35</sup> Addendum 7a was an interesting case. It concerned the carrying out of work by union members for people other than the Master Builders. The incorporation of addendum 7a into the union's rules would permit the membership to do for the Master Builders what they were already doing for private

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<sup>35</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/3, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1904 – 1905, 23 February 1905.

employers.<sup>36</sup> There was, '[the] largest number of men at this meeting since [the] strike in 1896.'<sup>37</sup> When the proposal was put regarding the incorporation of addendum 7a into the union's rules, 'it was carried by acclamation.' James Quaile, a lone dissenting voice, sounded a note of warning when he suggested that this might have been a rather rash move. Quaile's observation was to prove prophetic.<sup>38</sup>

Dark clouds started to boil up on the horizon almost immediately. A meeting was held on the evening of 23 February between delegations from the union and the builders. The builders immediately made demands on the union pertaining to 7a. If any member of the union took piecework or measurement from private individuals, the Builders demanded the same privilege.<sup>39</sup> Working under piecework, or measurement, for the Master Builders had been something the union had fought against in the previous century.

The following day James Lyons, Michael Doyle, James Quaile, and Richard O'Carroll, all members of the AGIBSTU's executive committee, met with the Master Builders Association. However, the meeting did not go well. With the addition of 7a to the union's rules, the builders wanted to bind the union to their bidding. No agreement was reached.<sup>39</sup> Thereafter the Master Builders gave the union an ultimatum, if it would not comply with what was demanded its membership would be locked out from 28 February onwards.<sup>41</sup> In their haste to approve 7a, and the possible benefits that might accrue from it, the union's membership appears to have overlooked any pitfalls that

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<sup>36</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/22/1, Working Rules of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Society of the City of Dublin, 21 August 1896, Rule 7. – p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/3, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1904 – 1905, 23 February 1905.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, 24 February 1905.

<sup>41</sup> *Irish Independent*, 28 February 1905.

might have accompanied the addendum.

It was at this time that Richard O'Carroll replaced Thomas Garland as the union's general president. He was just 28 years of age, having risen rapidly through the society. O'Carroll was in later years to leave an indelible mark on the union.

4 March is the first date recorded for the expenditure of society monies in relation to the lockout.<sup>42</sup> These were spent on sending blacklegs who had come from England back across the Irish Sea. The story from the union's point of view in March and April of 1905 is impossible to tell, the pages concerning that period were ripped from the minutes of the society. However, on 14 April the union sent a letter to John Good, secretary of the Master Builders Association. This was an insistence that 7a, the addendum to Rule 7, was the only point on which the union would go to arbitration.<sup>43</sup>

On 14 May Richard O'Carroll noted that the builders were introducing all the scab labour they could from the counties outside Dublin. They were doing everything in their power to crush the union once and for all. It was as if the employers were seeking revenge for all the individual defeats they had suffered to the bricklayers' society over the years.

Later in May a letter was received from John Batchelor, secretary of the London Order of Bricklayers. For example of later correspondence see 2 Appendix D.<sup>44</sup> O'Carroll remarked to the other officers of the trade that this correspondence indicated the English union's intention to establish a branch in Dublin. The AGIBSTU considered this prospect most unacceptable, even more so under the prevailing circumstances.

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<sup>42</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/2/12, Secretaries expense book (records income and expenditure), 1904 – 1909, 4 March 1905.

<sup>43</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/28/1, Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1896 – 1921, 14 April 1905.

<sup>44</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/30/12, Letter from John Batchelor, General Secretary, Operative Bricklayers' Society, London, 9 September 1905.

There was even talk of an English delegate coming to Dublin, and getting the English scab labour working there to leave the city. However, O'Carroll was against help from any English trade unionists, as he felt that the AGIBSTU was capable of managing its own affairs. There was also probably the fear that if the English union's representatives came to the city they might not be willing to leave after the lockout ended.<sup>45</sup>

An all-persuasive sense of panic permeates the minutes of the trade from the spring of 1905. It was under attack on all fronts, and appeared to be winning on none. The finances were creaking under the strain of supporting so many men unable to find work. Between 25 March and 1 July £1,506-12-8 was spent on payments to locked out members of the union. For a detailed breakdown of expenses see Table 4.1.<sup>46</sup>

**Table 4.1**

**Lockout expenses incurred by the union between 25/3/1905 and 1/7/1905**

| Date      |   | £    | S  | d |
|-----------|---|------|----|---|
| 25/3/1905 | - | 172  | 17 | 0 |
| 1/4/1905  | - | 101  | 1  | 6 |
| 8/4/1905  | - | 100  | 0  | 2 |
| 15/4/1905 | - | 116  | 0  | 6 |
| 22/4/1905 | - | 116  | 19 | 0 |
| 29/4/1905 | - | 83   | 0  | 6 |
| 6/5/1905  | - | 87   | 7  | 6 |
| 13/5/1905 | - | 92   | 18 | 6 |
| 20/5/1905 | - | 83   | 19 | 0 |
| 26/5/1905 | - | 83   | 7  | 0 |
| 3/6/1905  | - | 95   | 2  | 0 |
| 10/6/1905 | - | 91   | 14 | 0 |
| 17/6/1905 | - | 95   | 14 | 0 |
| 24/6/1905 | - | 93   | 11 | 6 |
| 1/7/1905  | - | 93   | 0  | 6 |
| Total     |   | 1506 | 12 | 8 |

(1097/11/1 Lock out account 1905, income and expenditure)

<sup>45</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/3, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1904 – 1905, 28 May 1905.

<sup>46</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/11/1, Lock out account 1905: income and expenditure March – August 1905, 25 March – 1 July 1905.

An indication of the union's desperation can be gauged from the fact that any avenue of salvation still open to it, no matter how bizarre, was looked into. A Joseph Horner offered to help in fighting the lockout in return for a clean membership card. He was going to try, (in order, he said, to settle an old score) to get the scabs away from their different jobs around Dublin. The chairman warned him that if the builders were victorious, the wages of members would fall to about 7d. per hour, a drastic reduction. The situation had already become so grave that apprentice boys were permitted, if circumstances warranted, to work alongside scab labour.<sup>47</sup> Long imposed rules were falling by the wayside.

In early June, under the strain of the lockout, antagonism developed between Cuffe Street and its Kingstown branch. The trouble focused on the forwarding of subscriptions, as Kingstown always held onto £4-0-0 for incidental expenses. Frank Wafer, Kingstown's delegate to the executive, reported that its members did not appreciate the tone of correspondence received from Dublin demanding explanations for what was going on. These messages insinuated, they felt, something insidious.<sup>48</sup>

On 6 June, the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Joseph Hutchinson, and an alderman named Cotter, convinced delegates from the union's executive of the likelihood of their success if the dispute went to arbitration. Cotter, who in that case would have been the arbitrator, went so far as to assure the delegates that he would settle at least one of the points under arbitration in the union's favour, while throwing the other 'overboard.'<sup>49</sup>

At a special meeting on 9 June the union debated settling the dispute by way of arbitration. James Quaile informed the membership that if the two points at issue went

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<sup>47</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/3, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1904 – 1905, 31 May 1905.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, 6 June 1905.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, 17 November 1905.



At its darkest hour, to add a touch of the surreal to the looming catastrophe, some bricklayers, with time on their hands, set about trying to re-establish the union's band!<sup>52</sup>

The arbitration took place in late June with alderman Cotter, the manager of the gas works, in the chair. O'Carroll later remarked that, after attending the arbitration court, he was convinced they had put their case across excellently and that the AGIBSTU would win.<sup>53</sup>

However, on 30 June Richard O'Carroll revealed the arbitration result to the general membership. The union had disastrously lost on both points. A stunned O'Carroll proclaimed, rather lamely, that he felt they 'might have got at least one of the points at issue.' A man named Harney summed up the general mood at Cuffe Street that day when he said, 'we [are] in a far worse position than ever, the fact remains that we were defeated.' The defeat he blamed on both the stupidity and treachery of the union's representatives. Yet, another member, John Heynes, remarked that he did not care who got his job so long as he belonged to the union.<sup>54</sup> A fire still burnt beneath the ashes.

This was the worst defeat ever suffered by the AGIBSTU. It made a rash move, and paid dearly for it. It had fought valiantly against the combined strengths of the employers, but it could not carry the day. Ironically, although the arbitration result was a complete defeat, it ultimately, if unintentionally, saved the union. By going to arbitration and losing, most members, probably with heads hung low, were able to return to work, and the arterial out flow of funds from the society ceased. If the lockout had dragged on much longer it would almost certainly have bankrupted the union.

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<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, 24 June 1905.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, 17 November 1905.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, 30 June 1905.

As with all defeats, the 1905 lockout was to have long lasting ramifications for the vanquished. As creditors began demanding recompense, all benefits to members were severely curtailed for years afterwards. Some branches collapsed, as did general discipline in the wake of that dark June. Nevertheless, there were no large-scale desertions, partially out of lack of alternative options, but also out of strong fraternal loyalty. Some employers kept their scabs on for quite some time after the end of the lockout, as if to taunt the prostrated union. General secretary Michael Ennis lost his job the following year to Richard O'Carroll.<sup>55</sup> Somebody's head had to roll for the fiasco. 'O'Carroll's defeat of the incumbent secretary represented a revolt by the rank and file' (Ward-Perkins, 1996, p. 26). The union was to take a very long time before it either threatened an employer with a strike, or actually struck again. As Alderman Cotter was a large employer, maybe the union displayed naivety by believing all that he told them. Despite all the pain, suffering, hopes, and heartache, the AGIBSTU did survive. The realm remained.

Fifteen years later, when 1905 had slipped into the pages of history, and at the end of the period covered in this dissertation, the bricklayers' union again went to war. It was as a result of the work of James Larkin, between 1907 and 1913, that there had been an explosion in unionisation amongst the unskilled workers. As a consequence, by 1920, trade union membership in Ireland represented about 25 per cent of all wage earners. This was a very different industrial relations environment from that which had prevailed at the turn of the century. Although the 1913 lockout could be looked upon as a victory for the employers, it also marked the apogee of their powers. The unions on

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<sup>55</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/4, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1906 – 1911, 5 February 1906.

the other hand had only been sowing the wind. By 1920 the employers of Ireland began to recognise that intense confrontations with trade unions were a lose-lose situation, and that union recognition and collective bargaining could not be fought off indefinitely.

On 2 September 1920 the bricklayers' union, amongst other building unions which together constituted the Building Trades Group (BTG), attended a conference with the DBTEA to discuss the conditions existing in their industry. This meeting was held in accordance with the terms of a settlement reached the previous May. The workers side demanded an advance in wages as they claimed that the costs of living had risen. AGIBSTU members were earning 2s. 2d. per hour and seeking a 4½d. increase, which would bring their hourly wages up to 2s. 6½d. The union was also seeking a 100 percent advance on the present scale of pay for apprentices. The employers obfuscated, saying that they would have to put the matter to a general meeting of their membership for consideration.<sup>56</sup>

There was a financial crisis in Dublin Corporation at the time. It had pledged loyalty to the rebel Dail Eireann instead of the British government, which then promptly withdrew some of its funding. This resulted in a serious shortfall in the corporation's budget. Bricklayers working for the corporation had to accept 25 percent of their wages in post dated cheques and the remainder in cash. At a union meeting a member named B. Holohan remarked, 'many men were making sacrifices in the national cause, and if it was necessary now, the corporation employees should make the sacrifice.'<sup>57</sup>

On 21 September Owen Hynes, the AGIBSTU's general secretary, formally sent to the employers the union's demands for an increase in members' wages of 4½d. per

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<sup>56</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/2, Minutes of general and committee meetings, 28<sup>th</sup> February 1918 – 26<sup>th</sup> January 1930, 2 September 1920.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

hour, and a 100 percent advance on the pay scale for apprentices. He threatened that if these demands, and a number of others besides, were not acceded to, the union would withdraw its labour on 2 October (3 Appendix D).<sup>58</sup> This effective ultimatum was forwarded as an individual demand, but other unions in the construction industry, all formerly part of the BTG, forwarded their demands simultaneously, all having agreed to a uniform date of stoppage.

The employers protested the demanded increase in wages in light of economic developments. The global expansion of productive capacity during the Great War, and immediately following to satisfy the demands of the peace-time market, had led to an overproduction crises by the autumn of 1920 (O'Connor, 1988, p. 97). An economic depression was coming.

On 29 September the Lord Mayor of Dublin offered to mediate in the dispute, his proposal was accepted. However, at negotiations there was no movement on the employers' side. The Lord Mayor, Laurence O'Neill, asked both sides to keep negotiating, and working for the following two weeks. The bricklayers, under capable general secretary Owen Hynes, were in fighting mood. The day following the conference, 1 October, the members of the AGIBSTU voted their thanks to the Lord Mayor for all his help and then voted to strike. The minutes record, 'this motion was passed with acclamation.'<sup>59</sup>

It should be noted that the dispute only affected employers who were members of the DBTEA. Union members could continue working for public boards, and for contractors and private firms which were not members of the DBTEA.

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<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, 21 September 1920.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, 1 October 1920.

On 21 October the employers' and workers' representatives met in the Mansion House. However, no agreement could be reached at this meeting. The Lord Mayor, chairing the conference, suggested that the issue be put to arbitration. The AGIBSTU's membership universally turned down the option of arbitration.<sup>60</sup> Many of the bricklayers on strike in Dublin travelled to England and worked there for the duration of the dispute. In contributing 2s. 6d. per week, they were helping to save the union's funds, and enabling it to struggle on in its battle.<sup>61</sup>

By late December 1920, more unsuccessful conferences with the employers had passed. Bricklayers who had remained in Dublin, and on strike, had had their benefits reduced.<sup>62</sup> As if matters were not bad enough war broke out on a second front. The union became involved in a dispute with the Corporation Housing Committee. Here too it was looking for an increase in members' wages in the order of 4½d per hour.<sup>63</sup> The long shadow cast by 1905 began to loom ominously over the union.

On 7 February 1921, when things appeared as if they could only get darker, a curious incident occurred. The contract for a job at 16 Parnell Street was taken out of the hands of a Messrs. Keegan, by a Mr. Kelly, the architect in charge, and given to a Messrs. Keating and Fitzpatrick. The reason was that the latter builders were not members of the DBTEA. AGIBSTU members could now work on this job, which they readily did.<sup>64</sup> Similar occurrences were to happen all over Dublin in the coming months, enabling those bricklayers who had remained in Ireland to obtain work where otherwise they would have had none.

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<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, 21 October 1920.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, 27 December 1920.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, 7 February 1921.

The secretary of the DBTEA, J. Gibson, in early March 1921 spelt out the implications of the 4½d. per hour increase in wages the union was seeking. Members' wages would rise from £4-15-4 to £5-4-6 per week. The increase would make the Dublin bricklayers the highest paid workers in their trade in the whole of the United Kingdom. The employers, he informed the AGIBSTU, could not consider it.<sup>65</sup> The strike went on.

By this time a number of employers had broken away from the Employers Association, in order for members of the AGIBSTU to work on their jobs. Other contractors were offering to pay union members the wages they were demanding in order to fulfil their contracts. A. R. Saunders, a foreman for Messrs. West & Co., contacted the union on 23 March and informed it that should members resume working for the firm they would be paid the demanded 2s. 6½d. per hour.<sup>66</sup> A week later J. Dunbar, a contractor, informed the union that he too was no longer a member of the DBTEA. He said that he was prepared to pay AGIBSTU members whatever they wanted to come back to work for him.<sup>67</sup>

On 11 April the Corporation Housing Commission informed the bricklayers' union, that it was willing to accede to their demands. The Commission only asked that there would be no delay in union members resuming work at the Mount Brown and Saint James Walk housing projects. The minutes book notes, 'the union decided to comply with the request which was noted with approval.'<sup>68</sup> They were victorious on one front.

Throughout the rest of April, and into early May 1921, membership continued

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<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, 4 March 1921.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, 23 March 1921.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, 30 March 1921.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, 11 April 1921.

to haemorrhage from the DBTEA. By mid May the employers informed the AGIBSTU that they would be happy to hold talks, if the union wished to arrange a meeting. The union's executive council decided against taking any action.<sup>69</sup> All members seemed confident that they could hold out, and bring the other party to the table first. In the AGIBSTU's minutes one gets the impression of a sense of high moral pervading all meetings. Nowhere is there the absolute sense of panic of 1905. Victory seemed to be almost within reach.

However, the employers still insisted that they could not offer a wage increase. In England bricklayers were earning 2s. 2d. per hour, but by August it was predicted that their wages would be reduced to 2s. per hour. The reason was wage agreements there which allowed for variations in earnings as the costs of living fluctuated. Ironically, even without the wage increase they so craved, the Dublin bricklayers were for the first time going to become the best paid members of their trade in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, at its twilight.

On 1 June the AGIBSTU's general president and general secretary attended another conference in the Mansion House. This meeting had been requested by the builders. A Professor Cleary presided. After proceedings began a group of Black and Tans broke in on the meeting. Having demanded knowledge of who everybody was, and their business, the British eventually withdrew.<sup>70</sup> An AGIBSTU general meeting was held on 10 June to consider the offer put forward by the employers at the 1 June conference. The meeting decided to accept a 1d. per hour increase in wages for members. This increase would bring bricklayers' hourly earnings up to 2s. 3d., and

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<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, 16 May 1921.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, 1 June 1921.

come into effect from the day they resumed work. However, the increase was only to remain in effect until 1 August 1921. Thereafter wages were to revert back to 2s. 2d. per hour until 1 January 1922.<sup>71</sup> Work was resumed on Monday morning, 13 June.<sup>72</sup> The strike had lasted eight months, the longest in the history of the union. However, was it a pyrrhic victory?

