

Electoral Politics in County Carlow, 1761 - 1841: Coalition, Consensus and Contestation

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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 Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright 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.

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Frontispiece: 'HB' Sketch No. 666: A Brown Study In Silence Eloquent, 31 Dec. 1840

(O'Connell is exhibited in a state of dejection and in contemplation of his political demise following the election of Henry Bruen in 1840. The empty bags on the ground indicate his weakening financial position with falling repeal rents, a lacuna in repeal agitation and an underperforming Precursor Association)

Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery (Ref. NPG D41600); description condensed from Thomas McClean, *An illustrative key to the political sketches of H.B., from No. 610 to No. 800*, (London, 1844).

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Abbreviations

<i>BCC</i>	<i>Belfast Commercial Chronicle</i>
<i>BN</i>	<i>Belfast Newsletter</i>
<i>BP</i>	<i>British Press</i>
<i>CCA</i>	<i>Carlow County Archive</i>
<i>CMI</i>	<i>Cork Morning Intelligencer</i>
<i>Ccon</i>	<i>Cork Constitution</i>
<i>CJEA</i>	<i>Clare Journal and Ennis Advertiser</i>
<i>CH</i>	<i>Clonmel Herald</i>
<i>CG</i>	<i>Clonmel Gazette</i>
<i>CMP</i>	<i>Carlow Morning Post</i>
<i>CWP</i>	<i>Carlow Post</i>
<i>CS</i>	<i>Carlow Sentinel</i>
<i>CSTD</i>	<i>Carlow Standard</i>
<i>CWH</i>	<i>Chute's Western Herald</i>
<i>DCorr</i>	<i>Dublin Correspondent</i>
<i>DEM</i>	<i>Dublin Evening Mail</i>
<i>DEPKT</i>	<i>Dublin Evening Packet and Correspondent</i>
<i>DEP</i>	<i>Dublin Evening Post</i>
<i>DIB</i>	<i>Dictionary of Irish Biography, (9 Vols, Cambridge, 2009).</i>
<i>DJNL</i>	<i>Dublin Journal</i>
<i>DUBMTR</i>	<i>Dublin Monitor</i>
<i>DUBOVR</i>	<i>Dublin Observer</i>
<i>DMR</i>	<i>Dublin Morning Register</i>
<i>DDA</i>	<i>Dublin Diocesan Archive</i>
<i>DRO</i>	<i>Derbyshire Record Office</i>
<i>DROJNL</i>	<i>Drogheda Journal</i>
<i>EC</i>	<i>Ennis Chronicle</i>
<i>EVC</i>	<i>Evening Chronicle</i>
<i>FDJ</i>	<i>Faulkner's Dublin Journal</i>
<i>FJ</i>	<i>Freeman's Journal</i>
<i>FLJ</i>	<i>Finn's Leinster Journal</i>
<i>HJ</i>	<i>Hibernian Journal</i>
<i>HMAG</i>	<i>Hibernian Magazine</i>
<i>IM</i>	<i>Irish Magazine</i>
<i>JHC</i>	<i>Journals of the House of Commons</i>
<i>JHCIRE</i>	<i>Journals of the House of Commons of the Kingdom of Ireland (21 Vols, Dublin, 1798-80)</i>
<i>JHL</i>	<i>Journals of the House of Lords</i>
<i>Jbull</i>	<i>John Bull</i>
<i>KEP</i>	<i>Kerry Evening Post</i>
<i>KKJ</i>	<i>Kilkenny Journal</i>
<i>KM</i>	<i>Kilkenny Moderator</i>
<i>LC</i>	<i>London Courier and Evening Gazette</i>
<i>LES</i>	<i>London Evening Standard</i>
<i>LE</i>	<i>Leinster Express</i>
<i>LIND</i>	<i>Leinster Independent</i>
<i>LKC</i>	<i>Limerick Chronicle</i>
<i>LKG</i>	<i>Limerick Gazette</i>

<i>LR</i>	<i>Leinster Reformer</i>
<i>LRG</i>	<i>Leitrim and Roscommon Gazette</i>
<i>LS</i>	<i>The Sun (London)</i>
<i>LSCA</i>	<i>Liverpool Standard and Commercial Advertiser</i>
<i>MC</i>	<i>Morning Chronicle</i>
<i>MH</i>	<i>Morning Herald</i>
<i>MP</i>	<i>Morning Post</i>
<i>NAI</i>	National Archives of Ireland
<i>NC</i>	Not Contested
<i>NLI</i>	National Library of Ireland
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> , (60 Vols, Oxford, 2004).
<i>PRONI</i>	Public Records Office of Northern Ireland
<i>RCBL</i>	Represented Church Body Library, Dublin
<i>SCA</i>	Sheffield City Archives
<i>SJC</i>	<i>Saint James's Chronicle</i>
<i>SL</i>	<i>Statesman (London)</i>
<i>SM</i>	<i>Stamford Mercury</i>
<i>SNL</i>	<i>Saunders's Newsletter</i>
<i>SRCCC</i>	<i>Southern Reporter and Cork Commercial Courier</i>
<i>SunLon</i>	<i>Sun (London)</i>
<i>TFP</i>	<i>Tipperary Free Press</i>
<i>TM</i>	<i>Tralee Mercury</i>
<i>TNA</i>	The National Archives, London
<i>UNA</i>	University of Nottingham Archives
<i>USA</i>	University of Southampton Archives
<i>Warder</i>	<i>Warder and Weekly Dublin Mail</i>
<i>WC</i>	<i>Waterford Chronicle</i>
<i>WM</i>	<i>Waterford Mail</i>
<i>WWC</i>	<i>Weekly Waterford Chronicle</i>
<i>WHJ</i>	<i>Westmeath Journal</i>
<i>WXC</i>	<i>Wexford Conservative</i>
<i>WXI</i>	<i>Wexford Independent</i>
<i>WXF</i>	<i>Wexford Freeman</i>

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Abstract: Michael Grant – Electoral Politics in County Carlow, 1761 – 1841: Coalition, Consensus and Contestation

This study examines parliamentary politics in Carlow county and borough between the middle of the eighteenth and the middle of the nineteenth centuries from a phase of secure Protestant ascendancy in the eighteenth century to one of corrosive contestation in the 1830s. Chapter one seeks, firstly, to describe the operation of the electoral system in the eighteenth century when Protestant ascendancy was secure, and the electoral and parliamentary systems essentially represented property. This system was not free from challenges, initially from within (by those who aspired to ‘reform’ the system) and subsequently from external interests (excluded from participation) which sought to change the system.

Up to the general election of 1830, parliamentary elections in county Carlow were characterised by a remarkable stability and were decided largely by agreement between the electoral ‘interests’ of the land-owning elite in the county. Major political developments such as the impact of the Patriots, the campaign to reform the present system, the admission of Catholics to the franchise, the 1798 insurrection and the change to the representation wrought as a consequence of the Act of Union all had a negligible impact on the conduct of electoral politics in the county. While Catholic Emancipation did become an issue in Carlow in the 1820s, electoral politics in the county remained largely undisturbed there in contrast to, for example, county Waterford in 1826 or county Clare in 1828. The first serious challenge to the aristocratic long term hegemony, with reform as the central issue, emerged in the 1830 general election. Although the ascendancy prevailed, the challenge heralded a decade of bitterly contested and extremely close elections in the county with clear lines drawn between Liberals and Conservatives. The influence of Bishop James Doyle was clear in the Liberal victories in the county in 1831 and in the borough and county in 1832. The Liberal side also challenged the repositories of conservative elite power such as the magistracy. The pendulum of electoral success swung between the two sides for the rest of the decade with, on the death of Bishop Doyle, an enhanced if not always successful role being played by Daniel O’Connell. By the beginning of the 1840s the Protestant ascendancy had reorganised and re-energised and was prepared to use the influence of landlord over tenant openly to secure electoral advantage at the polling booth. Nevertheless, electoral politics in the county had changed forever, as the long era of uncontested Protestant control sustained through the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries gave way to an era of contestation that was to endure until the later nineteenth century.

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Carlow

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Introduction

Giving evidence before the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the state of crime in Ireland on 19 June 1839, when asked if he considered that elections in Carlow would always produce unrest, Patrick Finn, a Catholic gentleman resident in the county, contrasted the past elections with those of the present remarking that before:

there was a degree of excitement before the election, but the moment the election was over, the excitement ceased. But the last seven or eight years a new order of things has arisen. It is not now to say that when a man stands on one side and another on the opposite, that it terminates with the result of the election, but the thing is kept up, that angry feeling and animosity, to such a degree that it is frightful to contemplate it.¹

Finn was from a prominent Catholic middle-class Carlow family and had taken an active part first, in Catholic politics and then in Liberal politics before becoming disillusioned and gravitating towards Conservative politics in the early 1830s.² For him, electoral politics in Carlow had become too violent, too partisan and too dangerously divisive with agitators aided by the clergy perpetuating friction in Carlow town and county. Finn's evidence pointed to the radical change that occurred in politics in Carlow between the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when it was the preserve of a secure landed, Protestant ascendancy class to become in the 1830s a battleground between them and a rising Catholic middle class. The decade from 1831 to 1841 saw a series of controversial and hotly contested elections that drew widespread attention to the previously passive politics of the second smallest county in the country. Political rancour promoted by both the Catholic clergy and Liberal agitators on one side and the Conservative landed elite on the other came to permeate society overturning the consistent and predictable pattern of parliamentary representation that had characterised the county's politics for the seventy years before.

Electoral politics in Carlow has not been the subject of an in-depth historical inquiry. This thesis will investigate the manner in which parliamentary politics was conducted in both the county and the borough between 1760 and 1850. It will describe how, in the eighteenth and

¹ *Report from the select committee of the House of Lords appointed to enquire into the state of Ireland with respect to crime*, HL, 1839 [Cd. 486-I] P. 822.

² For brief biographies of the Finn family, see Appendix G.

nineteenth centuries, political power was the preserve of the Protestant ascendancy and parliamentary representation was decided amongst the gentry class. This power was rooted in land ownership. Its foundations lay in the twin creations of landed estates and political representation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was at its most complete in the eighteenth century when successive elections witnessed the return of members of the established land-owning families. Land transfers in the later eighteenth century saw the arrival of the Bruen and Latouche families who, by virtue of their holdings, soon rose to political prominence. This pattern remained secure until the 1830s when it was dramatically challenged by a politically aware tenantry aided by an active Catholic clergy. Unwilling to accept this, the largely Protestant Conservatives combined under the leadership of Henry Bruen II, organised their resources and managed to assert their political control once more. The thesis will examine the forces from inside and outside the county that sustained the exercise of Protestant electoral ascendancy in Carlow.

During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, electoral politics in county Carlow was marked by tranquillity, mirroring the dominance of the largely resident Protestant landholding gentry. With land ownership, and the electoral influence that accompanied it concentrated in the hands of less than a dozen families, electoral politics in the county sprang more from consensus and compromise than from contestation and competition. The small and exclusively Protestant electorate, numbering less than seven hundred in 1792, allowed accurate predictions of electoral outcomes thus avoiding the expense and trouble of a poll. It is unsurprising then that parliamentary representation in the second half of the eighteenth century was dominated by these larger landowning families of Burton, Butler, Bagenal and Bunbury. The Kavanagh family of Borris, despite their considerable influence springing from their large landholding in the county, played a subsidiary rather than a leading political role. Of ancient lineage and regarded as benevolent landlords, as recent converts to Protestantism, they were viewed with something akin to suspicion by the Carlow gentry. The arrival of Henry Bruen I and David Latouche in the late eighteenth-century added a new dimension to county politics but did not alter the structure of political power. Bruen and Latouche were simply new faces in the ranks of the existing ascendancy. That is not to say that the Protestant gentry were all of the same political mind; there were differences with, for example, the Burtons inclined to support the Ponsonby 'interest' in the Irish parliament and the Butlers disposed to oppose it. Nonetheless compromise generally dictated the representation of the county. This is underlined by the uneventful nature of politics as reflected by the number of uncontested elections: of the nine general or by-elections held between 1760 and 1800, just three resulted in a poll and all candidates were local and members of the same gentry class.

Carlow was not insulated from political events outside the county. Political movements of national importance such as ‘Patriot’ politics, the Volunteer movement, the enfranchisement in 1793 of the Catholic majority, the raising of a militia regiment and yeomanry and the unrest and insurgency of the United Irishmen all had an impact in Carlow, but they did not fundamentally alter electoral politics. For example, the admission of Catholics to the franchise in 1793 saw a tripling of the electorate in county Carlow to two thousand and held the potential for active electoral contestation. This prompted the first electoral foray of a member of the Kavanagh family in the general election of 1797. Underlining the nature of the consensual politics in the county, this failed to affect the pattern of representation. Chapter one will examine the pattern of landholding and the way in which it translated into electoral power while chapter two will examine how the gentry in Carlow negotiated ‘Patriot’ politics and the impact, or lack thereof that this had on parliamentary representation.

The Act of Union, which saw the abolition of three of the six parliamentary seats in the county did not alter the structure of political power in the county or loosen the stranglehold on parliamentary representation enjoyed by the Protestant ascendancy. The settled nature of electoral politics continued into the first three decades of the nineteenth century. However, given the overwhelming Catholic majority in the county, Catholic relief loomed increasingly large as an issue. However, it was not an electorally divisive one as both representatives, sometimes contrary to their personal opinions, thought it wise to support it. While Catholics in Carlow organised, held meetings and raised petitions, they stopped short of mounting an overt political challenge. This was in contrast to other counties such as Waterford, Louth and Clare that witnessed widespread electoral agitation. James Doyle, Roman Catholic Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin from 1819 to 1834, who often wrote under the pseudonym ‘JKL’ and whose dioceses encompassed the county, was central to this calm and initially exercised a subtle, moderating influence on politics in Carlow during his episcopate. Strongly supportive of Catholic relief, his high public profile invested him with an influence beyond his diocese. Chapter three will assess the impact of the Act of Union on politics in Carlow while chapter four will examine the effect of the emergence of Catholic politics in the county. Chapter five will continue on to examine the settled nature of parliamentary politics in Carlow in the 1820s in contrast to tumult in other counties.

Bishop Doyle’s interests extended beyond emancipation: he also promoted social reform such as the institution of a poor law and the provision of education. He recognised early on that this might be achieved through the agency of sympathetic members of parliament.³ Recognising the public support for Daniel O’Connell, he was willing to co-operate with him in the pursuit of

³ Thomas McGrath, *Politics, interdenominational relations, and education in the public ministry of Bishop James Doyle of Kildare and Leighlin, 1786-1834* (Dublin, 2008), p. 55.

policies he felt would benefit his flock. He was not disposed to defer to the politician however, and avoiding public disagreement, once emancipation had been secured, he favoured those parliamentary candidates he considered amenable to his social aims. This did little to promote harmony between him and O'Connell. He valued reform over repeal and lent his support to parliamentary candidates who shared this view.⁴ In doing this, he fomented a series of successful electoral challenges to the established gentry in the 1830s that seemed to signal the end of the established political order. Doyle's death in 1834 allowed O'Connell to assume a more direct if not successful role in shaping Liberal politics in Carlow. His influence and political management incubated the long running political disaster that was the Raphael affair in 1835 ultimately allowing Conservatives to regain the representation of the county. O'Connell did however manage to garner almost unanimous clerical if not episcopal support in the county which proved central to success in the 1837 election. Conservatives were unwilling to accept that this was anything more than a temporary reversal and worked assiduously thereafter to register the freeholds of their tenants. Tenants were constantly reminded of the symbiotic relationship between landlord and tenant and the fear of dispossession proved decisive in the 1841 election where, despite an intense and sometimes violent campaign conducted featuring personal appearances by O'Connell and the candidacy of O'Connell's son, Conservatives prevailed and once again secured the representation of the county which they retained for the following four decades.

Carlow hosted two 'closed' borough constituencies, those of Carlow and Old Leighlin that returned two members each before the Act of Union and were under the patronage of the Earl of Charleville and the Bishop of Ferns respectively. Generally, the members returned for both boroughs had no connection to the area and as such formed no part of the electoral landscape in Carlow. Old Leighlin was abolished under the Act of Union and Carlow was reduced to a single seat that continued to be in the gift of Charleville. The increasingly politically aware inhabitants of Carlow first challenged the administration within the corporation and later turned their attention to Charleville's monopoly of its parliamentary representation. This culminated in the opening of the borough following the 1832 Great Reform Act.⁵ Initially the borough saw tense and closely fought electoral contests between local Conservative candidates and local Liberal activist N.A. Vigors. From the 1837 general election although local Conservative candidates continued to contest the constituency, their opponents tended to be 'strangers', often well-resourced Englishmen invited to stand in the constituency by the Liberal interest. The small

⁴ Ibid., p. 75.

⁵ The extension of the vote to £10 householders and the exclusion from the franchise of non-resident freemen effectively switched parliamentary representation in boroughs from established interests to property holders, see Peter Jupp, 'Urban politics in Ireland, 1801-31' in David Harkness and Mary O'Dowd (eds), *The town in Ireland* (Belfast, 1981), p. 121; Jacqueline R. Hill, *From patriots to unionists: Dublin civic politics and Irish Protestant patriotism, 1660-1840* (Oxford, 1997), p. 363.

electorate and geographically compact nature of the constituency readily lent itself to bribery and intimidation. By the time of its abolition under the Redistribution of Seats Act in 1885, it had come to be regarded by Conservatives as a corrupt borough. Unlike the county, the borough electorate were not as economically enmeshed with the Protestant land-owning ascendancy and thus freer to exercise the franchise if not honestly, then at least independently. Chapter six will consider the growth of and reaction to Catholic politics in county Carlow as well as the efforts to 'open' Carlow borough and how these efforts were used as a gambit to gain electoral advantage in the county. Chapter seven will examine the beginning of a decade of contestation while chapters eight and nine will outline and assess the decline of the political hegemony of the landed ascendancy, the brief period of popular domination of electoral politics and the eventual electoral resurgence of the landed elite.

Large multi-volume works on the histories of both the House of Commons of the Kingdom of Ireland and the Imperial House of Commons, published in the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, provide valuable works of reference for the researcher. Incubated over a twenty-year period and funded on a precarious and piecemeal 'hand-to-mouth' basis, E.M. Johnston-Liik's *History of the Irish Parliament 1692-1800: commons, constituencies and statutes* is the latest and most comprehensive prosopography of members of the pre-union Irish parliament.⁶ While the author does not claim it to be a work of perfection, it is still an authoritative work of reference.⁷ The breadth of the period studied naturally limits the depth of inquiry. This is the case with county Carlow where, in common with the other county constituencies, short biographies of the MPs elected between 1692 and 1800 is given together with some limited background.⁸ The History of Parliament Trust, originally instituted in 1940 and now funded by a grant-in-aid from the British parliament⁹ aims to provide a 'comprehensive account of parliamentary politics in England, then Britain' from the thirteenth century to the present.¹⁰ *The House of Commons, 1790-1820* edited by R.G. Thorne published in 1986 and *The House of Commons, 1820-1832* edited by D.R. Fisher published in 2009 provide surveys of each constituency and biographical details of varying detail for each of the MPs including those for Irish constituencies.¹¹ While all Irish members and constituencies are examined, the main focus of the volumes is Britain and only superficial attention is accorded to electoral politics within Irish constituencies. Nonetheless, they are the result of painstaking research that culminated in a valuable work of reference.

⁶ James Kelly, 'The Irish Representative System in the Eighteenth Century', *IHS*, 33:130, (2002), pp 233–6.

⁷ E. M. Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish parliament, 1692-1800: commons, constituencies and statutes* (6 vols, Belfast, 2002), i, p. 9; Charles Ivar McGrath, 'Parliament, People and Other Possibilities' *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, xvii (2002), p. 157.

⁸ Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, ii, pp 185–188.

⁹ <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/about/governance>.

¹⁰ <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/about>.

¹¹ R. G. Thorne, *The House of Commons, 1790-1820* (5 vols, London, 1986); D. R. Fisher, *The House of Commons, 1820-1832* (7 vols, Cambridge, 2009).

County Carlow does not possess an extensive historiography. Writing in 2015, Shay Kinsella observed that this ‘perpetuates the perception of the county as a non-contributor to the national story, a region with an insignificant historical legacy to complement its geographical status as the second-smallest county in the country’.¹² This is especially true of the electoral politics of the county. John Ryan recognised that unlike Great Britain, Ireland had produced very few county histories and he sought to fill the void in 1833 with his *The history and antiquities of the county of Carlow*.¹³ Ryan’s work spanned the twelfth to the nineteenth centuries and, while touching on electoral politics, his bias towards the Protestant interest and his virulent anti-Catholicism is all too evident. Robert Malcomson produced a record in 1872 of most of the parliamentarians who sat for Carlow constituencies between the fourteenth century and the date of publication, presenting them in chronological order.¹⁴ While a useful factual record, the volume’s dedication to Henry Bruen betrayed the partisan attitude of the author which emerges in sections of the text.¹⁵ Malcomson’s publication prompted George Dames Burtchaell to produce a similar volume in 1888 containing detailing the representation of the county and the boroughs of Kilkenny.¹⁶ Michael Brophy’s *Carlow Past and Present*, published as a souvenir of the centenary of Carlow College in 1878 provides some anecdotes, but nothing on politics in Carlow.¹⁷

Carloviana, the annual journal of the Carlow Historical and Archaeological Society has provided a platform for short articles on politics in Carlow. Most notable among these are contributions from Maura Duggan on the structure of political power in Carlow in the 1790s, from John F. Scott on the 1830 election and from John Joyce on the 1841 election and its aftermath.¹⁸ While there has been some recent scholarly work by Malcolm, Barr and Cronin, these have dealt with policing and social tensions and consequently have a narrow focus.¹⁹ John O’Shea has examined the career of John Sadlier, the financial swindler and twice representative for Carlow borough. While O’Shea gives an excellent account of the three elections fought by Sadlier in Carlow town in the 1840s and 1850s, his focus was always on the financial rather than the

¹² Shay Kinsella, ‘Milford Mills and the creation of a gentry powerbase: the Alexanders of Co. Carlow, 1790-1870’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis, DCU, 2015), p. x.

¹³ John Ryan, *The history and antiquities of the county Carlow* (Dublin, 1833).

¹⁴ Robert Malcomson, *The Carlow parliamentary roll* (Dublin, 1872). Malcomson provides details of members for Carlow borough between 1613 and 1868, for Old Leighlin borough between 1634 and 1798 and county Carlow between 1376 and 1868.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁶ G.D. Burtchaell, *Genealogical memoirs of the members of parliament for the county of Kilkenny* (Dublin, 1888).

¹⁷ Michael Brophy, *Carlow past and present* (Carlow, 1878).

¹⁸ Maura Duggan, ‘County Carlow in the last quarter of the eighteenth century: the structure of politics and power’ *Carloviana* 20 (1971), pp 35–40; John F. Scott, ‘The elections in Carlow in 1830’ *Carloviana*, 44 (1996), pp 36–40; John Joyce, ‘The county Carlow elections of 1841 and the marley evictions’ *Carloviana*, 47 (1996), pp 86–90.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Malcolm, ‘“The reign of Terror in Carlow”: The politics of policing Ireland in the Late 1830s’ *IHS*, 32: 125 (2000), pp 59–74; Colin Barr, ‘Lord Acton’s Irish election’ *Historical Journal*, 51:1 (2008), pp 87–114; Maura Cronin, *The death of Fr John Walsh at Kilgraney: community tensions in pre-famine Carlow* (Dublin, 2010).

political.²⁰ Longer studies have had their focus on the social and genealogical rather than on the political history of the county. These include Jimmy O'Toole's helpful *The Carlow Gentry* which provided illuminating vignettes of some of the more prominent landed families and Catherine Delaney's *Oak Park: People Place and Politics* which focuses on the Bruen family.²¹ While Thomas McGrath's fine study of Bishop James Doyle engages with the politics of Carlow during the prelate's era, it is naturally more concerned with pastoral, educational and interdenominational aspects rather than with political matters.²²

The County History and Society series from Geography Publications has provided excellent examinations of parliamentary politics in several Irish counties. Among these are surveys by B.M. Walker of county Down, by James Kelly of counties Cavan, Galway, Longford, and Mayo and by Thomas Power of county Kilkenny.²³ The volume on Carlow edited by Thomas McGrath was published in 2008. It sought to redress the lack of a historiography for Carlow which McGrath considered 'a neglected county' in this regard.²⁴ The volume considered the history of Carlow from pre-history to the present and, given the lengthy timeframe and the interdisciplinary nature of the series, the excellent overview of electoral politics offered by Donal McCartney covering the period from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries was necessarily brief in its engagement with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²⁵ This volume also includes an analysis by Maura Duggan on the impact of the United Irishmen on Carlow in the last decade of the eighteenth-century which contends that the insurgency fostered co-operation among the gentry class and that 'self-interest made them make common cause'.²⁶

In the 1970s P.J. Kavanagh examined politics in county Carlow and borough in the pivotal decade between 1831 and 1841 and provided a narrative of each election, short biographies of Conservative activists, details of clerical involvement by parish and descriptions of each of the local newspapers.²⁷ It is a useful but limited work because it tends to offer a narrative rather than attempting any analysis beyond that framed in terms of sectarian strife. More

²⁰ James O'Shea, *Prince of swindlers: John Sadleir, M.P. 1813-1856* (Dublin, 1999).

²¹ Jimmy O'Toole, *The Carlow gentry* (Carlow, 1993); Catherine J. Delaney, *Oak Park: people, place and politics* (Carlow, 2018).

²² Thomas McGrath, McGrath, *Religious renewal and reform in the pastoral ministry of Bishop James Doyle, 1784-1834* (Dublin, 1999).

²³ B.M. Walker, 'Landowners and parliamentary elections in county Down, 1801-1921' in Lindsay Proudfoot (ed.), *Down: history and society* (Dublin, 1997), pp 297-326; James Kelly, 'The politics of protestant ascendancy in county Cavan, 1584-1840' in Jonathan Cherry and Brendan Scott (eds), *Cavan history and society* (Dublin, 2014), pp 1000-1001; James Kelly, 'The politics of the Protestant ascendancy: county Galway' in Raymond Gillespie and Moran Gerard (eds), *Galway: history and society* (Dublin, 1996), pp 229-90; James Kelly, 'The politics of protestant ascendancy in county Longford, 1630-1840' in Martin Morris and Fergus O'Ferrall (eds), *Longford history and society* (Dublin, 2010), pp 179-202; James Kelly, 'The politics of protestant ascendancy in county Mayo, 1600-1830' in Gerard Morand and Nollaig Ó Muraíle (eds), *Mayo history and society* (Dublin, 2014), pp 229-256.

²⁴ McGrath, 'Foreword' in *Carlow: history and society*, p. xxv.

²⁵ Donal McCartney, 'Parliamentary representation and electoral politics in Carlow' in McGrath (ed.), *Carlow history and society*, pp 481-500.

²⁶ Maura Duggan, 'United Irishmen, Orangemen and the 1798 rebellion in county Carlow' in McGrath (ed.), *Carlow history and society*, p. 557.

²⁷ P.J. Kavanagh, 'The political scene: Carlow county and borough, 1831-41' (Unpublished MA Thesis, UCD, 1974).

recently Shay Kinsella investigated the politics and commercial activities of the Alexander family in county Carlow from their arrival in 1790 until their decline in 1870. Kinsella's focus was on a single family and while he deals admirably with their involvement in politics from 1800 to 1841, his survey of politics is too narrow to be comprehensive.²⁸ To date there has been no in-depth examination of the electoral system in the eighteenth century when the political power of the Protestant ascendancy was secure, remaining unthreatened by insurgency, the abolition of the Irish parliament and agitation centering on the Catholic question. This Conservative hegemony seemed to have ended in the turbulent 1830s yet reasserted itself in the 1840s. This thesis will attempt to address this shortfall through a comprehensive examination of the electoral history of Carlow between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries.

The terminology used in this study in discussing politics in Carlow will benefit from clarification. 'Independent' parliamentarians and electors, also referred to as 'Country' gentlemen, were those who placed principle above pecuniary advantage. They were inclined to eschew official office and patronage preferring to support the interests of the 'country'. In this they shared many of the characteristics of 'Patriots' who also strove to protect the 'constitution' put in place after the Glorious Revolution. They were in opposition to 'Courtiers', those who put personal advancement accompanied by pecuniary advantage above the common good.²⁹ The electorate is the total number of persons eligible to vote while the voterate are those who actually exercise their franchise.³⁰ Liberals and Liberal Protestants are those generally sympathetic to and supportive of Catholic and Non-conformist claims.³¹ The term 'Conservative' fell into common usage after 1832 and refers to those Irish politicians who supported government and the union.³²

²⁸ Kinsella, 'Milford Mills'.

²⁹ David Fleming, *Edmund Sexton Pery*, (Dublin, 2023), p. 35.

³⁰ See James Harris, 'Electoralates and turnout', <https://ecppecl.ncl.ac.uk/features/electorates-and-voter-turnout/>, accessed 11 Oct. 2024.

³¹ Elizabeth Anne Heggs, 'The nature and development of liberal Protestantism in Waterford, 1800-42', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, NUIM, 2008), p. 4

³² B.M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978), p. xiv.

Chapter 1: Land Ownership and the Exercise of Power in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Carlow

Introduction

County Carlow experienced widespread change in the structure of land ownership as a consequence of the Cromwellian confiscation which consolidated the foundations for the Protestant elite that dominated Irish society and politics in the eighteenth century. The second half of the eighteenth century saw further large transfers of land with members of the banking fraternity prominent among the new owners which may have contributed to a lack of cohesion among the gentry class in Carlow revealed by a study of its politics. The county constituency returned two MPs and had a compact and exclusively Protestant electorate before 1793. In addition there were two borough constituencies, essentially ‘closed’ in nature, that returned two MPs each. Between 1760 and 1793 representation of the county was dominated by the Burton and Butler families and Beauchamp Bagenal. Despite their domination, political life was keenly contested.

I. Land Ownership in Carlow

Carlow county has long been identified as agriculturally well-endowed. This is attributable to a number of factors including a favourable climate, tradition and a well-developed agricultural infrastructure with a high proportion of easily tilled, free draining and lighter textured soils.¹ The county contained 123,516 arable acres and 12,217 acres of mountain and bog giving a total of 135,733 plantation acres when surveyed in 1789.² While it was suggested that this survey understated the area of the county by as much as fifty thousand acres, this was to exaggerate.³ The area of 137,050 acres given in the 1821 census report was more accurate.⁴ The population

¹ Michael J. Conry, *Carlow granite: years of history written in stone* (Carlow, 2006), p. 69.

² John Ryan, *The history and antiquities of the county Carlow* (Dublin, 1833), p. 11.

³ Robert Moore Fishbourne, Carlow County Treasurer to T.S. Rice printed in *Report from the select committee on the survey and valuation of Ireland*, HC 1824 [445], p. 186.

⁴ See *Abstract of the answers and returns ... for taking an account of the population of Ireland, and for ascertaining the increase or diminution thereof*, HC 1823 [cd 577]. The CSO gives the area of County Carlow as 89,655 hectares which is 221,542 acres or 137,345 plantation measure

recorded as 69,566 in the 1813 census inhabited 12,090 houses, giving an average occupancy of 5.75 persons with each dwelling standing on an average of 11.34 acres.⁵ James Connelly, the owner of a large mill at Milford maintained in 1823 remarked that, the county was possessed of relatively large and well cultivated farms and had benefitted from a largely resident landholding class.⁶ Table 1.1 summarises the population and farm size for Leinster which, contrary to

Table 1.1: Comparison of Population, Dwellings and Land Area in Leinster Counties 1813							
County	Persons	Houses	Acres Plantation	Houses per acre	Acres per house	Persons per acre	Persons per house
Carlow	69,566	12,090	137,050	0.000	11.34	0.51	5.75
Dublin County	110,437	16,633	142,050	0.117	8.54	0.78	6.64
Kildare	85,133	14,564	236,750	0.062	16.26	0.36	5.85
Kilkenny	134,664	23,414	300,350	0.078	12.83	0.45	5.75
Kings County	113,226	19,705	282,200	0.070	14.32	0.40	5.75
Longford	95,917	16,348	134,150	0.122	8.21	0.71	5.87
Louth	0	0	110,750	0.000	0.00	0.00	0.00
Meath	142,479	25,921	327,900	0.079	12.65	0.43	5.50
Queens County	113,857	19,932	235,300	0.085	11.81	0.48	5.71
Westmeath	0	0	231,550	0.000	0.00	0.00	0.00
Wexford	0	0	342,900	0.000	0.00	0.00	0.00
Wicklow	83,109	13,445	311,600	0.043	23.18	0.27	6.18
Average				0.083	13.236	0.488	6.355
Median				0.000	11.57	0.42	5.75

Source: Compiled from *Abstract of the population of Ireland, according to the late census; viz return of the number of houses and inhabitants in the several counties of Ireland*, HC 1822 [cd 36]

Connelly's assertion, indicates that Carlow holdings were of average size.

Land was the medium through which English governments of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries pursued its 'ambitious attempt' at social engineering in Ireland.⁷ In 1641, about two-thirds of Irish land was in Catholic hands; this had fallen to a tenth by the end of the 1650s as a result of the Cromwellian Confiscation and it was to contract further as a result of the

⁵ *Abstract of the population of Ireland, according to the late census*, HC 1822 [cd 36].

⁶ *Report from the select committee on the employment of the poor in Ireland*, HC, 1823 [cd 561] p. 66, p. 69.

⁷ Micheál Ó Siochrú and David Brown, 'The Down Survey and the Cromwellian land settlement' in Jane Ohlmeyer (ed.), *The Cambridge history of Ireland* (4 vols, Cambridge, 2018), p. 586.

Williamite Confiscation.⁸ As Toby Barnard has observed, this redistribution ‘created the substructure on which Protestant dominance was based’.⁹ As one of four counties reserved for the government under the scheme of plantation pursued by the Cromwellians, the pattern of land ownership that developed lent itself to this.¹⁰ This encouraged land acquisitions in county Carlow by wealthy individuals from outside the county thereafter.¹¹ The nature of these transfers is exemplified by the activities of Dublin-based bankers Benjamin Burton (c. 1665-1728) and David Latouche (1769-1816) and by the military adventurer Henry Bruen (1741-95), all of whom purchased estates in Carlow in the eighteenth-century.

Burton was a prosperous Dublin banker. He served as sheriff of Dublin for 1694, was Lord Mayor in 1706 and represented Dublin city in the Irish parliament from 1703 until 1727.¹² Burton purchased land near Rathvilly, Hacketstown, Clonmore and Carlow from the Trustees for the sale of Forfeited Estates in 1712.¹³ Following Benjamin’s death in 1728, the banking business was continued by his son Samuel in partnership with Daniel Falkiner until its eventual failure on 25 June 1733.¹⁴ The Clonmore, Rathvilly and Hacketstown lands were sold to cover the debts of the bank in 1738, but the Burton family managed to retain a considerable estate of 4,500 acres surrounding the family seat of Burton Hall.¹⁵

David Latouche III was a member of the banking family of the same name and like Burton before him, he viewed land as an investment opportunity and as a complement to his banking business.¹⁶ He purchased an initial holding in county Carlow from Beauchamp Bagenal in 1773 and a second, larger tranche of 10,000 acres in 1789.¹⁷ Latouche Senior did not spend much time on his Carlow estate and, as he had already demonstrated in Dublin, he was a more than usually commercially orientated landlord. This can be seen from the manner in which he advertised his lands for rent; in 1782 he advertised almost 2,500 acres in 21 lots for rent promising that ‘resident, industrious tenants will meet with encouragement’.¹⁸ David junior had no interest

⁸ Ultan Gillen, ‘Ascendancy in Ireland, 1660-1800’ in Richard Bourke and Ian McBride, (eds), *The Princeton history of modern Ireland* (Oxford, 2016), p. 49.

⁹ T. C. Barnard, *The Kingdom of Ireland, 1641-1760* (Basingstoke, 2004), p. 29.

¹⁰ W.J. Smyth, *Map-making, landscapes and memory: a geography of colonial and early modern Ireland, c. 1530-1750* (Cork, 2006), p. 171.

¹¹ For a case study, see Oliver Whelan, *Landholding in the new English settlement of Hacketstown, Co. Carlow 1635 – 1873*, (Dublin, 2019).

¹² Richard Hawkins, ‘Benjamin Burton’, *DIB*, Sub Nomine.

¹³ Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, iii, p. 318, David Fleming, *Politics and provincial people, Sligo and Limerick, 1691-1761*, (Manchester, 2010), p. 24.

¹⁴ Thomas King, ‘Carlow town and its hinterland in the eighteenth century’ in Thomas McGrath (ed.), *Carlow history and society: interdisciplinary essays on an Irish county* (Dublin, 1988), p. 460.

¹⁵ Whelan, *Landholding in Hacketstown*, p. 25; Jimmy O’Toole, *The Carlow gentry: what will the neighbours say!* (Carlow, 1993), p. 73.

¹⁶ Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, v, p. 64.

¹⁷ Catherine Ann Power, ‘The origins and development of Bagenalstown, c. 1680-1920’ in Thomas McGrath (ed.), *Carlow history and society: interdisciplinary essays on an Irish county* (Dublin), p. 414.

¹⁸ *SNL*, 8 Sept 1787.

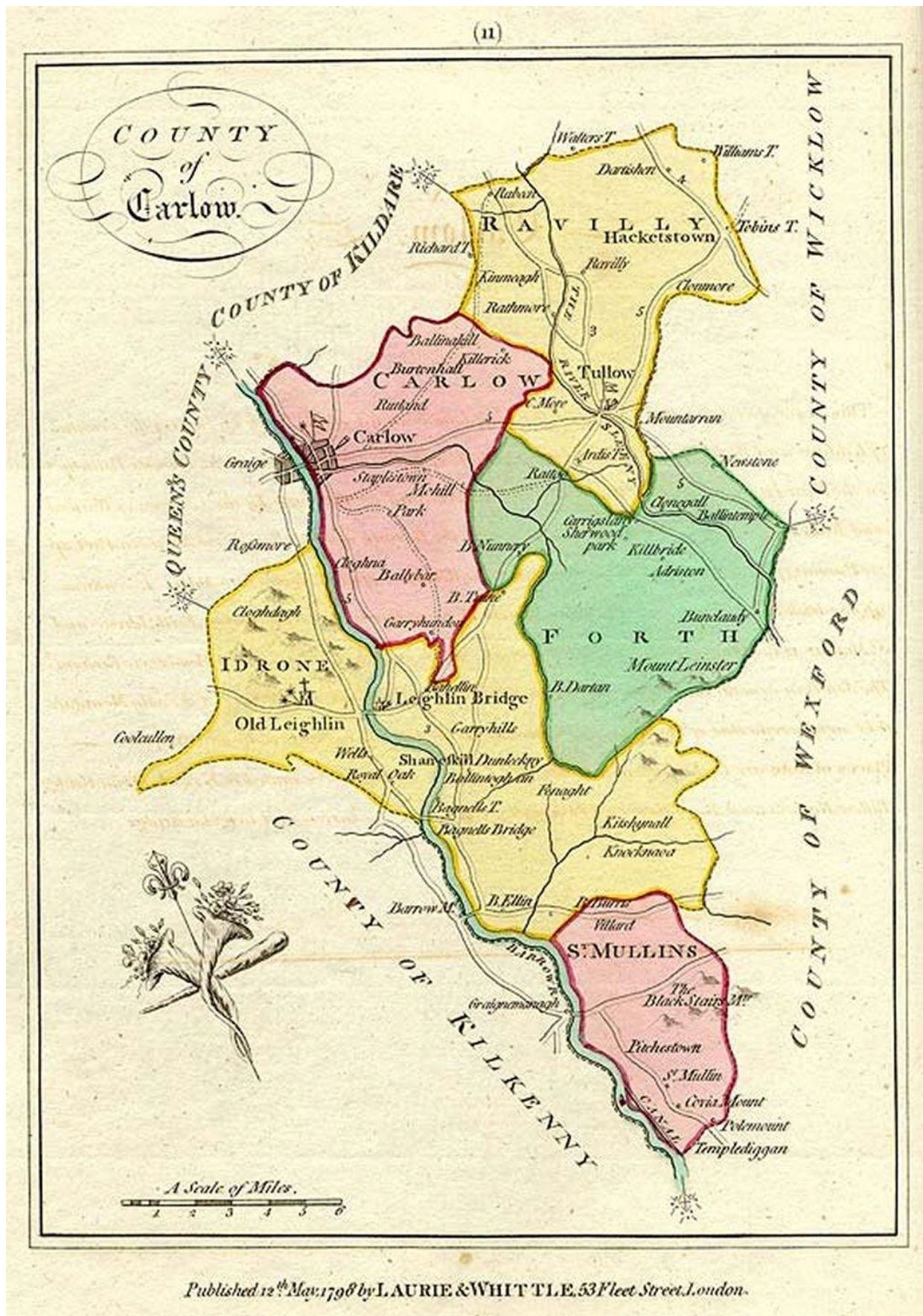


Fig. 1-1: Map of County Carlow, 1798

Source: *An Hibernian atlas; or general description of the Kingdom of Ireland*, (London, 1798)

in banking and sold his share of the banking business to his brother John David Latouche.¹⁹ Realising that David junior was probably better suited to life as a landed gentleman, David senior gifted him an estate of 10,000 acres in Upton, Carlow as a wedding present on his marriage to Cecilia Leeson on 24 December 1789. Latouche built a dwelling house on his newly acquired estate at Upton, took up residence there²⁰ and went on to become governor of county Carlow in 1795 and colonel of the Carlow Militia from that year.²¹

Henry Bruen was a more recent arrival in the county. He bought the Oak Park estate from the Cooke family in 1785.²² William Cooke was in financial distress and was forced to sell the Carlow lands.²³ Having seen service in the American revolutionary wars Bruen had controversially, amassed a considerable fortune through his activities as deputy quartermaster to General William Dalrymple.²⁴ Bruen expanded his holdings, purchasing large tracts of land from Beauchamp Bagenal and from the financially ruined Thomas (Buck) Whaley in 1790 for a rumoured £60,000.²⁵ Despite substantial income which was estimated at £12,000 in 1799, his recent arrival was considered an impediment to his social standing locally.²⁶ However Burton, Latouche and Bruen had one thing in common: all began as commercial land speculators and eventually became leading resident members of the Protestant gentry in county Carlow.

One of the consequences of the land confiscation pursued in the seventeenth-century was that few Catholic landowners managed to retain the estates that they had held before 1641.²⁷ The most notable exception was the Kavanagh family of Borris. They possessed 16,051 acres in county Carlow with 5,013 acres in neighbouring county Kilkenny.²⁸ Much of this land had been held by the family for centuries, as they were descendants of the Catholic Kings of Leinster.²⁹ However, as converts to the established church with Walter conforming on 22 January 1791 and his brother Thomas conforming eight years later on 23 January 1799, it was natural that they may

¹⁹ Thorne (ed), *Commons*, iv, p. 381.

²⁰ O'Toole, *The Carlow gentry*, p. 144.

²¹ *SNL*, 26 Dec 1795.

²² Catherine J. Delaney, *Oak Park: people, place and politics* (Carlow, 2018), p. 32.

²³ Edward MacLysaght (ed.), *The Kenmare manuscripts* (Dublin, 1942), p. 85.

²⁴ Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, iii, p. 298; Dalrymple was charged in 1782 with misappropriation of government funds during his service in America (see <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/dalrymple-william-1736-1807>) and as part-owner of a concern providing waggon transport to the British army while acting as deputy quartermaster. Major Henry Bruen was implicated. A parliamentary inquiry exonerated Bruen who was described by Dalrymple as one who had acted 'with a great deal of candour and propriety', see *Accounts & c presented to the House of Commons, relating to the account of General William Dalrymple*, HC 287 [1806], p. 23. While acknowledging Bruen as 'respectable', John Ryan did not class him among the Carlow 'gentry of the highest blood', see Ryan, *The history and antiquities of the county Carlow*, p. 358.

²⁵ *DEP*, 2 Sept 1790.

²⁶ H. McDougall, *Sketches of Irish political characters of the present day* (London, 1799), p. 200; Ryan, *The history and antiquities of the county Carlow*, p. 375.

²⁷ R Timothy Campbell and Stephen A. Royle, 'The country house and its demesne in county Carlow' in Thomas McGrath (ed.), *Carlow history and society: interdisciplinary essays on an Irish county* (Dublin, 1988), p. 726.

²⁸ O'Toole, *Carlow gentry*, p. 130.

²⁹ Thorne (ed), *Commons*, ii, p. 629..

have been viewed with a certain suspicion by the local Protestant gentry.³⁰ This almost certainly discouraged the Kavanaghs from engaging in electoral politics.

Table 1.2 identifies the major Carlow landowners in 1800 when a certain stability in the gentry class had emerged. Most of these larger landowners featured regularly on the Grand Jury with, for example, ten of the fourteen owners listed in table 1.2 serving at the Summer Assizes in 1800.³¹ All of those listed also acted as magistrates.³² Although there were some landowners such as Earls Fitzwilliam and Kenmare and Colonel Maxwell-Barry (later Lord Farnham) who lived

Table 1.2: Main Carlow Landowners, ca. 1800	
Owner	Acres
Bruen of Oakpark	20,089
Kavanagh of Borris	16,051
Latouche of Upton	10,000
Bunbury of Lisnavagh	8,061
Butler of Ballintemple	6,500
Newton of Dunleckney	5,000
Vigors of Burgage	4,200
Duckett of Duckett's Grove	4,000
Burton of Burton Hall	2,800
Doyne of Tullow	2,437
Lord Kenmare	2,000
Rochfort of Clogrennane	2,000
Cornwall of Myshall Lodge	1,650
Baillie of Sherwood	1,402
Sources: John Bateman, <i>The great landowners of Great Britain and Ireland</i> , (London, 1878), <i>Return of owners of land of one acre and upwards, in the several counties, counties of cities, and counties of towns in Ireland</i> [cd 1492 - 1876], Jimmy O'Toole, <i>The Carlow gentry</i> , (Carlow, 1993), R. Timothy Campbell and Stephen A. Royle, 'The country house and its demesne in county Carlow in Thomas McGrath (ed), <i>Carlow History and society: interdisciplinary essays in the history of an Irish county</i> , (Dublin, 1998), pp 723 - 749	

³⁰ http://census.nationalarchives.ie/search/cq/results.jsp?surname=Kavanagh&firstname=thomas&year_from=&year_to=&place_residence=&place_county=Carlow&place_diocese=&search=Search (accessed 16 Feb 2022); There was speculation as to the 'true' religion of the Kavanaghs with many of the Catholic population choosing to regard them as Catholic even after their conversion. This belief occasioned a riot at the funeral of Walter on 21 June 1818 when a Protestant burial service was interrupted by a mob and an effort made to have the corpse interred following a Catholic service, see *LKG*, 26 June 1818.

³¹ *County of Carlow. Summer Assizes 1800: [presentments]*, (NLI, Dix Collection, Carlow 1800(1))

³² No definitive listing available until 1832 in *A return of the names of magistrates included in the commission of the peace in Ireland up to the latest period*, HC 1832 [cd 531].

outside the county, generally Carlow landowners, large and small, were resident in the county which was considered an unusual circumstance.³³

II. The Electorate in County Carlow

The electorate in county constituencies in the eighteenth century was vested in landowners and tenants with holdings valued at 40 shillings or more. In the years between 1728 and 1793 the franchise was not only restricted to Protestants; it also excluded those Protestants who were married to Catholics.³⁴ The population of the county was overwhelmingly Catholic in the eighteenth century and remained so into the nineteenth century. While denominational surveys from the period are notoriously unreliable, all indicate that Catholics were in the majority in Carlow. The Religious Census of Ireland conducted in 1732 suggested that Protestant families represented 21% of the population of county Carlow; the Ecclesiastical Survey of 1766 put the Protestant population of the county at 23% while a census initiated by Bishop James Doyle at the behest of Daniel O'Connell in 1829 put the Protestant proportion of the population of the county at just 12%. Perhaps more impartially, The Commissioners of Public Instruction in 1831 suggested that the population of the diocese of Leighlin, which includes all of county Carlow, to be 11%.³⁵ Before Catholic enfranchisement, the exclusively Protestant pool of voters (numbering c. 557 in 1767) warranted the attention of landlords seeking to exert electoral influence. This was probably because the 'scarcity value' of votes in a restricted electorate gave tenants some bargaining power and no doubt a sense of social cohesion that resulted from even the humblest Protestant tenant enjoying the privilege of deciding which of his social superiors he would support.³⁶ Nonetheless landlords in Carlow were largely successful in dividing the representation of the county between themselves without the expense of a poll as can be seen from the five uncontested elections between 1760 and 1793. Where a poll could not be avoided, landlords were still to the fore in influencing their tenants' voting patterns with the elections of 1776, 1783 and 1797 generally reflecting the dominance of the Burton and Butler families.

Although many of the representatives for Carlow saw themselves as 'Independent', they expressed this through shepherding the votes of their Protestant tenant freeholders. This electoral

³³ John O'Connell, *Recollections and experiences during a parliamentary career* (2 vols, London, 1849), ii, p. 24.

³⁴ Johnston, *Great Britain & Ireland 1760-1800*, p. 123.

³⁵ D. Bindon, *An abstract of the number of Protestants and Popish families in the several counties and provinces of Ireland, Taken from the returns made by the Hearthmoney collectors...* (Dublin, 1736), P. 4; Brian Gurrin, Kerby A. Miller and Liam Kennedy (eds), *The Irish religious censuses of the 1760s*, (Dublin, 2022), pp 140-4, 429; JKL Diocesan Book, (Delany Archive, Doyle Papers, KL-JKL-00907).

³⁶ J.H. Whyte, 'Landlord influence at elections in Ireland, 1760-1885' in *The English historical review*, lxxx, no. 317 (1965), p. 740.

control continued after Catholic enfranchisement in 1793. The enlarged electorate of two thousand did not produce any major shift in representation. Indeed the landed class proved themselves adept at manipulating the new cohort of Catholic voters and exerted an enhanced political control over their tenants. If anything, the enfranchisement of Catholics added to the political strength and influence of Irish landlords.³⁷ Unlike the English system where tenant holdings were valued against land tax assessments, valuations of Irish holdings were more subjective and the terms of leases more flexible. This allowed landlords to modify the terms of leases so increasing their value for electoral purposes and thus qualifying them to vote. These tenants were termed ‘fictitious voters’ and ‘could and did give a landlord an obedient body of troops which he could deploy during an election and then disperse’.³⁸ It was customary for landlords to allow tenants to fall into rent arrears of six months and this debt could be called in at short notice if a tenantry was electorally uncooperative. Similarly, abatements of rent could be offered as an inducement. Given this, it is not surprising then that the period from 1793 to 1825 has been identified as a peak period for landlord influence over tenant voting patterns.³⁹ The settled nature of electoral returns in Carlow between 1760 and 1830 indicates that few electors chose to exercise their franchise independently and underlines the overwhelming political influence of the landed elite.

The terminology used in this study in discussing politics in Carlow will benefit from some clarification. ‘Independent’ parliamentarians and electors, also referred to as ‘Country’ gentlemen, were those who placed principle above pecuniary advantage. They were inclined to eschew official office and patronage preferring to support the interests of the ‘country’. In this they shared many of the characteristics of ‘Patriots’ who also strove to protect the ‘constitution’ put in place after the Glorious Revolution. They were in opposition to ‘Courtiers’, or in the Irish context, those disposed to support the Dublin Castle Administration, and who put personal advancement accompanied by pecuniary advantage above the common good.⁴⁰ Neither presented as a formal grouping but rather ‘as a loose coalition of individual voices rather than a coherent connection’.⁴¹ Liberals and Liberal Protestants are those generally sympathetic to and supportive of Catholic and Non-conformist claims.⁴² The successors to the Irish Whig movement, they supported parliamentary reform following Catholic enfranchisement in 1793, and became known as Liberals from the mid-1830s on.⁴³ Their outlook was in direct opposition to Ultra-Protestants

³⁷ Porritt, *Unreformed representation before 1832*, ii, p. 292.

³⁸ Peter Jupp, *British and Irish elections, 1784-1831* (Newton Abbot, 1973), p. 153.

³⁹ Whyte, ‘Landlord influence at elections in Ireland, 1760-1885’, p. 742-3.

⁴⁰ David Fleming, *Edmund Sexton Pery*, (Dublin, 2023), p. 35.

⁴¹ James Kelly, ‘The politics of protestant ascendancy, 1730-1790’ in *The Cambridge history of Ireland* (4 vols, Cambridge, 2018), p. 61.

⁴² Elizabeth Anne Heggs, ‘The nature and development of liberal Protestantism in Waterford, 1800-42’, (Unpublished PhD Thesis, NUIM, 2008), p. 4

⁴³ S.J. Connolly, *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, (Oxford., 1998), p. 590.

who viewed Catholics in general, and Irish Catholics in particular, as committed to the destruction of Protestantism, the Protestant state and later the union with Britain.⁴⁴ Ultra-Protestants were opposed to any civil or political concessions to Catholics. The term ‘Conservative’ fell into common usage after 1832 and refers to those Irish politicians who supported government and the union.⁴⁵ Although ‘popular’ politics and the ‘popular’ interest in pre-famine Ireland meant different things at different times to different people, it most visibly refers to the Catholic majority in addition to dissenters and some Protestants who sought to weaken Protestant ascendancy through campaigns for parliamentary, municipal and other reforms.⁴⁶ The electorate is the total number of persons eligible to vote, while the voterate are those who actually exercised their franchise in a given election.⁴⁷ For many smaller Catholic tenants, the franchise was regarded as a liability that placed them in an impossible situation where ‘moral pressure competed with economic pressure’ placed them in ‘a no-win situation’ and its loss in 1829 was not universally mourned.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ James Kelly, *Sir Richard Musgrave*, (Dublin, 2009), p. 12

⁴⁵ B.M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978), p. xiv.

⁴⁶ Maura Cronin, ‘Popular politics, 1815-1845’ in James Kelly (ed), *The Cambridge History of Ireland*, (4 Vols, Cambridge, 2018), iii, p. 129.

⁴⁷ See James Harris, ‘Electoral turnout’, <https://ecppec.ncl.ac.uk/features/electorates-and-voter-turnout/>, accessed 11 Oct. 2024.

⁴⁸ Michael Keyes, *Funding the nation: money and nationalism in 19th century Ireland*, (Dublin, 2011), p. 39.

III. The Structure of Representative Politics in County Carlow

Before and after the Act of Union, Irish members of parliament were returned by two types of constituency: the borough and the county. Constituencies were centred on communities and ‘interests’ rather than numbers of people, with boroughs intended to represent urban centres and counties the landed interest.⁴⁹ The pre-Union Irish parliament saw 234 members returned from 117 borough constituencies, 64 members returned from 32 county constituencies and the final 2

Table 1.3: County Carlow Members Elected 1761-1800	
Year of Election	Members
1761	Benjamin Burton Sir Thomas Butler
1767	Thomas Hyde (in place of Burton)
1768	Beauchamp Bagenal William Burton
1776	William Burton William Bunbury
1778	Beauchamp Bagenal (in place of Bunbury)
1783	William Burton Sir Richard Butler
1790	William Burton Henry Bruen
1796	Sir Richard Butler (in place of Bruen)
1797	William Burton Sir Richard Butler

Sources: Malcomson, *Carlow Parliamentary Roll; Return of the names of every member returned to serve in each parliament from the year 1696 up to the present time*, HC, 1878 [cd 69-I]; Johnston-Liik, *HIP*

members from the University of Dublin constituency.⁵⁰ Most boroughs were ‘close’ boroughs with small electorates, often numbering no more than thirteen that were under the direct control

⁴⁹ Peter Jupp, *The governing of Britain, 1688-1848: the executive, Parliament and the people* (London, 2006), p. 233.

⁵⁰ Jupp, *British and Irish elections, 1784-1831*, p. 152.; Edith Mary Johnston-Liik, *MPs in Dublin: companion to the history of the Irish parliament 1692-1800*, (Belfast, 2006), p. 161.

of patrons and were generally regarded as pieces of property.⁵¹ Carlow returned six members to the Irish parliament, two each from the boroughs of Old Leighlin and Carlow Town and two from county Carlow. Table 1.3 gives details of those returned for county Carlow between 1761 and 1800.

The borough of Carlow (or Catherlagh) came under the control of the Burton family sometime after 1712.⁵² The Burtons were closely connected to the ambitious Ponsonby family of

Table 1.4: Carlow Borough Members Elected 1761-1800	
Year of Election	Members
1761	Colonel Robert Burton Sir Richard Wolseley
1765	Robert Doyne Jnr (in place of Burton deceased)
1768	James Somerville Edward Hoare
1776	John Prendergast Arthur Dawson
1783	Sir John Brown Charles Desvaux
1790	Augustus Cavendish Bradshaw John Ormsby Vandeleur
1797	Henry Sadlier Prittie William Elliot (replaced by Colonel John Wolfe)
Sources: Malcomson, <i>Carlow Parliamentary Roll; Return of the names of every member returned to serve in each parliament from the year 1696 up to the present time</i> , HC, 1878 [cd 69-I]; Johnston-Liik, <i>HIP</i>	

county Kilkenny. William Henry Burton (1739-1818) was nephew to John Ponsonby (1713-87) who was the longtime head of the Ponsonby 'interest' and the speaker of the House of Commons between 1756 and 1771.⁵³ Burton was popular with his tenantry, for though he opposed Catholic

⁵¹ Carlow borough had thirteen electors in 1829 with just one of them resident in the borough. See *Returns of the numbers of persons entitled to vote at the election of members for cities and boroughs in Ireland*, HC 1831, [cd 522], p. 3.; E.M. Johnston, *Great Britain and Ireland 1760-1800: a study in political administration*, (Edinburgh, 1963), p. 182.

⁵² Donal McCartney, 'Parliamentary representation and electoral politics in Carlow' in Thomas McGrath (ed.), *Carlow history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 2008), p. 493.

⁵³ James Kelly, 'John Ponsonby', *DIB*, Sub nomine.

relief, he supported parliamentary reform.⁵⁴ Despite his proprietorship of the borough constituency, he chose the more prestigious option and sat for the county Carlow constituency from 1769 to 1800.⁵⁵ This allowed him to sell one or both of the borough seats while still retaining a parliamentary presence.⁵⁶ The members returned for Carlow borough between 1761 and 1800 are given in Table 1.4. In the borough of Carlow, Burton ensured that members returned before 1795 were sympathetic to the Ponsonby interest. They included Sir John Browne (1783-89), Charles Desvaux (1783-90)⁵⁷, Augustus Cavendish Bradshaw (1790-96)⁵⁸ and John Ormsby Vandeleur (1790-97).⁵⁹ In 1795, Carlow borough was sold by Burton for a reputed £15,000 to Charles William Bury, Baron Tullamore who was created Earl of Charleville on 16 February 1806.⁶⁰ Bury used the borough for the advancement of family members and government supporters as shown by his choice of his half-brother Henry Sadlier Prittie⁶¹ and Colonel John Wolfe as representatives in 1798.⁶² Although a borough seat guaranteed entry to parliament, Burton was confident that his electoral popularity in the wider and more open county constituency would provide him with a more prestigious parliamentary seat for the county. In parliament, Burton voted consistently with the opposition.⁶³

The second Carlow borough, Old Leighlin, which was known as the ‘bishop’s borough’, was under the control of the Bishop of Ferns and Leighlin who nominated both of its members.⁶⁴ In practice these nominations were generally made with the approval of Dublin Castle, but they did on occasion include family members of the nominating prelate. For example, Arthur Acheson who sat for Old Leighlin from 1783 to 1791 was a nephew by marriage to Walter Cope who was Church of Ireland bishop of Ferns and Leighlin.⁶⁵ By the second half of the eighteenth century, the Irish administration played a larger part, with several high-profile politicians and members of the Dublin Castle administration representing what had become a ‘safe’ government-controlled borough.⁶⁶

⁵⁴ James Quinn, ‘William Henry Burton’, *DIB*, Sub nomine.

⁵⁵ Robert Malcolmson, *The Carlow parliamentary roll: comprising lists of the knights of the shire and members for the borough of Carlow* (Dublin, 1872), p. 21.

⁵⁶ Johnston, *Great Britain & Ireland, 1760-1800*, p. 219.

⁵⁷ Des Voeux was a wealthy merchant of Huguenot extraction who purchased one of the seats in Carlow borough from William Burton in 1783. He was considered ‘independent’ but consistently supported the government, see Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, iv, p. 53.

⁵⁸ Cavendish Bradshaw was an exception. Like his father Sir Henry Cavendish, he was a consistent supporter of the government, see *ibid*, iii, p. 402..

⁵⁹ Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, vi, p. 462.

⁶⁰ *CMP*, 18 Jan. 1832; *Debrett’s peerage of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1839), p. 596.

⁶¹ McCartney, ‘Parliamentary representation and electoral politics in Carlow’, p. 493.

⁶² Wolfe was considered to be a Kildare Loyalist and a supporter of government, see Liam Chambers, *Politics and Rebellion in County Kildare 1790-1803*, (MA Thesis, NUIM, 1996), p. 199.

⁶³ Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish Parliament 1692-1800*, p. 330.

⁶⁴ This was alluded to in a very uncomplimentary profile of Sir John Blaquiery, who represented Old Leighlin between 1773 and 1783, *DEP*, 6 Jan 1780.

⁶⁵ William Courthope (ed), *Debrett’s complete peerage of the United Kingdom, Great Britain and Ireland*, (London, 1839), p. 592.

⁶⁶ McCartney, ‘Parliamentary representation and electoral politics in Carlow’, p. 489.

Among the Castle-nominated members were Edward Cooke the under-secretary (1790 to 1800)⁶⁷, Patrick Duigenan⁶⁸ (the vocal advocate of ‘Protestant ascendancy’ 1791 to 1797) and Sir Boyle Roche (1797 to 1800).⁶⁹ Roche was identified as one who ‘strenuously contends for every measure that administration chooses to support’ and less flatteringly as ‘a confirmed lackey of the Castle’.⁷⁰ Deference to the wishes of government were the hallmark of those nominated for Old Leighlin borough. This was clearly demonstrated during the election of 1783 when Bishop Cope nominated Lord Luttrell and Arthur Acheson⁷¹ with the agreement of Dublin Castle.⁷² As a

Table 1.5: Old Leighlin Borough Members Elected 1761-1800	
Year of Election	Members
1761	Francis Andrew John Bourke
1768	Sir Fitzgerald Alymer Thomas Monck (replaced by John Blaquiere on death of Monck)
1776	Sir John Blaquiere Robert Jephson
1783	Lord Luttrell (replaced by Sir Edward Leslie) Arthur Acheson
1790	Arthur Acheson (replaced by Patrick Duigenan) Edward Cooke
1797	Henry Sadler Prittie Sir Boyle Roche
Sources: Malcolmson, <i>Carlow Parliamentary Roll; Return of the names of every member returned to serve in each parliament from the year 1696 up to the present time</i> , HC, 1878 [cd 69-I]; Johnston-Liik, <i>HIP</i>	

⁶⁷ Undersecretary Cooke displayed a flair for managing public opinion on behalf of the Dublin Castle administration through the print media. During his parliamentary career, he carried the reputation of being a ‘castle *apparatchik*’, see James Kelly, ‘Edward Cooke’, *DIB*, Sub nominee.

⁶⁸ Duigenan was a staunch supporter of the government, see P.M. Geoghegan, ‘Patrick Duigenan’, *DIB*, Sub nominee.

⁶⁹ It was said of Boyle Roche that while a poor orator, ‘he supports the ministry in all their measures’, see McDougall, *Irish political characters*, p. 175.