The initial answer to the above question is an equivocal maybe, but then again, maybe not. To properly answer this question one must view the result in light of the 1905 lockout. Unlike that year the union never once displayed the slightest outward signs of cracking. Once action began, most members were dispatched to England, and elsewhere, from whence they sent back contributions. Strain on funds, although significant, was much alleviated by this. As a consequence, to all intents and purposes the AGIBSTU in fact seemed quite invincible. If it had not been for the world economic slump the dispute would most likely have continued, and it is quite possible that the DBTEA could have suffered a more severe loss of membership. Unlike the 1905 ambush the bricklayers' union had carefully chosen the ground it fought this action upon, chose it well, and fought excellently. The ghost of 1905 was finally laid to rest.

To answer the question properly, no, it was not so much a pyrrhic victory, as a glorious draw.

The above strikes, threatened strikes, and lockout, provide examples of how the union fought to either advance or defend the wages, conditions of work, and rights, of its membership. Victories were much easier to achieve in the late nineteenth century

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<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, 10 June 1921.

<sup>72</sup> *The Irish Times*, 14 June 1921.



than in the twentieth. These were welcome when they occurred, but defeat could be crushing. Ultimately, the AGIBSTU's ability to fight by means of industrial actions for its members, and its fighting qualities, were of vital importance in determining the extent of its realm.

## **Penalties: Expulsions and Fines**

The expulsions, threatened expulsions, and fines, dealt with here concern, in the main, union members seriously breaching the trade's rules in relation to work. These penalties were measures used to ensure that the majority of members did not engage in practices frowned upon by the union as a whole. Incidents of rule infringements were fairly common, but few were actually very serious and consequently expulsions and heavy finings were a rarity. Sometimes however a minor infringement of the rules could become critical very quickly if the member, or members, concerned failed to comply with a penalty, or obey an instruction imposed upon them. There is one notable exception to this, that was an expulsion which had more to do with the trade's image than a specific breach of its rules. However, the nine cases set out below provide an insight into the discipline imposed upon certain members whose actions were regarded as detrimental to the union, its membership, or even the public.

### **Nineteenth Century**

In early January 1869 three members of the combination who had worked with colts came before the trade's council for the month. This was a serious breach of the trade's regulations. As was seen above, the proscription of working with colts went back as far as 1792 at least. The indiscretion had occurred while the men were working on a job on

the Clyde Road for a Mr. M. Casey. This January meeting, upon hearing all the evidence presented, unanimously decided that the names Alex Thompson, G. Thompson, and William Dixon, should be struck from the books of the trade.<sup>73</sup>

The story of the Clyde Road does not end here however. It afterwards transpired that all the evidence presented did not constitute all the evidence available on the matter. It was discovered that the colts, had not actually been colts at all, but simply men who belonged to a different combination. A few months after their expeditious expulsion the three wronged men were received back into the bricklayers' trade.

However, when the economy was particularly weak, and employment difficult to come by, the rules regarding members working with either colts, or even labourers, were relaxed. At the trade's Easter Monday meeting of 1869 a number of motions were approved which permitted bricklayers to work alongside men who were not members of the trade. The Chemical Works at the North Wall was one of the locations where this practice was permitted, there were various other private jobs besides. This rule relaxation occurred out of necessity, as many bricklayers in the city were idle at the time.<sup>74</sup>

An interesting aspect of the bricklayers' combination is that members of the trade always seemed to have been on the lookout for fellow members who, through their actions, were weakening the organisation. In March 1870, John O'Neill of Kingstown brought a charge of working with colts, while employed by a Mr. Burke, against Patrick Mulhall of Dalky. O'Neill proved the charge, while Mulhall openly admitted to it. The decision by the master was that Patrick Mulhall should pay a fine of £2-10-0, the first

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<sup>73</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/6, Minutes of monthly and general meetings, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1869 – 17<sup>th</sup> April 1876, 7 January 1869.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, 29 March 1869.

instalment to be £1.<sup>75</sup> A very severe penalty, yet exactly the same amount as that paid by members named in the refractory list from some 40 years before.

At this time the trade began to appoint shop stewards in locations where members were employed. These appointments were to facilitate the collection of dues on Saturday evenings. The names of members who refused to pay their dues would be given to the executive council by the shop stewards. A fine of 10s. was introduced against any member who, by not paying his dues, caused others to withdraw in protest. Any member who refused to strike against a non-due paying member would be fined one day's wages! However, the trade would compensate the striking members.<sup>76</sup>

In August 1872 Robert Brannic's name was erased from the books of the trade. He had committed a criminal assault, been convicted, and served eighteen months imprisonment.<sup>77</sup>

Often, having ones name erased from the books did not constitute a permanent expulsion. Members expelled for whatever reason, upon a display of adequate contrition, were on occasion permitted to rejoin the union. They had to pay a re-entrance fees and usually a rather heavy fine.

The following month Brannic, eagerly seeking to rejoin the trade, encouraged members of the council for the month to investigate why he had been imprisoned. They would see, he informed them, that he had not been incarcerated for the crime the trade expelled him for. On this technicality he felt his salvation hung. Misters Costeloe and McCann, from the trade, were dispatched to meet with the governor of Harold's Cross prison. He discussed with them the case and the reasons for Brannic's incarceration.

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<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, 3 March 1870.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, 1 August 1872.

They were also given a letter to take back to Cuffe Street outlining in detail Brannic's offences. The letter explained that Robert Brannic had committed three separate assaults on women. When Brannic's crimes were reported to the body of members they decided that his expulsion was permanent.<sup>78</sup>

1874 was a year of international economic downturn. At a meeting in August a charge of not receiving their full railway fair, while working for Samuel Bolton in Kingstown, was laid, by a John Nugent, against John McGrath, Daniel O'Neill, William Slater, William Lears, and Thomas Murphy. These men had perpetrated a serious violation of the society's rules, and it could not be ignored. Members had certain duties to themselves, but also higher obligations to the society. By not demanding what according to the trade's rules was their right, while hurting themselves financially, these members could harm the trade by allowing an employer to interpret their behaviour as a possible sign of weakness on its part. It is noted in the minutes book that there was a heated discussion at the meeting considering the charge. Eventually, all of the five accused were fined £2-0-0 each.<sup>79</sup>

At the monthly meeting of the trade on 5 February 1875 it was revealed that Christopher Kavanagh had worked with colts in Eustace Street on Maurice Tracy's job. The members of the executive were in a militant humour at the time. The builder Samuel Bolton had just treated the trade's premier officers with utter disdain. Bad timing was to be Kavanagh's bad luck. He was not called upon to defend himself, or even to admit his guilt, instead his name was simply erased from the books of the trade.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, 5 September 1872.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, 6 August 1874.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, 5 February 1875.

In late March 1892 James McLarrify, a member of the AGIBSTU, was working for Messrs. Connolly on a job in New Fishmarket Street. He had seen preparations made for the coming of a tiler to work on a wall which the bricklayers had put up. When he reported this development to the master and executive council of the union they immediately ordered him to leave the job, and to inform the other AGIBSTU men there to do likewise.<sup>81</sup> This command was expected to be complied with under pain of expulsion. It was felt that if union members had put up the wall, then they had the right to tile it as well. This form of discipline, the threat of expulsion, ensured that the men at the job complied with executive council's instructions. It also ensured that a clear message was given to Messrs. Connolly. This dispute, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, was resolved the following month.

### **Twentieth Century**

Here again there is a marked variance between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in that the union was far less inclined to expel members for breaches of rules in the twentieth century than it had been heretofore. Numerous reasons could be found to elucidate for this greater tolerance. Probably nearest to the mark is the financial realism that an expelled member was a weekly contribution forfeited, or worse, a member lost to a potential rival union from England. This rational would have dominated in the years immediately following 1905. Expulsions and fines were still imposed however, one of the former even leading to the emergence of an unlikely antihero.

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<sup>81</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/1, Minutes of committee meetings and quarterly meetings, 1892 – 1895, 28 March 1892.

The first, economically depressed, years of the century passed relatively quietly for the AGIBSTU, then came the disaster of 1905. Throughout that period nobody was expelled, it was to be 1907 before that happened.

Few members attended the quarterly meeting in July of that year on account of the fine mid summer weather. Despite this, the meeting went ahead in a sweltering and almost deserted 49 Cuffe Street. During proceedings the case of James Brennan and James Breslin, who had both been suspended from the union on 7 May for breach of rules while employed by a James Casey, was considered. They had worked on a job for him on the Serpentine Avenue at less than the standard rate of 8½d. per-hour. After considering the evidence, the meeting decided to expel both men.<sup>82</sup> This action communicated to membership that the AGIBSTU was determined to reassert its control over wages in the industry in the wake of the lockout, and that it was laying down the law in this regard. The expulsions also indicated; firstly that the union was beginning to again wield its old authority over its membership, as it had not done since prior to 1905. Secondly, that it could do without the contributions of these members, indicating that finances, which had been ravaged during the lockout, were finally, in some sense of the word, on the mend. The shadow was becoming its former self.

By mid 1913 the union, under the diligent and rather flamboyant Richard O'Carroll, had full recovered from the effects of the 1905 lockout. Members who engaged in unapproved of work practices could quickly find themselves in serious trouble. Michael and Joseph McCabe had taken a job in Rathfarnham, and were receiving payment by way of piecework. When the union's executive council discovered, it referred both men to a rule passed the previous year and fined them each

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<sup>82</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/4, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1906 – 1911, 8 July 1907.

1s. This sum, in light of the refractory list from 1830, was a mild reprimand in the extreme. The union imposed a single requirement besides the fine, that both men immediately leave the job in question. This however they stubbornly refused to do, unless they were given strike pay. The executive council had no intention whatsoever of conceding to what amounted to almost a demand from the two rule breakers. Both men went back to the Serpentine Avenue. The union, enforcing the 1912 rule, then expelled them.<sup>83</sup>

Although 1913 is remembered for the Dublin lockout, the bitterest and most fierce labour struggle in the history of Ireland, it did not impact directly upon the AGIBSTU. However, although certain of the effects of its passing were felt, it struck but a glancing blow. A number of the union's membership had been working at locations from which the men of other trade unions had been locked out. The AGIBSTU's executive council ordered these bricklayers to leave all such jobs. However, some rebellious members openly flouted this instruction during the rancorous months of that grim autumn of 1913. One of these was Robert Murphy, a name that would live in infamy in the minutes books of the union for years to come. He had been working for the notorious Dublin United Tramways Company of William M. Murphy in early September 1913, at the beginning of the lockout. After he was asked to leave the job in solidarity with all the members of the other unions who had been locked out, most notably the members of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU), he demurred. When ordered to leave he flatly refused. Murphy felt that this demand should not be made of him, as it was, he believed, totally unfair. He was then

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<sup>83</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/1, Minutes of general and committee meetings, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1911 – 4<sup>th</sup> March 1918, 24 June 1913.

expelled from the union.<sup>84</sup>

Afterwards, the man strangely becomes almost legend. Over the next seven years his name floats like a phantom through the union's minutes. Reports of his passing here, snatches of him working there, seem to dot numerous proceedings at Cuffe Street. He, individually, almost becomes the union's arch nemesis. Yet, one can almost sense a grudging respect amongst the members for his self-reliance, and self-sufficient ability to get along without any of them.

Eventually Robert Murphy, seven years of blazing an individualist trail behind him, decided to rejoin the union. At a general meeting of the AGIBSTU on 25 January 1920, he formally applied to the executive council for readmission. Some members were hostile towards his application, however two well respected members, John Nagle and Joseph Howard, proposed and seconded that Murphy be readmitted on the payment of a fine of £5-0-0 together with his contributions. These monies were to be payable in instalments.<sup>85</sup> This was a severe punishment for his past dissent, but in light of his maverick behaviour a fitting penalty. It was felt by many that he was a man better to have within the union than without.<sup>86</sup> Few if any other Bricklayers in the union's entire history ever engendered such feelings as Robert Murphy.

The above cases show that if union members did not do as they were ordered they faced fining, or worse still the ultimate sanction. These penalties ensured that the majority of members always followed the rules, and the instructions of their executive council. Fines and expulsions, although rarely employed, were quite effective at ensuring discipline and keeping the general membership in line. The penalties were at

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<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, 23 September 1913.

<sup>85</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/2, Minutes of general and committee meetings, 28<sup>th</sup> February 1918 – 26<sup>th</sup> January 1930, 25 January 1920.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*



their most potent so long as Dublin remained a city with only one trade union for bricklayers. Expulsions also provided the union with a means of ridding itself of unwanted and troublesome members. The punishments ensured that the AGIBSTU's executive were effectively lords of all they surveyed. Yet, as was also shown, to the few indomitable radically nonconformist these penalties mattered not at all.

## **Status: Image Promotion**

Bricklayers and all other craftsmen, in the latter half of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth century, were considered the aristocracy of labour in both Britain and Ireland. Their unions tried to avoid strikes if possible, most of the money that they expended went on benefits to their members (Howell, 1900). '[Craft unions] did not wish to destroy the Capitalist fortress, but merely knocked humbly at its gates in the hope that they would be let in' (Crossick, 1978, p. 78). The perception of the AGIBSTU in the public mind was a very important consideration for its membership. The union always sought to have its name identified with fine buildings, builders, architects, and, as was seen in chapter II, prominent politicians. D'Arcy and Hannigan (1988, p. 97) state that the reason was the financial support the bricklayers received from various employers in the 1870s, which enabled them to improve their premises on Cuffe Street. As a consequence the trade tried to promote harmony between themselves and the builders. However, as was already shown this harmony was not always sustainable.

## **Nineteenth Century**

On 23 November 1869 a building under construction near the Coombe Lying in Hospital collapsed. Immediately the master and executive committee of the trade instructed the secretary, Denis Byrne, to have a statement published in the Irish Times, the Freeman's Journal, and the Daily Express. This statement declared that none of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers of Dublin had been employed at that building sight (4 Appendix D).<sup>87</sup> The Freeman's Journal of 6 December published the whole of the statement, however the Irish Times only published a simple denial that members of the trade had worked on the building.<sup>88</sup> This was because the editor of the Irish Times' had regarded parts of the trade's statement as libellous (D'Arcy and Hannigan, 1988). The trade took this action in order to prevent the association of its name, or those of its membership, with either incompetent contractors or shoddy building methods. The quality of its members' workmanship, and the reputations of its employers, was a point of honour with it.

Almost three years later, a labourer named Thomas Short was acting as a foreman for Messrs. Cockburn at Roes Distillery. When the trade heard of this, it deemed it totally unacceptable. A "lowly labourer," it was felt, should not be permitted to interfere with, or give instructions to, members of the trade. After duly considering the issue it was resolved that any member of the trade who permitted a labourer to give him directions, or to act as a foreman over him, would be fined a minimum of £2-10-0. This harsh penalty was made even more severe by the stipulation that while the fine remained unpaid the member would be unable to claim any benefits whatsoever.<sup>89</sup> Over

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<sup>87</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/6, Minutes of monthly and general meetings, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1869 – 17<sup>th</sup> April 1876, 1 December 1869.

<sup>88</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 6 December 1869.

<sup>89</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/6, Minutes of monthly and general meetings, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1869 – 17<sup>th</sup> April 1876, 4 July 1872.

the coming years almost no member of the trade was ever charged with breach of this rule.

The trade was not only anxious about its image and status at the building sights, it was also concerned with how other societies, and their members, perceived it and its reputation. Anything bringing disrepute upon it, and by extension its membership, was anathema. A curious incident in this respect occurred in August 1872. James Whelan, a member of the trade, along with a friend, had been drinking in a public house when a silk weaver accosted them. The fellow, probably inebriated, accused the bricklayers' combination of having borrowed money from the silk weavers' society, and of never having repaid it. When Whelan reported the strange confrontation to the council of the trade, it almost sent it into paroxysms. It immediately and frantically set about investigating its records. However, after much futile examination the treasurer stated that no such record could be discovered. Secretary Denis Byrne wrote to John Leary, secretary of the Silk Trade of Dublin, to discover at what point in the previous 70 years the money had been borrowed (5 Appendix D).<sup>90</sup> Byrne's inquiry gives an indication of the actual age of the bricklayers' combination. Or at least the date to which its records then stretched back, the turn of the nineteenth century.

On 17 August correspondence was received from the Silk Trade of Dublin. Its secretary stated that the Bricklayers had never borrowed from, or applied for assistance from, his society. He further apologised for the inappropriate and irresponsible remarks by the member of his society.<sup>91</sup>

As of 1888 the bricklayers became a registered trade union, under the name

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<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*, 14 August 1872.

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*, 17 August 1872.

Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union.<sup>92</sup> Aside from its name, a sense of the union's regard for its own importance can be gauged from the conversations amongst members concerning the conciliation boards which were established in the 1890s. Laurence Mulhall of the executive council, at the quarterly meeting in January 1893, commented that it was as a result of a previous bricklayer's strike that the first conciliation board had been introduced in Dublin. He, and other members of the union's executive, observed that the manner in which the proposed board was to be constituted would militate against the AGIBSTU. The reason was delegates from several smaller trades, none in any way connected with the construction industry, having seats on the board. John Litholder indignantly commented that the union had a right to have a representative on the board, and furthermore suggested that a delegation be dispatched to impress the necessity of this upon the Lord Mayor. Other speakers at this meeting were particularly contemptuous of the fact that the board could be constituted without one of them on it.<sup>93</sup> This, as if it were needed, highlights the very high regard in which members of the union held both it, and themselves, at the time.

## **Twentieth Century**

Nearing the close of the first decade of the twentieth century, the union, its finances still not in proper order as a consequence of the lockout four years previously, was one more time to stand up for its honour and its rights. In a manner, this was to be the final time that the AGIBSTU displayed glimpses of the haughtiness that had marked its behaviour

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<sup>92</sup> NA, RFSR, T82, Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, A/1, 1888 – 1960, [D].

<sup>93</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/1, Minutes of committee meetings and quarterly meetings, 1892 – 1895, 5 January 1893.

in the closing quarter of the nineteenth century.

In July 1909 it was discovered that the members of the plasterers union, the Operative Plasterers Trade Society of Dublin (OPTSD), were setting concrete blocks at the College of Science which was under construction at that time. A special general meeting of the AGIBSTU was called on 22 July to consider how to respond to what was regarded as an attack on their sacred territory. The union's executive decided to approach the problem cautiously, and exhaust all peaceful means at its disposal, before actually withdrawing its members. However, this was the first time since before 1905 that the option of strike action, although on the long finger, had been mentioned. It was decided to dispatch three deputations, one to the DTC, a second to the contractor Messrs. McLoughlin, and one to meet with the architect a Mr. Dean.<sup>94</sup>

On 24 July a special executive meeting of the DTC was held to consider the issue, however the plasterers did not bother to attend this.<sup>95</sup> Two days later a meeting at the plasterer's society's offices took place. Both meetings concerned which union, or if both unions, had the right to set concrete blocks at the College of Science. It was a matter of honour, prestige, and heritage, with the bricklayers that the right belonged to them exclusively.

The following week, on 1 August, a further special general meeting of the bricklayers' union concerning the dispute took place. Richard O'Carroll revealed to the members that the plasterers had not attended at the DTC meeting on 24 July. He had however met with them on 26 July. At that meeting, he explained, the plasterers had determined to hold their own special general meeting on the matter. Subsequent to the

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<sup>94</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/4, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1906 – 1911, 22 July 1909.

<sup>95</sup> N[ational] L[ibrary of] I[reland], D[ublin] T[rades] C[ouncil], Ms. 12781, 24 July 1909.

OPTSD's special general meeting a letter had been received in Cuffe Street. This message was the ultimate reason for the convening of the bricklayers' 1 August meeting. The plasterers' society's letter contained a resolution essentially resenting the bricklayers' union's claim to exclusive rights in the building of partition walls with concrete blocks. The plasterers' union's secretary further stated that the whole issue ought to be forgotten about as it was inconsequential, only a trivial matter.<sup>96</sup>

After considering the OPTSD's letter the special general meeting of the AGIBSTU passed a resolution stating its willingness to exhaust every peaceful means available to settle the dispute. This resolution emphasised the members' determination 'to resist this attempt to grab our work by every *fair* means and method open to us.'<sup>97</sup> It should be noted that the word fair seems to have been written into the minutes at a different time to the rest of the sentence. An afterthought, maybe? This meeting determined that strike action would be taken if the plasterers continued carrying out the disputed work at the College of Science pending a settlement.

On 5 August another meeting with the plasterers was held at the DTC.<sup>98</sup> The plasterers' representatives did take the trouble to attend on this occasion. AGIBSTU president James King was dispatched as one of its delegates to these talks. However, the meeting was brief, the plasterers' delegates abruptly leaving after a heated exchange.<sup>99</sup>

Although a strike was talked about within the bricklayers' union, in the end there seems to have been no real substance to this threat. There were in reality numerous factors militating against its taking strike action. If it struck then all the work at the

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<sup>96</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/4, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1906 – 1911, 1 August 1909.

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> NLI, DTC, Ms. 12781, 5 August 1909.

<sup>99</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/4, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1906 – 1911, 5 August 1909.

sight would go to the OPTSD by default. Consequently, employment amongst the members of the plasterers' union would almost certainly be higher during the struggle than before it had begun. The plasterers would be fighting the issue, but still in employment. Their union effectively held all the high ground if the matter went to a fight. There also seems to have been a malevolent presence instigating developments from behind the scenes. It came to the attention of the bricklayers that certain employers were surreptitiously abetting the plasterers in the dispute. If that was the case, and if both unions went head to head, there was recognised a genuine danger that the Master Builders might try to break the apprentice systems run by the unions while they would be occupied struggling with each other.

The AGIBSTU was only now beginning to flex its muscles after a four-year recovery from its last major struggle. It was ultimately hesitant to engage in industrial action, and extremely wary of the designs of the Master Builders. They had almost ruined the union once before by encouraging it to make a rash move, it would not be so impetuous again.

On account of the above, the union swallowed its pride, a pride it must be said which on occasion could be quite bloated and must have taken a lot of swallowing, and drew in its horns. The executive resolved to leave the question of the dispute open until a more opportune time. If there was to be a struggle then the AGIBSTU would wait until it could choose the time and place, and hence the advantage.

In this confrontation, although status was at issue it did not prove to be the union's primary concern. After 1905 there was a definite shift in priorities within the union, away from pomp and circumstance, to the bread and butter issues of pure survival. The four long years of struggle to recover from the 1905 lockout seemed to

bestow upon the membership a greater sense of realism, and a placing of priorities in their proper order. If these were the benefits of those terrible years, then maybe they were worth it. A stronger, leaner, and more calculating AGIBSTU emerged from the ashes of its former self.

As a final note, die-hard union member Michael Doyle strongly opposed the climb-down. He felt the society should have seen the matter through, to the bitter end if necessary.<sup>100</sup>

In society in general attitudes were changing, the barriers which had previously divided the craftsmen from the unskilled masses were evaporating. The motivation behind this change was the growing new unionism. Unions for the unskilled, especially the ITGWU, were to dominate in the coming decades of the twentieth century. 'Economically, the distinction between tradesmen and labourers weakened with the narrowing of wage differentials' (D'Arcy and Hannigan, 1988, p. 97). This narrowing of the remuneration gap, and the dominant role that was to be played by unions for the unskilled in the coming years, were by definition to lead to an erosion of the craft unions' status.

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This chapter has discussed the primary methods used by the Bricklayers' combination, and later trade union, to ensure that it both guarded and advanced the privileges of its membership. The chapter initially provided an overview of the earliest recorded actions by the bricklayers in defence of their rights. However, the above focus was by necessity on the trade in the 53 years between 1869 and 1921. Within that time frame are discussed the best and most relevant examples of the issues under consideration.

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<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*



The bricklayers' trade, through its use of strikes, expulsions, and fines, endeavoured to ensure that both employers and recalcitrant members did not in any way harm, or impair, the rights of the majority of its membership. In this regard the AGIBSTU conformed to the basic principle of craft trade unionism, 'collective action for defence of common interests' (O'Connor, 1992, p. 3). As regards status, the trade union's long history bestowed upon it a sense, debatably bloated, of its own importance. This pretentiousness was far from unique in the circles of Dublin craft trade unionism in the nineteenth century. The bricklayers guarded their society's status very closely in the years prior to 1900. This was in order to promote both the union and themselves within Dublin. This promotion of status, and it could be argued the maintenance of social divisions, was to be gradually eroded by hardships, a new sense of realism, and the coming of a new order in the twentieth century.

The realm remained, but it changed with a changing world, and a changing Ireland.

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## Chapter V

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# **The Bricklayers' Union's Provision of Benefits to its Membership**

'No act of kindness, however small, is ever wasted.'

Aesop [c. 500 BC]

The most important aspect of the AGIBSTU was the range of benefits it provided for its membership. The provision of these benefits was a primary function of first, the bricklayers' combination, and later, trade union. As it was a craft trade union, the essence of the AGIBSTU was the system of benefits it operated. These were central to the whole value system of the union, without providing benefits it would have been neither a true craft union, nor a new union. The types and levels of protection and assistance the society provided for its needy member said far more about it and the values of its membership in general, than any other facet of its multifarious composition. The provision of benefits went to the very heart of the bricklayers' union, defining its character, structure, and *raison d'être*, all other aspects of the society were essentially subsidiary to this particular function.

Howell (1900) notes how craft unions endeavoured to avoid strikes if possible, most of the monies they expended going on benefits to their membership. Apart from a lockout and an enduring strike in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the union did not regularly engage in prolonged industrial actions. Instead, its finances were husbanded for the assistance its needy members, and under certain circumstances their families.

Craft unions were in general conservative and, as was discussed, obsessed with improving their image of respectability. 'The Portsmouth lodge of the Ironfounders even proposed in 1849 not only the cessation of strikes, but the abolition of the word strike' (Lane, 1974, p. 69). Hutt (1975, pp. 25-26) breaks down the expenses of the ASE for the period 1851-89 as, friendly benefits (which included unemployment benefits) £2,987,993, while strike expenses totalled £86,664. These examples clearly illustrate the orientation of craft unions towards the provision of benefits to members. In the bricklayers' society's case however funds were never overly plentiful, and

maintaining the optimum levels of benefits sometimes proved to be an almost impossible struggle. This was normally on account of a proportion of the membership that was more than a little penurious in the payment of their dues.

Detailed records of benefits to members prior to the late 1860s are sketchy at best. As a consequence of this, these benefits are not discussed in detail here, but merely on occasion touched upon. The time period concentrated upon in this chapter spans from the late 1860s, up until 1921. This again is for the practical reason that much and detailed material is available from that period. Within this timeframe eight separate benefits will be analysed. To facilitate this examination the chapter is divided into two main sections, the first focusing on four benefits provided in the years leading up to the twentieth century, with the latter concentrating on the union's four "primary" benefits from both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As before, the issues focused upon in this chapter are not treated in isolation. It will also be necessary to discuss the impact of certain other events that influenced the provision of benefits, for good or ill. This will in part be accomplished by both sections initially setting out brief historical backgrounds to the periods and benefits under consideration. The approach adopted here will enable one to see how the trade's benefit system evolved over time, and will also highlight rule changes which impacted upon the eligibility of members for certain of these.

## **Nineteenth Century**

The benefits shall be divided along the following lines, each section dealing thematically with specific examples from within the specified time frame:

- Remittance of dues,
- Library,

- Band,
- Orphan boys.

There is less information available on these first four benefits, the reason for this is simply because they were not of as intimate concern to the membership as the latter four benefits. The above topic concerning orphan boys, was not an actual benefit to members, but a benefit granted by the union and its membership to outsiders. It should also be noted that some of the above four benefits existed into the twentieth century.

The Friendly Societies Act of 1855 gave legal protection to societies with benefit functions. Many union officials believed that the act provided the protection they had long sought for their funds.<sup>1</sup> However, it was found in the case of *Hornby v Close* (1867) that trade unions did not come under the 1855 Friendly Societies Act, as the Court of Queen's Bench ruled that unions had objectives in restraint of trade.<sup>2</sup>

A Royal Commission on the Organisation of Trade Unions and Other Associations was set-up in February 1867. Its chairman was Sir William Erle, and on account of this the Commission became known as the Erle Commission. In England, the famous London Junta nominated a barrister, Fredrick Harrison, to the Erle Commission. He, ably assisted by Robert Applegarth, general secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners (ASCJ), endeavoured to present the unions in the best possible light to the Commission (Cole, 1966). Both men focused on the welfare benefits provided to their membership by the trade unions, and on how the unions could be looked upon as miniature welfare states in their own right. 'They did not altogether deny that trade unions engaged in restrictive practices, but they created

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<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 5 February 1855.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 17 January 1867.

the strong impression that the main job of some important craft unions was to provide welfare benefits to their members' (Hanson, 1973, p. 11). Cooper and Bartlett (1976) note that it was as a direct result of the Erle Commission's report, that the legal status of trade unions was recognised in Britain and Ireland in the 1871 Trade Union Act.

### **Remittance of Dues**

This was an early benefit provided by the bricklayers' trade to assist members in various states of difficulty. When members fell upon hard times, or were unable to work on account of illness or injury, they could draw upon the dues they had already paid into the society. Provided that the trade had not been financially prostrated in a strike, or otherwise, its funds were normally secure. Once a member applied for remittance, and the council considering the application judged their case legitimate, their request was usually acceded to. In a manner remittance of dues functioned somewhat like a savings account for members.

Under normal circumstances there were only a few of impediments to the approval of a member's request for remittance of his dues. The primary one was that the request was not in itself legitimate. The member was demanding assistance for a problem, or affliction, which in reality did not affect them. Dues would also not be remitted to members who had not paid in their subscriptions either regularly, or ever.

Here shall be discussed a number of example from the union's minutes concerning remittance of dues. In late October 1869 a Daniel Coony applied to the trade for the remittance of his dues. When he had been working he had paid his contributions regularly, but for the past couple of years he had been incapacitated. The council, after giving his case careful consideration, agreed that his dues should be

remitted to him. In this instance, there were no complications for the council considering his case to contend with.<sup>3</sup>

A number of months later, in early 1870, a James Curry appeared before the council for the month. He was seeking to have his dues for the previous two years remitted to him. This was on account of his inability to work for some time, as he had lost an eye. After considering his appeal the council remitted the requested dues and declared that his working card was clean up to that date.<sup>4</sup> He was now free, if he so wished and was capable, to work with members of the trade and begin building up his contributions again.

On 12 January 1875 a fully recovered Martin Whelan came before the council for that month and was permitted to pay up the balance of his entrance money. For the previous two years he had been an inmate of Grange Gorman Asylum, 'labouring under temporary insanity.'<sup>5</sup> The dues he would have owed for the two years of his incarceration were remitted. This compassionately permitted him to start back with the trade on a clean slate.<sup>6</sup>

The above cases are but three examples taken from the minutes of the trade. However, the procedures for the application and granting of remittances were in most circumstances similar to those outlined. In later years applications for the remittance of dues declined as pensions, unemployment, and illness benefits were gradually introduced. Nevertheless, remittance of dues was in its own way a highly commendable system of assistance, as it was effectively self-assistance. One could only take out what one had put into the trade. Although this benefit did not ensure that all members paid

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<sup>3</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/6, Minutes of monthly and general meetings, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1869 – 17<sup>th</sup> April 1876, 21 October 1869.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, 3 March 1870.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, 12 January 1875.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

their subscriptions, it went some way towards making most of them cognisant of that necessity.

### **The Library**

At a time when most members of society were only receiving a primary school education, if even that, access to a library offered the opportunity of broadening curtailed horizons. A library for the bricklayers would provide them with the opportunity of expanding their range of knowledge in their own field of expertise, and also in other unrelated fields besides. It would provide them with a facility many members might otherwise never have availed themselves of.

It was Doctor William O'Leary, after a lecture he delivered to the members on the functioning of the human eye on 4 April 1872, who had urged on them the necessity of establishing a library in the Bricklayers' Hall.<sup>7</sup> A library he felt, and the executive agreed with him, would be a beneficial facility for the entire membership of the trade.

A week after the lecture a Library Committee was hastily set up. Its duty was to put the executive's decision to establish a library into motion. To accomplish the task, one of the first decisions of this committee of seventeen was to fix a levy. It proposed that each member pay 2s. 6d. towards the cost of creating the library.<sup>8</sup> However, the committee did not only concern itself with financial matters and the establishment of the library. It also arranged classes for members on one night in the week. These classes were in subjects such as mathematics and mechanical drawing.

At a special meeting at the end of April William Foley proposed, and Thomas Connor, vice president of the Library Committee, seconded, that the union grant £10

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 4 April 1872.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, 12 April 1872.



towards the cost of establishing the library.<sup>9</sup> By early May a room in the Bricklayers' Hall had been set aside to act as the library, and books were purchased to stock it. The Library Committee purchased ten volumes on science from a Mr. Peavey of Wood Quay, all for just 30s. Another four volumes of books were bought for 13s. 2½d. from a Mr. Smyth of Dame Street.<sup>10</sup> On 8 May the Library Committee decided to purchase as many books as they had funds remaining for. This was in order that a well-stocked library could be opened as soon as possible, and its facilities made available to the membership.<sup>11</sup>

In early May 1872 Doctor O'Leary donated £2-0-0 to the fund for the purchase of books. Patrick Bradigan, a builder and an employer of members of the trade, donated a selection of books from his own library. These constituted 22 works, along with a donation of £1-0-0. Bradigan even offered to teach classes in architectural drawing at Cuffe Street.<sup>12</sup>

When all the books had been purchased the Library Committee established a sub-committee for archiving the materials. By early June this task had been completed, and the library was operational. Its opening hours were from 7 PM to 10 PM every evening except on Saturdays.<sup>13</sup> It was the secretary's job to act as librarian. Curiously, it was to be almost two years after its establishment that the library's lending rules were laid down. The rules were quite detailed, running to nine points in all (1 Appendix E).<sup>14</sup>

The library was a valuable source of information and learning to the membership. It allowed them access to material on a world beyond their own trade, social circles, city, country, and culture. The library provided members with the

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, 25 April 1872.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, 3 May 1872.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 8 May 1872.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, 6 June 1872.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, 7 May 1874.

opportunity of enriching their minds, its most valuable benefit the knowledge it gave to them.

### **The Band**

The trades' band is discussed here as it was both a recreational benefit for the membership and a financial benefit as well. However, the band was also a status symbol, proclaiming the apparent growing affluence of the society to the other trades of Dublin. Its existence further saved the union from the necessity of having to hire an outside band for public occasions or demonstrations.

Prior to 1874, any time the trade resolved upon attending public events it always had to hire an outside band. This practice, as seen in Chapter II, was expensive, the Saint James Band charged £10-0-0 for its attendance at the Amnesty Association meeting in Cabra in 1869.<sup>15</sup> When the society's funds were in poor shape, as they sometimes were, the expense of hiring a band was almost prohibitive. However, in order to maintain their prestige amongst the trades of Dublin it was imperative that at public demonstrations or processions the bricklayers were always accompanied by some band. Nevertheless, many members, master of the trade in 1874 Timothy Whelan amongst them, felt it a slight on their organisation that, unlike many other combinations in Dublin, it did not have its own band.

In July 1874 the bricklayers decided to purchase instruments in order to establish a band. The total cost of these instruments, bought from a Mr. Butler in London, came to £133-16-6. To finance the purchase the union's band committee contributed a sum of £30-0-0, while each member of the trade was levied 4s., the levy to be paid in quarterly

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, 23 September 1869.

instalments.<sup>16</sup> It was felt that the establishment of a band removed a humiliation that had long been in need of remedying.