⁷⁰ McCartney, ‘Parliamentary representation and electoral politics in Carlow’, p. 491.

⁷¹ Hobart to Acheson, 30 Jul 1783, (PRONI D1606/1/1/104).

⁷² The bishops overseeing the other ‘Bishop’s Boroughs’ of Clogher, Irishtown and Armagh rejected government requests and nominated members independently, Bishop Cope alone complied, see Edward Porritt and Annie Porritt, *The unreformed House of Commons: parliamentary representation before 1832* (3 vols, Cambridge, 1903), p. 310 and Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, ii, p. 189.

result, the representatives for the borough of Old Leighlin had little connection with, and little impact politically or socially on Carlow.

As a small county, Carlow possessed a compact electorate in the later eighteenth-century. Table 1.6 shows the voterate in both county and borough between 1767 and 1802. As the borough

Table 1.6: Voterate in Carlow County and Borough, 1767 -1802		
Year	County	Borough
1767	557	13
1776	646	13
1783	598	13
1797	2000	13
1802	933	13

Sources: Malcolmson, *The Carlow parliamentary roll; Return of the names of every member returned to serve in each parliament from the year 1696 up to the present time* HC, 1878 [cd 69-I]; Johnston-Liik, *HIP*; National Library, P7142, *List of voters in county Carlow (c1767)*.

was ‘closed’, the number of electors remained static at thirteen. In the county, the numbers who voted was relatively steady at between 550 and 600 until the extension of the franchise to Catholic freeholders in 1793. On the surface, consistency was the hallmark of parliamentary representation in county Carlow in the latter half of the eighteenth-century. As Appendix A illustrates, of the fifteen individuals who sat for county Carlow between 1761 and 1800, the Butler and extended Burton families accounted for eleven members between them. Such dominance in representation was not unusual. A similar situation existed in neighbouring county Kilkenny where twelve of the sixteen representatives for the county in the same period were drawn from the Ponsonby and Butler families.⁷³ Even with the expanded electorate after 1793, the established ‘interests’ managed to maintain their electoral ascendancy. In keeping with the uniform composition of the Protestant elite, county elections reflected local power and prestige rather than fundamental political differences. As a result, the outcome was often the result of negotiation between local

⁷³ George Dames Burtchaell, *Genealogical memoirs of the members of parliament for the county and city of Kilkenny from the earliest record to the present time* (Dublin, 1888), pp 152–197.

coalitions.⁷⁴ This was particularly commonplace in the late eighteenth-century, prompting Edward Wakefield to observe that ‘many counties are overruled in their choice by the will of some great territorial possessor; and there are few in which a coalition of two or three of the principal landowners will not settle the election according to their own views’.⁷⁵ However continuity in Carlow should not be taken as complacency: radical and reforming ideas impacted on electoral politics and its operation in the second half of the eighteenth century is the focus of the next chapter.

⁷⁴ Whyte, ‘Landlord Influence’, p. 744.

⁷⁵ Edward Wakefield, *An account of Ireland, statistical and political* (2 vols, London, 1780), ii, p. 302.

Chapter 2: Electoral Politics in County Carlow 1760-1800

Introduction

The reign of George II (1727-60) has been characterised as an era of tranquillity in Irish politics. The absence of major issues, a judicious distribution of power and patronage by government and a general acceptance of the constitutional pattern contributed to the calm.¹ However, this tranquillity was disturbed in the final decade of George II's reign. While the rejection of a surplus money bill in 1753 had more to do with factional politics rather than fiscal policy, it encouraged the British government to take a more interventionalist role in political affairs in Dublin.² Other sources of angst included the forcing of an inquiry into a programme of barrack building in 1752 which provided another demonstration of the increasingly independent and awkward attitude of the Irish parliament.³ There were also demonstrations of political disaffection among the public such as the anti-union riot of December 1759 which has been characterised as 'a forceful demonstration of the existence at a popular level of what has been termed 'Protestant' or 'Anglo-Irish' or 'colonial nationalism'.⁴ The accession to the throne in 1760 of a new and young king and the prospect of the first general election in thirty-three years incentivised a renewed and a more consistent and widespread interest in politics.

I. Electoral Politics in the 1760s

The general election of 1761 saw the emergence of the eccentric Beauchamp Bagenal (1735-1802) as a political contender in county Carlow. During his lifetime, Bagenal attained notoriety as a high-profile duellist, an absentee MP and an adventurer.⁵ He was regarded as a 'singular' character and a zealous supporter of Catholic claims.⁶ Having completed a 'hugely expensive and riotous' grand tour, he inherited a large estate with lands in Carlow and Armagh that yielded the substantial rent roll of £6,681 in 1760.⁷ From an early age, his unconventional behaviour was a

¹ R. B. McDowell, *Ireland in the age of imperialism and revolution, 1760-1801* (Oxford, 1979), p. 209.

² Jacqueline Hill, "'Allegories, Fictions, and Feigned Representations': decoding the Money Bill dispute, 1752-6" *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 21 (2006), p. 69; M.J. Powell, *Britain and Ireland in the eighteenth-century crisis of empire* (Basingstoke, 2003), p. 37.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 21

⁴ Declan O'Donovan, 'The money bill dispute of 1753' in Thomas Bartlett and David Hayton (eds), *Penal era and golden age, essays in Irish history, 1690-1800*, (Belfast, 1979), p. 68.

⁵ Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, iii, p. 122.

⁶ *The manuscripts and correspondence of James, first Earl of Charlemont* (2 vols, London, 1891), i, p. 65.

⁷ James Quinn, 'Bagenal, Beauchamp', *DIB*, Sub nomine.

cause of comment among the gentry class in Carlow. His marriage in 1758 at the age of twenty-three to a widow, Mrs Ryan, was considered scandalous in Carlow as William Cooke of Painstown makes clear. Writing to his relative the Earl of Kenmare, he remarked:

Mr. Bagnol's [sic] marriage to Mrs. Ryan makes no small noise in this country. He was in Dublin when he heard of Ryan's death and immediately came to the country for the widow, brought her up to town and married her, and upon their return hither introduced her publicly as Mrs. Bagnol. He is a most unhappy young man and I fear he had entirely ruined himself by this simple marriage. He seems to be taking all the pains he can to destroy himself and family. He has run out this year besides his income they say between twenty and thirty thousand pounds and I am persuaded a man upon three or four thousand pounds would have lived much handsomer and have made a better figure than he did.⁸

He was regarded as a 'wild' man and a lavish if overly gregarious host.⁹ He shocked Carlow society, frequently transgressing social norms and was not always welcomed by his fellow gentry at social gatherings.¹⁰ Even in his advanced years, he continued to flaunt social etiquette, writing cryptic love letters to Colonel Bruen's widow that could never be considered proper.¹¹ Despite his unconventional behaviour, he still proved to be politically influential in Carlow. Although Bagenal presented himself as a candidate in county Carlow in the 1761 general election, he did not force a poll.¹² It has been suggested that this was probably because he was under-age at that time and, to avoid scrutiny, he chose instead to sit for the closed borough of Enniscorthy where the guaranteed uncontested election would render his age unimportant.¹³ However, he was almost certainly of age and the reason for his avoidance of a contest in Carlow was probably a lack of electoral confidence.¹⁴

County Carlow returned two stalwarts from the political dynasties of Burton and Butler in the 1761 general election. This was the first time that Benjamin Burton was returned for county Carlow having represented the Ponsonby borough of Knocktopher, county Kilkenny from 1741 to 1760.¹⁵ Burton was closely connected to the 'Ponsonby' parliamentary interest through his marriage on 9 December 1734 to Anne Ponsonby, daughter of Brabazon, 1st Earl of Bessborough.¹⁶ Benjamin had replaced his uncle Robert, a professional soldier who had

⁸ MacLysaght (ed.), *The Kenmare manuscripts*, p. 69.

⁹ William J. O'Neill Daunt, *Ireland and her agitators* (Dublin, 1845), p. 11.

¹⁰ Mary Leadbetter recounts how a drunken Bagenal 'gatecrashed' a soiree in the home of Clayton Bayley in Gowran in 1782 and it was feared that Bayley would either have to drink all night or face a duel with the miscreant, see Mary Leadbetter, *The Leadbetter papers: the annals of Ballitore* (2 vols, London, 1862), p. 118.

¹¹ Bagenal to Bruen, 8 June 1800 (NLI, Bruen Papers, MS 29,774-10); the note is signed 'B.B.' and comprises a single line: 'There was never anything like you'.

¹² Ryan cites electoral records shown to him by Edward Butler, Sovereign of Carlow that confirm that Beauchamp Bagenal was an unsuccessful candidate in the 1761 election. This suggests that the election did not proceed to a poll, see Ryan, *Carlow*, p. 287.

¹³ Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, iii, p. 122.

¹⁴ Johnson-Liik gives his year of birth as 1741 but his headstone in Dunleacney Graveyard, Bagenalstown gives the earlier year of 1735.

¹⁵ Burtchaell, *Memoirs*, p. 138.

¹⁶ Bernard Burke, *A genealogical and heraldic history of the landed gentry of Ireland* (London, 1899), p. 58.

represented county Carlow following his uncontested return in 1727. Robert subsequently sat for the Burton-controlled Carlow borough from 1761 until his death.¹⁷ The manner in which members of the Burton family could effortlessly and without a contest interchange parliamentary seats in town and borough is an indication of the strength of the electoral ‘interest’ that they held. Although the Butlers of Garryhundon were at political loggerheads with the Burtons, their ‘interest’ was still strong enough in 1761 to see Thomas Butler returned alongside Burton. Butler was heir to Sir Richard Butler who represented county Carlow from 1729 until 1760. As well as possessing a commanding electoral interest, Thomas was wealthy in his own right even before he succeeded his father; his marriage in 1759 brought him a dowry of £7,000 to supplement his independent income of £1,000 per year.¹⁸ Later in his parliamentary career, his hostility to the Burtons and the Ponsonby interest earned favour with the government and was responsible for his nomination by the administration for the borough of Portarlinton in 1771.¹⁹

Notwithstanding local and personal rivalries, national issues were not absent in politics in Carlow. The ‘Patriot’ movement, a loose parliamentary grouping enamoured of the ‘liberty’ won at the Glorious Revolution in 1688 aspired to promote ‘political virtue, responsible parliamentary government, the economic betterment of the kingdom, and constitutional equality with Britain under the crown’.²⁰ One issue that came to the fore in the 1760s was that of the duration of parliaments as Ireland had no counterpart to the Septennial Bill of 1716 that limited parliaments in Westminster to seven years.²¹ A similar measure in Ireland was championed as a means of popularising parliamentary representation not least because it would encourage men who, for professional or personal reasons, were reluctant to make a potentially open ended commitment.²²

The death of Benjamin Burton on 1 October 1767 prompted a by-election in county Carlow.²³ In his election address Thomas Bunbury of Kill, county Carlow promised that as a landowner and long-time resident, he would exert himself ‘in support of the independent interest of this my native county’.²⁴ John Hyde, a son-in-law of the deceased Burton, insisted that he put himself forward at the behest of a meeting ‘of the many principal gentlemen of the county of Carlow’ held on 8 October.²⁵ That same gathering of gentlemen and freeholders also discussed

¹⁷ Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, ii, p. 325.

¹⁸ Lady Llandover Delany, *The autobiography and correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany* (3 vols, London, 1861), iii, p. 543.

¹⁹ M Bodkin, ‘Notes on the Irish parliament in 1773’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 48 (1942), p. 211.

²⁰ James Kelly, *Henry Flood: Patriots and politics in eighteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 1998), p. 69.

²¹ Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, i, p. 129.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 133.

²³ *BN*, 6 Oct. 1767.

²⁴ *FJ*, 6 Oct. 1776.

²⁵ *FJ*, 10 Oct. 1767.

the topical issue of the limitation of the duration of parliaments through the introduction of a septennial bill. The meeting agreed to publish an address to Thomas Butler, the remaining county representative, calling on him to ‘use all of the spirited endeavours in your power’ to have the measure implemented.²⁶ It is noteworthy that Beauchamp Bagenal, MP for Enniscorthy, and a supporter of the ‘Patriot’ cause, was an attendee of the meeting and a signatory to the address, thus indicating his support for the Burton interest through his support for Hyde.²⁷ Butler replied that although he did not see the need for such a measure, he would support it in order to comply with the wishes of his constituents.²⁸ The meeting’s support for Hyde as a candidacy was contingent on his support for the reform measure. Carlow was not unique in so doing: the freeholders of Antrim, Donegal, Down, Dublin, Galway, Kilkenny, Mayo and Wexford all published similar addresses at the time.²⁹ This indicates that freeholders in county Carlow were responsive to the political pre-occupations that prevailed in other parts of the country and that they were quite prepared to press their views on their representatives.

The 1767 by-election was not without incident. Bunbury was enterprising in offering transport and accommodation for his supporters to attend the poll in Carlow.³⁰ There were more than 100 Dublin-based electors at that time.³¹ On 31 October 1767, he felt obliged to publish a notice denying ‘industriously propagated’ rumours that he would not contest the poll maintaining his failure to canvass some voters was the result of ‘mistake, or miscarriage of letters’.³² But he was bluffing; soon afterwards, sensing that he didn’t have sufficient support, he resigned from the contest allowing Hyde to be returned.³³ Following his election an address signed by his constituents reminded Hyde that they felt a bill limiting the duration of parliaments would strengthen the ‘Protestant interest’. Hyde was quick to acknowledge their wishes and assure them of his support for the measure.³⁴ The 1767 election demonstrated that there were no differences among the gentry in Carlow in their commitment to Patriot sentiment and particularly in their support for parliamentary reform. The strength of this feeling influenced Butler’s agreement to support reform counter to his own inclinations. Hyde, notwithstanding his connection to the government-supporting Ponsonby interest managed to attract Patriot support, notably that of Bagenal, on foot of promises to support reform. County Carlow mirrored national political trends where politicians of conservative hue experienced increasing popular pressure during the 1760s.

²⁶ *FJ*, 13 Oct. 1767, *FLJ*, 14 Oct 1767.

²⁷ *FJ*, 27 Oct. 1767.

²⁸ *FLJ*, 31 Oct. 1767.

²⁹ For Antrim see *BNL*, 20 Oct 1767, Donegal and Galway in *FDJ*, 12 Sept. 1767, Dublin in *FJ* 13 Oct. 1767 and Kilkenny and Wexford in *FJ*, 15 Sept. 1767.

³⁰ *FJ*, 27 Oct. 1767.

³¹ At least 100 Dublin-based franchise holders can be identified from a contemporary listing of voters, see List of Voters in county Carlow, [c. 1767], (NLI, P7142)

³² *FJ*, 31 Oct. 1767.

³³ *FJ*, 3 Nov. 1767.

³⁴ *FLJ*, 11 Nov. 1767.

The pressure for reform contributed to the introduction in 1768 of an Octennial Act, limiting parliaments to eight rather than the anticipated seven years.³⁵ It prompted an immediate general election.³⁶ Beauchamp Bagenal and William Burton, both of whom commanded substantial electoral interests, formed an alliance based on opposition to government. Bagenal now choosing to contest county Carlow and espousing the Patriot cause, found a natural ally in Burton whose close family connection to the Ponsonby interest then placed him firmly in the anti-government fold. Their co-operation and their confidence can be seen from their brief election address which did not go beyond asking for support. Thomas Butler by comparison published an address in which he stressed that he, unlike others, had the real interest of county Carlow at heart.³⁷ It was to no avail. Within days Butler realised that his chances of success in Carlow were slim and, recognising that the coalition of Burton and Bagenal was a 'powerful junction' that made his return impossible, he declined the expense and trouble of a poll.³⁸ Having established his pro-government credentials, the Castle engineered Butler's return for the borough of Portarlinton in 1771 for which he sat until his death in 1772.³⁹ While sitting for Portarlinton, Butler did not abandon hope of representing county Carlow again but he realised that he would need government support in retaking the seat. Displaying a mix of nepotism and political nous in the last year of his life, he wrote to Marquis Townshend, the Lord Lieutenant suggesting that his brother-in-law Dean Bayly should be appointed as Dean of Old Leighlin. Butler felt that Bayly would serve to dilute the anti-government influence of the Duke of Leinster in Carlow.⁴⁰ In 1768 however, the return of Bagenal and Burton was a popular outcome with bonfires, fireworks and illuminations on the night of the election.⁴¹

Carlow was not immune from agrarian unrest in the 1770s, but these disturbances did not have an electoral impact and were easily quelled by concerted action by local magistrates.⁴² This was with the active support of the Catholic Bishop James O'Keefe who threatened excommunication on those who engaged in Whiteboy activity. This reflected the prelate's constant anxiety, and that of the Catholic leadership, to earn the goodwill of government in order to achieve the relaxation of social and political restrictions.⁴³ To this end, O'Keefe participated

³⁵ Kelly, *Henry Flood*, p. 126.

³⁶ Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, i, p. 133.

³⁷ *FLJ*, 9 July 1768.

³⁸ *FLJ*, 13 July 1768.

³⁹ Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, iii, p. 354.

⁴⁰ Butler to Townshend, 21 Jan 1772 (RCBL, Letters to George 4th Viscount Townshend, Ms. 20-101).

⁴¹ *FLJ*, 16 July 1768. Bagenal engineered a 'double return' and was also returned again for the borough of Enniscorthy. He opted to sit for County Carlow and the seat in Enniscorthy was filled by Sir Edward Newenham, see *JHCIRE*, xiv, p. 515, 571.

⁴² *FLJ*, 14 Oct. 1775.

⁴³ Michael Comerford, *Collections relating to the dioceses of Kildare and Leighlin* (2 vols, Dublin, 1883), i, p. 83.

in 1774 in the formulation of an oath of loyalty to the crown to be taken by Catholics.⁴⁴ O’Keefe encouraged Walter Kavanagh (then a Catholic) to set an example in taking the oath. O’Keefe and many of his clergy took the oath publicly on 4 December 1775.⁴⁵ This overt display of loyalty contributed to the sense of security among local gentry, diffused agrarian unrest as a political issue and allowed a focus on ‘Patriot’ politics.

II. The 1776 General Election and the Rise of The Volunteers

Beauchamp Bagenal did not contest the general election of 1776.⁴⁶ By then he had completed the first of several large land sales to David Latouche of Dublin. His finances were in disarray and the financial burden of a contested election would have been hard for him to bear. Additionally he may not have found parliamentary life congenial. A parliamentary list of 1773, while acknowledging his dominant position in Carlow politics noted that ‘he never attends [and] likes amusements more than business’.⁴⁷ Indeed his most high-profile contribution to parliamentary affairs during his first term as a member for county Carlow was a duel with Chief Secretary John Blaquiere in February 1773.⁴⁸

In the 1776 election, Burton was returned for the county with William Bunbury notwithstanding a challenge from William Paul Warren of Grangebegg, county Carlow whose grandfather was elected for Carlow borough in 1668.⁴⁹ Warren and Beauchamp Bagenal were both members of the reform minded Dublin Constitution Club, Bagenal having joined on 9 December 1767 and Warren on 23 December 1772.⁵⁰ Warren affirmed his ‘Patriot’ credentials as a member of the jury that acquitted the ‘Hearts of Steel’ when they were controversially tried in Dublin for offences committed in county Down in a change in procedure that was viewed as an assault on liberty.⁵¹ Warren was also recommended to the Earl of Meath as a suitable member for Dublin rather than Luke Gardiner in the byelection in County Dublin in 1773 being described as one whose ‘Patriotism is in its purity, and he would support it with his blood’.⁵²

⁴⁴ Keefe has been credited with formulating ‘the policy of limited allegiance to, and co-operation with the government’, see Peadar MacSuibhne, ‘More thoughts on Bishop Keefe and his clergy’ *The Carlovian, the Carlow college magazine* (1951), p. 76.

⁴⁵ *FLJ*, 6 Dec. 1775.

⁴⁶ William Hunt (ed.), *The Irish parliament 1775* (Dublin, 1907), p. 3.

⁴⁷ Bodkin, ‘Notes’, p. 178.

⁴⁸ Bagenal was noted as a ‘keen duellist’ and challenged John Blaquiere in the Phoenix Park on 5 February 1773. Both survived and according to contemporary reports parted as ‘good friends’, see James Kelly, *That damn’d thing called honour: duelling in Ireland, 1570-1860* (Cork, 1995), p. 111.

⁴⁹ Thomas Warren, *A history and genealogy of the Warren family* (Henley, 1982), p. 270. Warren’s ancestors included enthusiastic Jacobites and loyal Protestants.

⁵⁰ *The members of the Constitution Club 1774* (Dublin, 1774).

⁵¹ For a summary of the incident, see Eoin Magennis, ‘The Hearts of Steel, the Baronet and the Minister: a killing in Gilford in 1772 and its aftermath’ *Seanchas Ardmhacha*, 24:2 (2013), pp 98–112. For a list of the jury members, see *FLJ*, 22 Aug 1772.

⁵² *HJ*, 10 Mar. 1773.

Although Warren acknowledged to the electorate that he was of advanced years and possessed of little political experience, he still managed to garner a respectable 183 votes against Bunbury's 188 and Burton's 245 after three days of polling.⁵³ Eventually Burton and Bunbury prevailed with 417 and 338 votes respectively with Warren in third place with 246.⁵⁴ Warren subsequently lodged a petition against the return in which he claimed intimidation of voters had taken place, that some of those who voted for Burton and Bunbury were unqualified and that the successful candidates had been guilty of paying for the 'entertainment of [such] voters'.⁵⁵ The petition also mentioned that Warren had attracted 146 single or 'plumper' votes, which occurred when electors used only one of the two votes available to them in order to 'satisfy a local interest or community'.⁵⁶ The fact that Warren did not have a high profile in Carlow, but yet managed to attract a large number of single voters suggests that he had the backing of Beauchamp Bagenal who, although he did not put himself forward, possessed a considerable electoral 'interest' in the county. This would account for the high number of 'plumper' votes. There were insufficient grounds to overturn the return and Bunbury took the seat. At any event, William Bunbury did not represent the county for long; he was killed in a fall from his horse in Leighlinbridge on 18 April 1778.⁵⁷ With perhaps unseemly haste, Beauchamp Bagenal put himself forward the following day as a candidate for the vacancy.⁵⁸ He was returned without a contest on 23 May 1778.⁵⁹

The active Volunteer movement in the county in the 1770s and 1780s was a visible manifestation of increasing political awareness among the middling sort in county Carlow. The Volunteers flourished initially as a defensive force, intended to fill the vacuum left by regiments that had been dispatched to the American wars. The movement fitted into the mould of the strong tradition of Protestant self-defence while also providing an important 'associational' opportunity within a structured organisation.⁶⁰ Indeed their engagement in policing was consistent with their self-perception as 'the epitome of the Whig ideal of the citizen soldier'.⁶¹ As they formed, many Volunteer corps participated in public reviews as well as playing an active role in maintaining law and order.⁶² Borris Volunteers engaged in suppressing Whiteboy activity in the south of the county in November 1779 and local Volunteers prevented the escape of several prisoners from

⁵³ *HJ*, 17 May 1776; *SNL*, 17 May 1776; *HJ*, 24 May 1776.

⁵⁴ *FLJ*, 25 May 1776.

⁵⁵ *JHCIRE*, xviii, p. 34, Ryan, *Carlow*, p. 299.

⁵⁶ Philip Salmon, "Plumping contests": the impact of by-elections on English voting behaviour, 1790-1868" in *By-elections in British politics, 1832-1924* (Woodbridge, 2013), p. 23.

⁵⁷ Malcolmson, *Carlow Parliamentary Roll*, p. 22.

⁵⁸ Bagenal's electoral address is dated 19 April 1778, see *FLJ*, 22 Apr 1778.

⁵⁹ Malcolmson, *Carlow Parliamentary Roll*, p. 24.

⁶⁰ Padhraig Higgins, *A Nation of Politicians: Gender, Patriotism, and Political Culture in Late Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Madison, 2010), p. 130.

⁶¹ James Kelly, "Era of liberty": the politics of civil and political rights in eighteenth-century Ireland' in Jack P. Greene (ed), *Exclusionary empire: English liberty overseas, 1600-1900*, (Cambridge, 2010), p. 99.

⁶² M.J. Powell, 'Civil society, c. 1700-c1800' in Kelly (ed), *The Cambridge history of Ireland, Vol 3*, p. 482.

Carlow Gaol in December 1779.⁶³ Several corps attended a well-received review in Carlow in January 1780 and in May 1781, with one thousand men under arms paraded in the county review.⁶⁴ However, as the threat of invasion receded, the Volunteers turned their attention to constitutional and commercial matters, and as a manifestation of the ‘convergence of popular and elite politics’ they became the visible representation of the ‘Patriot’ movement and the vehicle for reform. By August 1781, Colonel Charles Burton was being lauded by Volunteers as their ‘worthy commander in chief’ and praised for his ‘dedication to the Volunteer cause’ that encompassed the protection of ‘the safety and liberty’ of the country.⁶⁵

The Volunteer cause was at its strongest in 1782 following the passing of a series of resolutions calling for constitutional reform and proposing concessions to Catholics at the delegate assembly of Ulster Volunteers held in Dungannon in February. Despite less than half of the total number of active corps in Ulster attending,⁶⁶ numerous public meetings in the weeks following served to galvanise support for legislative independence.⁶⁷ The Carlow Association met at the County Courthouse in Carlow on 17 March and passed resolutions approving those passed at the Dungannon convention and calling for a general meeting of Carlow Volunteers to be held on 31 March 1782.⁶⁸ The meeting which was chaired by Colonel Charles Burton approved the resolutions of the Dungannon convention and also those passed at a meeting of Connaught Volunteers held at Ballinasloe on 15 March 1782. The meeting also declared that Carlow volunteers ‘never will support at a future election any candidate in this, or any county, who shall in parliament in the smallest degree oppose this universal sense of the nation’. These views were echoed by the Carlow Grand Jury at the Lent Assizes in 1782.⁶⁹ While Carlow was not unique in publishing notices of this kind, the publication demonstrates that political opinion in Carlow then was strongly supportive of the Patriot stance and that both Volunteers and the Grand Jury closely followed political developments on the national stage.⁷⁰ The Volunteer movement was by now indistinguishable from the Patriot interest in parliament following the concession of ‘Legislative Independence’ in May 1782 and Henry Grattan was widely regarded as ‘the hero of the hour’.⁷¹ On the 27 May, Beauchamp Bagenal made one of his very rare parliamentary contributions when he proposed the formation of a committee to consider what sum should be voted to Grattan so

⁶³ *DEP*, 16 Nov. 1779; *SNL*, 10 Dec. 1779.

⁶⁴ *SNL*, 18 Jan. 1780.

⁶⁵ *DEP*, 17 Sept. 1781.

⁶⁶ James Kelly, ‘The politics of volunteering, 1778-93’, *The Irish Sword*, 22:88 (2000), p. 147.

⁶⁷ James Kelly, *Prelude to union: Anglo-Irish politics in the 1780s* (Cork, 1992), p. 32.

⁶⁸ C.H. Wilson, *A compleat collection of the resolutions of the Volunteers, Grand Juries & c. of Ireland which followed the celebrated resolves of the first Dungannon diet* (Dublin, 1782), p. 70.

⁶⁹ *SNL*, 16 Apr. 1782.

⁷⁰ Volunteers Corps that published notices supporting the Dungannon resolutions included those of Co. Meath on 21 Mar 1782 (*DJ*, 23 Mar. 1782), 28 Corps from Cork who met on 7 April 1782 (*FLJ*, 13 Apr. 1782). Grand Juries that published notices of support included Dublin City & County Grand Jury (see *SNL*, 11 Apr. 1782, Wicklow (*DJ*, 23 Mar. 1782) and Queen’s Co, (*FLJ*, 20 Apr. 1782).

⁷¹ James Kelly, *Henry Grattan* (Dublin, 1993), p. 18.

that ‘men may well record him amongst the most propitious interpositions of heaven’.⁷² A payment of £50,000 was duly authorised, which served to both free Grattan from financial worry and to demonstrate the newly won independence of the Irish parliament.⁷³ The strength of the Volunteer movement in Carlow was further underlined when, despite very wet weather, a provincial review of Leinster Volunteers received a warm welcome in the county on 12 August 1782.⁷⁴

Local demonstrations on national issues continued as illustrated by the opposition in Carlow to the establishment of fencible regiments in what was described as an ‘ill-conceived attempt to replace the Volunteers with provincial regiments of fencibles’.⁷⁵ This was part of an effort to suppress the political activities of the Volunteers as the new regiments were to be under official control. While this initiative prompted some defections from the Volunteer movement, it also strengthened the resolve of those who remained.⁷⁶ This attachment and continuing commitment was evinced by the County Carlow Infantry Legion which met in Hacketstown on 10 October 1782 and declared that the Volunteers were quite capable of defending the country, that fencibles would be little more than mercenaries and that government attempts to bypass the Irish parliament were dangerous. The meeting also resolved to do all they could to prevent the new units of fencibles being raised.⁷⁷ The freeholders of the county convened at a meeting in Carlow on 24 October 1782 when they expressed confidence in the Volunteers’ ability to defend the country while describing the proposed fencibles as ‘a useless burden to the state’. They also equated the raising of fencible regiments with ‘the destruction of the liberties of this kingdom’. The meeting asked Richard Mercer, the sheriff, to relay their feelings to the two MPs for the county. Both Bagenal and Burton replied that they would most ‘most willingly’ oppose the introduction of the new regiments.⁷⁸ These meetings underline the depth of local support for the volunteer and Patriot agenda at this moment.

Following the achievement of ‘Legislative Independence’, the Volunteers turned their attention to the linked issues of parliamentary reform and the extension of the electoral franchise to Catholics.⁷⁹ The controversial element of Catholic relief contained in the Dungannon resolutions led to vague ‘professions of ‘liberality’’ becoming a feature of Patriot propaganda and

⁷² *HM*, Dec. 1783, P. 661

⁷³ James Kelly, ‘The politics of Protestant ascendancy’ in Kelly (ed) *The Cambridge history of Ireland Vol 4* (Cambridge, 2018), iv, p. 68.

⁷⁴ *FJ*, 15 Aug. 1782.

⁷⁵ Kelly, ‘The politics of Protestant ascendancy’, p. 69.

⁷⁶ Kelly, ‘The politics of volunteering, 1778-93’, p. 150.

⁷⁷ *DEP*, 17 Oct. 1782.

⁷⁸ *DEP*, 31 Oct. 1782.

⁷⁹ David W. Miller, ‘Non-professional soldiery, c. 1600-1800’ in Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffrey (eds), *A military history of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 328.

led to the active recruitment of Catholics to the Volunteer ranks.⁸⁰ However Catholic relief was a divisive issue because of the thorny matter of extending the electoral franchise to Catholics. It was decided to defer any decision on this to a Grand National Convention of Volunteers to be held in Dublin in November 1783.⁸¹ In any case, before the Convention, there was the small matter of a general election to negotiate.

III. The General Election of 1783 and the Decline of The Volunteers

The parliamentary performance of Burton and Bagenal was not without critics in the press. Burton elicited more negative comment. He was criticised in March 1781 for his opposition to the tenantry bill, a measure that was intended to help tenants who held perpetual leases and had neglected to renew their contracts. He was characterised as one who ignored ‘those very men to whom he was indebted for the honour of sitting in that house’ and rather than re-electing him, the county should ‘let him cringe and flatter to be brought in as the dependant by some of his powerful relations’.⁸² Although possessing a strong electoral interest in Carlow, this level of criticism was a concern for Burton who felt compelled to elicit support from Earl Fitzwilliam in the contest.⁸³ Despite the criticism directed his way, William Burton’s interest in the county was strong enough to see him returned without undue fuss.⁸⁴ There were early rumours that Bagenal would not contest the election and that he was grooming Edward Eustace, a sporting colleague from Tullow to take his place.⁸⁵ Despite being called on by a meeting of freeholders in Carlow on 24 October 1782 to go forward for election again, Bagenal persisted in his decision not to contest the election on the grounds that he saw no need to go forward as he knew of other ‘respectable’ candidates who would obey the instructions of their constituents.⁸⁶ One of these was William Burton, his former running mate. However, there was intense competition for the second seat between Richard Butler and John Rochfort and the influence of Bagenal was once again crucial in the outcome.