In the weeks following the arrival of the instruments, the bricklayers who could play set about organising the band, and practising together. Wednesday and Friday evenings at Cuffe Street were specifically set aside for band practice, and a whole set of rules was laid down regarding the protection of the instruments.<sup>17</sup> It was to be at the close of the quarterly meeting on 1 October 1874 that the band first performed for the membership. The tune played was Auld Lang Syne, and so taken was the assemblage with the performance that they demanded more music. However, the band's repertoire at that time seems to have been rather limited, that evening they performed Auld Lang Syne sufficiently to see out twenty years!<sup>18</sup>

As it became proficient with other tunes the band was to perform for, and with, the trade on various occasions. After the conclusion of the annual meeting, on Easter Monday 1875, the band left Cuffe Street and walked the short distance to Doctor William O'Leary's residence at 38 York Street. There they performed a selection of airs in front of his house.<sup>19</sup> This was their first public performance.

At the close of the quarterly meeting on 5 July of the same year, a meeting concerned with preparations for the O'Connell Centenary Celebration, the band performed for the membership. The evening was special, as it was Michael Ennis's final night as master of the trade. Refreshments were sent for, and the society's members spent the night singing and drinking until the early hours of the following

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, 2 July 1874.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, 6 August 1874.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, 1 October 1874.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, 29 March 1875.

morning.<sup>20</sup> The band took part in the O'Connell centenary celebration, and in numerous other processions and demonstrations in the years following.

Towards the close of the nineteenth century the band seems to have disintegrated, its passing receiving little attention in the union's minutes books. However, when members had unwanted time on their hands in 1905, during the lockout, they set about reviving the extinct band. This involved them repairing the damaged and disregarded instruments, many in need of replacement parts for which there was no money available.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, by early March the following year, although the union's funds were in a dire state, the band had been re-established. There was controversy at the time over the fee due to the bandmaster, and whether the band would take part in the, then upcoming, language demonstration. Eventually a reluctant executive council handed over a fee of £3-0-0 to the bandmaster, a large sum for an organisation with no money.<sup>22</sup> The band subsequently took part in the demonstration in question.

The bricklayers' band, although it could be regarded as a profligacy, considering the initial outlay involved, in the long run did save the union, and by extension its membership, money. With its establishment no outside bands had to be hired for processions, demonstrations, or celebrations. The band was also a symbol of the trade's status and, at least outwardly, its affluence. More important than any pecuniary considerations the band brought happiness to members, and provided them with many entertaining evenings to remember at Cuffe Street.

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<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, 5 July 1875.

<sup>21</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/3, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1904 – 1905, 24 June 1905.

<sup>22</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/4, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1906 – 1911, 7 March 1906.

## Orphan Boys

The taking on and training of orphans in the trade was an act of charity that the union bestowed upon those who were not in any way connected with it. It was an example of the union's deep concern for, and desire to assist, some of the weakest elements in Irish society. There were no ulterior motives behind the society's granting of this benefit, its existence stemmed simply from a genuine desire to help those less fortunate.

At the quarterly meeting of the combination on 1 July 1869, chaired by master of the trade Edward Gahan, it was decided that, as a charity, orphan boys could be apprenticed to the trade.<sup>23</sup> This was an act of significant charity in light of the fact that the union tightly controlled its system of apprenticeships, restricting them in most instances to close relatives of members. The taking on of orphans as apprentices gave to those who had nothing a trade, and also brought them, and in certain cases those who would come after them, within what was in a sense a fraternity. This benefit significantly altered for good or ill, however nearly always for the good, a young life.

This 1 July meeting resolved to pay £5-0-0 as a fee to any master willing to take on an orphan boy as an apprentice, and train them in the trade. This fee was to be paid to the master by way of a levy of 6d. on the other members of the society.

One such orphan taken on as an apprentice was Henry McEvoy. He was apprenticed to the master Joseph Beacon in January 1873.<sup>24</sup> The monetary value of this benefit to those it was bestowed upon, such as Henry McEvoy, is incalculable, as it was literally destiny altering.

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<sup>23</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/6, Minutes of monthly and general meetings, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1869 – 17<sup>th</sup> April 1876, 1 July 1869.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, 2 January, 1873.

This practice seems to have been confined to the nineteenth century, as there are no references to its existence in the minutes from the years subsequent to the turn of the twentieth century.

## **Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries**

This section, similar to the latter, beginning with the provision of a brief background, is also divided into four main subsections, each concentrating on a specific benefit:

- Pensions,
- Mortality Benefit,
- Accident and Sickness Benefit,
- Unemployment.

These benefits were arguably the most significant, as their provision was of vital importance to the membership of the combination and later trade union. These are also the benefits upon which the greatest quantity of data is available. Consequently the above benefits will be discussed in greater depth than the benefits in the previous section.

In 1906 the new Liberal government, which introduced the Trade Disputes Act of that year, embarked upon a programme of social reforms. Soon after coming to power it passed an act which made free school meals available to poor children. The following year a school medical service was founded. In 1908 a Children Act was passed, along with an Age Pension Act which granted non-contributory pensions to people over 70 years of age. Most of these reforms, and other social legislation not mentioned here, can be credited to Winston Churchill, then working at the Board of Trade, and David

Lloyd George the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Lloyd George said of his budget of 1909, that it set out deliberately to raise money to “wage implacable warfare against poverty and squalidness” (Hain, 1986, p. 68). Finally, in 1911 the National Insurance Act was introduced. It provided, on a contributory basis, for limited unemployment and health insurance for large sections of the population. This act was to prove beneficial for both the union and its membership, as will be discussed below. However, the paper work generated in order to comply with the legislation seems on many occasions to have been almost too much for the bricklayers to handle.

Despite the above, craft trade unions in general, and the bricklayers’ union in particular, were previous to this legislation providing pensions, mortality, accident and illness, and unemployment benefits to their membership.

### **Pensions**

The union introduced pensions in order to provide a level of security for its older retired members, and some younger ones who had not retired, but through injury or incapacity were unable to continue working. A pension was then, as it is now, a security against poverty. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century a pension was also a safeguard against union members having to seek refuge in the then still existing and dreaded workhouses. In the years prior to the introduction of the state sponsored pensions scheme, the trade unions’ provision of this benefit granted their members, both young and old, peace of mind. Coming to retirement age a bricklayer, whether he had savings or not, had the assurance of knowing, if he had been a good member all his working days, that the union was going to take care of him in his old age.

In order to receive a pension the member, or if he were incapacitated someone on his behalf, would have had to apply to the council of the trade. Once all the facts of

the application were laid before the council, and the member was found to be in good standing, the application was usually approved, and the pension granted. A number of provisos dating from the early years of the twentieth century should be noted here. Pensions were only granted to members of the union who had been fair members (not in arrears) for not less than ten years. Also, any member who joined the union when he was over forty-five years of age had no claim to a pension. Most importantly, all depended upon the condition of the funds. At certain times, for example in the wake of the 1905 lockout, all pensions and other benefits besides were either reduced severely or stopped altogether.

By providing pensions, older members of the trade, who had neither family nor savings to rely upon, were not forced to seek refuge in poorhouses. At the turn of the twentieth century the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, the act that had led to the rise of Chartism, was still on the statute books in the England, and a variation upon it from 1838 was still in force in Ireland (Rose 1976). When this legislation was first introduced it had led to outbreaks of violence, and had been condemned by writers such as the historian Thomas Carlyle. The 1834 act was a reviled piece of legislation, one of its central tenants was that conditions in workhouses had to be worse than the worst conditions in the labour market (2 Appendix E). As David Lloyd George said of the state pensions, and which is just as applicable to the trade unions' pensions, "[they] lifted the shadow of the workhouse from the homes of the poor" (Hain, 1986, p. 37).

Below are discussed some examples of members in receipt of pensions. These are just a random selection of cases, as it would be neither wise nor interesting to present a monotonous list of all pension applicants, and their application requests to the union's council. Certain issues which impacted upon the granting and maintenance of



pension payments will also be dealt with. These examples will illustrate how seemingly separate issues, within a small trade union, are actually very closely interconnected.

In the mid 1890s there were up to ten older retired members of the society on pensions. They were receiving 2s. 6d. on a weekly basis, and around Christmas time a little extra cash usually augmented this figure. For example, in the week just prior to Christmas 1895 members' pension payments were doubled to 5s.<sup>25</sup>

Quite a number of elderly members of the trade were also on the pension list a decade later. As of March 1 1905, at the beginning of the lockout, 15 members constituted this list.<sup>26</sup> Each, according to a 1902 rule, was entitled to be in receipt of a 5s. pension per week, many however were only paid 2s. 6d.<sup>27</sup> The previous year, 1904, had been good fiscally for the trade, and that Christmas an extra 5s. had been granted to all pensioners.<sup>28</sup> However, in the wake of the disastrous lockout, no extra money was given to pensioners for that festive season of 1905. Instead, by that time all pensions had been reduced to 1s. 6d. per week.<sup>29</sup>

In early March 1906 Michael Whelan, a long-standing member of the union, was experiencing health problems. He asked the executive council for assistance in the form of sickness benefit. However, the council decided, owing both to 'pecuniary difficulties' and the applicant's age, that Whelan should go on the pension benefit instead. The reason was that the latter benefit, at a rate of 1s. 6d. per week was much less expensive in the short term to the union than sickness benefit, which was provided

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<sup>25</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/2/9, Income and expenditure book, 1893 – 1896, 19 December 1895.

<sup>26</sup> NA, ABIGSTU, 1097/2/12, Secretary's expense book (records income and expenditure), 1904 – 1909, 1 March 1905.

<sup>27</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/3, Rules of the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1902, Rule 43. – Pensioners' Fund, p. 29.

<sup>28</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/3, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1904 – 1905, 5 December 1904.

<sup>29</sup> NA, ABIGSTU, 1097/2/12, Secretary's expense book (records income and expenditure), 1904 – 1909, 20 December 1905.

at 12s. per week for the first thirteen weeks of the illness.<sup>30</sup> Whelan does not seem to have protested the executive council's decision. He was informed by the committee that if he recovered from his illness the fact that he had received pension payments would not be an impediment to his returning to work. The committee further told him that, if he tried but was unable to return to work, he could go back on the pension.<sup>31</sup>

A similar case occurred with a James McLaughlin in November 1906. He had been ill and was very feeble after coming out of hospital. At the same time as he came out his wife went in to hospital. The committee considering his request for a pension quickly decided to grant it to him, as he was in benefit. They felt it unwise to delay the decision as the applicant might put in a sickness claim in the meantime. The consequence of that would have been a far greater drain on the society's finances.<sup>32</sup>

However, in the intervening almost five months to April 1907 the union's financial situation had continued to deteriorate. At a special general meeting of the society convened on 25 April, the balance sheet for the first quarter of that year, presented at the quarterly meeting four days previously, was reviewed. It showed a total expenditure of £115-9-9½, while income was £120-15-11. More significantly, a statement of accounts commencing with the lockout and ending on 31 March 1907 was read. This dealt with monies borrowed during the lockout, and goods received, and work done, during and since that event. There was a total of £778-3-8 on the debit side of the accounts, and £139-0-0 on the credit side, leaving a balance of £639-3-8 on the debit side!<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/3, Rules of the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1902, Rule 42. – Sick and Accident Benefit, pp. 28-29.

<sup>31</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/4, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1906 – 1911, 8 March 1906.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, 26 November 1906.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, 25 April 1907.

This special general meeting, on the proposal of James Lyons, a member of the executive, which was seconded by Richard O'Carroll, suspended all pensions to members. By this time the pension benefit had already been drastically reduced. However, there were seven more men than in 1905 dependant upon this shrivelling allowance as their only source of income.<sup>34</sup> O'Carroll readily admitted that the suspension of pensions was an unpleasant thing, but that there was no choice in the matter as their creditors were becoming impatient. He spoke feelingly about the necessity of clearing the debt and of maintaining their society in existence. He told those assembled at Cuffe Street that day that the union had been handed down to them, and it was their 'duty as men to hand it down in turn and in an improved state if possible to those who are to follow us.'<sup>35</sup>

At the monthly meeting of the trade on 5 November 1907 it was decided to hold a concert before Christmas.<sup>36</sup> The receipts from the concert were to go to the pensioners. On 12 December the concert was held in the Bricklayers' Hall.<sup>37</sup> Its proceeds were distributed amongst the pensioners who came to the Hall on 18 December.<sup>38</sup> Although this money was not a steady pension, it was the best the union could do under the most difficult of circumstances.

It was to be October 1908 before the union reintroduced its pension scheme. Early in that month Andrew O'Toole and Edward Mullen both reapplied for their pensions.<sup>39</sup> Before the 1905 disaster both men had been in receipt of pensions, the rate 5s. per week under the rule introduced in 1902.<sup>40</sup> Both were infirm and consequently

<sup>34</sup> NA, ABIGSTU, 1097/2/12, Secretary's expense book (records income and expenditure), 1904 – 1909, 30 January 1907.

<sup>35</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/4, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1906 – 1911, 25 April 1907.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, 5 November 1907.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, 12 December 1907.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, 18 December 1907.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, 7 October 1908.

<sup>40</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/3, Rules of the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1902, Rule 43. – Pensioners' Fund, p. 29.

unable to work. However, both did not qualify for assistance under the new Old Age Pensions Act, the provisions which were to come into effect in January 1909.<sup>41</sup> O'Toole was too young, the minimum age was set at 70, while Mullen was noted in the minutes as 'disqualified through poverty.'<sup>42</sup> This meant that he was in receipt of poor law assistance. After taking all the above into account the executive council recommended the next general meeting of the union to grant both men a pension of 2s. 6d. per week each. O'Toole and Mullen were to receive this amount until the society was able to pay them their full pensions. This clearly indicates that the union's funds were finally on the mend, otherwise the men's applications would not even have been considered.

In mid November 1908 the union's executive council meeting granted a pension of 5s. per week to the wife of the above James McLaughlin. He was in hospital again, and she was without any support. At this meeting a John Taylor, who had lost his sight, also applied for and received a pension of 5s. per week. This was not before a careful examination of his records revealed him to have been an excellent member. Finally, the meeting also granted Daniel Sheehan a half pension of 2s. 6d. per week.<sup>43</sup>

After the granting of the above pensions, a moratorium was introduced on account of the funds inability to support more than a very limited number of pensioners.<sup>44</sup>

The quarterly general meeting on 21 October 1909 moved that all pensions paid out to those qualifying for them should increase to 5s. per week, with the provision, 'as far as the finances would permit.'<sup>45</sup> It had been almost two and a half years since all pensions had been suspended. Thereafter the provision of the benefit proceeded

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<sup>41</sup> *The Times*, 7 December 1908.

<sup>42</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/4, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1906 – 1911, 7 October 1908.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, 13 November 1908.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, 5 January 1909.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, 21 October 1909.

relatively smoothly. By 1911 O'Toole, Mullen, Taylor, and Sheehan, were still alive, and in receipt of full pensions of 5s. per week from the union. Besides them, the name of another member, John Dowdall, had been added to the pension list.<sup>46</sup> Consequently the union was paying full pensions to a total of five men in 1911. If any of these men were over seventy years of age it is likely that they were also in receipt of the state financed pensions. For Christmas 1911, as in the previous year, each pensioner received a bonus of 2s. 6d. in addition to their normal 5s. from the union.<sup>47</sup> Even in 1913, a year of terrible hardships in Dublin generally, the AGIBSTU, despite the financial strain of supporting some of its membership who had also been locked out, paid 2s. 6d. extra to its retired members in their pensions for Christmas.<sup>48</sup>

This section has described in a clear and concise manner the workings of the union's pension scheme in the late nineteenth and early years of the twentieth century. The occurrence of certain factors, some beyond the control of the society, impacted upon this benefit, causing it to be suspended for a period of one and a half years. At that time not only was the future provision of pensions questionable, but the union's continued existence was uncertain. Nevertheless, concern amongst members for the society's elderly dependants never diminished. Pensions were eventually reintroduced after the union's financial problems had been rectified. Tentatively at first, but then on a wider basis as funds strengthened.

### **Mortality Benefit**

This was originally a benefit paid to union members' families when either the member themselves or their wife died. Under certain circumstances during the nineteenth

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<sup>46</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/2/14, Income and expenditure book, 1909-1912, 1 February 1911.

<sup>47</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/1, Minutes of general and committee meetings, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1911 – 4<sup>th</sup> March 1918, 20 December 1911.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, 22 December 1913.

century, although mortality benefit itself was not, alternative assistance might be extended to the members upon the deaths of others within their immediate family. Consequently assistance could be sought, although it was not always granted to a member, when a child died, or even in certain cases a parent. However, by 1902, as shown in table 5.1, the union was specifically providing mortality benefits in the case of child fatalities as well.<sup>49</sup>

**Table 5.1**

**Rates of mortality benefit, 1848-1912**

|      | Member | First Wife | Second Wife | Children |
|------|--------|------------|-------------|----------|
| 1848 | 2-0-0  | 2-0-0      | -           | -        |
| 1879 | 2-0-0  | 2-0-0      | -           | -        |
| 1888 | 5-0-0  | 5-0-0      | 3-0-0       | -        |
| 1902 | 10-0-0 | 10-0-0     | 5-0-0       | 3-0-0    |
| 1912 | 8-0-0  | 7-0-0      | 3-12-0      | 2-0-0    |

Mortality benefit assured all fair members of the union that they, or their loved ones, would receive a decent burial when their time came. As few members of the union ever appeared to have much money in life, this benefit guaranteed them that at least they would have dignity in death. The money provided was usually sufficient to pay the expenses of the funeral, as in many cases members could not afford these costs. This situation in a way gives lie to the image that the trade tried to portray of itself, with its pomp and circumstance. In reality few members, one of them James Carey, could have been considered in any way affluent. Most lived lives of varying degrees of hardship, mortality benefits helping in some small way to alleviate their adversities.

The practice of granting mortality assistance stretched back to the very beginning of the combination's existing financial records. Income and expenditure accounts from 12 August 1844 record the granting of two instances of mortality

<sup>49</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/3, Rules of the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1902, Rule 41. – Mortality Benefit, pp. 28-29.

benefits. The accounts note an expense of £1-0-0 paid upon the deaths of members Michael Whelan and William Hoey.<sup>50</sup> The 1848 rules of the Bartholomew Accident and Burial Society of Operative Bricklayers clearly set out the mortality benefit to be paid upon the death of either a member themselves, or their first wife. These rules establish a benefit figure of £2-0-0 for each, but specifically do not refer to the death of a member's second wife (3 Appendix E).<sup>51</sup>

By the late 1870s the amount of mortality benefit granted was still £2-0-0, however there were slight variations upon this figure.<sup>52</sup>

In later years the granting of a petition for mortality assistance depended upon a number of factors. Compliance with the Accident and Burial Society rules from 1848. The standing of the member with the trade, that is whether he was a fair member, were all his subscriptions paid up to date. When funds were plentiful, full mortality benefit was always granted to applicants who satisfied these requirements. The provision of this benefit assured members that when their time came they would be buried with dignity. Yet changes in rules, and sudden alterations in the society's financial fortunes, often affected the liberality with which the benefit was dispensed.

Below are set out a number of examples, from the union's records, of applications for mortality assistance. The granting of these applications was very much determined by the above factors. The examples begin in the 1870s, and provide a good overview of how this benefit functioned.

Although this first instance would not strictly qualify as mortality benefit according to the later examples, it is worth noting all the same. On 2 February 1872 John Clowry was returned the money his brother Michael had paid into the trade upon

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<sup>50</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/2/1, Income and expenditure book, 1844 – 1845, 12 August 1844.

<sup>51</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/30/4, Rules of the Bartholomew Accident and Burial Society of Operative Bricklayers, c. 1848.

<sup>52</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/2/5, Income and expenditure book, 1878 – 1884, 27 October 1879.

his entrance. Michael had died from small pox just prior to paying up his full freedom fee. The returned money was to be used to pay for the expense of his burial.<sup>53</sup>

There was controversy in late February 1874 as to whether a £2-0-0 loan should be given to Patrick Fallon. His father was dying and he would need money to bury him. The contention arose over a rule introduced earlier in the month restricting the lending of money for purposes other than the 'legitimate expenditure of the trade.' After a heated discussion amongst those on the committee considering his request, it was decided to grant Fallon the money, but to strictly enforce the rule in future.<sup>54</sup> At this time the trade could afford to be generous, it was fresh from a string of almost effortless victories over the employers.

As of 1888, the earliest printed rules of the trade dealing with mortality benefits state that a figure of £5-0-0 was to be provided to defray the funeral expenses of either a member or his first wife. If the member died first, his spouse, after the payment of the above sum, was to have 'no further claim on this society.'<sup>55</sup> In the case of whoever happened to die the money was to be paid over within 24 hours of the production of a registrar's certificate of the death. However, any members more than six months in arrears with their contributions would not be entitled to any mortality benefits. Curiously, in the event of a fair member's second wife dying the union's rules from 1892 state that he would only be entitled to a mortality benefit of £3-0-0.<sup>56</sup>

In early April of 1892 the auditors reported to the membership that the recent expenses on the trade had been so heavy, and the funds coming in so insufficient, that

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<sup>53</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/6, Minutes of monthly and general meetings, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1869 – 17<sup>th</sup> April 1876, 2 February 1872.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, 24 February 1874.

<sup>55</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/1, Rules and Regulations of the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1888, Rule 11. – Mortality Benefits, p. 17.

<sup>56</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/2, Rules and Regulations of the Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1892, Rule 16. – Mortality Benefits, pp. 28-29.



the union would soon be in financial difficulties if the situation were not corrected. The secretary, Michael Ennis, observed that mortality rates for the previous six months had been unprecedented. He frankly stated that if members did not pay their contributions, not only would mortality benefits cease, but the union itself would effectively disintegrate.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, the union endured.

As of 1902 the amount of mortality benefit paid, upon the death of a member or his first wife, was increased to £10-0-0, while the figure for the death of a second wife was set at £5-0-0. Additionally, members were to be granted £3-0-0 upon the death of a child between the ages of three months and twelve years. Again, the provision of mortality benefit was conditional upon the production of a certificate of death and that the member concerned was in benefit. These benefits were to be paid from the union's funds and recouped by way of a levy, 3d. for adult mortality and 1d. for child mortality, on all members. The levies were to be paid into the funds on the quarter day after the benefit had been paid out.<sup>58</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the 1905 lockout the finances of the trade were in turmoil. Their state can be judged by the case of Edward Barry. The finance committee, in September 1905, would only advance £3-0-0 to pay for the expenses of his burial. This amount was provided on condition that his family undertook to later repay it.<sup>59</sup> The AGIBSTU went as far as refusing to pay the mortality benefit to a Mrs. Murphy. She was the mother of a young man who died when part way towards becoming a full member of the union. As he had not taken out his freedom at the time of his demise, according to the rules of the union, he was not technically entitled to any

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<sup>57</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/1, Minutes of committee meetings and quarterly meetings, 1892 – 1895, 4 April 1892.

<sup>58</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/3, Rules of the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1902, Rule 41. – Mortality Benefit, pp. 27-28.

<sup>59</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/3, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1904 – 1905, 5 September 1905.

mortality benefit.<sup>60</sup> These examples highlight the hard-line approach that was adopted toward money when the society's fate literally hung in the balance.

In April 1907 mortality benefit for members was officially reduced to £5-0-0, while all other benefits, except for accident which was set at 12s. per week, were abolished. This decision was discussed in greater detail above in relation to pensions.<sup>61</sup> It may seem strange to remain relatively liberal with mortality benefits, while all the others were cut, but it is worth remembering that mortality was in all cases a once off expense. However, two months later mortality benefit was further reduced.

In the early years of the twentieth century Dublin's tenement slums were notorious, and contained up to one third of the inner city's population. These blocks of flats had been condemned by an official commission of the time as, in most cases, totally unfit for human habitation (Plunkett, 1980). Large families were crowded into single rooms. In such cramped conditions the quality of life in the tenements was very poor. Mortality rates among babies born in Dublin were consequently high.

In 1911 the death rate in Dublin was 27.61 per cent per thousand people per annum, compared with a figure of less than 27 per cent for Calcutta, a city notorious for being infested with diseases such as cholera (McNamara, et al., 1988, p. 21).

As a result many requests for mortality benefit at the time were from members who had lost a child, or in some cases children.

Despite its hardening attitude towards the granting of money, the union's heart had not turned completely to stone. On 25 May 1907 a Mrs. O'Connor came before the finance committee and informed it that her child had died. She admitted that her husband was out of benefit with the union, but pleaded for assistance. However, the

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<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/4, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1906 – 1911, 25 April 1907.

committee's hands were tied by rules regarding the granting of aid to members who were not in benefit. Nevertheless, committee members gave her 7s. out of their own pockets.<sup>62</sup>

On 26 May 1909 Thomas Garland, former union president and sometime auditor, came before the finance committee. One of his children had died and he was seeking any mortality assistance they would grant him.<sup>63</sup> However, as he was over £2-0-0 in arrears with his subscriptions he was not entitled to the benefit.<sup>64</sup> He received only a £1 loan to help him through his tragedy. Again, the money did not come from the union, but from the individual members of the finance committee themselves.<sup>65</sup>

The 1909 annual meeting of the union, on 28 January, reviewed and found satisfactory the accounts from the previous year. This was the first time since 1904 that the society's accounts were found to be in such a healthy state. Richard O'Carroll, after his re-election as general secretary, applied for mortality assistance on behalf of the aunt of a late member of the union, Patrick Sherlock. Sherlock had died after a lengthy and tedious illness. The mortality benefit was needed to help Sherlock's aunt with the funeral expenses and the other financial difficulties she was in at that time. These difficulties were a consequence of her taking care of Sherlock through the stages of his terminal illness. The mortality benefit was readily granted her.<sup>66</sup> With the general secretary championing this lady's case, it was unlikely that his request would have been turned down even if the union had been on the verge of bankruptcy.

By January 1910, as the union's finances had further improved, full mortality benefits were again granted to members who were not in arrears with their

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<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, 25 May 1907.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, 26 May 1909.

<sup>64</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/4/8, Secretary's book, 1909, Garland was over £2-0-0 in arrears throughout January 1909 – June 1909.

<sup>65</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/4, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1906 – 1911, 26 May 1909.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, 28 January 1909.

contributions. In late January Patrick Campbell applied for mortality assistance on the death of his child. He produced a registrar's certificate as evidence of death. However, as he was not in benefit, the finance committee flatly refused to do anything for him.<sup>67</sup>

By way of complete contrast, at the 12 June 1910 meeting of the union's finance committee it was reported that James McLoughlin had died in Richmond Asylum the previous day. The general secretary was instructed to pay over the full amount of mortality benefit. However, he withheld 10s. until a registrar's certificate of the death was produced. This decision by the general secretary could be looked upon as a parsimonious if somewhat necessary precaution, as at the time the union could ill afford to squander its new-found resources wantonly.<sup>68</sup> On a Saturday in early March of the previous year a curious incident involving a Mrs. McCauley had occurred. She came before the finance committee and informed its members that one of her children had died, and that she needed money to bury him. The committee asked her to come back the following Monday night with documentary evidence of this, and that they would then see what they could do for her. On Monday Mrs. McCauley never reappeared. This incident made committee members unusually suspicious of any claims for mortality assistance if they were not supported by actual documentary evidence.<sup>69</sup>

Interestingly, in 1912 there were alterations made to all mortality benefits paid on the deaths of members, their wives, and their children. Members of less than three years standing were to receive £1-10-0 upon the death of a child, while those of greater than three years were to receive £2-0-0. The amounts of mortality benefit to be provided on the deaths of established members or their first wives were also reduced, to £8-0-0 and £7-0-0 respectively. The benefit to be paid on the death of a second wife

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<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, 29 January 1910.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, 12 June 1910.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, 6 March 1909.

was maintained at half of that which was to be provided upon the death of a first wife.<sup>70</sup> In effect, the alterations introduced in 1912 to the mortality benefits were to contract those benefits as provided in 1902. A levy of 3d. on all members would be struck in order to recoup the mortality benefit paid in respect of each adult, while in cases of child mortality the levy on the membership was fixed at 1½d.<sup>71</sup>

This section provides an impression of the somewhat chaotic nature of the mortality benefits operated by the trade in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As in the case of pensions, most of the excitement regarding mortality benefits, if one can call it that, occurred in the aftermath of the 1905 lockout. After 1910 things again settled down as the union's finances strengthened. To recount the cases of appeals for mortality assistance in the years after 1910 would be rather monotonous and add little to that which is already set out. Nevertheless, this section illustrated the value of the benefit to fair members as it guaranteed them, or a member of their immediate family, a decent burial upon death.

The basic humanity of the members of the trade who sat on the union's finance committee, their positions sometimes-thankless ones, is plain to see here. They were on occasion to discover that changes in rules, and uncertainty in rule definitions, affected their ability to grant mortality benefits from the union's funds to friends and colleagues. However, this situation never prevented them from delving into their own pockets to lend assistance when they empathised with a request before them.

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<sup>70</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/4, Part 1 of the rules: Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1912, Rule 10. – Mortality Benefit, p. 9.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*

## **Accident and Sickness Benefits**

These two benefits are grouped together because the rules concerning them in the union's early rulebooks are interwoven. There is also the fact that an accident could result in a member becoming seriously ill, rendering that member incapable of attending to his work. Accident and sickness benefits were simply, as their names' suggest, benefits paid to members of the trade on account of incapacitating accidents or illnesses. These benefits provided incapacitated members with an income where otherwise they would have had none. This ensured that members in difficulty would not have been without some funding during what would have been, for them, a trying time. Throughout the period covered in the dissertation an employer did not pay workers for any days missed from work. Accident and sickness benefits, in a manner similar to the pension, granted to members the peace of mind of knowing that should their health for whatever reason deteriorate, or should they be injured and unable to work for a time, they would not be rendered destitute upon the world.

This section shall discuss the union's accident benefits first, and thereafter the sickness benefits it provided for members.

### **Accident Benefit**

There are numerous entries in the trade's income and expenditure books referring to accident monies paid out to members in the years prior to printed rules coming into existence. In 1879 there was the case of one Joseph Redmond. Payments of accident benefit to him began on 7 July, at the rate of 10s. per week. This was the standard rate of accident benefit throughout the 1870s. Entries of payments to Redmond ceased on 4 August 1879, the rate of accident benefits throughout the month having remained 10s

per week.<sup>72</sup> One must assume that Redmond either recovered from his accident, or payments for some inexplicable reason ceased. The latter suggestion is highly unlikely. On the basis of my analysis of the case of one Thomas Fell in 1882, it appears that the duration of accident assistance granted in those years was almost identical to that set out in the union's printed rules from 1888 onwards. Fell had been injured in the middle of 1882. For the first thirteen weeks after the accident he received 10s. per week. Thereafter this benefit was reduced to 5s. per week for a further thirteen weeks.<sup>73</sup> By 1884 the initial rate of accident benefit, for the first three months after an accident, was 15s. per week.

As of 1888 the rules governing the provision of accident benefit were clearly laid down in the union's first printed rulebook. Members of more than one years standing who were injured in accidents at work, caused neither by their own negligence or alcohol, became entitled to an accident benefit of 15s. per week.<sup>74</sup> To receive the benefit the injured member, or someone on their behalf if they were unable to attend at Cuffe Street, had to produce a medical certificate explaining the nature of their accident. Once the application for assistance was deemed acceptable by the union, the member or someone on their behalf, to draw on the benefit money, had to produce a medical certificate once a week. The above rate of assistance of 15s. per week was to continue for the first three months following the accident. If after this time the member was still unable to resume work on account of his injuries, he was entitled to 7s. 6d. per week for a further three months. However, at the end of the sixth month all accident benefits would cease.<sup>75</sup> If the member was still unable to return to work the union would

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<sup>72</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/2/5, Income and expenditure book, 1878 – 1884, 7 July – 4 August 1879.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, 18 May – 16 November 1882.

<sup>74</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/1, Rules and Regulations of the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1888, Rule 17. – Accident Benefits, pp. 17-18.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*

thereafter pay him 5s. per week disability pay.<sup>76</sup> To be entitled to receive the disability benefit the disabled member had to have been younger than 45 years of age when he joined the union, and have been a member for at least 10 years before his accident. This benefit was paid as a weekly allowance, and included under pension payments. The union's rulebook from 1892 contains the exact same provisions on accident benefits as those set out in 1888.<sup>77</sup>

By 1902 the rate of accident benefit to injured members had been reduced to 12s. per week for the first three months after the accident, and 6s. per week for the remaining three months. If after the 26 weeks set out here, the injured member was still unable to return to work he would be entitled to, as previously, a disability benefit of 5s. per week.<sup>78</sup>

On 13 November 1909 the Kingstown branch's president, Denis Kelly, was knocked down by a motorcyclist. He was for a time seriously ill in Saint Michael's Hospital. When the accident occurred he happened to be a few weeks behind with his contributions, and it appeared for a brief period as if he would not be entitled to any benefits whatsoever. It was ultimately resolved to pay him sick benefit in accordance with the figures set out in 1902; their values were still applicable at the time.<sup>79</sup>

By 1912 accident benefit was classified in the union's rules, together with sickness, unemployment, sanatorium, and disablement benefits, under the heading of sickness benefit, and was operated in conjunction with the state's Insurance Act (4 Appendix E).<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/2, Rules and Regulations of the Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1892, Rule 17. – Accident Benefits, pp. 17 – 18.

<sup>78</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/3, Rules of the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1902, Rule 42. – Sick and Accident Benefit, pp. 28-29.

<sup>79</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/4, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1906 – 1911, 13 November 1909.

<sup>80</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/4, Part 1 of the rules: Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1912, Rule 5. – Sickness Benefit, pp. 4 – 7.



As alluded to above, members, who due to either sickness or accidents were unable to resume working, could become entitled to disablement benefits. In 1912 the rate of disability allowance was fixed at 10s. per week.<sup>81</sup> However, the conditions under which one could receive this benefit had remained unchanged from those set out in 1888.

### **Sickness Benefit**

As was mentioned in the section on pensions, the cost of sickness benefit to the union was higher than that of pensions. This became an issue of some significance at times when funds were meagre.

Upon a member falling ill, they, or somebody on their behalf, could apply to the union for assistance. Again the member's standing within the trade would be an issue which came under consideration. The granting of sickness benefit, like most others, was in the final analysis determined by the state of the trade's funds. When cash was plentiful sickness benefit was more readily granted to applicants. According to new rules introduced in 1902, a member absent from work on account of illness was, on the production of a doctor's certificate, entitled to a sickness benefit of 12s. per week for the first thirteen weeks of their illness. For the subsequent thirteen weeks, if their illness persisted, they were entitled to receive a further 6s. per week. Thereafter all sickness benefit would cease.<sup>82</sup> In 1912 a complex system of sickness benefit was introduced for members. As mentioned above this benefit was classified together with a number of other benefits. The rates of sickness benefit to be paid were based upon the

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<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*, Rule 6. – Disablement Benefit p. 7.

<sup>82</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/3, Rules of the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1902, Rule 42. – Sick and Accident Benefit, pp. 28-29.

age at which the member had joined the union, and if late joining how much they had already contributed to the state run insurance scheme.<sup>83</sup>

A number of examples of applications for sickness benefit, from the union's minutes, shall be discussed below. These examples have been chosen to provide an insight into the functioning of this specific benefit. The impact of certain outside factors may also be observed here.