⁸⁰ Ian McBride, “‘The common name of Irishman’”: Protestantism and Patriotism in eighteenth-century Ireland’ in Ian McBride and Tony Claydon (eds), *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland, c.1650–c.1850* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 254.

⁸¹ James Kelly, ‘Parliamentary reform in Irish politics’ in David Dickson, Daire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (eds), *The United Irishmen: republicanism, radicalism and rebellion* (Dublin, 1993), p. 81.

⁸² *DEP*, 20 Mar. 1781.

⁸³ Burton was brother-in-law to Earl Fitzwilliam. Although most of the Fitzwilliam lands were in Wicklow, the Earl nonetheless wielded some electoral influence in Carlow with his tenants who held lands in Wicklow but who were also qualified to vote in Carlow. Burton wrote to him before the election thanking him for his expected support, see Burton to Fitzwilliam, 7 Dec. 1782, (SCA, Wentworth Woodhouse Muniments, WWM/F93/2).

⁸⁴ Burton was described as one who was ‘deaf to every shout of shame’ in an anonymous letter, *DEP*, 5 May 1782. The Sovereign of Carlow (and thus Burton as borough patron) were berated over the condition of Carlow Town with ‘immense quantities of ashes, straw, dung and entrails’ found lying in the streets, see *FJ*, 6 Mar 1783. Burton was classed as a ‘borough monger’ because of his ownership of Carlow borough, something that set him at loggerheads with the Volunteer’s aim of parliamentary reform, see anonymous letter from R---A, *FJ*, 5 April 1783.

⁸⁵ *DEP*, 20 Mar. 1781.

⁸⁶ *DEP*, 12 Nov. 1782.

Richard Butler of Ballintemple and Garryhundon was the eldest son of Sir Thomas Butler, a former MP for Carlow, who had just attained his majority when he stood for election in 1783.⁸⁷ The Butler family was most anxious to regain the representation of the county. As early as November 1780, almost three years before the election in a most unusual move, Lady Dorothea Butler published notices to the effect that she had become aware that some of the family's supporters had been canvassed in the expectation of a general election and requesting those supporters to 'hold themselves disengaged' until later.⁸⁸ In view of this, it was not surprising that Butler was early to put himself forward, or that in his election address dated 14 Feb 1783, he alluded to the Butler family's political pedigree and while acknowledging his inexperience, he hoped to make a worthy member.⁸⁹ Alongside the support from Bagenal, Butler was also active in seeking support from others and, no doubt on the suggestion of William Burton, he wrote to Earl Fitzwilliam in February 1782 seeking his support. Fitzwilliam however was not supportive and 'could give no positive answer'.⁹⁰

John Stanton Rochfort of Clogrennane was a local landowner, an active volunteer and was both nephew and close confidant of John Foster, the 'ministerial Patriot' who was chairman of the Commons ways and means committee and was soon to become chancellor of the Exchequer.⁹¹ Rochfort received early support from 'Brutus'⁹² who wrote to the *Hibernian Journal* from Carlow. Brutus recommended Rochfort to the Carlow Freeholders as one who would 'gain respect and advantage to their county'. He equated Rochfort with 'the cause of independence' and asked were 'there any so weighed down with the shackles of influence as not to exert themselves in his support?'.⁹³ He was later described as a very popular landlord who was held in universal esteem by 'a numerous tenantry and extensive surrounding neighbourhood'.⁹⁴ However, it was the association that Rochfort had with government that prompted Bagenal to oppose him and to use his influence to engineer the young Butler's return.⁹⁵

⁸⁷ Cokayne (ed.), *The complete baronetage*, i, p. 259.

⁸⁸ Lady Dorethea's public statement was unusual, but the factional nature of Irish politics often saw an overlap of the domestic and political spheres, see Mary O'Dowd, *A history of women in Ireland, 1500-1800* (Harlow, 2005), p. 43 Lady Doretha was the relict of Sir Thomas Butler and daughter to Edward Bayly, D.D. of Ardfert and Archdeacon of Dublin, see John Burke, *A general and heraldic dictionary of the peerage and baronetage of the British empire* (2 vols, 4th ed., London, 1832), p. i, 189. Following the death of Sir Thomas, Lady Butler together with her father acted as guardians to Sir Richard and seem to have been forceful in fulfilling their duties, see for example a notice published in *DEP*, 7 July 1781 warning tenants to pay rents only to the official land agent Edward Butler as no credit would be given for payments to any others. Her experience as guardian goes some way towards explaining her engagement in electoral matters; the notice was dated 10 Nov. 1780 first appeared in *DEP*, 16 Nov. 1780. It subsequently appeared on at least twenty-eight times between then and February 1781.

⁸⁹ *DEP*, 22 Feb. 1783.

⁹⁰ Burton had already been promised support by Fitzwilliam, see Burton to Fitzwilliam, 7 Dec 1782 (SCA, Wentworth Woodhouse Muniments, WWW-F-93-2), Butler to Fitzwilliam, 7 Feb 1783 (SCA, Wentworth Woodhouse Muniments, WWW-F-93-4).

⁹¹ A. P. W. Malcomson, *John Foster (1740-1828): the politics of improvement and prosperity* (Dublin, 2011), p. 138; Kelly, *Prelude to union*, p. 86.

⁹² Although 'Brutus' was a pseudonym favoured by Sir Edward Newenham, it is very unlikely that he was the author in this case. See James Kelly, *Sir Edward Newenham, MP, 1734-1814: defender of the Protestant constitution* (Dublin, 2004), pp 50-51.

⁹³ *HJ*, 13 April 1781.

⁹⁴ *HJ*, 14 May 1783.

⁹⁵ Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, ii, p. 187.

The election was contested over six days from 13 August 1783 and saw the return of Burton with 508 votes and a narrow victory for Butler with 351 votes to Rochfort's 337.⁹⁶ Sir Edward Newenham attended the election and exercised his franchise in favour of Burton and Butler having asked both if they would 'follow the instructions of their constituents and also support a bill for the more equal representation of the people in parliament'. Both his chosen candidates agreed that they would and Newenham ignored Rochfort's protestations that he would do likewise. Newenham was connected to both of the successful candidates. He was married to Grace Anna, daughter of Sir Charles Burton and second cousin to William Burton⁹⁷ and his own niece, Sarah Maria Newenham of Coolmore, county Cork married Butler.⁹⁸ Indeed, the tenuous family connection through marriage between the Burtons and the Butlers may have neutralised any inherited animosity that existed between the two families.

After the poll closed, Rochfort acknowledged the concerted effort to thwart his return that had taken place. In a post-election address, Rochfort praised those who had voted for him in the face of 'so powerful an union of interests' and promised to be ready in the future to 'stand forth in defence of, or to aid the independent interests of their county'.⁹⁹ This view was endorsed in a letter from 'An Independent Elector' that was published in the *Freeman's Journal* in September. The writer took Sir Edward Newenham to task for his support of the 'three leading powers' of the Bagenals, Burtons and Butlers in Carlow. It was suggested that Newenham, having acknowledged the 'independence' of all three candidates, supported Burton and Butler 'who had been set up by an oligarchy who had long taken it upon themselves to nominate its representatives, and were now exerting their utmost, and it is to be hoped, final efforts to crush the independent interest'. It also mentioned that Newenham had allowed familial relationships to obscure political principles.¹⁰⁰ This illustrates the parochial nature of Carlow politics in the later eighteenth century where in the absence of political difference, personal considerations came to the fore.

The enthusiasm for the Volunteer movement continued in Carlow after the election. At the consecration of the Catholic bishop Daniel Delany in Tullow on 7 September 1783, local Volunteers attended at the chapel 'to prevent interruption of the ceremony' in what was described as a manifestation of 'the indiscriminate liberality universally [that] enlightens our prospering nation'.¹⁰¹ Apart from public ceremony, politics continued to be central in the Volunteer

⁹⁶ Malcolmson, *Carlow Parliamentary Roll*, p. 25.

⁹⁷ Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, v, p. 353.

⁹⁸ Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, iii, p. 351.

⁹⁹ *FLJ*, 27 Aug. 1783.

¹⁰⁰ *FJ*, 6 Sept. 1783.

¹⁰¹ *FLJ*, 24 Sept. 1783.

movement with parliamentary reform as a central issue. Carlow was to the forefront in discussions on the matter. Samuel Carpenter was nominated in October 1783 to receive any material or proposals for parliamentary reform in advance of the Grand National Convention which was scheduled to convene in November.¹⁰² County Carlow volunteers selected Beauchamp Bagenal, John Rochfort, Sir Charles Burton, John Stewart and Rev Frederick Ryan as delegates to the convention.¹⁰³ The fact that five delegates were willing to attend attests to the strength of reform feeling in the county. At the Convention, Bagenal was appointed to represent Carlow on a sub-committee to form a plan for reform for presentation to the general committee.¹⁰⁴ He was not a good choice. During the deliberations of the sub-committee, Bagenal made few worthwhile or even coherent contributions and at one point proposed that rather than having a resolution published in the 'Dublin papers' only, it should be 'printed in all the papers in Europe'.¹⁰⁵ Bagenal's general behaviour attracted light-hearted comment when in a satirical piece listing new publications for 1784, the *Dublin Evening Post* suggested that he might produce a volume entitled 'Steady boys, steady! A drinking catch, with a chorus from the bucks of Clogh grenan [sic]'.¹⁰⁶ In any case, the efforts of all Carlow delegates were applauded by the Carlow Association which published a resolution agreed at a meeting held on 5 December lauding their delegates and proposing their thanks for their efforts.¹⁰⁷ Eventually a bill proposing parliamentary reform was agreed by the Convention and was presented to parliament by Henry Flood on 29 November 1783. The bill was roundly opposed by the majority of MPs as an attempt by the Volunteers to dictate to the legislature which would set a dangerous precedent. It was not even admitted for discussion.¹⁰⁸

The rejection of this bill was a major setback for reform and the Volunteers and has been characterised as an occasion when a 'radical segment of a divided public opinion proved incapable of forcing change from the native parliamentary elite supported by the state'.¹⁰⁹ This resistance in parliament was recognised in Carlow. A meeting of freeholders and gentlemen chaired by the High Sheriff William Vicars in Carlow on 24 January 1784 endorsed the plan of reform that had been proposed by the National Convention and agreed on a petition to be presented to parliament by Burton and Butler. The petition observed that parliament was dominated by those 'returned by a few interested individuals and cannot be said to speak the voice

¹⁰² *DEP*, 30 Oct. 1783. Carpenter was a local magistrate and was active in public life acting, for example, as secretary to a meeting of the governors of Carlow County Infirmary in July 1783 (see *DEP*, 1 July 1783) and as treasurer thereafter (see *SN*, 6 Oct. 1783).

¹⁰³ *DEP*, 13 Dec. 1783. Ryan of Dunleckney was later appointed as a Justice of the Peace for Carlow, see *SNL*, 15 Feb. 1783 and also *HJ*, 17 Feb. 1783.

¹⁰⁴ *The history of the proceedings and debates of the Volunteer delegates of Ireland on a subject of parliamentary reform* (Dublin, 1784), p. 41.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹⁰⁶ *DEP*, 30 Dec. 1783.

¹⁰⁷ *DEP*, 16 Dec. 1783.

¹⁰⁸ Kelly, *Henry Flood*, p. 360.

¹⁰⁹ Ultan Gillen, 'Ascendancy in Ireland, p. 65.

of the people' and called for change to 'remedy the grievances'.¹¹⁰ Neither Butler nor Burton was quick to respond to the request and this prompted the freeholders to express their surprise and to suggest that as there was nearly seven years of their parliamentary tenure remaining, the representatives would hardly use so long a term to 'treat their constituents with neglect'.¹¹¹ The representatives took note and on 1 March 1784, Richard Butler was among others to present a petition seeking a more equal parliamentary representation.¹¹²

There was a flurry of public meetings in the months following when Volunteers and freeholders made their opinions heard on political matters. The County Carlow Legion Volunteer Corps met in Tullow on 25 May 1784 when, after bemoaning the state of Irish manufacturing, they approved of the performance of Richard Butler.¹¹³ A meeting of freeholders chaired by Sir Charles Burton in Carlow courthouse on 17 Feb 1785 was convened to discuss the 'Issue of Attachments'.¹¹⁴ The proposed introduction of a riot act and the effectiveness of the Volunteers was also discussed. The resolutions agreed at the meeting described the Volunteers as 'a most useful institution and perfectly constitutional' and that they had 'long since' suppressed the White Boys, which no other force ever could'. It went on to note that the Volunteers 'obviated the expence [sic] of a Militia' and that together with the army they provided all the peacekeeping needed.¹¹⁵ Richard Butler replied promptly assuring freeholders of 'a strict attention and obedience to your instructions'.¹¹⁶ William Burton also thought it necessary to address the Carlow freeholders to reassure them, that, while he was willing to act in accordance with their wishes, he had never heard any opposition voiced to the establishment of a militia in place of the Volunteers.¹¹⁷ A year later, a meeting of freeholders in Carlow on 18 July 1785 called on the two MPs to oppose the adoption of the 'twenty' trade propositions that were seen as dangerous 'to our rising prosperity and trade'.¹¹⁸ This attitude reflected the continuing strength of Patriot opinion in the county and the swing in public opinion against the measures brought about by an active parliamentary opposition.¹¹⁹ Burton replied on the 21 July¹²⁰ and Butler on the 23 July¹²¹ with both promising to oppose the measures. A Carlow freeholder's meeting to consider the

¹¹⁰ *DEP*, 7 Feb. 1784.

¹¹¹ *DEP*, 14 Feb. 1784.

¹¹² *SNL*, 2 Mar. 1784.

¹¹³ *DEP*, 8 June 1784.

¹¹⁴ *SNL*, 14 Feb. 1785. An attachment was a legal device usually used against those who were in contempt of court. It was used by the attorney general in 1784 against some county High Sheriffs (Dublin, Roscommon and Leitrim) and some newspaper publishers involved in organising meetings or reporting the resolutions of meetings in connection with parliamentary reform. This practice was considered 'unconstitutional' by 'Patriot' politicians who viewed it as an assault on liberty and was vigorously opposed by Henry Flood and other 'Patriots', see Kelly, *Henry Flood*, p. 389; Kelly, *Edward Newenham*, p. 228.

¹¹⁵ *SNL*, 22 Feb. 1785, *Volunteers Journal*, 23 Feb. 1785.

¹¹⁶ *SNL*, 9 Mar. 1785.

¹¹⁷ *SNL*, 11 Mar. 1785.

¹¹⁸ *DEP*, 21 July 1785.

¹¹⁹ Kelly, *Prelude to union*, p. 168.

¹²⁰ *DEP*, 21 July 1785.

¹²¹ *DEP*, 26 July 1785.

adjournment of the bill concerning Orde's revised trade propositions in August was called for 20 October 1785.¹²² In anticipating the meeting, *Saunders's Newsletter* opined that Carlow freeholders would 'join in opinion with their virtuous fellow countrymen' and oppose the proposed measures.¹²³ The meeting duly declared Orde's bill 'repugnant to every principle of the constitutional rights, and commercial freedom on this kingdom' and called on the two MPs to oppose any measures that would further damage what was seen as a declining trade. Both Butler and Burton replied with assurances that they would oppose any measure that would injure the liberties and trade of the country.¹²⁴ Tithes and parliamentary reform were raised by Carlow freeholders at a meeting in October 1786¹²⁵ with Butler afterwards promising to pursue both issues.¹²⁶ These resolutions were republished in June 1787 following another meeting in Carlow on 25 May 1787 that resolved that tithe reform should accompany parliamentary reform.¹²⁷

Alongside political activity, support for ceremonial Volunteer activity in Carlow continued in the years following. There were still reviews, parades and field days such as those at Dunleckney on 14 June 1784, Pollerton on 12 July 1785¹²⁸ and the formation of two corps of Volunteer Cavalry in May 1786 under Beauchamp Bagenal and Sir Charles Burton. The institution of these new bodies was celebrated, and held up as 'proof that the Volunteer ardour will, as every virtuous Irishman wishes, be rendered perpetual'.¹²⁹ However, as the decade drew to a close and the prospect of government sanction grew, the Volunteer movement withdrew from politics which, as James Kelly observed, 'saved them from proscription but the price was increasing irrelevance'.¹³⁰ The decline in Volunteer support can be judged by the fall in attendance at the annual set-piece parades in Dublin; by 1787 there were just 250 participants, a dramatic reduction on the thousands that paraded earlier in the decade.¹³¹ Towards the end, in Carlow as well as other places, the continuing Volunteer parades and reviews in Carlow were more akin to a social rather than a political activity, as if the local gentry who had united in the cause were reluctant to abandon their newfound cohesion.¹³²

¹²² *DEP*, 11 Oct. 1785.

¹²³ *SNL*, 17 Oct. 1785.

¹²⁴ *DEP*, 1 Nov. 1785.

¹²⁵ *FLJ*, 4 Nov. 1786.

¹²⁶ *FLJ*, 12 Dec. 1786.

¹²⁷ *DEP*, 14 June 1787.

¹²⁸ *HJ*, 19 July 1784; *SNL*, 19 July 1785.

¹²⁹ *SNL*, 25 May 1786.

¹³⁰ Kelly, 'The politics of Protestant ascendancy, 1730-1790', p. 71.

¹³¹ James Kelly, 'The emergence of political parading' in T.G. Fraser (ed.), *The Irish parading tradition, following the drum* (Basingstoke, 2000), p. 20.

¹³² Padhraig Higgins, 'Bonfires, Illuminations, and Joy: Celebratory Street Politics and Uses of "the Nation" during the Volunteer Movement' *Éire-Ireland*, 42:3 (2007), p. 177.

IV. The 1790 Election

As the general election of 1790 approached, support for Patriot principles remained strong in Carlow as demonstrated by the support shown by the Grand Jury for the Whig Club. The Irish Whig Club was formed in the aftermath of the 'Regency Crisis' of 1788-9 when all elements of the opposition banded together in an attempt to further their legislative agenda.¹³³ The stated aims of the Irish Whig Club mirrored those of the 'Patriot' movement and included the preservation of the independence of the Irish parliament, curtailment of expenditure on pensions and the preservation of the link with Britain.¹³⁴ On 15 April 1790, a general meeting of Carlow freeholders passed a series of resolutions endorsing those published by the Whig Club and thanking 'the minority of the late House of Commons for their spirited exertions to redress those grievances mentioned in the said resolutions'.¹³⁵

The election of April 1790 produced a concerted challenge to the tenure of Richard Butler, one of the sitting representatives. Sir Charles Burton of Pollerton and Henry Bruen of Oak Park were selected as candidates at a freeholder's meeting chaired by Robert Cornwall in Carlow Courthouse on 19 January 1789.¹³⁶ It is telling that the meeting was chaired by Cornwall who was later to distinguish himself as an ardent loyalist and ultra-Protestant.¹³⁷ Bruen was the only serious challenger, as Sir Charles Burton later declined the nomination allowing his cousin William to go forward again.¹³⁸ Butler's parliamentary career was the subject of speculation long before the election with *Finn's Leinster Journal* surmising in August 1789 that William Burton and Bruen would almost certainly be returned for the county in the next election.¹³⁹ This drew a swift public response from Lady Dorothea Butler, her second intervention in the political career of her son. She expressed surprise at these reports as he had 'the most flattering prospect of having again the honor [sic] he now enjoys'.¹⁴⁰ Butler's character (he was described as 'a weak young man' in the Castle list of the Irish Parliament compiled in 1783) no doubt prompted his mother into action.¹⁴¹ Some six months before the election, Burton was considered 'safe' but Butler thought vulnerable in the face of competition from Colonel Bruen, who had both the support of some

¹³³ Towards the end of 1788, it was apparent that George III was insane. The Irish Parliament went against the Dublin Castle administration in sending a deputation to London to ask the Prince of Wales to assume the regency of Ireland. By the time they arrived, the king was recovering and the crisis ended. See ; James Kelly, 'Elite political clubs, 1770-1800' in James Kelly and M.J. Powell (eds), *Clubs and societies in eighteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 2010), p. 279.

¹³⁴ McDowell, *Ireland in the age of imperialism*, p. 343.

¹³⁵ *DEP*, 17 Apr. 1790.

¹³⁶ *FLJ*, 24 Jan. 1789.

¹³⁷ *DEP*, 24 Jan. 1789.

¹³⁸ Charles was a popular choice and his nomination could only serve to discourage Butler. The speed with which he stepped aside supports this view, see *FLJ*, 21 April 1790.

¹³⁹ *FLJ*, 12 Aug 1789.

¹⁴⁰ *FLJ*, 19 Aug. 1789.

¹⁴¹ Castle list of the Irish House of Commons noting members elected prior to the general election, 1783, (PRONI, T3035/1).

‘spirited and independent gentlemen’ including Beauchamp Bagenal and carried the advantage of ‘the possession of a great fortune’.¹⁴² Richard Butler was quick to respond, and just a few days later published an assurance to Carlow electors that he did not intend to decline a contest and fully intended to defend his seat.¹⁴³ These early exchanges some six months in advance of the election demonstrate the importance of a parliamentary seat for the Carlow gentry. They also serve as an indication that fissures were appearing in the bulwark of solidarity created during the Volunteer movement.

Henry Bruen was a strong candidate and an experienced MP.¹⁴⁴ Although a relatively recent arrival in Carlow, Bruen’s wealth meant he was well placed to challenge Butler.¹⁴⁵ Funding for Bruen was not an obstacle as can be seen by his preparedness to provide carriages to ferry supporters from Dublin to Carlow during the election.¹⁴⁶ Like William Burton, Bruen was a borough proprietor having purchased the borough of Duleek from the Ram family in 1789 for £10,000.¹⁴⁷ Bruen went on to purchase the borough of Taghmon, county Wexford from the Hore family in the early 1790s.¹⁴⁸ As was the case with Burton, Bruen sought the prestige associated with a county seat over the certainty of a borough. Support for Bruen remained strong as the election neared: he was characterised as practical rather than patrician. The *Dublin Evening Post* was particularly supportive describing him glowingly as one who ‘prefers the real interests of his native country to the glittering tinsel of high sounding titles or courtly favours’ and remarking on his status as a resident landlord amongst ‘his happy tenantry’.¹⁴⁹

It is also noteworthy that in their election addresses, Butler emphasised his family’s parliamentary pedigree while Bruen modestly claimed that he would not have gone forward had he not been ‘called upon to stand forward as a candidate’ and that he held the welfare of country and county at heart.¹⁵⁰ There was certainly a sense of the fresh, new and practical replacing the stale. In addition, Burton and Bruen clearly identified themselves as Whigs in a tactic utilised in several other counties by displaying signed copies of the printed resolutions of the Whig Club as they canvassed.¹⁵¹ Butler seems to have recognised Bruen’s ascendancy and, citing ‘a concurrence of unexpected circumstances’ decided not to contest the election.¹⁵² Bruen and

¹⁴² *DEP*, 20 Oct. 1789.

¹⁴³ *DEP*, 24 Oct. 1789.

¹⁴⁴ Bruen sat for the borough of Jamestown from 1783 to 1790, see *return of the names of every member returned to serve in each parliament from the year 1696*, p. 679.

¹⁴⁵ Duggan, ‘County Carlow politics and power’, p. 37.

¹⁴⁶ *DEP*, 20 Apr. 1790.

¹⁴⁷ Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, iii, p. 298.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 360.

¹⁴⁹ *DEP*, 6 Apr. 1790.

¹⁵⁰ *DEP*, 14 Apr. 1790.

¹⁵¹ *DEP*, 13 Apr. 1790.

¹⁵² *FLJ*, 24 Apr. 1790.

Burton were returned without contest.¹⁵³ This was not surprising given the strong support in the county for the Patriot-Whig cause and the fact that both candidates adopted the practice of presenting printed copies of the resolutions of the Whig club to freeholders during their canvass.¹⁵⁴ William Burton was one of the original members of the Irish Whig Club at its formation on 26 June 1789¹⁵⁵ and Henry Bruen had been admitted to membership on 17 September 1789.¹⁵⁶ Carlow freeholders voiced support for the Patriot interest before the election and Butler (and presumably his mother!), realising that a poll would be expensive and pointless.

V. The Catholic Relief Acts of 1792 and 1793

The granting of concessions to English Catholics in 1791 prompted the intensification of agitation for similar measures in Ireland.¹⁵⁷ These English concessions, together with French revolutionary notions of religious toleration served to re-energise the previously inactive Catholic Committee.¹⁵⁸ The more active committee was thought to contain a ‘violent’ element led by John Keogh and Edward Byrne and a ‘moderate’ element that included Archbishop John Troy and Lord Kenmare.¹⁵⁹ One favoured a more aggressive approach that demanded concessions while the more moderate element was more disposed to gentler means. Friction between the two factions saw a split in December 1791 with Lord Kenmare, the only great Catholic landowner, and sixty-nine others seceding from the committee.¹⁶⁰ Kenmare, supported by Archbishop Troy, was quick to publish an address of loyalty to the Lord Lieutenant in an effort to discredit the radicals on the committee.¹⁶¹ The address was mild-mannered in nature and stressed the loyalty of Catholic subjects noting that any further concessions to Catholics would be ‘at the wisdom and discretion of the legislature’.¹⁶² Troy was quick to approach Bishop Daniel Delany in Carlow to use his influence with ‘great’ Catholic Carlow landowners to have them sign the address. Delany replied that few of that ilk existed and that the only ‘great’ Carlow landowners were those who were portly rather than propertied.¹⁶³ In the event just two Carlow landowners, Walter and James Blackney, added their names to the address. Delany did not remain idle as shown by the forty-two names in addition to his own that were appended to an almost verbatim copy of the same

¹⁵³ Malcolmson, *Carlow parliamentary roll*, p. 26.

¹⁵⁴ *DEP*, 13 Apr. 1790.

¹⁵⁵ Henry Grattan, *The life and times of the Rt. Hon. Henry Grattan*, (5 Vols, London, 1841), iii, p. 432.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 433.

¹⁵⁷ Thomas Bartlett, *The fall and rise of the Irish nation: the Catholic question 1690 - 1830* (Dublin, 1992), p. 124.

¹⁵⁸ David Dickson, *New foundations: Ireland, 1660-1800* (2nd ed., Dublin, 2000), p. 150.

¹⁵⁹ Bartlett, *fall and rise*, p. 129.

¹⁶⁰ C. J. Woods, ‘The personnel of the Catholic Convention, 1792-3’, *Archivium Hibernicum*, 42 (2003), p. 26.

¹⁶¹ Eamon O’Flaherty, ‘The Catholic Convention and Anglo-Irish politics, 1791-3’, *Archivium Hibernicum*, 40 (1985), p. 19.

¹⁶² *FJ*, 29 Jan. 1792.

¹⁶³ Delany to Troy, 30 Dec. 1791, (DDA, Troy Collection, 27-9 – 1790-92, 1).

address published towards the end of January 1792.¹⁶⁴ Catholic opinion in Carlow was predominately conservative and Bishop Delany was willing to accede to Dr Troy in bringing this conservatism to the fore.

The Catholic Relief Bill introduced on 25 January 1792 resulted in some moderate reforms in the legal and educational spheres as well as removing the restrictions on intermarriage.¹⁶⁵ Catholics were not pleased either by the ‘niggardly nature of the concessions’, the lack of progress on the franchise and grand or petty jury membership or the high-handed and almost abusive manner adopted by the Irish parliament and Dublin Castle in dealing with Catholic petitions. It was thought better to bypass Dublin Castle in the presentation of future petitions.¹⁶⁶ As part of the rejuvenation process, a sub-committee was formed to consider the constitution of the committee and ways of broadening the membership to make the committee representative of all Catholics rather than the urban and aristocratic elites that had dominated it.¹⁶⁷ A circular letter, signed by Edward Byrne representing the Catholic Committee, outlined the plan for achieving this democratisation as well as a statement of some of the aims of the committee.¹⁶⁸ One of the more controversial aims was ‘to procure for Catholics the elective franchise and an equal participation in the benefits of trial by jury’.¹⁶⁹

The plan and the proposed Catholic Convention were not well received by conservatives and resulted in a flurry of resolutions from Grand Juries and freeholders condemning the contents of Byrne’s letter.¹⁷⁰ The magistrates and freeholders of county Carlow at a meeting on 17 September 1792 elected a committee of twenty-four which proposed resolutions to the effect that they would ‘resist by every means in our power any measure that shall directly or indirectly tend to give the Roman Catholics any influence over the legislative body’ mainly because this would herald the ‘end of Protestantism’. The committee members included Henry Bruen and William Burton, the two county MPs, several magistrates and members of the Grand Jury. It is interesting to note that Walter Kavanagh, the largest landholder in the county and by then a Protestant, was not present at this meeting.¹⁷¹ It is likely that his sympathies still rested with his former co-religionists.

¹⁶⁴ *FJ*, 31 Jan. 1792, *DEP*, 2 Feb. 1792.

¹⁶⁵ R.B. McDowell, ‘The age of the United Irishmen: reform and reaction, 1789-94’ in R.B. McDowell and W.E. Vaughan (eds), *A new history of Ireland Vol 4: eighteenth century Ireland, 1691-1800* (Oxford, 1986), p. 310.

¹⁶⁶ Bartlett, *fall and rise*, p. 148.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹⁶⁸ McDowell, ‘The age of the United Irishmen’, p. 315.

¹⁶⁹ *Vindication of the cause of the Catholics of Ireland* (Dublin, 1793), p. 31.

¹⁷⁰ McDowell, ‘The age of the United Irishmen’, p. 315.

¹⁷¹ *FJ*, 25 Sept. 1792.

The Catholic Convention, described as ‘pioneering as well as unprecedented’, met in Dublin in early December 1792.¹⁷² Carlow selected six delegates to the convention just three of whom were resident in Carlow. While non-resident delegates were not unusual, it dovetails with Bishop Delany’s observation that Carlow had few Catholics of ‘substance’.¹⁷³ The Convention selected a delegation to present a petition directly to George III in London, so bypassing the unsympathetic Dublin administration. This contributed to the passing of the Franchise Act (33 Geo. 3, c.21) in April 1793 which removed the majority of restrictions that existed to prevent the exercise by Catholics of civil, electoral and legal rights.¹⁷⁴ Catholics could now vote, sit on Grand and Petty Juries, carry arms, hold certain public offices and serve as officers in the army and navy.¹⁷⁵ The news was greeted enthusiastically in Carlow with almost 60 Catholics registering their freeholds at the Quarter Sessions on 11 April 1792 and celebrations afterwards in the town giving ‘glowing testimonials of satisfaction at the emancipation of three fourths of their countrymen’.¹⁷⁶

VI. The Carlow Militia and Yeomanry

The decline in the Volunteers in the late 1780s meant the kingdom did not possess a civilian force for national defence.¹⁷⁷ However, in the early 1790s, the conflict with revolutionary France with its mass mobilisation of a half million ‘citizen soldiers’ provoked a desperate need for extra British military manpower. This prompted the suppression of the Volunteers and the decision was taken to form an Irish militia, with a largely Catholic rank and file and a mainly Protestant officer corps.¹⁷⁸ As both a defence force and a feeder for the regular army, the militia was composed entirely of infantry and was raised on a county-by-county basis by both ballot (or draft) and by volunteering.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷² James Kelly, ‘Repealing the penal laws, 1760-95’ in Niamh Howlin and Kevin Costello (eds), *Law and religion in Ireland, 1700-1970* (Cham, 2021), p. 103.

¹⁷³ The three resident delegates were William Blackney of Dunleckney, William Finn of Carlow and James Cullen of Rathvilly. Walter Fitzgerald of Castledermot, Edward Butler of Dublin and Thomas Warren of Dublin were the non-resident delegates. See Woods, ‘The Personnel of the Catholic Convention, 1792-3’, pp 39–75.