The earliest existing application for financial assistance, from an ill member of the trade named Michael Morrissey, dates from May 1845. The application, presumably written by someone on his behalf, outlines that Morrissey was apparently dying (5 Appendix E).<sup>84</sup> There is no evidence in the combination's available financial records from that year of any assistance given to the unfortunate Morrissey while he was alive. However, on 30 June 1845 there is the following entry in an income and expenditure book under house expenses – 'mortality to Mick Morrissey £1-0-0.'<sup>85</sup>

Almost 38 years later, at the quarterly meeting of the union on 1 January 1893, it was reported that John Foley, a widely respected member of the trade, was ill. At the time there were no clearly set out rules regarding what specific amounts of illness benefit should be paid to sick members each week. John Litholder proposed, and Thomas Hearney seconded, that the meeting grant £2-0-0 to see Foley through his illness. This proposal was unanimously supported by the assemblage.<sup>86</sup>

The amounts to be given in sickness benefits were clearly set out in the union's 1902 rulebook. From that year the procedures for the application and granting of

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<sup>83</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/4, Part 1 of the rules: Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1912, Rule 5. – Sickness Benefit, pp. 4 – 7.

<sup>84</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/30/2, Petition of Michael Morrissey Canal Harbour, James St., for financial aid, 13 May 1845.

<sup>85</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/2/1, Income and expenditure book, 1844 – 1845, 30 June 1845.

<sup>86</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/1, Minutes of committee meetings and quarterly meetings, 1892 – 1895, 1 January 1893.

requests for sickness benefit were fairly straightforward, provided there was no financial crises. As mentioned in the section on pensions, nearly all benefits were abolished in April 1907. However, the union continued to pay sickness benefit to some members. It was at this time that the above mentioned John Taylor was unable to work on account of his visual impairment. Despite the union's financial dilemma, he received his full 13 weeks of sickness benefit at a rate of 12s. per week, thereafter receiving a further 13 weeks of benefit at 6s. per week. This example elucidates how the union tried its best, despite its difficulties, to support those of its membership with grave problems.<sup>87</sup> Taylor was also one of the first members put on the pension scheme when it was re-instituted in 1908.<sup>88</sup>

In the middle of October 1914, general secretary Richard O'Carroll was taken seriously ill.<sup>89</sup> It was December before he had recovered sufficiently from his ordeal, and was back at work. A short time after O'Carroll became sick, John Long, the treasurer, was also taken ill. John Litholder's son, James Litholder, took Long's place on the union's executive committee.<sup>90</sup> Both ill men were paid sickness benefits throughout their illnesses. By 1914 the above set out framework from 1912, concerning the amounts and the duration of sickness benefit, had been in operation for some time (4 Appendix E).<sup>91</sup>

The monies provided with both the sickness and accident benefits were generous. Individually the payments of these benefits far exceeded all other benefit

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<sup>87</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/2/13, First Steward's expense book (records income and expenditure), 1904 – 1908, 7 March 1907 – 25 September 1907. Note, this runs to more than 26 weeks, however a payment was not made to Taylor each and every week.

<sup>88</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/17/4, Minutes of committee and general meetings, 1906 – 1911, 13 November 1908.

<sup>89</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1034/1, Minutes of general and committee meetings, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1911 – 4<sup>th</sup> March 1918, 24 October 1914.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*, 16 November 1914.

<sup>91</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/4, Part 1 of the rules: Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1912, Rule 5. – Sickness Benefit, pp. 4 – 7.

payments to the membership, and their ultimate duration of six months gave incapacitated members a long period in which to recover from their affliction. Ultimately, accident and sickness benefits were a safeguard, protecting incapacitated members from abject poverty as they sought to recover their health and return to work. However, if a member was unable to return to work on account of an illness, or accident, the provision of disability payments acted in a manner like a pension.

### **Unemployment Benefit**

The union was providing unemployment benefit to its membership long before the state introduced anything of a similar nature. Although, as will be seen, the provision of unemployment benefit was restricted, it was nevertheless of significant value to members. It guaranteed members that at specific times in a year they would not be without a source of income if unable to find work.

As of 1902, the union's rules in relation to unemployment benefit were that any members without work between 1 December and 1 March would be entitled to 10s. per week. To receive unemployment benefit the idle members had to come twice daily to Cuffe Street, at the times of 11AM and 3.30 PM. This was in order to prove that these members were genuinely without any employ. Any bricklayers earning over 10s. per week, whether working at the trade or not, would not be considered unemployed under the terms of the union's rules. If any of these members took unemployment benefit, they were liable to be fined 5s.<sup>92</sup>

If a member decided to leave a job of his own volition, or without proper cause, he was not entitled to any unemployment relief. Also, any member without work at the

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<sup>92</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/3, Rules of the Ancient Guild of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1902, Rule 45. – Unemployment Benefit, p. 29-30.

time of a lockout was, by his receipt of unemployment benefit, ineligible to receive lockout payments.<sup>93</sup>

At the beginning of December 1904, when according to the union's 1902 rule unemployed union men became eligible for assistance, it is noted that £12-5-0 was paid to idle members that week.<sup>94</sup> By Christmas week of that year the outlay for unemployed bricklayers had reached £37-5-0.<sup>95</sup> This figure must be viewed as an aberration, due to extra money granted to unemployed members on account of the festive season. By January 1905 the amount of unemployment benefit paid to idle members had returned to £16-1-8.<sup>96</sup> From these figures one can easily deduce how many of the bricklayers were without work at any one time. During the winter of 1904-1905 an average of 26 members of the union seem to have been unable to find work.

By 1912 the union was operating its unemployment allowance in conjunction with Part II of the 1911 National Insurance Act (4 Appendix E).<sup>97</sup> This act gave the British working classes their first contributory system of insurance against illness and unemployment. In the years after 1912, for union members to receive their full unemployment benefits they had to be in compliance with both the society's rules, and the State's regulations.<sup>98</sup> Certain members out of benefit with the union might still have been entitled to the state operated benefits, while members in benefit with the society might not have been in compliance with the state's regulations. In both of these cases the unemployed members would not have been in receipt of the full unemployment benefits to which they were entitled.

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<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/2/12, Secretary's expense book (records income and expenditure), 1904 – 1909, 15 December 1904.

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, 23 December 1904.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*, 14 January 1905

<sup>97</sup> NA, AGIBSTU, 1097/21/4, Part 1 of the rules: Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, 1912, Rule 9. – Unemployment Benefit, p. 8.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*

As the state gave no financial assistance during the first week of unemployment, idle bricklayers could only receive unemployment benefits from the union. Thereafter the unemployed member, provided that he was also in full compliance with the state's regulations, became entitled to both unemployment benefits.<sup>99</sup>

After lodging his unemployment card at the local labour exchange upon becoming unemployed, the member signed the unemployment register daily. Members of the Dublin branch would sign the register at the Head Office, 49 Cuffe Street, between 11 AM and 2 PM. At the time members were not entitled to more than fifteen weeks unemployment benefit from the union in any twelve calendar months.<sup>100</sup>

Unemployment benefit, although its provision was limited to a brief period in a year, was a valuable protection for members. It guaranteed them that if they lost their jobs, or were unable to find work, they would have a source of income to fall back upon while they sought out new employment. The fact that the benefit's provision was for a restricted period of time ensured that members did not come to see it as a source of supplementary income. In essence, unemployment benefit shielded members from the full impact of the sudden loss of income which accompanied a loss of employment, and provided them with the means of seeking out new employment.

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This chapter has touched upon eight different benefits offered by the society, however not all of these benefits were exclusively on offer to its membership. One benefit could only in fact be tendered to those who were not members of the combination.

First dealt with were four benefits which, although not confined exclusively to the nineteenth century, were operated primarily in that period. For this reason these benefit were placed under the heading of nineteenth century. Certain of these benefits

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<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*

were phased out as they were superseded by some of the latter four discussed benefits. Other benefits seem simply to have died away at the turn of the twentieth century, as what Gray (1981, p. 8) called the aristocracy of labour faded in the face of the growing new trade unionism, and the coming of Larkin in 1907.

The latter four discussed benefits were arguably the most important provided by the AGIBSTU. These were the benefits that survived into, or came into existence in, the twentieth century, and upon which there is the greatest quantity of material available. Through the provision of the pension benefit the union tried its best to take care of, in their old age, its long-standing members. However, at certain times the AGIBSTU found supporting the pension a very heavy financial burden. After the 1905 lockout the union's minutes are rich with the executive's frantic efforts to maintain uninterrupted the provision of this benefit. However, this was a challenge which ultimately proved impossible to overcome. With mortality benefits the combination, and later the trade union, endeavoured to enable members, or members' families, to give their loved ones a decent burial. With accident and sickness benefits, long before the state provided any similar benefits, the combination was helping members. The rules of the Bartholomew Accident and Burial Society of Operative Bricklayers, from 1848, are proof of this. Unemployment assistance, although not liberally dispensed, initially confined to a three-month period each year, was concentrated in the darkest and coldest months. This helped to see members through to the spring, and the better building season. The chapter also discussed some of the legislative changes, and union rule alterations, which impacted upon the union's system of benefits.

It is worth noting that the above is not a definitive list of assistance granted by the union to its membership. There were many other appeals for, and grants of, assistance which were not discussed in this chapter. The reason for their absence is

simply because the assistance sought would have fallen outside of the above headings, most of those appeals having been unique cases.

The provision of benefits to its membership was at the heart of the AGIBSTU. Providing assistance to members was essentially the union's primary reason for existing. The maintenance and improvement of the union's system of benefits, and the efforts to which it went to ensure their uninterrupted provision, clearly defined the values which the AGIBSTU's membership stood for and believed in. The benefits provided encapsulate the essence of the protection of the weak by the strong, and the belief that everyone is entitled to a certain minimum level of assistance and protection. There is also the realism here that eventually the strongest themselves grow weak, and in need of care. Finances and benefits were central to the union's existence. It could not have participated in the national cause, conducted its industrial actions with the vigour in which it did, nor lent assistance to its members, without its financial base. It was this base which allowed the AGIBSTU to protect its membership.



## Conclusion

At the close of the eighteenth century trade unions or combinations were small, disorganised, scattered, and under constant threat from the establishment. Due to the combination laws all combinations of workmen were illegal, and although these laws were not enforced rigidly their penalties were severe. The combinations also had many powerful enemies in the establishment in both Ireland and Britain. As a consequence, most of these bodies existed under the guise of a different type of organisation, such as a friendly society. It was in this environment in the latter years of the eighteenth century that the seeds of the AGIBSTU were sown, with the emergence of a shadowy bricklayers' combination in Dublin.

However, it was not until the early nineteenth century, when members of the Guild of Bricklayers and Plasterers set about infiltrating the embryonic bricklayers' combination, that the origins of the AGIBSTU can be clearly identified. The bricklayers' combination essentially came into existence as an organisational development upon the decaying Guild of Saint Bartholomew. All within the guild who had an interest in its trades were gradually abandoning that body, as its influence over the bricklaying and plastering trades deteriorated. The hopes of the members of the guild, such as its master Benjamin Pemberton, was that they could, through their activities within it and the bricklayers' combination, reform and save the guild and its trade privileges. This however was not to be, despite the efforts of the "union" of bricklayers and plasterers in the half decade after 1840. Thereafter the Guild of Saint Bartholomew ceased to exist, however certain of its members, its better traditions, and its appellation, transferred to or were adopted by the combination. The combination thereafter developed as a continuance upon the guild, albeit in a different organisational

form, and with a different focus. The Guild of Saint Bartholomew could consequently be regarded as having transformed into the mid-nineteenth century combination, and remained in existence as such.

In the years afterwards the combination developed along similar lines to those of other Irish craft unions coming into existence at that time. However, unlike many of these, the bricklayers' combination did not amalgamate with any British unions, instead it strove determinedly to ensure that British societies of bricklayers never achieved a foothold in Dublin.

In 1892 a new rule was introduced which permitted the union to establish branches anywhere in Ireland, except for Dublin, if it so chose. However, it was in the years after Richard O'Carroll became the AGIBSTU's general secretary in early 1906 that the expansionism began apace. Branches were established, or acquired by amalgamation, in all of the cities and many of the larger towns on the island. In order to cope with this expanded and altered structure new layers of government were instituted within the society. Nevertheless, the seat of power of the expanded union remained vested in 49 Cuffe Street throughout the period under discussion in this dissertation.

The growing sense of nationalism in the country from the nineteenth century onwards, firstly economic and later political, impacted upon the membership of the combination and later trade union. However, the combination's display of this nationalism was sometimes for motives ulterior to simple and pure patriotism. As with society in general, a minority of the combination's, and later trade union's, membership engaged in violent forms of nationalist protest and activities. It was highlighted how the trade union movement, and the bricklayers' union in particular as part of this movement, was able to bring the country to a standstill during both the conscription crises of 1918, and the General Strike of 1920, simply by doing nothing. In this regard the attitudes of

the AGIBSTU and its membership reflected those of the majority of the Irish citizenry's, non-violent protest and opposition to British rule, and the British armed forces operating in this country.

The finances of the union were central to its existence. Without adequate funds the various benefits available to members could not have been provided, strikes could not have been undertaken, and ultimately the union would have ceased to exist. In this respect the intake of subscriptions was an issue of critical importance to the society.

Members in serious arrears with their dues to the union had to be compelled through various forms of threats and coercion to clear these. However, these coercive methods did not always succeed, and there seems to have been a certain proportion of the union that never cleared what they owed. In the end continuous monitoring was adopted as a solution to the problem, but this only served to emphasise the failure of the earlier coercive methods and the resoluteness of certain members to avoid contributing to their society if possible. However, these members in arrears usually had their own applications rejected when they sought one type of benefit or another from the union.

The issue of the misappropriation of funds was of critical importance to the society. This involved members in positions of trust and responsibility betraying the union and their fellow members. Some of these traitorous members were dealt with harshly, while others got off quite lightly. The most serious incident of this nature occurred when a highly respected and long serving treasurer began to embezzle large amounts of the society's money. The actions of John Long could actually have endangered the union if he had not been apprehended when he was, as there is no reason to presume that he would have ceased embezzling of his own volition.

In order to defend the rights of its membership the union was, on a number of occasions, to either threaten, or actually engage in, industrial actions. Most of these

strikes in the nineteenth century were of a minor nature, and in the majority easily won by the union. These victories normally resulted in improved pay, or conditions of work, for the membership. However, as occurred within Irish industrial relations in general, the AGIBSTU's strikes in the early years of twentieth century were of a different nature entirely. These confrontations were longer in duration and much harder fought than those that went before. This was a time when the growth of new unionism, and socialism, added great tension to the relationship between employers and workers. It was an industrial relations environment of a completely different nature to the rather genteel world of the mid-nineteenth century. In the bitter lockout of 1905 the employers came close to destroying the AGIBSTU, leaving it financially ravaged for years after that event. This lockout forever altered the pretentiousness of the union and its membership. It made them aware that they were not as important or powerful as they had formerly believed themselves to be. The employers' combined assault on the union also made it conscious of the necessity to be more cautious in future, in both its decision making and choices of opponents.

The union also defended its realm by penalising members who breached its rules and regulations in relation to their working environment. This was a safeguard which in general ensured that certain members did not by their actions, these either intentional or unintentional, erode rights which had been hard won in the past. Although this form of sanction did not always work, it did in most cases and it guaranteed that the majority of members followed the official union policy.

The bricklayers' union, over the time period covered in this dissertation, provided a myriad of benefits to its membership, these ranging from mortality to unemployment. As the AGIBSTU was a craft trade union, the provision of benefits to members was ultimately its primary focus. These benefits existed to assist members in

various states of difficulty or need. The numerous benefits provided evolved and developed with the union as its membership and structure evolved. Some benefits were phased out over time, as they became redundant or were superseded, while others were developed, altered, and expanded.

Only fair members of the trade were eligible for these benefits in general, however when funds were meagre certain benefits were restricted or granted less liberally. Nevertheless, the combination, and later the trade union, did its best, under all circumstances and within reason, to help all fair members who came to it in distress, and on certain occasions it even assisted members in arrears. The impact of social legislation in the twentieth century was discussed, as were the alterations to the union's system of benefits resulting from this. In a manner this issue highlighted how far behind the trade unions the state actually was in its social welfare policies.

In conclusion, this dissertation has discussed the origin and evolution of an Irish trade union in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries within the wider context of the development of Irish trade unionism. The impact and influence of other trade unions, employers, and of social and political developments in Ireland and Britain, upon the AGIBSTU were also examined. The dissertation has shown how, within an industrial relations environment fraught with turbulence, the AGIBSTU, standing all alone, managed to survive, in certain circumstances against the odds, and expand. As a consequence of the union's existence the wages and working conditions of the bricklayers of Dublin, and later other parts of the country, improved substantially. However, it must not be lost sight of that the AGIBSTU was but one constituent in a 330 year continuum, a legacy spanning a transformation from discrimination and despotism to equality and democracy, from guild to trade union. Although its fire has

long past from the world, as has that of its members, the light of promise it once cast upon them still endures to this day in the BATU.

This dissertation has examined the evolution of an early Irish trade union, a society whose properties had never previously been thoroughly examined. The thematic approach permitted an in depth examination of various aspects of the society. It also revealed certain of the challenges which faced the pioneers of trade unionism in Ireland. The dissertation has traced the path followed by a society of bricklayers, within the context of evolving industrial relations, social, and political environments of the time.

## **Note on Primary Sources**

The basis of this dissertation is extensive research into the documentary records of the Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union located in the National Archives of Ireland. Of this source the most important materials are the combination's, and later trade union's, minutes books. The minutes books that exist are exhaustive in their detail concerning most meetings, no matter how trivial the focus of some of these actually were. However, there are substantial gaps in the minutes of the union. No minutes of monthly or general meetings exist for the period from 1877 to 1891. From 1895 to 1903 there is also a complete absence of committee and general meetings' minutes. On account of this it was necessary to draw from other sources in order to fill in these gaps. The union's various financial records, as well as the correspondence received, and copies of that sent by it, were useful in this regard. Where the missing minutes are no one knows, as with the original Royal Charter from 1670, they seem to have simply disappeared. It was this fragmentation of the trade union's records which partially accounted for the thematic approach adopted in this dissertation. As for the other union claiming descent from the Guild of Saint Bartholomew, the still existing Operative Plasterers and Allied Trades Society of Ireland, most of its various existing records date from years subsequent to those covered in this dissertation. Consequently, all the information on its interactions with the bricklayers' combination and later trade union, in the years under discussion, is sourced primarily from the records of the AGIBSTU.

The files of the AGIBSTU's annual returns to the Registrar of Friendly Societies, also located in the National Archives, are a useful source of primary material on the union. These contain material on the number of members in the union, its

officers, and documentation concerning the union's rules which is also to be found within its own records.

The minutes of certain Dublin Trades Council meetings, and newspapers from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, all located within the National Library of Ireland, form the preponderance of the other primary sources used in the dissertation. These sources both enhance and expand upon certain of the material found in the above records.



## **Appendix A**





We the Bricklayers of the City and County of Dublin,  
and Kildare, having assembled, agreed to the follow-  
ing RULES and *REGULATIONS*, viz.

RULE I. That no Man belonging to said Community, shall work with any Person who cannot prove his Time served, under the Bond of a lawful Indenture, but in Government or Corporation Work more than one Day, without getting a Pass from the Council.

RULE II. That no Man belonging to said Society shall work for Carpenter, Stone-Cutter, or Sleator, building on their own account, for less than four Shillings and four Pence per Day; nor in Government or Corporation Work, for less than five Shillings and five Pence per Day, or any of our Work they should undertake.

RULE III. That no Man belonging to said Society, shall Circumvent any Person belonging to the Community, by giving in Proposals under Rate.

RULE IV. That no Person or Persons belonging this Society, shall take the second Apprentice, until the first has served his time under the Bond of a lawful Indenture for seven Years (except the last Year,) only the Son, Brother, or Nephew of such Member or Members.

RULE V. That if any Person or Persons belonging this Society shall attempt to Abolish the Rules made by this Community, he or they shall be accounted refractory, and no Man or Men get leave to work with him or them, on any account whatever.

RULE VI. That no Person will be admitted into the Club-Room during Club-hours, which are from two until six o'Clock, but when called on Business, except the Stewards and Council.

RULE VII. That if any Member shall come into the Club-room of this Society, when intoxicated, he shall pay a fine of five Pence for every such Offence;-----If any of the Members while assembled, shall take the Name of God in vain, in like manner, he or they shall pay a fine of five Pence for every such Offence; that if any Person or Persons shall Quarrel in the House while the Members are assembled, or on their way home, he or they shall be tried by the Council, and fined according to the CRIME.

DISTRICT, Seven Miles distant from LEIXLIP, except where the DUBLIN meets with our own.

Each Member to pay for his Admission Ticket, Eleven Shillings and four Pence Half-penny.

---

LEIXLIP, 3d SEPTEMBER, 1815,

At a General Meeting it was unanimously agreed, that no Person shall be admitted a Member of this SOCIETY OF BRICKLAYERS, for a less sum than One Pound two Shillings and Nine Pence sterling, excepting those who are serving under a lawful Indenture, to a Member of the Society.

*Signed by Order,*

THOMAS NOWLAN, Master.

WILLIAM RAYAN,  
RICHARD COWELY, } Managers.  
PATRICK M'KONE,

BAPTIST CHURCH

Hall No 15  
CITY OF

Incorporated by



&amp; PLASTERERS

Kennedy's Lane  
DUBLIN

Charter A.D. 1670

Whereas

*Boyle James & Co. Plasterers &c.*

having been duly examined before us and the Council appointed for that purpose by the Members of the *Boyle Plasterers* who form a competent part of this Corporation, and that they and they prove that he was duly skilled and that he is duly qualified to exercise that Art and Mystery

Now know all men by these Presents that we the Master & Wardens for the time being do hereby pursuant to the power vested in us for that purpose, authorize and give licence unto *Boyle James & Co.* to exercise that Art and Mystery within the limits of our jurisdiction until the day of August next ensuing the date hereof provided that he the said *Boyle James & Co.* shall at all times during said period up hold and maintain and in every respect conform and comply with the due Rules Orders and Ordinances commonly called the Laws now made or hereafter to be made by this Corporation in strict accordance with the tenor of our Charter viz. for the better regulating said Art or Mystery and other special purposes as therein set forth but not otherwise

Dublin the *Twenty-fifth* day of *August* 1843

*Benj. Demerston*

Shoemaker

*Thomas James*

Warden of the Corporation

3.

*Bricklayers & Plasterers Hall,  
No. 15 Kennedy's Lane,  
City of Dublin,  
Incorporated by Royal Charter A. D. 1670.*

*Whereas Boyle Lynch, 8 Plunkett Street having been duly examined before us and the council appointed for that purpose by the members of the Bricklayers' Faculty, who form a component part of this Corporation, and there and then prove that he was duly skilled, and therefore qualified to exercise that Art and Mystery. Now know all men, by these presents, that we the Master & Wardens, for the time being do hereby pursuant to the powers vested in us for that purpose, authorise the said Boyle Lynch, to exercise that Art and Mystery within the limits of our jurisdiction until the 24<sup>th</sup> day of August next ensuing the date hereof, provided the said Boyle Lynch shall at all times during the said period, uphold and maintain in every respect conform and comply with the due rules, orders, and ordinance commonly called bye-laws, now made, or hereafter to be made by this Corporation, in straight accordance with the tenor of our Charter, viz:- For the better regulating the said Art and Mystery and other special purposes as therein set fourth but not otherwise.*

*Dublin,  
Twenty-fifth day of August 1845  
Benjamin Pemberton, Master.  
Thomas Leary, warden of the faculty.*

4.

#### **Indenture Procedure**

When a boy was approved of by the union's council as suitable to be apprenticed to the trade, and a master (usually the boy's father) was also approved of as a suitable person to teach the trade, both parties attended before the union's council. There the indentures were drawn up and signed by the Master and Stewards of the Trade. The Master of the Trade, then standing uncovered, placed the finger and thumb of the Master and Boy upon the seals of the trade affixed to the indentures. He then required the parties to repeat after him the following words: -

The boy first tendered the indenture to the master saying, 'I give you this indenture as my act and deed.' The master then replied 'I receive it as such.' In like manner the Master of the boy, holding the indenture in the same form, presents it to the boy, repeating the same words:- 'Boy, I give you this indenture as my act and deed.'

The boy replies, 'Master, I receive it as such.'

The indenture was then signed by the contracting parties, and witnessed by the Master of the Trade (later President), first and second stewards, and finally counter signed by the society's secretary.

In the case of boys not having any hereditary rights to the trade, and who wish to be indentured as an apprentice, and agreed to pay a specified fee, the foregoing procedure of indenture was adopted. In this case a monetary fee was given to the master on the signing of the indentures. Another fee was credited to the trade's funds, and the union retained the balance for the protection of the boy. This was paid to the master on the completion of the contract. The union, as a charitable work also took on orphan boys and trained them in the

trade. In this case, the master of the boy was paid by the imposition of a levy of 6d. on all the other members of the society.

When the terms of the apprenticeship were completed the master was under obligation to bring the apprentice before the council, in order for the apprentice to take out his freedom. If the council was satisfied that the apprentice was qualified to take his place amongst the journeymen he was required to repeat after his master a simple declaration to abide by the rules of the trade. The combinations secretary holding a lighted candle throughout. Then the apprentice signed his name to the declaration, and with the presentation of his maiden card was admitted to the freedom of the society.



Witnesseth, that

of his own free-will and accord, and with the Consent of

doth put himself Apprentice to

to learn his Art, and with him, (after the manner of an Apprentice,) to dwell and serve  
from the day of

until the full end and Term of years, from thence next following, to be fully completed and ended. During which Term, the said Apprentice his said Master faithfully shall serve, his Secrets keep, his lawful Commands everywhere gladly do. He shall do no damage to his said Master, nor see it to be done of others, but that he, to his power, shall let, or forthwith give warning to his said Master of the same. He shall not waste the Goods of his said Master, nor give or lend them unlawfully to any. He shall not commit Fornication, nor contract Matrimony within the said Term. Hurt to his said Master he shall not do, cause, or procure to be done of others. He shall not play at Cards, Dice, Tables, or any other unlawful Games, whereby his said Master may have Loss with his own or others' Goods. During said Term, without License of his said Master, he shall neither buy nor sell; he shall not haunt nor use Taverns, Ale-houses, or Play-houses, nor absent himself from his said Master's Service Day nor Night unlawfully, but in all things, as an honest and faithful Apprentice, he shall behave himself towards his said Master, and all his, during the said Term. AND the said Master his said Apprentice in the same Art which he useth, by the best way and means that he can, shall teach and instruct, or cause to be taught and instructed, with due Correction, finding unto his said Apprentice

and other Necessaries befitting such an Apprentice, during the said Term, according to the custom of the

And for the true Performance of all and every the said Covenants and Agreements, either of the said Parties bindeth himself to the other by these Presents. IN WITNESS whereof the Parties above-named to these INDENTURES interchangeably have put their Hands and Seals, the day of in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and and in the Year of the Reign of our Sovereign

Signed, Sealed, and Delivered

## **Appendix B**



1.

### The Guild of Saint Loy's oath from 1840

I, ... do solemnly and sincerely in the presence of God profess, testify and declare that I do in my conscience believe that in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper there is not any transubstantiation of the elements of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ at or after the consecration thereof by any person whatsoever and that the invocation of the Virgin Mary or any other saint and the sacrifice of the mass as they are now used in the Church of Rome are superstitious and idolatrous.

2.

### Subscription for the Repeal of the Union 12 December 1830

|                                  |      | £ | S | d |
|----------------------------------|------|---|---|---|
| Philip Connolly                  | Paid | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| John McCann                      | Do*  | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Thomas Harnett                   | Do   | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| John Doyle                       | Do   | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| John Reilly                      | Do   | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Thomas McGuire                   | Do   | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Benjamin Pemberton               | Do   | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Michael Erwin                    | Do   | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| John Walsh                       | Do   | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| John Maguire                     | Do   | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| James Downey                     | Paid | 0 | 4 | 4 |
| Patrick Byrne by Michael Redmond | Paid | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| Thomas Capagh                    | Paid | 0 | 1 | 0 |

3.

### The address of Benjamin Pemberton on 13 March 1833

*Brother trades men,*

*The several matters in the following pages, although addressed to the Bricklayers and Plasterers, may never the less be applicable to all the other trades. Is there an individual amongst you, whose trade is not intruded on, by fraudulent and unskilled practitioners, who prey on public credulity, and fatten on the spoils of their fellow tradesmen, without due skill or ability, to appreciate your merits, and who never condescend to go through the mere form of apprenticeship to attain it.*

*As charters were granted to the different Incorporated trades of the City, and one and all based on similar principles, and I beg leave to submit for your consideration, a few passages from an address of mine to the Bricklayers and Plasterers on my becoming Master of that Corporation. My object was to impress on them, as I now do upon you, the important benefits likely to follow from the due use of their chartered rights and privileges with a little correction as may render applicable to yourselves and therefore subjoin them.*

*I would further suggest the propriety of your immediately forming a union of the talented and orderly men of your respective trades for the express purpose of seeking by*

*legal and constitutional means the restoration of them, and you may rest assured that the government will aid and assist you. The same advice applies, where two or more trades are combined in one charter, as in the case of the Bricklayers and Plasterers. Their rules and standing orders, I also subjoin for your better information, that they should prove salutary to you is the ardent wish and desire of*

*your brother tradesman,*

*Benjamin Pemberton*

4.

**The branches of the union throughout its history**

|         |               |             |           |
|---------|---------------|-------------|-----------|
| Arklow  | Cork          | Kilkenny    | Sligo     |
| Athenry | Drogheda      | Killarney   | Tralee    |
| Athlone | Dundalk       | Larne       | Waterford |
| Belfast | Dungannon     | Limerick    | Wexford   |
| Bray    | Dun Laoghaire | Londonderry | Youghal   |
| Clare   | Fermoy        | Mullingar   |           |
| Clonmel | Galway        | Newry       |           |
| Comber  | Kildare       | Queenstown  |           |

5.

**The re-establishment of the Kingstown branch, 8 June 1892**

On this date the AGIBSTU reopened its branch in Kingstown. The following from Cuffe Street were present:

Richard Sherlock (Master)  
James Lyons (Steward)  
Peter Murphy (Steward)  
William Murray (Trustee)  
James King (Treasurer)  
Michael Ennis (Secretary)

42 men from Kingstown met the group from Dublin, and thereafter they moved to a Mr. Burkes house in Sandycove. The master explained to those present the necessity of having all masons and bricklayers in a common bond of union. He commented that the only way to do that was by organising branch lodges in every town where bricklayers were working. The secretary then explained the conditions under which the branch was to be operated. All monies received by the branch would be sent to Cuffe Street along with a balance sheet every quarter. However, the Kingstown branch, and all the other branch lodges, would be permitted to keep £7-0-0 on hand for working expenses, but the rest of their monies had to be forwarded to the head office.

James Lyons then explained to the Kingstown men the basics of collective bargaining. Together, he informed them, they could fight for and achieve their rights. However, if they stood isolated and apart then the employers could do as they pleased.

William Cox informed the Kingstown men that the union had fought for and protected its members in an area stretching from Dublin to Bray, and from there to Kildare.

When everything was completed the master declared the Kingstown lodge opened. He then called upon its chairman, Francis Wafer, to take his position as branch president. The rest of the branch's officers, these also having been previously elected, then took their places at the table. Wafer thanked the Dublin trade for their assistance and 'putting the men in Kingstown in a position to keep in with their brothers in Dublin and Bray.' All present then declared their willingness to support and assist the cause of the union to the best of their abilities.

6.

#### **Rule 52. – Branch Lodges.**

That this Trade Union has the power to establish Branch Lodges throughout Ireland, Dublin excepted. Such lodges to be affiliated to the Central Executive Council in Dublin. That it shall be competent for the Executive Council to direct that any town making application for permission to be opened as a Branch Lodge under the Rules and Regulations of this Union, shall be established as a branch, providing that such town can guarantee and the Executive Council are satisfied that at the opening there shall not be less than six persons who have paid their entrance fee. In all cases of towns making such application, they must, previous to being opened, certify the schedule of rules, and customs, and privileges of the town which they have had twelve months previous, and if the employers take any privileges from the schedule. Such lodge to be supported from the General Fund. All lodges to be opened by the principle officers of the Dublin Executive, who shall attend the opening of every new Branch, and be allowed reasonable charges therefor.

## **Appendix C**

1.

**The twelve members of the trade's committee of management appointed to oversee its participation at the October 1869 great aggregate meeting.**

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| William Foley<br>John Queale<br>James Cannon<br>Thomas Fell | Patrick Dermott<br>Lawrence Murphy<br>Edward Costello<br>James Bergin | Bernard Murphy<br>James Granger<br>Joseph Morton<br>Michael Tobin |
|---|---|---|

2.

**Address of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers of the City of Dublin to W. H. O'Leary Esq. MD, FRSCI, and MP for the Borough of Drogheda, 4 April, 1874.**

Honourable Sir,

We the members of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers of the City of Dublin most respectfully tender to you our most sincere congratulations on the recent glorious victory achieved by you and the proud position which the constituency of that historic town beside the Boyne have placed in you as their representative. Immortal honour on those patriotic men who have chosen the grandson of the late James O'Leary, a member of our ancient Guild, the good employer, the firm friend and worthy citizen, the upright honest man.

Electors of the borough of Drogheda we gratefully thank you for selecting such a man as W. H. O'Leary, a man of strict integrity, the highest honour, and the truest patriotism. The benevolent, kind, and warm-hearted Irishman beloved by his friends and respected by all who have the honour of his acquaintance. Yes, men of Drogheda you have placed our trade under an obligation that we cannot soon forget. You have elected as your representative to the Imperial Parliament a man who has by his own assiduous attention won a place in the front rank of his profession, a man who has been proclaimed by one of the highest legal authorities in Ireland to be a man of genius. A true patriot, a firm supporter of nationality, the friend and advocate of the fair, just, and reasonable rights of the working man. Sir, we hail with delight your entry into an alien senate there to advocate the right of your own country to manage and direct her own affairs without in any manner interference with the Imperial Parliament of the Empire and we pray that the allwise and beneficent God may vouchsafe to grant to you a length of years to be an ornament to your profession and an honour to your country.

*Michael Hanley*, Master of the Trade

*Pat Reid*, Chairman of the Committee

*Edward Costelloe*

*Timothy Whelan*                      Stewards

*Richard Tobin*

*Denis Byrne*                              Secretary

3.

**List of those initially accused of the participating in the Phoenix Park Murders**

| Name             | Age | Occupation   | Name             | Age | Occupation   |
|------------------|-----|--------------|------------------|-----|--------------|
| James Carey      | 45  | Builder      | James Mullett    | 35  | Publican     |
| Joseph Mullett   | 25  | Clerk        | Daniel Curley    | 35  | Carpenter    |
| Joseph Brady     | 26  | Stone Cutter | Joseph Hanlon    | 23  | Carpenter    |
| Thomas Martin    | 30  | Compositor   | Laurence Hanlon  | 22  | Carpenter    |
| Robert Farrell   | 24  | Vanman       | John Dwyer       | 21  | Tailor       |
| Daniel Delaney   | 40  | Carpenter    | Peter Doyle      | 35  | Coachbuilder |
| Timothy Kelly    | 20  | Coachbuilder | Peter Carey      | 32  | Bricklayer   |
| William Morony   | 40  | Shoemaker    | Patrick Whelan   | 30  | Clerk        |
| Edward McCaffrey | 40  | Van Driver   | George Smith     | 21  | Bricklayer   |
| Henry Rowles     | 50  | Tailor       | Edward O'Brien   | 40  | Shoemaker    |
| Michael Kavanagh | 23  | Hack driver  | Michael Fagan    | 24  | Blacksmith   |
| Joseph Smith     | 24  | Labourer     | Patrick Delaney  | 32  | Carpenter    |
| Thomas Caffrey   | 26  | Labourer     | James Fitzharris | 50  | Hack driver  |

(Corfe, 1968, pp. 242-243)

4.