¹⁷⁴ Kelly, ‘Repealing the penal laws, 1760-95’, p. 107.

¹⁷⁵ Bartlett, *fall and rise*, p. 165.

¹⁷⁶ *FLJ*, 20 Apr. 1793.

¹⁷⁷ Neal Garnham, *The militia in eighteenth-century Ireland: in defence of the Protestant interest* (Suffolk, 2012), p. 147.

¹⁷⁸ Ciarán McDonnell, ‘“Zeal and Patriotism”: Forging Identity in the Irish Militia, 1793-1802’, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 42:2 (2019), p. 211; Allan Blackstock, ‘The union and the military, 1801-c. 1830’ *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, x (2000), p. 331.

¹⁷⁹ Thomas Bartlett, *Ireland, a history* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 215.

The raising of the militia in Carlow, which was set at 244 under the Militia Act, was welcomed less than enthusiastically.¹⁸⁰ Henry Bruen was appointed as Colonel of the newly constituted Carlow Militia and as Governor of the county on 30 April 1793.¹⁸¹ It proved a challenging undertaking: he narrowly escaped injury when attacked on 12 May 1793 by a mob protesting against the possible separation of men balloted under the Militia Act from their families. The attack occurred on a Sunday morning when the mob, comprising thousands ‘principally belonging to the colliery and quarries’, was narrowly foiled in its attempt on Bruen by the ‘local gentlemen and more respectable inhabitants’ of Carlow town. He was later escorted to his home by the military.¹⁸² At a meeting of freeholders held in Carlow on 30 May 1793, it was noted that Bruen managed ‘at peril of his life’ to arrest one of the ‘ringleaders of the mob’ who appeared ‘not to be a resident of this district’. A subscription was raised to fund rewards for the apprehension of the other assailants and Bruen was lauded as ‘a man who had rendered great services to this County’.¹⁸³ Four men were later convicted of the assault and were sentenced to be whipped, pilloried and imprisoned.¹⁸⁴ Significantly, those who fomented the Militia unrest were not from the county. The protesters were from the colliery areas of county Kilkenny and Queen’s County and their attack on Bruen can be regarded as part of ongoing unrest among that group which was noted for its propensity for drunken riot and violence.¹⁸⁵ Bruen and the local gentry could be forgiven for not anticipating unrest. The populace of Carlow was altogether more peaceable and supportive of official action. This can be seen from the trouble-free ballot for the militia held in Carlow on 9 June 1793 when the quotas for all parishes were quickly filled and the parish of Myshall produced over two hundred candidates to fill a quota of just thirteen.¹⁸⁶ Of course the enthusiasm of Carlow recruits could have been heightened by the prospect of financial gain: an initial daily rate of 8d.¹⁸⁷ rose to 12d. after 1797.¹⁸⁸ An enlistment ‘bounty’ of a guinea was also payable¹⁸⁹ and members became eligible for pension after 16 years of service.¹⁹⁰ Service in the militia represented an attractive career opportunity for those without access to land or employment.

¹⁸⁰ The Militia Act was among a raft of bills passed alongside the Catholic Relief Act 1793 and was designed to ‘reassure and placate fearful Protestants’, see Gillian O’Brien, ‘Revolution, rebellion and the viceroyalty 1789-99’ in Peter Gray and Olwen Purdue (eds), *The Irish lord lieutenancy, c. 1541-1922* (Dublin, 2012), p. 118; *SNL*, 7 May 1793; *FLJ*, 8 May 1793

¹⁸¹ *SNL*, 26 Apr. 1793, *FLJ*, 1 May 1793

¹⁸² *SNL*, 14 May 1793.

¹⁸³ *FLJ*, 5 June 1793.

¹⁸⁴ *FJ*, 20 Aug. 1793.

¹⁸⁵ Coote noted the miner’s ‘unconquerable propensity to whiskey’ and their drunken mob violence, see Sir Charles Coote, *General view of the agriculture and manufactures of the Queen’s County with observations on the means of their improvement drawn up in the year 1801* (Dublin, 1801), p. 191.

¹⁸⁶ *SNL*, 14 June 1793.

¹⁸⁷ *FLJ*, 8 May 1793

¹⁸⁸ McDonnell, “‘Zeal and Patriotism’”, p. 214.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

¹⁹⁰ I.F. Nelson, *The Irish militia, 1793-1802: Ireland’s forgotten army* (Dublin, 2007), p. 51.

By August 1793, the Carlow Militia saw service in Nenagh, Limerick on 7 September 1793.¹⁹¹ The following years saw them in Kinsale in March 1793 when they confronted a group of ‘Defenders’ killing ten.¹⁹² Their actions in Ballinhassig on 10 March 1794 when they broke up an illegal meeting and killed three drew praise from the *Freeman’s Journal* which noted ‘nothing could exceed the steady conduct of the Carlow Militia on this occasion’.¹⁹³ They were transferred to Waterford in June 1795¹⁹⁴ and they were present in Blaris Camp, county Antrim on 16 May 1797 at the execution of four members of the Monaghan Militia who had taken the United Irishman’s oath.¹⁹⁵ At Blaris Camp, they were anxious to affirm their loyalty. They claimed that they had rebuffed seditious advances from ‘artful and designing men’ who had attempted ‘by false statements, to cause discontent among the soldiery, and warp them from their allegiance’. They also resolved to contribute a portion of their pay to fund rewards for those who uncovered subversives in the ranks of the militia.¹⁹⁶ In another act of visible loyalty in November 1797, the men of the regiment donated a day’s pay to a fund to support the widows and orphans of those killed in the British naval victory over the Dutch in the Battle of Camperdown that took place on 11 October 1797. This was greeted with ‘singular satisfaction’ by the officers of the regiment.¹⁹⁷

The loyalty of the Carlow Militia was a reflection of the loyalty of the county in general where it was considered that ‘nine-tenths of the inhabitants are firmly and zealously attached to the King and Constitution’.¹⁹⁸ Early in 1798, the rank and file of the militia felt moved to express again their loyalty to their officers and their disgust at rumours in circulation casting doubt on this fidelity. They also volunteered to serve in England if required. These sentiments were accepted and acknowledged by the Colonel and officers of the regiment who referred to the rumours as ‘unfounded calumnies’.¹⁹⁹ Shortly afterwards, on the eve of insurrection of 1798, an individual, one John McIntyre, was acquitted at Down Assizes held on 10 April 1798 of trying to swear Carlow militiamen into the United Irishmen in November 1797. It was mentioned during the trial that the United Irishmen had not managed to infiltrate the Carlow regiment as they had managed to do in other militia regiments.²⁰⁰ The Carlow Militia went on to see action against insurgents in county Meath in July 1798 for which they won praise from their immediate commander, Captain Gordon of the Dumfries Light Dragoons for their ‘spirit and alacrity’.²⁰¹ This contradicts the claim made later by William Farrell that the militia in Blaris and

¹⁹¹ *BNL*, 23 Aug. 1793; *The Times*, 24 Sept. 1793.

¹⁹² *FLJ*, 11 Mar. 1794; *SNL*, 17 Mar. 1794.

¹⁹³ *SNL*, 18 Mar. 1794; *FJ*, 18 Mar. 1794.

¹⁹⁴ *BNL*, 1 June 1795.

¹⁹⁵ *The Times*, 23 May 1797.

¹⁹⁶ *FJ*, 25 May 1797.

¹⁹⁷ *BNL*, 13 Nov. 1797.

¹⁹⁸ *FLJ*, 18 Nov. 1797.

¹⁹⁹ *FJ*, 24 Mar. 1798.

²⁰⁰ *The Times*, 25 Apr. 1798.

²⁰¹ Quoted in J.G. Kerrane, ‘The Carlow militia and the rebellion in Meath, 1798’, *Carlovania*, i, no. 19 (1970), p. 10.

Loughlinstown camps were ‘all United Irishmen to a man’.²⁰² Nonetheless, while Irish militia regiments were not regarded in government circles as ‘reliable’,²⁰³ were largely untested in battle and, by the late 1790s, were suspected of having been infiltrated by United Irishmen,²⁰⁴ the Carlow Militia acquitted itself well in action and was relatively loyal to its officers.

The Irish Yeomanry were embodied in October 1796 as a response to an increased threat of foreign invasion and a deteriorating domestic security situation caused by increases in United Irish and Defender activity.²⁰⁵ It was intended that the yeomanry would free up regular soldiers for service overseas and that they would be deployed in their own areas to pursue lawbreakers and to stifle subversion.²⁰⁶ As noted by Blackstock, the yeomanry was essentially ‘a gentry-sponsored law and order association’ which, unlike the Volunteer Associations, was subject to overall government control.²⁰⁷ The selection of suitable members was delegated to the local gentry who were trusted to use their local knowledge to produce law-abiding recruits.²⁰⁸ Some counties, particularly those where the Defenders were particularly active experienced difficulties in filling the ranks of their yeomanry corps due to local intimidation.²⁰⁹ There were no difficulties in county Carlow. Robert Cornwall of Myshall offered to raise a cavalry corps and, it was reported, he managed to enrol ‘several hundred respectable landholders’ with ease.²¹⁰ By 1798 Carlow boasted some eight yeomanry corps, each commanded by a member of the local gentry that included all the major resident landholders. These units included the Bagenalstown and Mount Leinster Infantry (commanded by Beauchamp Bagenal), the Borris Cavalry (commanded by Walter Kavanagh), the 1st Carlow Cavalry (Sir Charles Burton), the 2nd Carlow Cavalry (Robert Cornwall), the Carlow Infantry (William Burton) and the Cloydagh and Killeslin Cavalry (JS Rochfort).²¹¹

It is likely that the majority of Carlow yeomen were Protestant and loyal. Even though the force was intended to be non-sectarian it was inevitable, given the local and almost exclusively Protestant leadership, that the bulk of its rank and file would be Protestant. In any case, the loyalty of Catholic yeomen was suspect with Richard Musgrave claiming that the majority of them ‘were disaffected, and would, had an opportunity offered, turned their arms against their king and

²⁰² William Farrell, *Carlow in '98: The autobiography of William Farrell of Carlow*, ed. R.J. McHugh (Dublin, 1949), p. 60.

²⁰³ G.A. Hayes-McCoy, *Irish battles: a military history of Ireland* (Belfast, 1990), p. 276.

²⁰⁴ Ruan O'Donnell, ‘The military committee and the United Irishmen’ in M.T. Davis and P.A. Pickering (eds), *Unrespectable radicals? popular politics in the age of reform* (Aldershot, 2008), p. 131.

²⁰⁵ Allan Blackstock, ‘The Irish Yeomanry and the 1798 rebellion’ in Thomas Bartlett (ed.), *Irish rebellion of 1798: A bicentenary perspective* (Dublin, 2003), p. 332.

²⁰⁶ Thomas Bartlett, ‘Ireland during the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars 1791-1815’ in *The Cambridge history of Ireland Vol 4* (Cambridge, 2018), p. 90.

²⁰⁷ Allan Blackstock, *An ascendancy army: the Irish Yeomanry, 1796-1834* (Dublin, 1998), p. 55.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 339.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 219. This was certainly the case in Derry where many tenants were unwilling to enlist.

²¹⁰ *BNL*, 30 Sept. 1796.

²¹¹ Pádraig Ó Snodaigh, ‘Ceatharlach í 1798’ in McGrath (ed.), *Carlow history and society*, pp 597–99.

country'.²¹² The Borris Cavalry was an exception in Carlow where the majority of its members were Catholic. This was due to the particularly close relationship between Walter Kavanagh, a recent convert to Protestantism, and his mainly Catholic tenantry who still considered him to be 'one of their own'.²¹³ Despite their sterling defence of the Kavanagh seat during the 1798 insurrection when, according to Musgrave they withstood an attack by five thousand rebels, the Borris Yeomanry were still regarded as suspect by other Protestant corps.²¹⁴ Indeed, in the years after the rebellion, they were the object of a Dublin Castle investigation that bordered on a witch-hunt. The investigation was grounded on apparently baseless accusations against Luke Hagerty (a Catholic officer in the Borris cavalry) that had been made to Thomas Rawson, a loyalist magistrate in Kildare.²¹⁵ In Carlow as elsewhere, the yeomanry became an almost exclusively Protestant force and largely because of their activities in the 1798 Rebellion, a manifestation of the power of the ascendancy.

VII. The 1795 By-Election and the 1797 General Election

Henry Bruen died in Dublin on 14 December 1795 and within a week, Sir Richard Butler, Walter Kavanagh and John Rochfort declared their candidacies for the seat vacated by him.²¹⁶ In the following days, Rochfort was the first to drop out explaining that, as parliament was not expected to last, it was not worth 'agitating the county by the hurry of a contested election'.²¹⁷ Kavanagh also reconsidered and declined a contest, probably agreeing with Rochfort thus leaving the way clear for Butler to be returned unopposed. Butler later thanked the freeholders for their 'unanimous appointment' and assuring them of 'the most rigid attention' to their commands.²¹⁸ Butler's unopposed return signalled the re-emergence of the established order mainly because there was no appetite among the local gentry to go to either the expense or effort of mounting a challenge. Neither was there any attempt, most notably by Walter Kavanagh, to harness the electoral power of the newly enfranchised Catholic freeholders.

²¹² Musgrave went on to give details of those Catholic yeomen who were executed in the course of the rebellion, see *Memoirs of the different rebellions*, ii, p. 30.

²¹³ Wakefield, *Account of Ireland*, ii, p. 599.

²¹⁴ Suspicion of Kavanagh-sponsored military formation existed even during the Volunteer era in 1784: It was noted that the Borris Rangers under Colonel Cavanagh (sic) was 'entirely composed of Catholicicks [sic]: he himself is one', see James Kelly, 'Select documents XLIII: a secret return of the Volunteers of Ireland in 1784', *IHS*, 26: 103 (1989), p. 286.

²¹⁵ For a full account of this incident, see James G. Patterson, "'Put One Irishman on a spit and another will turn him": a postrevolutionary episode in south Carlow, 1804', *Éire-Ireland*, 53:1 (2018), pp 64–97.

²¹⁶ Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, iii, p. 297, *SNL*, 22 Dec. 1795.

²¹⁷ *DEP*, 2 Jan. 1796.

²¹⁸ *FLJ*, 10 Feb. 1796.

There was certainly a concerted effort in Carlow to increase the electorate, particularly

Table 2.1: New Freeholders Registering By Year, Carlow and Surrounding Counties 1795 to 1799

County	1795	1796	1797	1798	1799	Total
Carlow	518	2264	128	4	18	2,932
Kildare	6	207	242	6	210	671
Wicklow	0	2198	29	0	15	2,242
Kilkenny County	167	989	52	13	3	1,224
Queen's County	153	2047	46	2	55	2,303
Waterford	525	161	114	2	37	839
Meath	0	1591	463	36	107	2,197
Total	3,164	11,253	2,871	1,861	2,244	

Source: *Abstract of the number of freeholders registered by the clerks of the peace in the several counties in Ireland*, [cd 86-1802-03]

among the Catholic population after the Electoral Act of 1795²¹⁹ which ‘codified and consolidated freeholder’s franchise’ and divided them into three categories namely those with annual values of 40s, £20 and £50 specifying residence requirements for each classification that were more stringent for the lower values.²²⁰ Table 2.1 shows the numbers of freeholders registered in each year for Carlow and surrounding counties between 1795 and 1799, the vast majority of whom were in the 40s classification. It can be seen that in 1795 Carlow had the greatest number registered at 2,264 freeholders followed by Wicklow and Queen’s County at 2,198 and 2,047 respectively. However, when numbers registered are compared to land area and population, it can be seen that registrations in Carlow were at a higher rate than neighbouring counties. Table 2.2 shows that Carlow saw 0.021 freeholders registered per acre and 0.066 registered per Catholic inhabitant. This is double that of its nearest rivals on each metric. Given the lack of electoral experience of the Catholic population, it can be safely assumed that they did not register without some encouragement. This suggests that there was a concerted registration campaign, probably orchestrated by Walter Kavanagh, who had a large number of Catholic tenants.

It was expected that David Latouche Junior, now Colonel of the Carlow Militia, would stand in the 1797 election in opposition to the established anti-government candidates.²²¹

²¹⁹ 35 Geo. III, c. 29.

²²⁰ Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, ii, p. 144.

²²¹ L.M. Cullen, ‘Politics and rebellion: Wicklow in the 1790s’ in Ken Hannigan and William Nolan (eds), *Wicklow history & society* (Dublin, 1994), p. 421.

Table 2.2: New Freeholders by Acre and by RC Inhabitant 1795-99, Carlow and Surrounding Counties

County	New Freeholders Per Acre	New Freeholders Per RC Inhabitant
Carlow	0.021	0.066
Kildare	0.002	0.008
Wicklow	0.007	0.038
Kilkenny County	0.004	0.012
Queen's County	0.010	0.027
Waterford	0.003	0.011
Meath	0.006	0.018

Sources: Abstract of the number of freeholders registered by the clerks of the peace in the several counties in Ireland, [cd 86-1802-03], Daniel Augustus Beaufort, *Memoir of a map of Ireland illustrating the topography of that kingdom*. London, 1792) for populations and acreages and E.M. Johnston-Liik, *MPs in Dublin, companion to the history of parliament 1692-1800*, (Belfast, 2006), pp. 223-232 for estimates of the protestant proportions of county

Latouche had already commenced a canvass and issued an electoral address.²²²In a later address, he claimed that he was forced to step down due to ‘unforeseen circumstances’²²³ These circumstances turned out later to have been Latouche Senior’s decision that a Latouche should not contest the Carlow election for ‘family reasons’.²²⁴ David Latouche was instead returned for the Latouche-owned borough of Newcastle suggesting pecuniary rather than political reasons were behind the abandonment of county Carlow.²²⁵ Philip Newton, a landlord and future magistrate of liberal sentiment,²²⁶ put himself forward in Latouche’s place having been ‘encouraged by some of the first interests in the county’.²²⁷ Walter Kavanagh also aligned himself with the group seeking to overturn the established order where Burton and Butler had dominated the representation for the county. Even before the election was called, he was in negotiation with several landholders that had an ‘interest’ to dispose of in the county including Lord Kenmare (whose lands in Ballyellin were let to the Blackney family) the Latouche family and Beauchamp Bagenal who were all supportive, while the Earl of Courtown was evasive.²²⁸ Robert Cornwall was also well disposed towards Kavanagh’s challenge promising that when the election campaign

²²² DEP, 26 Apr. 1796.

²²³ DEP, 4 July 1797.

²²⁴ Humfrey to Kavanagh, 20 June 1797 (NLI, Kavanagh Papers, P7155).

²²⁵ Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, v, p. 65.

²²⁶ On his death in 1833, Newton was eulogised as ‘a good landlord, an upright magistrate, and in private life, a kind, charitable and benevolent gentleman’, see CWS, 26 Oct. 1833.

²²⁷ DEP, 4 July 1797.

²²⁸ Kenmare to Kavanagh, 11 Apr. 1776 (NLI, Kavanagh Papers, P7155); Writing to John Humfrey, his election agent, Walter Kavanagh claims the support of Latouche and Bagenal, see Kavanagh to Humfrey, 5 July 1797, (NLI, Kavanagh Papers, P7155); Courtown mentioned that several gentlemen had approached him but that he was not willing to give any commitments and had asked his agent in Ireland to keep his tenants ‘disengaged’ until a decision had been made, see Courtown to Kavanagh, 26 Apr. 1796 (NLI, Kavanagh Papers, P7155).

got underway, he would 'render every service as a friend in my power'.²²⁹ Kavanagh published an electoral address on 18 May 1796 promising to canvass freeholders in person.²³⁰ Cornwall saw support for government as essential in countering rising disaffection and obviously saw Kavanagh as a potentially useful ally. Kavanagh for his part was anxious to prove his credentials as a loyal subject given, as noted above with regard to the loyalty of his corps of yeomanry, suspicions may have lingered as he was a recent convert to the established church. The election campaign was professional with John Humfrey,²³¹ a Dublin-based solicitor and minor Carlow landholder agreeing to act as agent and offering Kavanagh advice on how the election should be managed.²³²

The election was held between the 25 July and 4 August 1797 and ended with Kavanagh and Newton, having polled 922 and 936 respectively, conceding defeat to the sitting members Burton and Butler who polled 1072 and 1069 respectively. While the established order had survived, the challenge was a serious one. Kavanagh and Newton had secured support from a range of the Carlow gentry who seemed to have been united in little other than their desire for change. Ultimately it was an election that was decided by the landed class and the manner in which they disposed of their electoral 'interest'. While the inclusion of Catholic freeholders had seen a quadrupling of the electorate, the increased numbers seem to have been managed as they had been before. This election gave no hint of the electoral turmoil that was to emerge in just a few decades.

²²⁹ Cornwall to Kavanagh, 27 April 1796 (NLI, Kavanagh Papers, P7155).

²³⁰ *FLJ*, 18 May 1796.

²³¹ Humfrey was also a Grand Juror in Carlow and died on 25 May 1828, see *DEP*, 29 May 1828. Humfrey acted as Clerk of the Crown in Carlow and was therefore acquainted with electoral law.

²³² Humfrey to Kavanagh, 12 July 1797 (NLI, Kavanagh Papers, P7155).

VIII. Insurrection and Reaction

As insurgency and counter-insurgency intensified in late 1797 and early 1798, the majority of the Carlow gentry identified little cause for alarm in the county. The complacency of the minority Protestant population and the Carlow gentry is understandable given the calm that had been successfully imposed by local magistrates since the 'Whiteboy' disorders of the 1770s. Not all of the gentry shared this inertia. Robert Cornwall, a magistrate of Myshall Lodge, whose ominous warnings of the impending insurrection were ignored, went further by suggesting that the ambivalence of the local gentry was a form of passive connivance with the United Irish movement. Maura Duggan has suggested that Cornwall's actions in appraising government of local unrest were viewed with distaste by his peers.²³³ Cornwall was also regarded as an 'outsider', his family recent arrivals in Carlow and spent more time in Dublin than he did in the county. He had not participated in the Volunteer movement locally, choosing instead to act as Captain Commandant of the Union Light Dragoons in Dublin.²³⁴ His family were originally of Presbyterian stock, something which also marked him as an outsider, and he had an unsettled relationship with the established church. Writing to Samuel Faulkner, he remarked that the Bishop of Ferns had written to him and observed pointedly that he must be 'liberal in religion' as he had given a plot of land for the building of a Roman Catholic chapel in Myshall. The bishop hoped that Cornwall would be equally generous when it came to contributing to a proposed church for Fenagh and that £50 would constitute a suitable donation. Cornwall bristled at the suggestion and remarked to his uncle that the bishop 'may go to Old Nick before I give him a farthing'.²³⁵

Appointed as a magistrate for Carlow in May 1786, Cornwall was an attorney who practised from his uncle's premises on Stephen's Green, Dublin.²³⁶ His uncle, Samuel Faulkner, was also an attorney, a Carlow landowner and a former sheriff of Carlow who acted as agent for the estates of Richard Chappell Whaley of Dublin and George Ogle of Richfield, county Wexford.²³⁷ In correspondence with his uncle, Cornwall displayed a deference that cast him in the definite role of junior.²³⁸ Samuel Faulkner's death at sea in November 1795 allowed Cornwall to assume an enhanced status even purchasing a parliamentary seat in the borough of Enniscorthy.

²³³ Duggan suggests that local 'independent' opinion held that unrest was certain to follow the withdrawal of the 'Patriot; Ponsonby/Grattan faction from parliament in 1797 and that Cornwall's support for government was somehow at odds with the feelings of the local gentry, see Duggan, *'1798 rebellion in county Carlow'*, p. 536.

²³⁴ *DEP*, 22 Oct. 1782.

²³⁵ Cornwall to Faulkner, *nd*, (NLI, Faulkner-Cornwall Papers, P4647).

²³⁶ *SNL*, 17 May 1786.

²³⁷ *FJ*, 10 Mar. 1787; Amy Monahan, 'An Eighteenth-Century Family Linen Business: the Faulkners of Wellbrook, Cookstown, county Tyrone', *Ulster Folklife*, 9 (1963), p.30.

²³⁸ There are many examples of Cornwall both seeking and acknowledging direction from Faulkner. Among them are letters dated 27 Aug. 1789 where he writes of the steward in the Castletown Estate in Carlow: 'I shall observe your directions about Kennedy' and another dated 20 June 1790 where he awaits orders on advertising some Whaley lands for sale. (NLI, Faulkner-Cornwall papers, P4647).

His advancement led him to act as a government agent, and from 1797, in a stream of correspondence characterised by Maura Duggan as ‘a crescendo of alarm’, he reported insurgencies and outrages from Carlow and the surrounding counties.²³⁹ *His was a lone voice among the gentry.* It is clear that Cornwall saw himself as a bulwark against sedition in the area.

Cornwall was most zealous in the suppression of sedition in 1798 and his activities are regarded as having been to the ‘foremost in violence and brutality’.²⁴⁰ Sir Richard Musgrave, the banner carrier of an ultra-Protestant ideology, praised Cornwall’s ‘unabated exertions and the most undaunted courage’ that prevented county Carlow from falling ‘as much desolate as the county of Wexford’.²⁴¹ Cornwall, together with John and Robert Rochfort, were heavily involved in the Orange Order which was seen as providing a counterweight to United Irish influence in the South East.²⁴² Although of questionable credibility, William Farrell²⁴³ mentioned the aggressive and threatening behaviour of Cornwall when interrogating prisoners in the wake of the rebellion.²⁴⁴ However, in spite of distaste for the combative Cornwall that may have existed, the local authorities were catapulted into action by the murder of William Bennet near Leighlinbridge on 25 October 1797.²⁴⁵ Bennet, a substantial Protestant farmer, was selected for assassination following his public airing of anti-United Irishmen opinions. As pointed out by Shay Kinsella, the fact that he was singled out underlines the fact that the subversive movement was stronger in the county than was realised by the gentry and the respectable farming classes. The move by the United Irishmen against Bennet was intended to ‘send a powerful message to all their Protestant and loyalist opponents’.²⁴⁶

The murder certainly sent shockwaves through the local ascendancy and seemed to confirm Robert Cornwall’s view that the situation in Carlow was more serious than local magistrates were prepared to acknowledge.²⁴⁷ At a hastily arranged meeting of magistrates in Carlow on 28 October 1797, a substantial reward of €100 was offered for information on the Bennet murder and an additional €100 offered for information on a nocturnal attack made on the house of the magistrate John Butler on 21 October 1797.²⁴⁸ The government later offered a reward of €100 for each of the first three persons arrested on foot of information given together with a pardon for the informer.²⁴⁹ An additional £50 was later offered for information on the Bennet

²³⁹ *The Times*, 7 Dec. 1795; Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, iii, p. 509; Duggan, ‘County Carlow politics and power’, p. 38.

²⁴⁰ Shay Kinsella, ‘The “slashing parson”’, p. 117.

²⁴¹ Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions*, ii, p. 246.

²⁴² James G. Patterson, ‘White Terror in South Leinster’, *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 15 (2000), p. 39.

²⁴³ Farrell was suspected of giving information to the authorities in order to secure his own release, see Duggan, ‘1798 in county Carlow’, p. 535.

²⁴⁴ Farrell, *Carlow in '98*, p. 137.

²⁴⁵ Duggan, ‘1798 in county Carlow’, p. 537.

²⁴⁶ Shay Kinsella, ‘Prelude to rebellion: the murder of William Bennett in 1797’, *Carlovania*, 63 (2015), p. 168

²⁴⁷ Duggan, ‘1798 in county Carlow’, p. 537.

²⁴⁸ *DEP*, 7 Nov. 1797.

²⁴⁹ *FJ*, 11 Nov. 1797.

murder by Captain John Bennet of the Carlow Militia then still stationed in Blaris Camp.²⁵⁰ Carlow magistrates were quick to pass resolutions noting the large number of prisoners held in the local gaol on suspicion of insurrectionary activities and noting that the only way to restore peace was ‘by making immediate examples’ and calling on government to take swift action.²⁵¹ As Shay Kinsella notes, the ‘murder acted as a catalyst, shocking Carlow’s ruling Protestants into unanimous action’.²⁵² This newly found willingness among the Carlow magistracy to act and the firmness of their actions was in contrast to their neighbours in county Kildare and Wicklow who were thought to be lax and unwilling to take strong action.²⁵³

Carlow was the scene of two of the bloodiest encounters of the rebellion in 1798. While contemporary estimates of the numbers of insurgents killed vary from 300²⁵⁴ to 500²⁵⁵ at Hacketstown, and from 400²⁵⁶ to 630²⁵⁷ in Carlow, the number of soldiers and militiamen killed was in single digits. Contemporary newspaper and official reports of these encounters are unsurprisingly vague, with the conduct of the Antrim Militia and the local yeomanry in Hacketstown praised.²⁵⁸ A despatch from Lord Camden, the Lord Lieutenant to London mentioned that the rebels had been defeated in Carlow and that they had sustained 400 casualties.²⁵⁹ The investigations and courts martial held in the aftermath of the unrest received scant notice with, for example, the trial and public execution of Sir Edward Crosbie reported as a ‘snippet’ piece.²⁶⁰ While Rev James Gordon,²⁶¹ in his account of events published in 1801, mentions the firing of Carlow town by the military where eighty houses containing rebels were burned and for days afterwards ‘the roasted remains of unhappy men were falling down the chimneys in which they perished’,²⁶² his moderate view of events drew the ire of Sir Richard Musgrave who, through repeated strident criticism, quickly managed to have this attempt at impartiality labelled as ‘unreliable and ideologically compromised’.²⁶³

However, accounts contrary to the received loyalist narrative of what occurred in Carlow did emerge, beginning with an anonymous account of the court martial of Sir Edward Crosbie that was published in 1802. The pamphlet had the aim of ‘rescuing his (Crosbie’s) character from

²⁵⁰ *FLJ*, 22 Nov. 1797.

²⁵¹ Copy of resolutions passed by Carlow Magistrates at the Petty Sessions on 7 Dec. 1797 (NAI, Rebellion Papers, Ref. 620/33/120).

²⁵² Kinsella, ‘Prelude to rebellion’, p. 170.

²⁵³ Cullen, ‘Wicklow in the 1790s’ i, p. 477.

²⁵⁴ *The Times*, 31 May 1798.

²⁵⁵ Musgrave, *Memoirs of the different rebellions*, p. 514.

²⁵⁶ *FLJ*, 2 June 1798.

²⁵⁷ *FJ*, 2 June 1798.

²⁵⁸ *FJ* 29 May 1798 and *Lgzte*, 30 June 1798, p. 603.

²⁵⁹ *Lgzte*, 1 June 1798.

²⁶⁰ *FJ*, 7 June 1798 and *The Times*, 7 June 1798 simply reported his execution having been convicted ‘of an intimate and criminal connection with the rebel army’.

²⁶¹ Gordon has been described as ‘the quintessential scholarly gentleman’, see Bernard Browne, ‘Rev. James Gordon - A Loyalist Historian of the 1798 Rebellion’, *The Past*, no. 29 (2008), p. 12.

²⁶² Rev James Gordon, *History of the rebellion in Ireland, in the year 1798, &c* (Dublin, 1801), p. 78.

²⁶³ James Kelly, *Sir Richard Musgrave*, p. 129.

the heavy charges with which it has been grossly calumniated'.²⁶⁴ The pamphlet went on to describe the one-sided nature of the trial, the rushed execution of Crosbie and the unavoidable bias of the court whose judges 'had been actively engaged in the battle of Carlow, and whose minds were in a high degree of irritation from thence, and who, could therefore not judge dispassionately'.²⁶⁵ It has also been suggested that Crosbie's refusal to attend the Spring assizes (as he disagreed with some provisions of the Insurrection Act²⁶⁶) and a disagreement that he had with one of the younger Burtons may have damaged his standing with the local gentry.²⁶⁷ Indeed, Crosbie was later described in one of a series of letters written by 'A Carlow Friend' that appeared in Wattie Cox's *Irish Magazine* in 1811 entitled *Slaughter in Carlow* as one who had 'done little to conciliate the affections of the higher order of this truly *enlightened* and *liberal* country' and 'that from his hatred of oppression, he incurred the displeasure of the aristocracy of the country'.²⁶⁸ Crosbie was one who came to be seen as a victim of the suspicious prejudice of the local Protestant gentry. This series of letters were almost certainly written by Thomas Finn,²⁶⁹ a native of Carlow and an associate of Cox,²⁷⁰ and very likely the 'learned ghost-writer' who probably wrote most of the content of *The Irish Magazine*.²⁷¹ The 'letters' carried lurid accounts of excesses on the day of, and in the days following the battle of Carlow, including the burning alive of insurgents by the military and the 'ruthless, remorseless, relentless conduct of the aristocracy' as 'they beheld their poor, but honest unarmed neighbours agonize beneath the bayonet of the whole bred assassin'.²⁷² Descriptions of the unceremonious disposal of charred corpses by the authorities²⁷³ and the merciless and sadistic flogging of prisoners²⁷⁴ certainly served to fuel sectarian resentment in Carlow. The authorities did little to soothe any resentment that may have festered in the aftermath. One visitor to Carlow in 1805 noted that the severed heads of some of the rebels were still on display on spikes over the gateway gaol as 'ghastly objects'.²⁷⁵

The theme of bigoted brutality was continued by William Farrell, who wrote his memoir of 1798 between 1832 and 1845, and whose descriptions of floggings and executions in Carlow barracks were probably influenced by Finn's earlier writings. This can be seen from the similarity of the vivid accounts of the floggings and executions of some of the suspected insurgents, with,

²⁶⁴ *An accurate and impartial narrative of the apprehension, trial and execution on the 5th June 1798 of Sir Edward William Crosbie, bart*, (Dublin, 1802), p. v..

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

²⁶⁷ Duggan, '1798 in county Carlow', p. 574.

²⁶⁸ *IM*, Apr. 1811, p. 175.

²⁶⁹ See endnote No. 1 in Kinsella, 'Prelude to rebellion', p. 176.

²⁷⁰ C. J. Woods, 'Walter Cox', *DIB*, Sub nomine.

²⁷¹ Elizabeth Tilley, *The periodical press in nineteenth-century Ireland*, (Cham, 2020), p. 26.

²⁷² *IM*, Feb. 1811, p. 79.

²⁷³ *IM*, Mar. 1811, p. 110.

²⁷⁴ *IM*, May 1811, p. 222.

²⁷⁵ *Elizabeth ham by herself, 1783-1820*, ed. Eric Gillet (London, 1945), p. 74.

for example Farrell describing the flogging of the Maher brothers and an O'Connor from Tullow which made 'flesh fly in every direction'²⁷⁶ and Finn describing 'the flesh of men ascend in fragments, sufficient almost, to intercept the rays of the sun'.²⁷⁷ Although, as pointed out by Ó Snodaigh, Finn laid the blame for the calamity on the Orange faction, Farrell blamed the United Irish movement.²⁷⁸ Farrell insisted that before the insurrection, 'there was no town in Ireland where there was a friendlier feeling between Catholics and Protestants'²⁷⁹ and that the revolutionary movement was 'that dreadful curse of Ireland'.²⁸⁰

Conclusion

Land ownership, and by extension electoral interest in county Carlow in the later part of the eighteenth century was heavily influenced by the Bruen and Kavanagh families by virtue of their larger landholdings. There were also a large number of smaller, resident landowners that provided a stable gentry class at the start of the nineteenth century. The political scene was stable with contested election taking place only in the county constituency and representation there usually falling to the Burton, Butler, Bagenal and Bunbury families. The Volunteer movement provided an opportunity for displays of solidarity among the gentry classes and there were several active volunteer corps in the county that provided a conduit for Patriot and reform opinion which was at its sharpest in the early 1780s. It declined from the mid-1780s to a point where in 1793, when the militia was established, Carlow Catholics joined enthusiastically. The militia was also strongly supported and there were no difficulties in raising several corps of yeomanry in the county.

County Carlow was relatively tranquil in the years leading up to the 1798 rebellion. The gentry were complacent in the face of the growing United Irish threat. They were galvanised into action by the murder of William Bennet, an upstanding Protestant farmer, in October 1797. In the flurry of anti-establishment activity that followed, Robert Cornwall became a lightning rod for conservative Protestantism. When the rebellion did occur, it was brutally suppressed in Carlow and the opposing narratives of events would provide the basis for much rancour in the following years when the question of admitting Catholics to parliament moved to centre stage. But first, the electoral representation of county Carlow came to change as a consequence of the Act of Union.

²⁷⁶ Farrell, *Carlow in '98* p. 94.

²⁷⁷ *IM*, Apr. 1811, p. 174.

²⁷⁸ Ó Snodaigh, 'Ceatharlach i 1798', p. 588.

²⁷⁹ Farrell, *Carlow in '98*, p. 80.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Chapter 3: Carlow Politics in the First Decade of the Union

Introduction

This chapter will explore the response in county Carlow to the enactment of the legislative union of Ireland and Great Britain in 1800 and the political activity in the county in the decade that followed. Initially a strong ‘patriot’ feeling cast the proposed union in a poor light and both of the representatives for Carlow, William Burton and Sir Richard Butler, opposed it. This was not the case with all the politically inclined in the county and for practical rather than political reasons, a shift in support occurred as the government campaign in support of union progressed. The first election to the Imperial parliament in 1802 saw Butler and Burton seeking to retain their seats for pecuniary rather than purely political reasons. Their replacement by David Latouche and Walter Bagenal in 1802 came about because of support by the Bruen and Kavanagh ‘interests’, rather than a groundswell of opinion among the electorate. The change to the parliamentary representation brought about by the Act of Union had little impact as the existing power structures in the county proved to be more important than political opinion. Neither of the new MPs proved to be impressive parliamentary performers, but both were public in their support of Catholic claims. This was not surprising given that most Carlow freeholders were Catholic. Although the elections of 1806 and 1807 saw the Catholic question a central issue in England, this was not the case in Ireland. Latouche and Bagenal were returned without contests on both occasions. Once again the contests were decided by the major electoral interests with the Bruen and Kavanagh estates playing a central role.

I. Carlow and the Act of Union

For the British government, a political union presented a means of stabilising Ireland, restoring the authority of the state there and preventing France from extending its dangerous influence over a near neighbour.¹ Given that the concept of union provoked public unrest and violence in the past, it was not surprising that the authorities in Ireland expected that there would be some public disorder. In fact there was little public protest due to a combination of the comprehensive defeat of the United Irishmen in 1798, the withdrawal of Whig-patriots from parliament in 1797 and the

¹ John Bew, ‘Ireland under the union, 1801-1922’ in Bourke and McBride (eds), *The Princeton history of modern Ireland*, (Oxford, 2016), p. 77.

tactful silence of the Catholic leadership who were more anxious to demonstrate their loyalty in the wake of the rebellion than they were to press for further concessions.²

However, the House of Commons was a different matter. The completion of a union required the agreement of the Irish parliament, and the government faced opposition from a Protestant ascendancy that managed 'to exercise a high degree of political control over the country' through that parliament and who were reluctant to surrender their influence.³ The task of negotiating the passage of the measure through a reluctant parliament fell to Lords Castlereagh and Cornwallis as chief secretary and lord lieutenant respectively, a task initially pursued by them with insufficient urgency.⁴ As G.C. Bolton noted, initial approaches from Castlereagh served only to imbue county members and borough magnates with caution.⁵ Ultimately the opposition managed to inflict an embarrassing defeat on government by 111 votes to 106.⁶ It was wisely decided to temporarily withdraw the issue.⁷ This defeat galvanised government and set about 'constructing a majority' using its power over patronage.⁸

The six representatives from Carlow voted along predictable lines. As the Bishop of Ferns and Leighlin and the Earl of Charleville, the patrons of the boroughs of Old Leighlin and Carlow were supporters of government, the four members for the two boroughs supported the union. The county members, William Burton and Sir Richard Butler were disposed to oppose government and both voted against when the measure was introduced in January 1799.⁹ Burton's opposition was rooted in his close association with the Ponsonby parliamentary interest which was opposed to the measure. Butler's opposition sprang from the anti-union and 'patriot' attitude of the freeholders of Carlow. This was reflected in a county meeting called by Edward Eustace, the high sheriff, on 16 January 1799 to consider the 'propriety of a Legislative Union between this kingdom Great Britain'.¹⁰ The meeting, held in Carlow on 26 January 1799, approved a number of resolutions opposing the union and urging the county representatives to take note. Special mention was made of John Foster, the Speaker of the house, for his 'opposition to the measure, and his knowledge of the interests of this country, and constant attention to them'.¹¹ Foster had by then positioned himself as a resolute opponent of union, and his influence on the meeting in Carlow can be detected from

² James Kelly, 'Popular politics in Ireland and the Act of Union', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 10 (2000), p. 260.

³ McDowell, *The age of the United Irishmen* p. 367.

⁴ O'Brien, 'Revolution, rebellion and the viceroyalty 1789-99', p. 127.

⁵ C.G. Bolton, *The passing of the act of union* (Oxford, 1966), p. 95.

⁶ P.M. Geoghegan, *The Irish Act of Union*, (Dublin, 2001), p. 270.

⁷ Castlereagh to Portland 25 Jan 1799 in *Castlereagh Corres.*, ii, p. 133

⁸ James Quinn, 'Dublin castle and the act of union' in Brown, Geoghegan and Kelly (eds), *The Irish act of union, 1800* (Dublin, 2003), p. 100.

⁹ One of two copies of a printed statement of the majority and minority of the Irish House of Commons on the union, 22 Jan. 1799 (PRONI D3030/552A).

¹⁰ *DEP*, 19 Jan. 1799.

¹¹ *DEP*, 26 Jan. 1790.

the text of the resolutions passed and the participation of his in-law, John S. Rochford, who acted as vice chairman.¹²

It soon became apparent that opposition to union was not unanimous. Robert Cornwall, who had been zealous in his suppression of insurgent activity in county Carlow during the 1798 insurrection, purchased a seat for the borough of Enniscorthy in 1794. He purchased the seat again in 1797 and, unlike the two representatives for county Carlow, he voted for the Union in January 1799.¹³ As he had done in a military capacity during the insurrection in 1798, Cornwall acted in a political capacity in Carlow as the representative and functionary of government supporting the campaign to have the union passed. Writing to Castlereagh in April 1800, Cornwall reported on local efforts to convene a meeting with a view to raising a petition in opposition to the Union. He related that both Burton, Butler and Rochford and some dozen others had signed the requisition and that few were actually resident in the county. He observed that most 'respectable' landowners were in favour but that they were unwilling to express support because of 'their private connections'. As always, if government had any measures to recommend, he promised that they would be 'punctually and most earnestly attended to'.¹⁴ Cornwall's loyalty to government was rewarded when he was appointed commissioner and overseer of barracks in July 1799.¹⁵ Because he accepted public office, Cornwall was obliged to resign his parliamentary seat in Enniscorthy and undertake what was seen as the formality of re-election.¹⁶ However, the borough owner Lord Lismore was a fervent anti-unionist and returned the eminent anti-unionist lawyer Peter Burrowes in Cornwall's place with the express aim of opposing the union in parliament.¹⁷ His failure to deliver the pro-government seat obliged Cornwall to resign his post as commissioner.¹⁸ Cornwall did receive compensation, some £2,700, on the abolition of the borough of Enniscorthy. This amount was consequently deducted from the standard £15,000 payment made to borough owners leaving Lismore with £12,300.¹⁹ This suggests that Cornwall paid Lismore £2,700 for the seat and the refund of the amount from government was both a punishment for Lismore and provided some consolation to Cornwall, their loyal supporter.

Cornwall was not alone in his support for union amongst the Carlow gentry; Henry Bruen eventually came to support the measure. Bruen was regarded as an 'independent' member of parliament and was not readily identifiable as either an opponent or supporter of government. As a member for the borough of Jamestown, Co. Leitrim between 1783 and 1790, he was described as

¹² Malcomson, *John Foster*, p. 138.

¹³ *SNL*, 22 Oct. 1794; Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, iii, p. 509.

¹⁴ Cornwall to Castlereagh, 12 Apr. 1800 (NAI, Rebellion Papers, 620/5/77).

¹⁵ *BNL*, 23 July 1799.

¹⁶ Castlereagh to King, 25 Jan. 1800 (TNA, HO 100/93).

¹⁷ Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, iii, p. 313; C.J. Woods, 'Peter Burrows' *DIB*, Sub nominee.

¹⁸ Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, iii, p. 510; *FJ*, 20 Dec. 1800.

¹⁹ *A return from the commissioners under act 40 Geo. III Cap. 34*, HC, 1805 [cd 53], p. 12.

‘constantly in opposition’²⁰ in 1784 yet ‘generally in support’ of government in 1785.²¹ In 1790, although acknowledged as one ‘without obtrusive claims to public notice’, he was lauded as one who held ‘undeviating support for the cause of Liberty, Truth and Justice’ who aspired ‘to no other character than that of an independent country gentleman’.²² James Mulalla noted Bruen in 1793 as a ‘friend’ whose opposition to the commercial propositions springing from a sense of ‘patriotism’ had brought the MP ‘severe suffering’.²³ The profile of an independent country gentleman was one cultivated by Bruen as can be seen from his presence in Mulalla’s volume, a publication that was later dismissed as biased towards opposition rather than government.²⁴

There were practical rather than political considerations behind Henry Bruen’s eagerness to harness political influence in Ireland and to have himself identified as a ‘patriot’ politician. His opaque financial dealings as a deputy quartermaster in the American wars were long a source of concern at the highest level. The lord lieutenant, the Marquis of Buckingham writing in October 1788 referred to Bruen’s evasion of inquiries relating to suggestions of fraud made against him in Britain because he was resident in Ireland. Buckingham bemoaned the lack of a mechanism to bring Bruen to account and where the ‘Attorney General of either kingdom [could] sue in either kingdom for the King’s debts’.²⁵ More than three years later, when the Earl of Westmorland cautioned Grenville against the introduction a bill that would see the judgements of English courts enforceable in Ireland, he made particular mention of the case of Henry Bruen who ‘by his political connexions and other means has a great many friends’ and whose opposition to government was seen by some as the underlying reason for the introduction of such a mechanism.²⁶ By the time the question of union came about, confident that no action would be taken against him, Bruen had gravitated towards support for government and for union. Following his election as a member for country Carlow in April 1790, Bruen returned family members and associates for the boroughs of Duleek and Taghmon. His parliamentary nominees invariably supported the union. The support of the Bruen interest for union sprang from practical considerations. It also indicates that opposition to union was not universal among the political classes in Carlow. This chimes with Louis Cullen’s observation that in the counties, the divide on union was more likely to reflect local circumstances rather than national alliances or abstract political concepts.²⁷

²⁰ E.M. Johnston, ‘Members of the Irish Parliament, 1784-7’ *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, C71 (1971), p. 172.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

²² Falkland, *principal characters*, p. 10.

²³ Mullala, *The political history of Ireland* (Dublin, 1793), p. 132.

²⁴ Ogygia, *The critical review or annals of literature extended and improved by a society of gentlemen* (London, 1793), p. 536.

²⁵ HMC, *The manuscripts of J.B. Fortescue, Esq., preserved at Dromore* (10 vols, London, 1892-1927), i, p. 359.

²⁶ HMC, *Fortescue Mss*, ii, p. 14.

²⁷ L.M. Cullen, ‘Alliances and misalliances in the politics of the Union’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 10 (2000), p. 222.

This was certainly the case with Richard Butler. Unlike William Burton, the other representative for Carlow, Butler had no strong 'interest' in the county and relied on the support of others for electoral success. In January 1799, Butler adopted a neutral position and appeared in none of the contemporaneously published lists of MPs that supported and opposed the union.²⁸ This apparent abstention was a tactical consideration given the opposition demonstrated by Carlow freeholders at the meeting of 26 January 1799 and the support of Bishop Delany, the Roman Catholic prelate.²⁹ Later in 1799, Butler appeared to support union before reverting to an anti-union stance in January 1800. Edward Cooke identified both Carlow representatives as anti-union in late January 1800 while the Church of Ireland Bishop of Killaloe writing to John Hamilton on 6 February 1800 remarked that Butler had 'deserted' them.³⁰ Writing to Lord Grenville on 6 February 1800, Edward Cooke noted that Butler had changed sides probably because 'the activity, the intimidation, the subscription purse of the enemy has been employed with effect'.³¹ Butler's defection was also noted by Castlereagh who remarked on 7 February 1800 that the Carlow MP along with others 'were taken off by county cabals during the recess'.³² This suggests that Butler was persuaded by government, probably with the promise of pecuniary reward to lend his support to union, but that local pressure was brought to bear on him and that he changed his mind.

While the avowedly anti-union Burton interest stoked anti-union sentiment, the presence of the Downshire Militia in Carlow in February 1800 added to the political tension. Lord Downshire secured the signatures of members of the Down Militia to an anti-union petition while stationed in Carlow early in February 1800. Concern about the propriety of this act was registered with Lord Castlereagh by an anonymous member of the public in Carlow who was concerned about the reliability of the Down Militia as they 'decidedly petition against and reprobate the measures of the Government who pay them'.³³ The matter was investigated and Downshire was sanctioned by the loss of several posts including the command of the Down militia and his seat on the privy council.³⁴ Despite this demonstration of the strength of official displeasure with those opposing union, Butler maintained his anti-union stance and voted against the government in the division of 6 February 1800. Subsequently heartened by the flood of anti-union county petitions raised in February 1800,³⁵ he continued in his anti-union posture and was to the fore in attempts to organise a freeholders'

²⁸ *BNL*, 1 Feb. 1799; PRONI D3030/552B. Barrington included Butler in the Original 'Red List' and then in the 'Black List' as one who had voted against union in 1799 but for union in 1800 (see Jonah Barrington, *secret memoirs of the legislative union* (London, 1844), p. 480 and p. 488).

²⁹ Delany wrote to Sir John Coxe Hippisley in February 1799 expressing his support for Union, see John Roche Ardill, *The closing of the Irish parliament* (Dublin, 1907), p. 46.

³⁰ Cooke to Eden, 20 Jan 1800 (PRONI, Sneyd Papers, T3229/2/52); Bishop Knox of Killaloe to Abercorn, 6 Feb 1800 (PRONI, Abercorn Papers, D623/1/158).

³¹ HMC, *Fortescue Mss*, vi, p. 118

³² Charles Ross (ed.), *Memoirs and Correspondence of Charles, first marquis Cornwallis* (3 vols, London, 1859), iii, p. 182.

³³ Charles Vane, *Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh*, (5 Vols, London, 1848), iii, p. 230.

³⁴ Geoghegan, *The Irish Act of Union*, p. 106.

³⁵ Kelly, 'Popular Politics in Ireland and the Act of Union', p. 283.

meeting in Carlow to raise an address against the union before the Spring Assizes in 1800.³⁶ His anti-union stance was not to last. The country experienced a sudden and unexpected surge in loyalism in late May and early June 1800 in the wake of a failed assassination attempt on George III.³⁷ Carlow was prominent among those counties that framed addresses to the king. Signed by William Knott, the high sheriff and Bruen satellite, it expressed 'gratitude to the Supreme Being for his kind interference' in safeguarding the monarch and expressed the hope that they, 'the noblemen, gentlemen, clergy and freeholders of the county of Carlow' would 'long enjoy the blessings of your majesty's presence and excellent government'.³⁸

This spontaneous outpouring of support for government influenced Butler's behaviour and by the final reading of the bill on 7 June 1801, he was once again in support.³⁹ Sentiment however was not his only motive. Given the level of patronage and the amounts of cash dispensed by government in smoothing the passage of the union, it is not surprising that it was thought that Butler was bribed to switch his support.⁴⁰ This was vehemently denied by Butler who, in response to the suggestion by Lord Plunkett that bribery had been used by government retorted that 'he represented one of the most respectable counties in the kingdom, and that no man could or should dare to say that the influence of bribery could reach him'.⁴¹ Despite his protestations, it is certain that he received a cash inducement.⁴² Butler was in difficult financial circumstances and embroiled in expensive legal actions surrounding his father's estate.⁴³ This forced to sell 900 acres of land near Myshall in December 1795 for the 'payment of family incumbrances'.⁴⁴ He also found it necessary to dispose of more lands near Rathvilly in 1800.⁴⁵ His straitened financial circumstances made him amenable to a cash inducement and his sudden support for government was prompted by a financial reward.

³⁶ Cornwall to Castlereagh, 12 Apr. 1800 (NAI, Rebellion Papers, 620/5/77).

³⁷ Kelly, 'Popular Politics in Ireland and the Act of Union', p. 285.

³⁸ *London Gazette*, 15 July 1800

³⁹ Geoghegan, *The Irish Act of Union*, p. 116.

⁴⁰ Over £30,000 was covertly supplied to Dublin Castle between October 1799 and May 1800, see David Wilkinson, "'How did they pass the union?': secret service expenditure in Ireland, 1799–1804' *History*, 82:266 (1997), p. 232.

⁴¹ John Cashel Hoey (ed.), *Speeches at the bar and in the senate by the right honourable Wm. Conyngham, Lord Plunket* (Dublin, 1859), p. 81.

⁴² As already mentioned, Butler was included by Barrington on the 'Red List' who received 'cash' for his vote, see Barrington, *secret memoirs*, p. 488. Butler felt obliged to rebut the insinuation of William Conyngham Plunket in the last days of the Irish parliament that he had been bribed by government to support the union, see J.C. Hoey, *Speeches at the bar and in the senate by the right honourable Wm. Conyngham, Lord Plunket*, (Dublin, 1859), p. 81.

⁴³ Sir Richard Butler legal Costs, nd, (NAI, Cliffe-Vigors papers, PRIV-1096-5-35/-xiv).

⁴⁴ *SNL*, 12 Dec. 1795.

⁴⁵ Printed rental of part of the estates of Sir Richard Butler, Bart. (intended to be sold) in the baronies of Rathvilly and Forth, Co. Carlow (NLI, Colclough Family of Tintern Abbey Papers, Ms. 24,555/37).

II. The Imperial Parliament: New Beginnings

As county members, Richard Butler and William Burton automatically retained their seats in the imperial parliament when Irish representation was transferred to Westminster in 1801. They comprised two of the three MPs that the county now sent: the borough of Old Leighlin was abolished and Carlow was reduced to one member. The first session of the enlarged house began on 23 January 1801. In general, Irish members were slow to take their seats with just between twenty and thirty appearing by 28 January. This was seen as an indication of a lack of commitment to the new arrangement and ‘not very expressive of the joy of that country at the union’.⁴⁶ It was not altogether certain that the Irish MPs would be accorded a warm welcome in London and the new members were often caricatured (Figure 3.1) as uncouth, unsophisticated and unwilling participants in the United Kingdom parliament. This, together with the expense of removing to London was a major disincentive to Irish participation. While non-attendance was not limited to Irish members, it was noted by Isaac Gascoyne (1763-1841) speaking on 9 February 1801 that scarcely fifty of the one hundred Irish members had yet taken their seats and he proposed a ‘Call of the House’.⁴⁷ When the ‘Call’ was taken on 17 March 1801, William Burton was among the twenty-two Irish members who were absent and ordered to appear within a month.⁴⁸ Richard Butler was not among those listed as missing, but his name was included in a later list.⁴⁹ As had been the case in Dublin, neither were impressive parliamentarians, rarely attending and never speaking.⁵⁰ Burton and Butler were examples of the early Irish members characterised by Peter Jupp as a ‘humdrum and lacklustre crew’.⁵¹

The first united parliament was closed by George III on 28 June 1802.⁵² In Britain, the general election was generally seen as a referendum on the recently concluded peace with France.⁵³ This did not feature as an issue in Ireland where the election was conducted along the same lines as before the union with local ‘interests’ at work both in the counties and boroughs. The election saw

⁴⁶ *MP*, 29 Jan 1801.

⁴⁷ *Parliamentary Debates*, 9 Feb 1801, p. 101. The ‘Call of the House’ was a process where all MPs were required to appear or to explain why they could not appear. Those who did neither were considered defaulters and liable to arrest by the Serjeant at Arms, see T.E. May, *A treatise upon the law, privileges, proceedings and usage of parliament*, (London, 1846), p. 149.

⁴⁸ *Parliamentary Debates*, 17 Mar. 1801, p. 80.

⁴⁹ List of Irish Members by County with Observations dated 25/03/1801 (TNA, Colchester Papers, PRO 30/9/134/1).

⁵⁰ Thorne (ed), *Commons*, , iii, p. 344 & p. 348.

⁵¹ P.J. Jupp, ‘Irish M.P.s at Westminster in the early nineteenth century’ in J.C. Beckett (ed.), *Irish historical studies VII* (London, 1969), p. 68.

⁵² *Parliamentary Register*, 28 June 1802, p. 647.

⁵³ Boyd Hilton, *A mad, bad, and dangerous people? England, 1783-1846* (Oxford, 2006), p. 99.

forty sitting members returned for the same constituency, four sitting members for different constituencies and a remarkable fifty-six new members returned.⁵⁴ Despite the large cohort of new Irish representatives, surprisingly few polls took place with just five out of the thirty-two county constituencies and six of the thirty-four borough seats contested.⁵⁵ Carlow was one of the five county constituencies where there was a contested poll but where local electoral 'interests' once more determined the outcome.

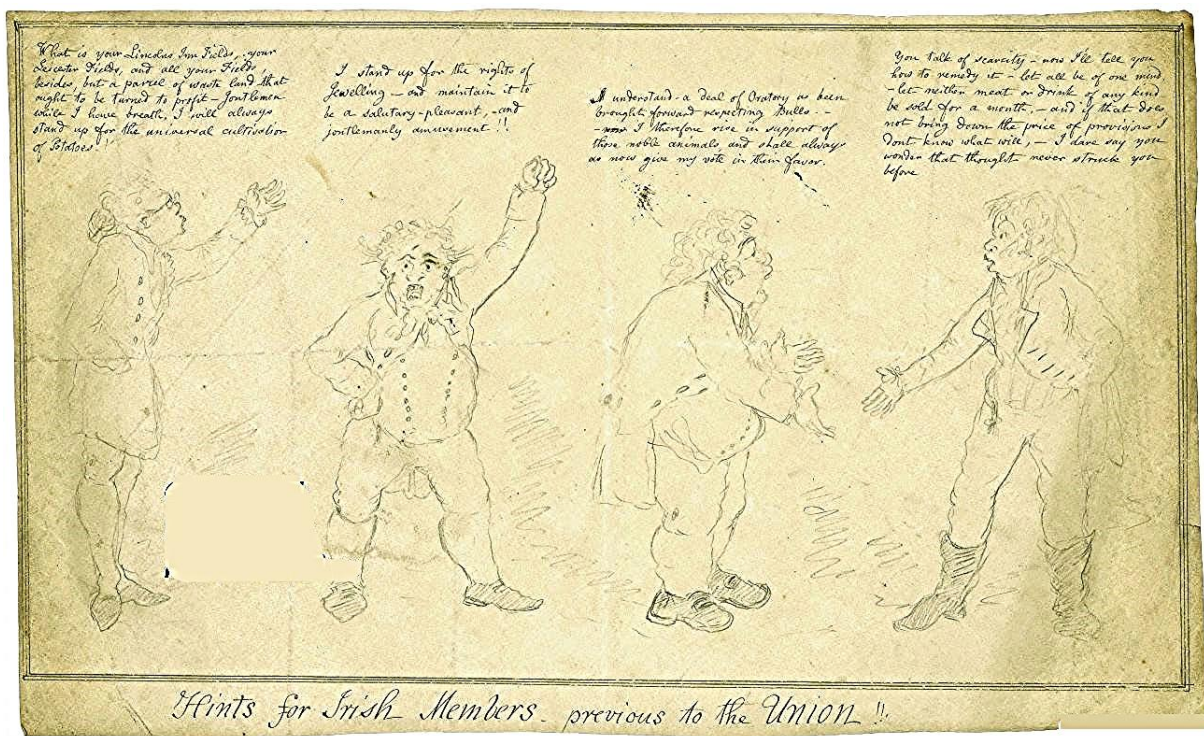


Fig. 3.1 George Murgatroyd Woodward, *Hints for Irish members - previous to the Union*, 1800.

The cartoon caricatures four Irish MPs as having interests that stretch no further than the cultivation of potatoes, 'Jewelling', 'Bulls' and the last who propose a total ban on the sale of expensive provisions as a means of forcing prices down. For a more extensive treatment of this topic and other examples see Nicholas Robinson, 'Marriage against inclination: the union and caricature' in Daire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (eds), *Acts of Union: the causes, contexts and consequences of the act of union*, (Dublin, 2001), pp 140-58.

Courtesy of Derbyshire Record Office, Ref. D5459/1/93/32

Despite their ineffectiveness, both incumbents declared their intention to stand again. Butler and Burton faced two new, if not unknown candidates in Colonel David Latouche and Walter Bagenal. As colonel of the Carlow Militia, and a large local landowner, Latouche was a formidable

⁵⁴ Walker, *election results*, (Dublin, 1978), pp 1-8.

⁵⁵ Thorne (ed), *Commons*, i, p. 165.

opponent. He had been a candidate in Carlow in the 1797 general election when, as discussed earlier, he withdrew before the poll on foot of pressure from his father. Latouche was an extremely popular landlord and was described by one observer as ‘acting the part of a guardian angel to his tenants’.⁵⁶ Stationed in county Meath during the insurrection in 1798, he was not tainted by the excesses that occurred in Carlow.⁵⁷ Latouche was aware of these advantages and signalled his candidacy well in advance. His intention to put himself forward was reported in July 1801, a full year before the election when he modestly professed ‘a disinclination to obtrude himself at an improper season, or to commence a premature canvass’.⁵⁸ Latouche’s move from the military to politics was also prompted by the disembodiment of all Irish militia regiments following the peace of Amiens.⁵⁹ The Carlow Militia were disbanded in April 1802 effectively depriving Colonel Latouche of an occupation other than that of landlord.⁶⁰ The second new candidate, Walter Bagenal, was the only son of Beauchamp Bagenal and, unsurprisingly as most of his father’s estate had been sold, he took up residence in England on attaining his majority initially settling in Hampshire.⁶¹ Unusually for an Irish parliamentary county candidate, he spent most of his time in England and seldom visited Ireland.⁶² While Latouche commanded the loyalty of his own substantial tenantry, Bagenal appealed to the traditional support for his family among his former tenants. Importantly as will be seen later, both also enjoyed the support of the substantial Bruen interest as Henry Bruen II had not yet attained his majority.

With the exception of county Dublin, no candidates in the county constituencies that were contested published addresses to freeholders in 1802.⁶³ This is indicative of the fact that candidates eschewed public appeals in favour of close canvassing and the cultivation of existing electoral interests. Bruen support for Bagenal and Latouche was crucial. By way of direct support for the favoured candidates, the Bruen estate also spent a considerable amount on ‘eating etc.’ for their tenants who attended the election in 1802.⁶⁴ Bagenal and Latouche were also supported by the Kavanagh interest. The election was rumoured to have been expensive: it was reported that one of the candidates spent £500 per day.⁶⁵ Transport costs were a considerable element as most carriages in Carlow were on hire to one or other of the candidates resulting in a shortage.⁶⁶ The election began

⁵⁶ Atkinson, *The Irish tourist*, p. 395.

⁵⁷ For an account of Colonel Latouche’s action against rebels near Tara in late June 1798, see *FDJ*, 7 Aug. 1798.

⁵⁸ *Sun*, 24 July 1801.

⁵⁹ Nelson, *Irish militia*, p. 247; McDonnell, “‘Zeal and Patriotism’”, p. 221.

⁶⁰ *SNL*, 7 April 1803.