**The circular dispatched by the Irish Trades Union Congress in April 1918.**

**IRISH**

**Trades Union Congress and Labour Party**

**NATIONAL EXECUTIVE, DUBLIN.**

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**All Ireland Labour Convention,  
APRIL 20<sup>th</sup>, 1918, MANSION HOUSE, DUBLIN,**

---

**RESOLUTION**

"That this Convention of the Irish Labour movement representing all sections and provinces of Ireland pledge ourselves and those whom we represent that we will not have conscription; that we shall resist it in every way that to us seems feasible; that we claim the right of liberty to decide as units for ourselves, and as a nation for itself; that we place before our brothers in the Labour movement all the world over our claim for independent status as a nation in the international movement, and the right of self-determination as a nation as to what action or actions our people should take on questions of political or economic issues.

That in view of the great claims on the resources of the National Executive of the Irish Trades Union Congress and Labour Party we hereby call upon the bodies represented here to forward subscriptions for the purpose of enabling them to carry out their campaign against conscription and pledge ourselves to make it a success.

That this Convention calls upon the workers of Ireland to **abstain from work on Tuesday** next, April 23<sup>rd</sup>.

- (1<sup>st</sup>) As a demonstration of fealty to the cause of Labour in Ireland;
- (2<sup>nd</sup>) As a sign of their resolve to resist the application of the Conscription Act; and
- (3<sup>rd</sup>) For the purpose of enabling every man and woman to sign the pledge of resistance against conscription.

Believing that our success in resisting the imposition of Conscription will be a signal to the workers of all countries now at war to rise against their oppressors and bring the war to an end, we pledge ourselves in the name of the oppressed of every land in every age to use all means that may be deemed effective to defeat this present conspiracy to enslave our nation.

We call upon all lovers of liberty everywhere to give assistance in this impending struggle.

## **Appendix D**



1.

Refractory List decided on by the last field November the 17- 1830.

*Williams Employment fines.*

|   |       | £ | S  | d |
|---|-------|---|----|---|
| Patrick Connor  | Do    | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| Owen Whelan   | Do    | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| William Crosby  | Do    | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| Morgan Connor   | Do    | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| James Clements  | Do    | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| Arthur Nolan  | Do    | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| Nichols Crow  | Do    | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| Mick Walsh  | Do    | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| Arthur Morris   | Do    | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| Frank Brennan   | Do    | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| John Fitzpatrick  | Do    | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| Martin Donohoe  | Do    | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| Dick Barns  | Do    | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| William Murphy  | Do    | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| Patrick Brennan   | Do    | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| <hr/>   |       |   |    |   |
| Farrell's Employment  |       | £ | S  | d |
| Matt Cardiff  | Fined | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| John Whelan   |       | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| Michael Carey   |       | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| Peter Bowes   |       | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| Michael Darcy   |       | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| Mick Rowley   |       | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| <hr/>   |       |   |    |   |
| Cardiff's Employment  |       | £ | S  | d |
| Snuff Hendrick  |       | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| <hr/>   |       |   |    |   |
| <i>Paktrick Byrne's, son of James Byrne worked without freedom last year.</i> |       |   |    |   |

2.

Letter from John Batchelor, General Secretary, Operative Bricklayers Society

Operative Bricklayers' Society,  
EXECUTIVE COUNCIL GENERAL OFFICE,  
46, Southwark Bridge Road, London, S. E.  
Sept 9 1905.

Mr. Michael Ennis,  
Secretary Brick & Stone Layers T. U.  
48 Cuffe Street,  
Dublin,

Dear Sir

*We have been invited to open a branch of our Society in Dublin but before deciding the question my council would like your view of the matter. I may say we are informed that there are a large number of nonunionist Bricklayers in the City + district in addition to a small society which we understand has recently been*

*founded + whose members desire admission if the branch is opened, your early reply will oblige,*

*Yours faithfully,*

*John Batchelor*

*G. Sec.*

3.

**Letter from Owen Hynes to the Dublin Building Trades Employers' Association**

**Ancient Guild of  
Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union**

APPROVAL No. 83

Head Office: 49 CUFFE STREET, DUBLIN.

TELEPHONE:  
"DUBLIN 3425."

DUBLIN BRANCH  
21 Sept 1920

Owen Hynes,  
*General Secretary.*

The Secretary  
Dublin Building Trades  
Employers' Association

Dear Sir

The report of our representatives who attended the Conferences between your Association and The Building Trades Group was considered by this union, when the following resolution was adopted: -

"That we demand an advance of 4½d per hour on the standard rate, and an advance of 100% on the present scale of pay for Apprentices, and further that the overtime rates be fixed as follows, time and a half after leaving off time up to 9 O'C, after 9 O'C up to starting time to be double time, after leaving off time on Saturdays up to starting time on Mondays to be double time"

Kindly place this matter before your association at your earliest convenience. We will be pleased to appoint a deputation to discuss the demands of your council if a Conference is arranged.

In the event of no settlement been arrived at before the 2nd October 1920. we will withdraw our labour on that date.

Your's faithfully,

Gen Sec

P.S. The advanced pay to be retrospective as from 1st Sept 1920

4.

**Text of letters from Denis Byrne, Secretary of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers of Dublin, to the editors of The Irish Times, Freeman's Journal, and Daily Express.**

*Bricklayers Institute*

*To the editor of the Freeman's Journal*

*Sir,*

*You will confer a very great favour on the members of our trade if you will give insertion in your widely circulating and most influential journal to an occurrence which has taken place within the past ten days or so and which the character of the men of our trade might be seriously compromised for competency as workmen in the public mind and also with parties having in contemplation building works and who intend to give such works by contract or estimate to competent and experienced builders for execution.*

*The occurrence which I refer to is the new building in connection with the Coombe Lying in Hospital and which building fell to the ground on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> inst. of November with a dreadful crash causing dismay and consternation in the neighbourhood and its vicinity least some of the workmen were buried in the ruins which most providentially was not the case. Now in order that there shall be no misconception in the public mind on the matter, I most distinctly declare that no members of the Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers of Dublin have worked or been employed at the said building as McDouglas Snr. the contractor does not employ the men of our trade as he is one of those employers that give a preference to cheap labour to the great detriment of the respectable builders of Dublin who pay a fair rate of wages and who execute the works entrusted to them in such a manner as to give confidence and safety to the public and obtain credit for the workmen they employ.*

*Yours respectfully,  
Denis Byrne, Sect.*

5.

**Letter from Secretary Denis Byrne to John Leary, Secretary, Silk Trade of Dublin**

*Bricklayers' Hall,  
Cuffe Street,  
August 14th. 1872*

*John Leary,  
Secretary Silk Trade of Dublin.*

*Sir,*

*I am instructed by the Master and council of our trade to respectfully request that you please to inform them if there is in your trade a member by the name John Auburn or Osburn. The reason for this inquiry is that this man whoever he is has given currency*

*to a report that our trade had at some time borrowed money from the funds of your trade and that the said money had never been repaid.*

*Now it is unpleasant to be obliged to contradict idle reports of this kind nevertheless the council of our trade feel that the character of their trade must be maintained at every hazard and that no man or body of men shall wantonly or maliciously assail it by calumny and therefore our council feel called upon to utterly repudiate the slander of this man who calls himself a member of that most respectable body the Silk Weavers of Dublin.*

*Now if the members of your trade endorse the fictitious report of this libeller you will please inform the council of our trade at what period within the past seventy years that this money has been borrowed by our trade or that our trade has ever applied to your trade or to any other trade in Dublin for a single sixpence by way of loan or otherwise.*

*Now our council most distinctly and positively state and they defy contradiction that our society has not for the past seventy years been under the slightest pecuniary obligation to any trade in Dublin and if this fact be true, which it is because it is beyond contradiction, it is not a little too bad that any man calling himself a member of the Silk Trade of Dublin should in a low public house or beerhouse publicly give utterance to so base a calumny.*

*Now do not for one moment imagine that the council of our trade believe that this gross fabrication had in any way emanated or is countenanced by the members of the Silk Trade as a body or that this audacious falsehood is sanctioned by those respectable men. But I do say that if a member of our trade had been guilty of such misconduct as I have stated that the men of our trade would find means to silence the tongue that would dare give utterance to so base and slanderous a libel upon any body of respectable tradesmen.*

*Yours respectfully,  
Denis Byrne, Secretary,  
Incorporated Bricklayers.*

## **Appendix E**

**The Lending Rules of the trade's library, 7 May 1874**

*Rule 1<sup>st</sup>*

*That in order that the member of the trade do have the benefit of the library attached to the trade that the library do become a lending library to members only.*

*Rule 2<sup>nd</sup>*

*That the secretary of the trade do become librarian with an assistant to be appointed montly by the council or committee of the trade.*

*Rule 3<sup>rd</sup>*

*That each succceeding Tueaday evening do be the evening for lending or returning such books as may be lent out the previous week the hour of attendance to be from 8 unto 9 o'clock.*

*Rule 4<sup>th</sup>*

*That all members of the trade who may have taken out the working card of the trade for the time being do be entitled to borrow the books of the library subject to the rules and regulations as laid down by the Committee.*

*Rule 5<sup>th</sup>*

*That all members of the trade when seeking then lend of any book must produce his working card in order to receive the same and give his address to the librarian or his assistant to be entered in a book kept for the purpose and be accountable for the return of all such books as he may borrow and that the librarian and his assistant do have no power or authority to lend out to any member any book until such members do produce his working card.*

*Rule 6<sup>th</sup>*

*That all books lent out to the members of the [trade] do be returned to the librarian within one month after getting the lend of same and if not returned within the specified time that such member do incur a fine. Six pence per week for each week that such book is retained by such member such fine to charge to his trade dues and be strictly enforced by the master and council of the trade.*

*Rule 7<sup>th</sup>*

*That any book lent out that may receive damage by negligence of the borrower that the full price of such book do be charged to the borrower and that he shall not get another book until the value of such book so damaged do be paid as dues to the trade.*

*Rule 8<sup>th</sup>*

*That no member of the trade do receive the lend of a second book until he has returned to the librarian the book previously borrowed by such member.*

*Rule 9<sup>th</sup>*

*That the names of the members of the committee do be attached to those rules with power to add to their number as may be deemed necessary for the purpose of having those rules carried out to the full extent.*

*The following are the names of the committee [not provided].*

2.

### **The main points of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834**

- No able-bodied person was to receive money or other help from the Poor Law authorities except in a workhouse.
- Conditions in workhouses were to be made very harsh to discourage people from wanting to receive help.
- Workhouses were to be built in every parish or, if parishes were too small, in unions of parishes.
- Ratepayers in each parish or union had to elect a Board of Guardians to supervise the workhouse, to collect the Poor Rate and to send reports to the Central Poor Law Commission.
- The three man Central Poor Law Commission would be appointed by the government and would be responsible for supervising the Amendment Act throughout the country.

3.

### **Rules of the Bartholomew Accident and Burial Society of Operative Bricklayers, 1848**

[Please note, this material, unlike all else from the union reproduced in the appendices, is not in its original form. This is partly for legibility considerations. All words reappear exactly as they appear on the sheet of paper recording these rules, however there was no punctuation whatsoever on that sheet. Certain punctuation was added in order to assist the reader.]

#### *Rule*

*That this society is instituted for the purpose of mutual support of the members in case of any of the members receiving hurt by accident, and for the burial of the members, and also for the burial of the members' wives. And that this society shall be known by the title of the Bartholomew Accident and Burial Society of Operative Bricklayers.*

#### *Rule*

*That the meetings of the society shall be held on each and every Monday evening at ½ past seven o'clock and business shall commence at 8 o'clock. At which time the officers shall each take his place, and should any of them be absent he that is absent shall be fined the sum of 8 pence. And should any officer be absent the whole of the meeting he shall be fined the sum of two shillings, unless he sends an excuse in writing together with his key (if he has one) in due time. If so, he shall be exempt from any fine.*

#### *Rule*

*That there be a president chosen from amongst the members of the society. He shall be a person most eligible for the office. He shall leave 3 months and then another*

*shall be chosen in his stead. If any one chosen president refuses to serve the office, unless he has served or paid the fine within 12 months, he shall be fined the sum of 2s. and another chosen in his stead. The duty of the P[resident] shall be to keep good order in the society during these hours, inspect the society's business, and examine the accounts. Present all requests that may be made for the society's approbation and in every respect superintend the society's business, and see that it be conducted in a proper manner, or be fined such sum as a majority of the members present may think proper, not to exceed 2s. 6d. There shall be two stewards chosen by ballot. 6 names shall be taken as the standard in regular notation on the notebook, and 2 be elected from them. They shall serve 3 months and then others shall be called in like manner. Any one refusing to serve as a steward shall be fined 2s. and others called in their stead.*

*The duty of the stewards shall be to attend all meetings of the society and see that all demands upon the society be paid.*

*Rule*

*That there shall be a secretary appointed to this society, one that is qualified for such office. He shall be appointed by a majority of the members at a regular meeting of the society, and continue in office so long as he gives general satisfaction, and his salary shall be such sum as agreed upon by him and the society quarterly. The secretary's duties shall be to keep the society's accounts in a clear and correct manner, attend all meetings of the society, and transact all writing for the society as regards their account. And shall be fined if late 1s., and if absent entirely at any of the societies meetings he shall be fined 2s. 6d.*

*Rule*

*That if any member of this society meet with an accident while following his employment, he being sober at the time, and be rendered incapable of following his work in consequence of such accident, then he shall receive from the stewards of the secretary the sum of 10s. per week for ... [no information].*

*The stewards shall visit such afflicted member, while receiving pay, at least once a week. The president shall pay the money to the stewards every Monday evening at 8 o'clock, and they shall pay the same fee above, 8 o'clock on Tuesday evening, or be fined 1s. for each neglect. No member will be allowed to follow any work, or over look any work done by another man, while he is receiving support, on pain of being excluded this society, or fined not exceeding one pound. Any member while receiving pay be found in a state of intoxication shall not receive pay for that week, and every member while receiving pay shall bring a certificate signed by the surgeon specifying his inability to follow his employment.*

*Rule*

*That when it shall please almighty God to take away any member of this society by death, the stewards shall pay to the nearest of kin the sum o 2 pounds to defray the funeral expenses. And in like manner shall the stewards pay to any member the sum of 2 pounds at the death of his wife, but for one wife only.*



4.

**Unemployment Benefit 1912 from Part 1 of Rules 1912**

BENEFIT.

|               |             |                |
|---------------|-------------|----------------|
| From Society. | From State. | Total,         |
| 5/-.          | 7/-.        | 12/- per week. |

Junior members between 17 and 18 years of age shall be entitled to :-

|               |             |               |
|---------------|-------------|---------------|
| From Society. | From State. | Total,        |
| 2/6.          | 3/6.        | 6/- per week. |

Junior members 18 years of age and over shall be entitled to:-

|               |             |               |
|---------------|-------------|---------------|
| From Society. | From State. | Total,        |
| 2/6.          | 7/-.        | 9/6 per week. |

Members shall be entitled to one sixth of the above benefits in respect of each days employment after the first week, Sundays excepted.

5.

**Petition of Michael Morrissey, Canal Harbour, James Street, for financial aid**

*Sunday May 18<sup>th</sup> 1845.*

*The humble petition of Michael Morrissey bricklayer. Herewith that your petitioner now lying on his sick bed without any hopes of recovery having a large family without the least means of support humbly hopes that your generous committee will be pleased to take his case into your kind consideration. As for the last fifteen weeks he is without the least nourishment but what he derives from the Charitable. Trusting in God he hopes you will take his case into your consideration. And your petitioner will be in duty bound to ever pray.*

*Michael Morrissey  
Canal Harbour  
James St.*

## **Bibliography**

This contains only material actually used in the dissertation.

## **Contents**

### **a) Original material**

- (i) Trade union archives
- (ii) Guild archives
- (iii) Registrar of Friendly Societies
- (iv) Parliamentary papers
- (v) Miscellaneous papers
- (vi) Newspapers

### **b) Secondary sources**

- (i) Books
- (ii) Journals
- (iii) Unpublished research thesis

### **a) Original material:**

#### **i) Trade Union Archives**

##### **National Archives, Dublin**

*Records of the Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union.*

1034 files.

*Records of the Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union.*

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*Administrative records of the Dublin Trades Council.*

Ms. 12,781, (minutes, 14 March 1907 – 23 January 1910).

## **ii) Guild Archives**

### **Dublin Civic Museum, Dublin City Archives**

*Roll of Free Citizens of Dublin.*

Roll number 3.

*Roll of Free Citizens of Dublin.*

Roll number 4.

*Roll of Free Citizens of Dublin.*

Roll number 5.

### **Gilbert Library, Dublin Public Libraries**

*Charter and Documents of the Dublin Guild of Bricklayers.*

Ms. 81.

## **iii) Registrar of Friendly Societies**

### **National Archives, Dublin**

*Records of the Registrar of Friendly Societies.*

T82, Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stonelayers' Trade Union, A/1, 1888 – 1960, [D].

## **iv) Parliamentary Papers**

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**v) Miscellaneous Papers**

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**vi) Newspapers**

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