⁶¹ Bagenal was resident in Southampton when he married Elizabeth, widow of John Chambers of Bell Vue in Froyle Parish Church, Hampshire see *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, 13 Mar. 1786.

⁶² He was variously reported as visiting Carlow in October 1805 after an absence of between 15 and 21 years, see *London Star*, 9 Oct. 1805; *The Times*, 10 Oct. 1805.

⁶³ A survey of *FJ*, *FLJ* and *SNL* between July and August 1802 found no addresses from any county candidates in the contested counties of Carlow, Clare, Leitrim and Meath.

⁶⁴ On 1 October 1802 the estate of Henry Bruen I paid Francis Hayden, a local innkeeper, £49-10-0 for ‘eating & C’ for those freeholders that attended the election in July (NLI, Bruen Papers, Rough Account Book of Robert French, Ms. 32,483-1), hereafter *French rough accounts*.

⁶⁵ *FJ*, 27 July 1802; *BNL*, 30 July 1802.

⁶⁶ *FLJ*, 21 July 1802.

on 20 July 1802 and polling ended abruptly six days later when Walter Kavanagh's interest 'amounting to six hundred and ten freeholders' arrived at the poll in support of Bagenal and Latouche.⁶⁷ Butler and Burton realised that they could not succeed in the face of such a united opposition and resigned without waiting for the Kavanagh tenants to be polled.⁶⁸ The unseated members were unhappy with the result and the way that the poll was conducted. This caused the High Sheriff to call on them to discuss their unhappiness.⁶⁹ Neither continued in their complaint.

It has been observed that in the immediate post-union period, the mass of the population was unaware of the change in the system of parliamentary representation and that the existing structures of power survived largely intact.⁷⁰ The election of Walter Bagenal in Carlow in 1802 provides proof that this was the case. While the Bagenal name no doubt attracted some residual support springing from historic loyalty to his family, depleted landholdings resulted in depleted electoral influence. Bagenal succeeded because of the support afforded to him by the Bruen and Kavanagh interests.⁷¹ Latouche also benefitted from the combined Bruen and Kavanagh support. The combined electoral block of the Bruen and Kavanagh interests succeeded in altering the established parliamentary political order in Carlow, but this happened with almost no disruption to the existing ascendancy power structure.

⁶⁷ *SNL*, 3 Aug. 1802.

⁶⁸ The final poll figures suggest that 933 voters were polled, almost 2,000 were polled in the 1797 election indicating that not all registered freeholders were required to vote.

⁶⁹ *Sun*, 23 Aug. 1802.

⁷⁰ Gearóid ÓTuathaigh, *Ireland before the famine: 1798-1848* (Dublin, 2007), p. 32.

⁷¹ Thorne (ed), *Commons*, iii, p. 102.

III. Local Stability in an Unstable World – Carlow and Catholic Relief 1800-

10

The two new MPs for Carlow did not make a better parliamentary impression than their predecessors with neither speaking in the house in their first term. As Colonel of the re-embodied Carlow Militia, which was raised again following the collapse of the Peace of Amiens, military business kept David Latouche with his regiment in Galway between 1803 and September 1804,⁷² in Athlone and Banagher in October 1805 and Killarney in June 1806.⁷³ This made attendance at Westminster difficult but, despite this, Latouche was generally a supporter of government who could be relied on to attend parliament if necessary. It was thought that Bagenal would generally follow Latouche's line.⁷⁴ In fact Bagenal, who was a more frequent attendee, was inclined to oppose the Addington and Pitt administrations,⁷⁵ arising out of his membership of the opposition grouping

**Table 3.1: Summary of Voting Record of
Walter Bagenal & David Latouche 1803-
1806**

	Bagenal	Latouche
For Government	0	0
Against Government	14	3
Absent	18	29
Unclear	3	3

Sources: Thorne (ed) , *Commons* , i; , *MC*; , *Hansard*, *LS*,
LKG, *Cobbets Weekly Register*, *LC*, *Oracle & Weekly*
Register, *MP*, *The Times*

⁷² *SNL*, 7 April 1803; 7 Nov 1803.

⁷³ *DJ*, 29 Oct. 1805; *SNL*, 3 June 1806; *FJ*, 5 June 1806; *DJ*, 18 Sept 1806.

⁷⁴ Government list of the Irish members with comments, Jan to June 1804 (PRONI, Stanhope (Pitt) Papers, T3401/5/1).

⁷⁵ Peter Jupp, 'Irish parliamentary representation 1801-1820' (PhD thesis, University of Reading, 1966), p. 14.

known as ‘The Prince of Wales’s Friends’.⁷⁶ Latouche was also associated with this loose grouping and was identified as such in a parliamentary list compiled by George Rose and Charles Long in May 1804.⁷⁷ The performance of both MPs can be seen from Table 3.1 which gives details of how, or indeed, if they voted in the thirty-five divisions that took place in the second united parliament. Latouche voted in opposition to government three times while Bagenal voted in opposition fourteen times. Appendix B carries full details of the divisions.

Catholic relief was the most challenging problem presented by the union.⁷⁸ William Pitt’s determination to introduce Catholic relief as part of the union led to his resignation as prime minister in February 1801 on foot of George III’s refusal to countenance any concessions.⁷⁹ His replacement, Henry Addington recognised that as well as royal obstinacy and prejudice, there was a groundswell of opposition in the united parliament to Catholic relief arising from three sources. The first sprang from a distrust of Irish MPs, the majority of whom were from county constituencies with a largely Catholic electorate. Secondly there was the fear that concessions to Catholics would be extended to dissenters thus threatening the supremacy of the established church. Finally, there was a rising British nationalism personified by the monarch himself that harboured an innate xenophobia and an anti-Catholic bias.⁸⁰ It is not surprising therefore that Catholic relief was removed from the political agenda in Westminster. At the same time, anti-Catholic bias in England was reinforced by popular accounts from Ireland of the events of the 1798 rebellion, which that provoked further reluctance among Protestants to extend further to Catholics.⁸¹ This paranoia was stoked by commentators like Richard Musgrave when he implicated the Catholic clergy in Robert Emmet’s failed insurrection in July 1803.⁸² Moreover, his was not a lone voice; in August and September 1803 the Irish Lord Chancellor Lord Redesdale in ‘superficially polite but increasingly acrimonious exchanges’ questioned whether Catholics were prohibited by their church from being loyal to a non-Catholic monarch.⁸³

In the absence of progress in parliament, Irish Catholics sought to engage with the Pittite government that was formed in May 1804. Catholic meetings in Dublin over the summer resulted in the production of a suitably deferential petition.⁸⁴ Eventually presented in May 1805, it was emphatically rejected in both Lords and Commons.⁸⁵ Both of the representatives for Carlow voted

⁷⁶ *FJ*, 9 June 1804.

⁷⁷ Thorne (ed), *commons*, i, p. 170.

⁷⁸ Douglas Kanter, *The making of British unionism, 1740-1848* (Dublin, 2009), p. 111.

⁷⁹ S. J. Connolly, ‘The Catholic question, 1801-12’ in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland Vol 5: Ireland under the union*, p. 1, Hilton, *A mad, bad, and dangerous people?*, p. 98.

⁸⁰ Bartlett, *fall and rise*, p. 271.

⁸¹ Kelly, *Sir Richard Musgrave 1746-1818* (Dublin, 2009), p. 141.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁸³ Connolly, ‘The Catholic question, 1801-12’, p. 25.

⁸⁴ *BNL*, 2 April 1805.

⁸⁵ *DJ*, 18 May 1805; *JHC*, Vol. 60, p. 271, 14 May 1805.

Table 3.2: County Carlow Members Elected 1800-1830	
Year of Election	Members
1802	Colonel David Latouche Walter Bagenal
1806	Colonel David Latouche Walter Bagenal
1807	Colonel David Latouche Walter Bagenal
1812	Colonel David Latouche Henry Bruen II
1816	Robert Latouche (in place of David Latouche)
1818	Henry Bruen II Sir Ulysses Bagenal Burgh
1820	Henry Bruen II Sir Ulysses Bagenal Burgh
1826	Thomas Kavanagh (in place of Burgh)
1830	Henry Bruen II Thomas Kavanagh
Sources: Malcolmson, <i>Carlow Parliamentary Roll; Return of the names of every member returned to serve in each parliament from the year 1696 up to the present time</i> , HC, 1878 [cd 69-I]; Walker, <i>Election Results</i>	

in favour of the Catholic petition, a unity of pro-Catholic opinion shared by just five other counties.⁸⁶ This demonstrates that both Carlow representatives were responsive to what was considered important by the majority of their constituents. Although there was no overt Catholic agitation in Carlow, both Bagenal and Latouche were sensitive to Catholic ‘opinion’.

Pitt’s death on 23 January 1806 saw the installation of a new administration under Lord Grenville. Known sarcastically as ‘the ministry of all the talents’, it was supported by those who had been in opposition, including the grouping associated with the Prince of Wales and followers

⁸⁶ The other five counties whose representatives both supported the petition were Clare, Kerry, Kilkenny, Meath and Wicklow.

of the former prime minister Henry Addington.⁸⁷ Grenville was a supporter of Catholic relief but together with Fox, he was aware that such measures would meet a hostile reception from both the king and the Commons.⁸⁸ Fox advised Irish Catholics against another petition and, presumably to demonstrate his good faith to them, he removed several officeholders that were seen as anti-Catholic and replaced them with figures that were considered to be more sympathetic.⁸⁹ Patronage was also employed to 'keep the government resting on as broad a political base as possible'.⁹⁰ It was this policy that saw William Burton, former MP for county Carlow and close associate of the Ponsonby interest appointed as a Commissioner of the Irish Treasury demonstrating the effectiveness of his efforts to promote his own interest.⁹¹ Further manifestations of this policy in Carlow saw the alleged removal by Lord Chancellor Ponsonby of seven magistrates who were anti-Catholic. The errant magistrates were supposedly reinstated by Ponsonby in return for their electoral support for William Burton who was said to have been canvassing the county at the time.⁹² While Ponsonby was not above such electoral interference,⁹³ as the 1806 election was uncontested in Carlow, it is unlikely that Burton would have been canvassing.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the rumour serves to illustrate the disenchantment felt by the Catholic majority in relation to the Butler and Burton dynasties that had dominated the representation of the county in the Irish parliament.

IV. The 1806 and 1807 General Elections

The death of Charles Fox and the possibility of a multi-front war prompted Grenville's strategic decision to seek a dissolution of parliament in October 1806 in the hope that a general election would strengthen his position in the Commons.⁹⁵ It was thought that few Irish constituencies would be contested, a circumstance that the *Freeman's Journal* hoped was due to the 'satisfaction that the sitting candidates have yielded to their constituents' rather than 'the listlessness which is said to prevail in the country'.⁹⁶ As staunch proponents of Catholic relief, it is not surprising that Latouche and Bagenal were identified as supporters of the Grenville ministry in a parliamentary list prepared in advance of the general election.⁹⁷ Neither was premature in declaring their candidacies, with Bagenal's address to freeholders issued on 17 October 1806 and Latouche's on 19 October 1806.

⁸⁷ Connolly, 'The Catholic question, 1801-12', p. 30; A. D. Harvey, 'The Ministry of All the Talents: The Whigs in Office, February 1806 to March 1807' *Historical Journal*, 15:4 (1972), p. 619 P.J. Jupp, *Lord Grenville, 1759-1834* (Oxford, 1985), p. 349.

⁸⁸ Jupp, *Lord Grenville*, p. 352.

⁸⁹ Bartlett, *fall and rise*, p. 286.

⁹⁰ Jupp, *Lord Grenville*, p. 386.

⁹¹ *BCC*, 24 Mar. 1806; *FJ*, 27 Mar. 1806

⁹² Francis Plowden, *The history of Ireland from its union with Great Britain in January 1801 to October 1810*, (3 Vols, Dublin, 1811), ii, p. 373.

⁹³ Thorne (ed), *Commons*, iv, p. 853.

⁹⁴ Francis Plowden's reliability on this matter has been questioned, see Connolly, 'The Catholic question, 1801-12', p. 32.

⁹⁵ Jupp, *Lord Grenville, 1759-1834*, p. 383.

⁹⁶ *FJ*, 22 Oct. 1806.

⁹⁷ Kelly, 'The Members of Parliament for Ireland, 1806: two lists of 'Parliamentary Interests'', *IHS*, 34:134 (2004), p. 205.

Bagenal was brief, promising freeholders that ‘he would ever obey your instructions, having no object but your wishes’.⁹⁸ Latouche was equally brief and reminded his constituents of his ‘efforts to promote the welfare and prosperity of this kingdom’.⁹⁹ Although each candidate published multiple addresses, this was a mere formality as both were secure in the knowledge that the Bruen and Kavanagh electoral interests were again at their disposal and would secure their return. This was apparent to observers who remarked that the election was uncontested as ‘the son and heir of the late Henry Bruen Esq. is still in his minority’.¹⁰⁰ Thus the Bruen interest was recognised as an essential ingredient in electoral success in Carlow.

The renewed Grenville ministry enjoyed the support of Bagenal and Latouche during its brief tenure that came to a precipitous end in 1807 over its dogged support for Catholic relief in the form of clauses included in the annual Mutiny Bill permitting Catholics to hold commissions in the army and navy.¹⁰¹ One of the first parliamentary tests for the new Portland ministry which lasted from March 1807 until October 1809 was the division on a motion critical of government proposed by Thomas Brand that contained an oblique suggestion that Spenser Perceval gave an undertaking not to contemplate Catholic relief.¹⁰² Latouche supported the motion and while Bagenal was absent, he too would almost certainly have joined him.¹⁰³ While the vote on Brand’s motion proved to be a lot closer than the new administration would have liked, no great blame was attached to the Irish members. Table 3.3 provides an analysis of how Irish members voted on the motion. One of the striking aspects is the low participation: just forty-six of the one hundred Irish members featured with 32 country representatives and 14 borough representatives voting. If Bagenal had stayed in the house to vote, Carlow together with Kerry, Tipperary, Wexford and Wicklow would have seen both members voting with the opposition. All of these counties had significant numbers of Catholic freeholders and, as P.J. Jupp observed, county representatives and proprietary interests were often influenced by this factor.¹⁰⁴ This was certainly the case in Carlow where the Bruen interest, anxious to maintain their electoral influence among their Catholic tenantry, saw it as necessary to support Catholic claims.

⁹⁸ *DEP*, 25 Oct. 1806.

⁹⁹ *FJ*, 24 Oct. 1806.

¹⁰⁰ *SNL*, 15 Nov. 1806.

¹⁰¹ Jupp, *Lord Grenville*, p. 409.

¹⁰² *Hansard (Commons)*, 9 April 1807, vol. 9, col. 304.

¹⁰³ *Hansard (Commons)*, 9 April 1807, vol. 9, col. 349. Newspaper reports (*DEP*, 23 April 1807, *FJ*, 30 April 1807) erroneously suggested that David Latouche had not returned from the Spring Assizes in Carlow but *Hansard* is more authoritative.

¹⁰⁴ Jupp, ‘parliamentary representation 1801-1820’, i, p. 41.

In the course of the 1807 general election, the ‘No Popery!’ slogan appeared on walls throughout Britain.¹⁰⁵ The issue was central because, according to its originator Perceval, ‘the great mass of voters were terrified of the idea of Catholic emancipation’.¹⁰⁶ The fact that ‘No Popery’ did not feature in Ireland is a reflection of the overwhelmingly Catholic composition of the electorate

Table 3.3 Brand's Motion April 1807: Irish Members By Constituency Type

	County	Borough	Totals
For	17	10	27
Against	15	4	19
Absentees / Abstentions	32	22	54
Totals	64	36	100

Sources: *Morning Chronicle*, 13 April 1807, R.G. Thorne (ed), *The House of commons, 1790-1820*, Jupp, Irish parliamentary representation

and that many constituencies ‘counties as well as boroughs had taken up fixed attitudes to the Catholic claims, and these remained undisturbed by the crisis which had led to the election’.¹⁰⁷ In Ireland, the Portland administration nonetheless put considerable effort into promoting candidates they felt would support their ministry. Naturally it was easier to exert influence over ‘closed’ borough constituencies and the administration considered itself to be in a position to nominate members for Carlow, Cashel, Tralee, Enniskillen and Athlone and possibly for Dundalk.¹⁰⁸ Government was also prepared to broker payment for borough seats for government supporters with, for example, Lord Charleville agreeing £4,500 for the return of Andrew Strahan for Carlow borough.¹⁰⁹ The easily controlled electorates of the smaller boroughs lent themselves to this type of manipulation.

The election for county Carlow was set for 20 May 1807.¹¹⁰ In a parliamentary list prepared in advance for the Duke of Portland, the sitting members for county Carlow are both noted as being in opposition. The list also indicated that Thomas Butler was likely to contest the election and that

¹⁰⁵ Thorne (ed), *Commons*, i, p. 189.

¹⁰⁶ Denis Gray, *Spencer Perceval: the evangelical prime minister, 1762-1812* (Manchester, 1963), p. 106.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Hinton, *The general elections of 1806 and 1807* (PhD Thesis, University of Reading, 1959), p. 352.

¹⁰⁸ Arthur Wellesley to Henry Wellesley, 29 April 1807 (USA, Wellington Papers, MS61/WP1/167/30).

¹⁰⁹ Long to Wellesley, 21 May 1807 (USA, Wellington Papers, MS61/WP1/168/28).

¹¹⁰ *DEP*, 9 May 1807.

he would support government.¹¹¹ Butler declared his candidacy early in May claiming the support of ‘several of the leading and independent interests’ and reminding electors of his ancestors who served as representatives and ‘the independence and integrity with which they discharged their parliamentary duty’.¹¹² Government support for Butler is evident. Writing to Wellesley on 13 May 1807, the Earl of Aldborough asked if there was any government objection to his supporting Butler in Carlow with his interest in that county.¹¹³ Wellesley replied on 15 May 1807 thanking him for his efforts on behalf of government and confirming government support for Butler.¹¹⁴ On 16 May 1807 Wellesley was again active on Butler’s behalf canvassing Colonel Maxwell-Barry of Cavan for the interest that he had in county Carlow.¹¹⁵ Maxwell-Barry was amenable at first and, replying on 17 May 1807, he agreed to support Butler.¹¹⁶ However, the following day, having had word from Carlow on the likely outcome of a contest there, he quickly reconsidered his support for Butler and suggested to Wellesley that his Carlow electoral interest ‘may be of a practical service in furthering our views in Wexford’.¹¹⁷ Maxwell-Barry clearly considered that trading his Carlow interest for another’s interest in Wexford would serve the government aims better and that Butler had little chance of success. This demonstrates the cold, practical approach to electoral politics taken by government and its supporters and the confidence with which observers could predict electoral results.

Butler’s father Sir Richard was also active on his behalf. He wrote to Robert French, the guardian of the still underage Henry Bruen, and in attempt to dislodge the Bruen interest from Bagenal and Latouche, he sought the support of the Bruen interest for his son Thomas. If assistance was forthcoming, Butler promised to support the minor Henry Bruen should he decide to stand in Carlow at a future date. Butler also asked that the proposal be ‘kept secret ‘till after the election’ for fear that he ‘might lose some interest by it being made public’.¹¹⁸ The Bruen interest had already been offered to Walter Bagenal and David Latouche. As part of the offer, an undertaking in writing of future electoral support for Bruen junior was sought by Mrs. Bruen from Latouche. He was unwilling and, writing to Robert French on 10 May 1807, he stressed that although he had declined the offer, he was anxious that the refusal would not be taken ‘as anything unfriendly’.¹¹⁹ French replied to both Butler and Latouche on 16 May 1807, informing Butler that Mrs. Bruen ‘sees no reason why’ she should not continue to give her son’s interest to the sitting members as she did ‘on former occasions’.¹²⁰ Replying to Latouche, French accepted that the refusal to pledge future

¹¹¹ List of the Irish House of Commons; 1807 (UNMSC, Portland Papers, Pw F 10522/1).

¹¹² *DEP*, 5 May 1807.

¹¹³ Aldborough to Wellesley, 13 May 1807 (USA, Wellington Papers, MS61/WP1/166/121).

¹¹⁴ Wellesley to Aldborough, 15 May 1807 (USA, Wellington Papers, MS61/WP1/167/79).

¹¹⁵ Wellesley to Barry, 16 May 1807 (USA, Wellington Papers, MS61/WP1/167/89).

¹¹⁶ Barry to Wellesley, 17 May 1807 (USA, Wellington Papers, MS61/WP1/156).

¹¹⁷ Barry to Wellesley, 18 May 1807 (USA, Wellington Papers, MS61/WP1/168/2).

¹¹⁸ Butler to French, 11 May 1807 (NLI, Bruen Collection, Ms. 48,338-8/3).

¹¹⁹ Latouche to French, 10 May 1807 (NLI, Bruen Collection, Ms. 48,338-8/2).

¹²⁰ French to Butler, 16 May 1807 (NLI, Bruen Collection, Ms. 48,338-8/4).

support did not 'indicate or intend anything unfriendly to the interest of young Bruen' and that he instructed Philip Watters, local Bruen agent 'to solicit the tenants of the Bruen estate to vote for you and Mr. Bagenal'.¹²¹ It was plain to Butler that he could not prevail if the election was brought to a poll and he resigned on 19 May 1807 remarking that his 'independent' supporters had 'delayed and materially neglected to register their freeholders'.¹²² Latouche informed French of the resignation on 19 May and thanked him for his support.¹²³ He was returned alongside Walter Bagenal.

The elections of 1802, 1806 and 1807 highlighted the electoral strength of the Bruen interest in county Carlow. It was the most important factor in the return of Walter Bagenal who, although of an august political pedigree, was neither resident in the county nor in possession any longer of lands that would have provided him with his own electoral interest. While Latouche also benefitted from Bruen support, he was more independent as he had his own phalanx of tenants on whom he could rely for support. The differing circumstances of the two members is further underlined by the fact that it was Latouche rather than Bagenal that was approached by the Bruen estate to form an electoral pact with a view to the political future of Bruen minor. The 1807 contest also demonstrated the weakness of government in the county where their preferred and supported candidate judged it better not to force a poll.

Conclusion

The abolition of the Irish parliament and the reduction in the number of parliamentary representatives made little immediate difference to the conduct of electoral politics in the county. The electoral interests that were influential before the union remained so in the decade that followed and had a profound effect on the selection of parliamentarians. While the representatives changed, the forces underpinning the changes did not. The Catholic question was a factor rather than an issue in Carlow politics. This is not surprising given that the majority of freeholders in the county were Catholic. This encouraged the pro-Catholic stance taken by both parliamentary representatives, yet it led to no breakthrough. In the general election of 1807, Dublin Castle attempted unsuccessfully to exert influence in favour of a candidate that was thought to be a potential government supporter. The exertion of government influence in this way was to become a feature of Carlow politics in the second decade of the Union.

¹²¹ French to Latouche, 16 May 1807 (NLI, Bruen Collection, Ms. 48,338-8/5).

¹²² *DEP*, 21 May 1807.

¹²³ Latouche to French, 19 May 1807 (NLI, Bruen Collection, Ms. 48,338-8/7).

Chapter 4: The Development of Catholic Political Consciousness, Carlow Politics 1811-1818

Introduction

In Carlow, the period between the 1812 and 1818 elections saw the aspiring middle class beginning to flex its political muscle. While the Catholic question remained central, other issues that affected the emerging middle classes also found their way into political debate. The middle class included Liberal Protestant and Catholic merchants and professionals as well as larger and more prosperous farmers. The politicisation of the middle classes was registered by the willingness and ability to hold meetings, form committees, send delegations and raise petitions and the arrival of the *Carlow Morning Post* in 1818 provided a public platform for political discussion. The impact on electoral politics was less striking. But in a decade that saw the emergence of Henry Bruen II in 1818, and the first significant if ineffective intervention by a senior Catholic clergyman, the Catholic question was established as a central political issue.

I. The Birth of Carlow Catholic Politics

The re-elected members continued in the new parliament of 1807 as they had in the old with Bagenal attending more frequently than Latouche, who persisted with his almost nomadic military duties with the Carlow Militia.¹ Following their re-election, they continued to be identified as opponents of government and thus supporters of the Catholic cause and were numbered among those Irish MPs who ‘stood in the popular interest’.² Of the twenty-two divisions that Bagenal participated in between his election in May 1807 and the dissolution of that parliament in July 1812, he voted with the opposition on twenty-one occasions.³ Latouche voted just ten times, each time with the opposition. Both were steadfast in their support for Catholic relief. The issue gained increased prominence in Carlow over the term of that parliament given the decidedly anti-Catholic bias of the new government. The ‘no popery’ government

¹ The regiment saw service in Tralee, Fermoy, Londonderry, Mullingar, Chichester, Hull, Hastings and Leeds between July 1807 and August 1812, see *FJ*, 30 July 1807, 4 July 1811, 17 Aug 1811, 4 Oct 1811, 9 Nov 1811, *DEP* 19 Nov. 1807, *Hull Advertiser* 25 Apr. 1812, *Leeds Mercury* 28 Aug. 1812.

² *DEP*, 26 May 1807.

³ Bagenal voted against James Stuart Wortley’s motion on 21 May 1812, see *Cobbett*, xxiii, p. 284 and Thorne (ed), *Commons*, v, p. 311.

headed by Lord Portland and represented in Dublin by the Duke of Richmond and Arthur Wellesley was characterised by ‘a strong desire not to concede to Catholic aspirations’.⁴ The government lost no time in making its mark in Ireland with a series of, from a Catholic perspective, regressive appointments to official positions.⁵ William Saurin, another well-known opponent of Catholic claims, was appointed attorney general and the annual grant for Maynooth College was reduced leading militant Protestants to feel that ‘they now had a government more favourable to their interests’.⁶ This in turn prompted a wave of Catholic meetings across the country to consider the best course of action in the future.⁷ Although Carlow Catholics did not frame a petition being regarded at this time as ‘very timorous’ and ‘afraid of their task masters who are numerous, severe and vigilant’, there was a still strong support for petitioning for relief.⁸

In March 1808, Liberal Protestants, keen to demonstrate their support for what they saw as the justified claims of Irish Catholics, published a ‘Protestant Declaration’ which recognised that ‘the interests of the Protestants and Roman Catholics of Ireland are inseparable’ and calling for county meetings to declare Protestant support for Catholic claims. Walter Kavanagh from Borris was one of the first signatories when it was published on 11 March 1808 and he was joined by David Latouche on 2 April 1808.⁹ There were similar declarations from the Protestants of Meath, Waterford, Kilkenny, Queen’s County and Kerry.¹⁰ While Walter Bagenal does not appear to have signed the declaration, in parliament he voted against the cut to the Maynooth College grant on 29 April 1808 and 5 May 1808, and against the appointment of Dr Patrick Duigenan to the Irish Privy Council on 11 May 1808.¹¹ Latouche made one of his infrequent Westminster appearances on 25 May 1808 when, in tandem with Bagenal, he opposed government and supported Henry Grattan’s motion for the formation of a committee to consider Catholic claims.¹² Even though the motion was heavily defeated, both of the representatives for county Carlow were keen to publicly demonstrate their support for Catholic relief measures.

Controversy arose from this petition centering on the suggestion that the Irish Catholic hierarchy was amenable to allowing government the power to veto candidates as appointees to the prelate as well as agreeing to accept the payments to clergy by government. These concessions were unveiled by Grattan and Ponsonby, the promoters of the Catholic petition at the

⁴ Margaret Ó hÓgartaigh, ‘Catholic politics in early nineteenth-century Ireland’, *Seanchas Ardmhacha*, 23:1 (2010), p. 188.

⁵ These appointments included John Gifford as a Revenue official and Patrick Duigenan as a member of the Privy Council. Both were considered to be ‘red hot’ Protestants: Bartlett, *The fall and rise*, p. 290.

⁶ Connolly, ‘The Catholic question, 1801-12’.

⁷ Margaret Ó hÓgartaigh, *Edward Hay: historian of 1798* (Dublin, 2010), p. 76.

⁸ Yore to Hay, 17 Jan. 1808 (DDA, Catholic Board Papers, Section 390-1, File II-4). Yore made these comments when writing from Carlow College.

⁹ *HJ*, 11 Mar. 1808; *DEP*, 2 Apr. 1808.

¹⁰ *FLJ*, 2 Apr., 4 May, 1 June, *DEP*, 17 Mar., 21 June 1808.

¹¹ *Hansard (Commons)*, 25 Apr. 1808, vol. 10, col. 98; *MC*, 9 May 1808; *Hansard (Commons)*, 24 May 1808, vol. 11, col. 638.

¹² *Hansard (Commons)*, 25 May 1808, vol. 11, col. 638; *Cobbett’s*, xi, p. 638.

suggestion of Archbishop Milner, the Irish hierarchy's agent in London. Milner however had not secured the support of the Irish hierarchy.¹³ Although not repugnant to the Irish Catholic aristocracy, there was a popular furore orchestrated by Daniel O'Connell mainly through the press. This campaign suggested that a veto in any form would render the Catholic church as little better than 'puppets of a government dedicated to the retention of both the Protestant and British ascendancy in Ireland'.¹⁴ As S.J. Connolly noted, the veto controversy marked the final transfer of power from the Catholic landed gentry to the more militant and more aggressive Catholic professional and mercantile classes.¹⁵ The episode also established Daniel O'Connell as the dominant force in the Irish political scene.¹⁶

In county Carlow, Bishop Daniel Delany was not supportive of agitation and held a jaundiced view of emancipation itself. Writing to his fellow Bishop, Francis Moylan, on 15 November 1808, he broached the topic of the veto and voiced his disapproval of the laity discussing matters that concerned the Catholic hierarchy remarking that 'decidedly and intimately adverse do I feel to this audacious innovation'.¹⁷ He went on to dismiss the notion that, as part of a politically-inspired veto mechanism, a Catholic nobleman might have the right to elect bishops:

You see, then, my dear and most honoured Lord, to what a pass we are at length brought to by our politics, our addresses, our *Diplomaticis and Aristocraticis*, our conversations, our aggregate meetings, parliamentary negotiations [sic], our Boards, secular discussions and our emancipations and the deuce knows what!!! Where will it end, or whither finally lead us?¹⁸

Writing the following month, he dismissed:

politics, with committees and their chairmen, with pamphlet and newspaper polemics, with conventions and addresses and petitions and the plague knows what applications and diplomatic negotiations, at ye seat of Empire, within or out Ministers and Professional Speechifiers in Imperial Parliaments &c., &c.¹⁹

Delany had scant regard for the 'rising socially ambitious middle classes' and felt that the hierarchy should concentrate on spiritual rather than political matters.²⁰ In general, Delany was deferential to government and was grateful for any concessions made to Roman Catholic clergy.²¹

¹³ Ambrose Macaulay, *The Catholic Church and the campaign for emancipation in Ireland and England* (Dublin, 2018), p. 150.

¹⁴ Oliver MacDonagh, *The hereditary bondsman: Daniel O'Connell, 175-1829* (London, 1988), p. 99.

¹⁵ Connolly, 'The Catholic question, 1801-12', p. 41.

¹⁶ Ó hÓgartaigh, 'Catholic Politics in early nineteenth-Century Ireland', p. 192.

¹⁷ Bolster, 'The Moylan Correspondence in Bishop's House, Killarney: Part 2' *Collectanea Hibernica* 15 (1972) p. 83.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹⁹ Evelyn Bolster, 'The Moylan Correspondence in Bishop's House, Killarney: Part 1', *Collectanea Hibernica* 14 (1971), p. 137.

²⁰ C.A. Power, 'Daniel Delany, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin (1787-1814) and the commencement of the veto controversy in Ireland' *Carloviana* 60 (2011) p. 48.

²¹ See for example his letter of 31 August 1810 to W.W.Pole, then Chief Secretary where he contrasted 'the liberal and beneficial conduct of our legislature at the present day....and the penal restriction – may I presume to say – of former periods'. The letter was

Unlike other counties where the hierarchy were supportive,²² those persons in Carlow contemplating the continuation of agitation for emancipation could expect little help or support from their bishop. This did not prevent agitation from surfacing, but deprived it of leadership and self-confidence.

Early in 1810, the Catholic Committee decided to petition parliament for relief again. A meeting of Carlow Catholics was requisitioned to 'take into consideration the propriety of petitioning parliament for the removal of disabilities'. Among the signatories to the notice calling for the meeting was William Finn Snr. (a wealthy Catholic tanner and property owner from Carlow), John Coffey (a Catholic innkeeper from Carlow), Thomas Cloney (Catholic landowner and former United Irishman from Graiguenamanagh) and William Francis Finn (son of William Snr., brother-in-law to Daniel O'Connell and future MP for county Kilkenny) all of whom were to figure prominently in Liberal politics in Carlow in the coming years.²³ The meeting, on 25 January 1810, agreed to frame a separate petition for presentation to parliament by Lord Clifden in the Lords and Colonel Latouche in the Commons and welcomed the decision of the Irish bishops to oppose the imposition of any veto on episcopal appointments. It was also agreed to form a permanent committee with twenty-four members and to thank Bagenal and Latouche as well as Henry Parnell for their 'uniform and zealous support'.²⁴ The committee's duly framed petitions were presented as planned in the Lords on 21 March 1810 and the Commons on 6 April 1810.²⁵ Plainly, the middle class in county Carlow were now confident enough to initiate political action without episcopal or clerical support. This was also an indication of an 'awareness of the power of the masses beneath them' recognised by those merchants and professionals who were beginning to dominate Catholic politics at the start of the nineteenth century.²⁶

Carlow Catholics arranged a second meeting to be held on 19 September 1811 at which it was hoped 'the support of many enlightened Protestants' would be evident.²⁷ The participation of Protestants was seen as important by the Carlow Catholic Committee and they postponed this meeting until 2 October 1811 to facilitate many Protestant gentlemen who were unable to attend on the date originally set.²⁸ The meeting was held in Carlow courthouse and was attended by 'all that were respectable, and enlightened in the county' and was chaired by William G. Bagot (a

reproduced seventeen years later and presented as a contrast to the aggressive posture of Bishop James Doyle and the Catholic Association; *BNL*, 9 Feb. 1827.

²² Ó hÓgartaigh, *Edward Hay*, p. 82; Bartlett, *fall and rise*, p. 298.

²³ *DEP*, 18 Jan. 1810.

²⁴ *DEP*, 1 Feb. 1810.

²⁵ *JHL*, Vol 47, 21 Mar. 1810, p. 532; *JHC*, Vol 65, 6 Apr. 1810, p. 256; *FJ*, 22 Feb. 1810.

²⁶ Bartlett, *fall and rise*, p. 295.

²⁷ *FJ*, 9 Sept. 1811. There were also meetings in Cork, Down, Leitrim, Louth, Longford, Dublin, Wexford and Wicklow, see *SNL*, 11 Sept. 1811; *The Times*, 13 Sept. 1811.

²⁸ *LS*, 23 Sept. 1811.

Catholic of Castle Bagot, Co. Dublin who held some lands in Carlow).²⁹ Many of the emerging Catholic commercial and stronger farming class were in evidence. It was reported that as many Protestants as Catholics attended. Benedict Hamilton, the Lord of the Manor of Carlow and a life-long Protestant spoke at length and hoped that ‘concord and union between Catholic and Protestant be perpetual’ and that the Catholic cause would eventually succeed. A committee including Walter Blackney, the future Liberal MP and William F. Finn was appointed to prepare a petition to parliament and thanks were extended to the Protestant gentlemen that attended. Finally, Bagenal and Latouche for were lauded for their ‘uniform and steady support’ of the Catholic claims as were Lord Clifden (a Whig peer and prominent supporter of Catholic relief) and William Knott the sheriff.³⁰ Letters of apology from Bagenal and Latouche for their non-attendance were published a few days later, their publication prompted by rumours that at the next general election ‘a disciple of Mr. Pole’s is to start for that county’.³¹ William Wellesley Pole, the Irish Chief Secretary, it was perceived, saw an opportunity in county Carlow to have a sympathetic candidate returned at the expense of one of the sitting members.

There was an almost immediate conservative reaction to the reports of the meeting in Carlow. The *Dublin Journal* refuted reports that the meeting in Carlow had been attended by either Rev James Magrath (a magistrate and clergyman of the Established Church) or William Humfrey (a landowner resident in Carlow and a former sheriff of Dublin), both described as ‘distinguished loyalists’. Those Protestants that attended had done so, it was asserted, ‘through terror of assassination and midnight plunder; very, very few in heart coincided with the acts of the Popish leaders’.³² This provoked a response from the liberal *Freeman’s Journal* which printed a list of those Catholics and Protestants in Carlow that attended asserting that they represented ‘every man of respectability in Carlow’. It also remarked that the *Dublin Journal* was under the direct influence of Dublin Castle.³³ Some days later, William Knott the High Sheriff of county Carlow, called to the office of the *Freeman’s Journal* and berated the editorial staff claiming that the report carried by the newspaper of his attendance at the meeting was erroneous. The newspaper was unrepentant alleging that Knott was denying his attendance in order to maintain his place as a revenue collector.³⁴ The support of Latouche and Bagenal for the meeting is a further illustration of their recognition of the growing power of the predominately Catholic electorate. However, the reaction of the *Dublin Journal* and the overreaction of William Knott indicated unease among Protestant gentry at the nascent political consciousness of Carlow Catholics which appeared to be a new political movement.

²⁹ *FJ*, 5 Oct. 1811.

³⁰ *FJ*, 7 Oct. 1811., Thorne (ed), *Commons*, iii, p. 52.

³¹ *FJ*, 11 Oct. 1811.

³² *DJ*, 15 Oct. 1811.

³³ *FJ*, 17 Oct. 1811.

³⁴ *FJ*, 21 Oct. 1811.

One local Protestant landowner was conspicuous by his absence, especially as a political career awaited. The approach made by Mrs. Bruen to David Latouche before the election in 1807 with a view to a future electoral pact is a clear indication that a parliamentary career was intended for her son. With this in mind, steps were also taken to strengthen the Bruen electoral interest in the county. Regular payments were recorded in Bruen's financial papers between 1806 and the election in 1812 to Alex Humfrey, the clerk of the Crown in Carlow for registering Bruen tenants as freeholders.³⁵ The estate was also active in 'creating' freeholders paying stamp duty amounting to £18 8s 4d on 15 January 1805 on leases issued to tenants so that they could be registered as freeholders.³⁶ This tactic continued in 1810 with William Farrer, a non-resident tenant in Nurney paid £4 11s on 2 June 1810 to surrender his lease so that his sub-tenant, John Murphy, could become the leaseholder and then register as a suitably malleable freeholder.³⁷ The Bruen estate carefully built an electoral base in Carlow during the minority of Henry II with the intention of securing a parliamentary seat for him when the opportunity presented. Additionally there is little doubt that Bruen was the individual identified by the *Freeman's Journal* as the 'disciple' of Chief Secretary Pole.³⁸

Despite the hysterics of the *Dublin Journal*, there was support for Catholic claims amongst Carlow Protestants and relations between Catholic and Protestant were harmonious at this time. Catholic and Protestant attended a jubilee dinner in Carlow in October 1809 when, as well as the usual loyal toasts, the health of Dr Delany and Dr Staunton of Carlow College were included. The dinner was hailed as an exemplar of cordiality.³⁹ Protestant and Catholic co-operated in charitable ventures such The Carlow Dispensary and the Committee for the Sick Poor in Carlow.⁴⁰ Mrs. Harriet Bruen subscribed £100 on 26 June 1810 to Dr Delany's fund to build a new chapel in Tullow.⁴¹ Walter Kavanagh from Borris and Benedict Hamilton from Carlow attended a dinner on 19 December 1812 given in Dublin by The Friends of Religious Liberty by the Catholics of Ireland.⁴² On the eve of the election of 1812, Carlow town and county showed no signs of deep seated sectarian rancour, though Carlow Catholics were active within the larger emancipation movement and sent a delegation to a meeting in the Crown and Anchor Tavern,

³⁵ See appendix 1 for details.

³⁶ *French rough accounts*, 15 Jan 1805 (NLI, Bruen Papers, Ms. 32,483-2).

³⁷ *General account of Henry Bruen with Philip Watters*, 2 June 1805 (NLI, Bruen Papers, Ms. 29,773/2, p. 46).

³⁸ *FJ*, 11 Oct. 1811. It was common knowledge that Bruen had by then amassed a phalanx of registered freeholders, that he harboured political ambitions and that he was sympathetic to government. This was recognised by the *Freeman's Journal* when it mentioned that government and Pole had a 'disciple' ready to stand in Carlow.

³⁹ *DEP*, 2 Nov. 1809.

⁴⁰ Henry Staunton of Carlow College and P.P. of Carlow, Edward Box the Carlow Barrack Master and Robert Croswaithe served together on these committees, see *DEP*, 2 Jan. 1810.

⁴¹ *Bruen account with Watters*, 26 June 1810 (NLI, Bruen Papers, Ms. 29,773/2, p. 46).

⁴² *FJ*, 20 Dec. 1811. Hamilton was Lord of the Manor in Carlow and first cousin to Hans Hamilton, MP for county Dublin from 1801 until 1822. See Pedigree of the Hamilton family in Viscount Clanboye in T.K. Lowry (ed), *The Hamilton manuscripts*, (Belfast, 1867), p. 161.

Earl Street, Dublin on 23 December 1811. The meeting produced a requisition for an aggregate meeting to be held on 26 December to draw up an address to the prince regent. William G. Bagot, W.F. Finn and his brother Patrick Finn were among the signatories to the requisition.⁴³ A petition from the Catholics of Carlow town and county was duly presented in the House of Lords by the Earl of Bessborough on 20 April 1812 alongside petitions from Kilkenny, Tipperary, Waterford and Queen's County among others.⁴⁴

On the same day a petition from the Protestants of Ireland in favour of Catholics was presented in the Commons by Maurice Fitzgerald.⁴⁵ This Protestant petition was launched in January 1812 when it was decided to draw up a single petition from the Protestants of Ireland in support of Catholic claims.⁴⁶ The petition was widely circulated with Carlow receiving a copy in late January 1812.⁴⁷ Henry Bruen was among those Carlow Protestants who agreed to sign.⁴⁸ In presenting the petition on 20 April 1812, Maurice Fitzgerald remarked that several Protestants, although well-disposed towards Catholic claims, had declined the opportunity to add their signatures to the document on foot of official intimidation.⁴⁹ He went on to claim that one unnamed Protestant gentleman 'of large fortune' in county Carlow had been denied the post of Sheriff for 1812 as one of his proposers had signed the petition.⁵⁰ The parliamentary debate was widely reported, but there was no further investigation into Fitzgerald's claims.⁵¹ It was evident that the growing confidence of Catholics in Carlow gave rise to disquiet among the ranks of the local Protestant elite.

This disquiet was manifest in the refusal by Sheriff Gilbert Rudkin to allow the Court House to be used as venue for an aggregate meeting of Catholics on 26 August 1812. While professing great respect for the Catholic body, he justified his refusal on the grounds that it would 'not be consistent' with his duties as chief magistrate of the county.⁵² The meeting was instead held in the Assembly Rooms. William Gerald Bagot, the chairman of the meeting voiced criticism of Rudkin pointing out that 'the jurisdiction of the courthouse' lay with the Grand Inquest and the Magistracy of the county rather than the sheriff and that it was to them that future applications would be made'. Thomas Finn was also stridently critical of Rudkin, dismissing out of hand his claims of sympathy for the Catholic cause and calling on 'the production of a single instance' of

⁴³ *FJ*, 26 Dec. 1812.

⁴⁴ *FJ*, 27 Apr. 1812; *JHL*, 20 Apr. 1812, Vol. 48, p. 740

⁴⁵ Fitzgerald was the Knight of Kerry, an opponent of government at the time, see P.M. Geogheghan, 'Maurice Fitzgerald', Sub Nomine.

⁴⁶ *FJ*, 14 Jan. 1812.

⁴⁷ *FJ*, 2 Feb. 1812.

⁴⁸ *Copy of the Protestant petition to both houses of parliament and the names of the subscribers thereto*, (Dublin, 1812), p. 71.

⁴⁹ *Hansard (Commons)*, 20 Apr. 1812, vol. 22, col. 483.

⁵⁰ *Hansard (Commons)*, 20 Apr. 1812, vol. 22, col. 486.

⁵¹ *FJ*, 27 Apr. 1812.

⁵² *Pilot*, 1 Sept. 1812.

his liberality towards Catholics. Towards the close of the meeting, Finn delivered further invective aimed at Lord Castlereagh whom he viewed as unsympathetic to the Catholic cause.⁵³ The aggressive and combative tone of this meeting is an illustration of the growing impatience of Carlow Catholics and their supporters and represented an important first stage in the development of a popular voice in electoral politics in Carlow.

II. The 1812 Election: The Beginning of Bruen Dominance

The Bruen interest had been preparing for the 1812 general election for almost two decades. Henry Bruen II attained his majority in 1810. Although parliament was not dissolved until 29 September 1812, canvassing by Bruen in Carlow was underway well in advance.⁵⁴ Robert Cornwall writing to Henry Bruen II in 1811 assured him of his continuing electoral support and mentioned the 'strong friendship' he held for Henry Bruen I 'that hath not been by time erased from my memory'.⁵⁵ At the beginning of August 1812 David Latouche, then in England with the Carlow Militia, in a letter addressed to the freeholders of Carlow noted that the canvass in Carlow had already begun and expressed the hope, not entirely confidently, that his parliamentary conduct to date would 'entitle him to a continuance of their support and confidence'.⁵⁶ Latouche's political antennae were more finely calibrated to Carlow politics than those of the press with, as the election loomed, many journals confidently predicting the uncontested return of Bagenal and Latouche.⁵⁷ Bagenal was the first to address the electors. Writing from Weymouth on 25 September, even before parliament was dissolved, he referred to his three terms as a Carlow representative and assured the electorate that he 'never will vary from our mutual interests'.⁵⁸ Latouche spoke in similar terms in his address dated 4 October 1812 assuring electors that 'no private feeling has ever interfered with the discharge of my public duty' and that he intended to continue to act in parliament as he had done to date. Bruen offered a more locally focussed appeal in his address dated 8 October 1812; he made mention of his late father and that he had 'resolved, like him, to pass my life among you' and claimed his interests were the same as those of the electorate.⁵⁹

⁵³ *FJ*, 29 Aug. 1812.

⁵⁴ Thorne (ed), *Commons*, i, p. 226.

⁵⁵ Cornwall to Bruen II, 20 Jan. 1811 (NLI, Bruen Papers, Ms. 48.338/9)

⁵⁶ *SL*, 8 Aug. 1812.

⁵⁷ *FJ*, 1 Oct. 1812; *LKG*, 2 Oct. 1812; *LS*, 10 Oct. 1812.

⁵⁸ *DEP*, 5 Oct. 1812.

⁵⁹ *DEP*, 10 Oct. 1812, 13 Oct. 1812.

Bruen's intention to contest the constituency prompted a flurry of activity and meetings among Catholics within the county. On 15 October 1812 at a dinner to the friends of religious liberty in Kilkenny, Bagenal and Latouche were toasted as supporters of Catholic emancipation and the Catholic freeholders of Carlow were urged 'to remember on the hustings the sterling integrity of their votes in the senate'.⁶⁰ The tenants of David Latouche held a meeting in his support in Coffey's Inn in Carlow on 18 October 1812. The meeting did not mention the Catholic question, but in an extraordinary display of loyalty, it bestowed praise upon Colonel Latouche as a landlord and agreed that the cost of his election campaign would be borne by his grateful tenants.⁶¹ A meeting of Roman Catholic freeholders of Carlow held in the Assembly Rooms, Carlow on 23 October 1812 endorsed the parliamentary performances of Bagenal and Latouche for their 'steady and uniform support for the Catholic claims'.⁶² The decision of Carlow Catholics to support the existing representatives rather than Bruen carried with it an implicit criticism of the new candidate.

The poll opened on 22 October with Latouche, Bagenal and Bruen proposed.⁶³ W.F. Finn and W.G. Bagot, two stalwarts of the Catholic Committee made what were described as 'very neat' speeches in support of Bagenal and Latouche firmly identifying them with the Catholic cause.⁶⁴ After seven days of polling, Latouche had polled 680 votes, Bruen 597 and Bagenal a mere 296, prompting him to resign from the contest.⁶⁵ Electorally, Bagenal was the weaker of the sitting MPs as he was non-resident and did not possess landholdings of consequence in the county and he faced a well-connected and well-resourced opponent in Bruen. One of his main electoral supporters was Philip Newton, his brother-in-law, whose interest extended to two hundred freeholders.⁶⁶ Newton was persuaded by Bruen to favour him with his support rather than giving it to Bagenal and, to a large extent, this decided the election.⁶⁷ Newton was regarded as a benevolent and liberal landlord and his tenants were loath to go against his electoral directions on this occasion.⁶⁸ The apolitical bishop Daniel Delany also played a role in Bruen's success. It was rumoured afterwards that the bishop procured two hundred votes for the Bruen campaign in return for the £100 subscription to the Tullow chapel building fund.⁶⁹ More importantly, Bruen also enjoyed the support of government. Robert Peel, as Arthur Wellesley had done for Thomas Butler in the 1807 election, actively canvassed on Bruen's behalf. It was made clear to Peel on his taking

⁶⁰ *FJ*, 21 Oct. 1812.

⁶¹ *FJ*, 27 Oct. 1812.

⁶² *FJ*, 28 Oct. 1812.

⁶³ *DJ*, 27 Oct. 1812.

⁶⁴ *LKG*, 30 Oct. 1812.

⁶⁵ Malcolmson, *Carlow parliamentary roll*, p. 31.; *DJ*, 3 Nov. 1812.

⁶⁶ Burke, *landed gentry of Ireland*, p. 327.

⁶⁷ Denys Scully and Brian MacDermot (ed), *The Catholic question in Ireland & England, 1798-1822* (Dublin, 1988), p. 390.

⁶⁸ Following his death in October 1833, Newton was eulogised as one who was 'esteemed and respected by every class in society', see *CS*, 26 Oct 1833.

⁶⁹ As discussed above, Delany was notoriously averse to politics, sceptical of the value of emancipation and those politicians supporting it, see letter from 'A Curate', in *The Irish Magazine*, May 1813, p. 229.

up the Chief Secretaryship barely a month before, that this type of necessarily covert election management was one of his principal duties.⁷⁰ Consequently, writing to Colonel Barry on 6 October 1812, Peel noted that ‘Mr. Bruen is anxious that every influence in the county of Carlow should be exerted in his favour’ and he hoped that Barry would ‘give him the assistance he wishes’.⁷¹ Government clearly recognised Bruen as a potential government supporter and were prepared to support him.

The political demise of Bagenal elicited a critical reaction from both Catholic and Protestant activists. Speaking at an aggregate meeting of the Catholics of Dublin on 5 November 1812, W.F. Finn felt obliged to exonerate Carlow Catholics from blame following Bruen’s election. Finn attributed Bruen’s election ‘solely to a combination which had been formed between him and Mr. Newton’.⁷² It was reported that Finn also ascribed the electoral defeat to dishonesty among Bagenal’s friends rather than the actions of Catholic freeholders, but later qualified his remarks to the effect that ‘perhaps it would be unjust to say that, the treachery of Mr. Bagnal’s [sic] friends has been the occasion of his defeat, but certainly it is not attributable to Catholic ingratitude’.⁷³ In his message of thanks to freeholders, Bruen praised the Catholic voters that supported him despite attempts by some of their co-religionists to persuade them to do otherwise. Bruen remarked that ‘The unwearied exertions of a few, to fetter the freedom of election have failed in their object’. This was a clear reference to the attempt by the Catholic Association to impose pledges on freeholders to support only those candidates in favour of Catholic relief.⁷⁴ Without being openly hostile to Catholic claims, this immediately put him at odds with the local Catholic activists and identified him as an opponent of Catholic claims.

The manner in which the election was conducted and the prominence of the Catholic question as an issue prompted a reaction from Carlow conservatives. A meeting of Protestant freeholders to consider the claims of Catholics was held in Carlow courthouse on 27 November 1812. Carlow was not unusual in this as similar meetings were held in Dublin, Sligo, Leitrim, Longford, Monaghan and Armagh.⁷⁵ While the meeting in Carlow adopted resolutions opposing the granting of Catholic claims, opinion was by no means unanimous. It was reported that not many Protestants attended and those that did, apart from those that had signed the requisition for the meeting ‘were recognised as the supplementary yeomanry of the whole county’. However, Sir Richard Butler, John S. Rochfort and Henry Bunbury supported the anti-Catholic resolutions with Rochfort observing that as ‘Catholics had improperly interfered in the election for the county of

⁷⁰ Norman Gash, *Mr Secretary Peel: the life of Sir Robert Peel to 1830*, (London, 2011), p. 114.

⁷¹ Peel to Barry, 6 Oct. 1812 (NLI, Farnham Papers, Ms. 18,600/5).

⁷² *FLJ*, 11 Nov. 1812.

⁷³ *FJ*, 6 Nov. 1812.

⁷⁴ *DEP*, 31 Oct. 1812.

⁷⁵ *LKG*, 17 Nov. 1812.

Carlow' it was time for Protestants to counter this. Dissenting voices included those of Rev William Sutton and William Tighe who supported Catholic relief and opposed the resolutions.⁷⁶ The resolutions were passed but the meeting illustrates the beginning of the realisation among the Protestant gentry that electorally, the Catholic vote was becoming organised and had the potential to overturn the political status quo in the county.

The resolutions provided the basis for petitions to both houses of parliament which called for no further Catholic relief measures without 'adequate security being provided by Parliament for the maintenance of the present constitution'.⁷⁷ The patron of Carlow borough, the Earl of Charleville presented the petition in the House of Lords on 22 February 1813 remarking that while the spirit of the petition opposed the unrestricted concession of Catholic claims, it still 'breathed a spirit of toleration and conciliation suitable to the subject'.⁷⁸ Surprisingly Colonel David Latouche who presented the petition in the Commons on 17 February made it clear that 'his opinion was the reverse of that of the petitioners'.⁷⁹ Despite his misgivings and his commitment to his Catholic constituents, from a high-minded sense of duty, he still felt obliged to act on behalf of a section of the Carlow Protestant gentry.

The parliamentary performance of David Latouche following his re-election in 1812 mirrored his earlier behaviour. Often away on military business, he was not a frequent attender of parliament. Bruen was also a lax attender. He was, however, active outside parliament in his pursuit of government patronage for his supporters. In his first term as one of the representative for Carlow, he maintained a regular correspondence with Robert Peel the Chief Secretary, usually in connection with the advancement of his associates to government positions. For example, within weeks of his election, he unsuccessfully canvassed for the vacant post of Barrack Master in Carlow. Other examples include his successful canvass on behalf of James Eustace for the post of High Sheriff of Carlow in January 1813, his unsuccessful representations on behalf of Mr. Harold and Rev John Hardy in February 1814 and his unsuccessful application for the living of Kilmain on behalf of Rev Francis Lambert in June 1814.⁸⁰ He went on to make another fourteen applications to Peel between July 1814 and June 1818. This constant search for patronage was to become a pattern in Bruen's relationship with government.

⁷⁶ *FJ*, 4 Dec. 1812.

⁷⁷ *JHC*, Vol. 69, 17 Feb. 1812, p. 169.

⁷⁸ *Hansard (Lords)*, 22 Feb. 1813, vol. 24, col. 658.

⁷⁹ *LC*, 25 Feb. 1812.

⁸⁰ Bruen to Peel 1 Nov. 1812 (BL, Peel Papers, Add Ms. 40223, f. 304); Bruen to Peel 1 Feb. 1813, (BL, Peel Papers, Add Ms. 40224, f. 20, 183); Bruen to Peel 16 Feb. 1814 (BL, Peel Papers, Add Ms. 40239, ff 332,336); Bruen to Peel 8 June 1814 (BL, Peel Papers, Add Ms. 40227, f. 263).

Although both Latouche and Bruen voted for Grattan's motion on the formation of a committee to consider Catholic claims on 2 March 1813, Bruen's support for Catholic claims afterwards was less certain than that of Latouche.⁸¹ Neither representative voted in any of the four divisions relating to the Catholic Bill in May 1813, their failure to support the measures springing more from absence rather than political conviction.⁸² This was against the background of increasingly vocal agitation from Carlow Catholics. This hardening of attitudes can be measured by the support shown at a meeting of Catholics in Carlow on 21 October 1813 to consider the endorsement of resolutions, including a contentious vote of thanks to O'Connell proposed by another meeting in Dublin following the controversial trial of John Magee on 26-27 July 1813. Magee as editor of the *Dublin Evening Post* was charged with a libel on the Duke of Richmond who had held the office of Lord Lieutenant. Daniel O'Connell appeared for Magee, but his conduct of the defence was unorthodox and was seen as needlessly aggressive and not serving Magee well. O'Connell considered Magee's case to be hopeless and used the trial as a forum in which to attack the government.⁸³ At a Catholic Board meeting in Cork on 30 August 1813, there was disagreement on the appropriateness of proposed votes of thanks for Magee and O'Connell as one was a convicted libeller and the other had engaged in questionable 'public conduct'.⁸⁴ When the votes were approved, some board members were unhappy and afterwards decided to secede from the Catholic body.⁸⁵ W.G. Bagot who had chaired several Catholic meetings in Carlow was uncomfortable with these controversial votes of thanks and declined to attend the meeting. It was chaired by W.F. Finn and was supportive of the votes of thanks. Finn described O'Connell as 'an honest man, and his most worthy friend'. The outspoken journalist Thomas Finn, brother to William Francis, waxed lyrical in his praise of Magee observing that:

far from being considered a criminal by the Irish People, [sic] either at this day or in after times, [he] will have his name handed down in posterity, and canonized as a martyr to the cause of Public Liberty.⁸⁶

The meeting approved the votes of thanks to 'great applause'. It was also agreed that a petition would be presented in the House of Commons by Colonel Latouche and in the House of Lords by Lord Clifden.⁸⁷ The meeting indicated that Carlow Catholics were willing to support radical action and were increasingly confident and organised in their actions.

⁸¹ *Hampshire Chronicle*, 15 Mar. 1813.

⁸² Bruen figured among the lists of non-attending MPs in calls of the house taken on 11 and 17 May 1813. He did not appear on a list from 24 May suggesting that he made his excuses by then. Latouche appeared on none of the list suggesting that he had been excused on account of his military duties. See *JHC*, Vol 68, 11 May 1813, p. 472; 17 May 1813 p. 490; 24 May 1813 p. 516

⁸³ MacDonagh, *The hereditary bondsman*, p. 122.

⁸⁴ Patrick M. Geoghegan, *King Dan: the rise of Daniel O'Connell 1775-1829* (Dublin, 2010), p. 132.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁸⁶ *MC*, 3 Nov. 1813.

⁸⁷ *LKG*, 26 Oct. 1813.

In parliament, both of the Carlow representatives, through their absence from Westminster, failed to support a motion to establish a parliamentary committee to examine Catholic claims on 30 May 1815.⁸⁸ Their failure to support the motion was noted in Catholic circles. In an analysis of the voting patterns, conducted by the Catholic author Denys Scully of Irish members, the Carlow representatives were categorised among those ‘who neither voted for Sir Henry [Parnell]’s motion nor are known to have opposed it’. The writer qualified this observation by noting that it was not certain whether they had deliberately absented themselves or whether they had been accidentally shut out of the vote; it was certain though that ‘they did not vote for the motion’ (Scully’s emphasis).⁸⁹ It was clear that by then neither felt obliged to publicly demonstrate their support for measures intended to benefit the Catholic electors of Carlow. It was also evident that the performance of Irish representatives was going to be subjected to greater scrutiny by an increasingly politicised electorate.

Despite these parliamentary setbacks, agitation among Catholics in Carlow continued. They met on 21 September 1815 and endorsed a number of resolutions that were broadly in line with those passed at an aggregate meeting of Catholics held in Dublin on 4 July 1815.⁹⁰ Other counties had already met and endorsed the same resolutions that confirmed the intention to continue to petition parliament for relief and that rejected any veto over episcopal appointments.⁹¹ Opposition to the veto was led by Daniel O’Connell.⁹² The fact that Carlow Catholics opposed the veto signalled that they, like O’Connell, were becoming more assertive. This assertiveness was identifiable in the contribution of Thomas Finn, who at the meeting pointed to the growing economic and moral strength of the Carlow Catholics. Finn suggested that:

every day education is diffusing most extensively its lights among us and industry increasing our property. These two great advantages are sufficient alone to operate on the mind of government to grant that which in justice, they cannot withhold and in wisdom will not. Their disposition in this way is sufficiently evident from their anxiety and exertion to procure an interference in the appointment of prelates.⁹³

Finn’s observations were greeted with applause. The meeting presented Carlow Catholics as aggressive, assertive and politically aware and underlined the need to begin to manage electoral politics in the county more carefully.

⁸⁸ *Hansard (Commons)*, 30 May 1815, vol. 31, col. 524.

⁸⁹ Scully specifically engaged with the vote on Sir Henry Parnell’s motion, see NLI, *Scully Papers*, Ms. 27,539.

⁹⁰ *DEP*, 8 July 1815.

⁹¹ For example, meetings in Limerick on 21 July 1815 and Kilkenny on 20 Aug. 1815 approved the resolutions, see *LKG*, 28 July 1815, *DEP*; 24 Aug 1815.

⁹² Patrick Geoghegan, ‘The impact of O’Connell, 1815-1850’ in Kelly (ed) *The Cambridge history of Ireland*, Vol 3 (Cambridge, 2018), p. 108.

⁹³ *DEP*, 26 Sept. 1815.

III. The 1816 By-Election: the Emergence of Local Activism

David Latouche fell into what was a terminal illness in March 1816.⁹⁴ His death prompted calculated discussion in government circles as to his likely successor both as an MP and as the colonel of the Carlow Militia. However it was recognised that any member of the Latouche family would easily succeed in a contested election.⁹⁵ So when his brother Robert Latouche put himself forward shortly afterwards, he was returned unopposed.⁹⁶ His success was the result of an amalgam of sympathy and speed, and government reluctance to interfere as they recognised the certainty of a Latouche success. However government clearly saw Carlow as having the potential to return a second candidate that would support government. This was recognised by Robert Peel who, although near the end of his term as chief secretary, agreed to stay on to superintend the government interest in the next general election.⁹⁷

Sir Ulysses Bagenal Burgh had reason to harbour hopes to win a seat in county Carlow. He was especially well connected. As well an illustrious military career that saw him act as aide-de-camp to the Duke of Wellington, he married Maria Bagenal, Walter Bagenal's only daughter which prompted him to add Bagenal to his name.⁹⁸ He was brother-in-law to John Staunton Rochford of Clogrennane, then one of the Commissioners of Enquiry for Ireland, and nephew to William Burgh of Bert, Co. Kildare. He was also nephew to John Foster, the former speaker of the Irish House of Commons.⁹⁹ Burgh held a high public profile, was politically well connected and was keen to enter parliament. Burgh began his groundwork early and was anxious to raise awareness that he intended to contest the election and that he would support government. Writing to Robert Peel on 6 June 1817, he assured him that he intended to stand in Carlow as he had been promised 'very great support'. He suggested that Robert Latouche was the weaker of the two sitting representatives and while he was anxious to avoid a contest, he would not shrink from one. Eliciting electoral assistance he assured Peel that he would be a 'steady supporter' and a 'regular attender of parliament particularly as my military duty will keep me constantly in London'.¹⁰⁰ His interest piqued, Peel drew on Rochford's local knowledge to assess the political situation in Carlow. Rochford noted that as Bruen had been appointed as Colonel of the Carlow Militia and was about to be appointed Custos Rotulorum for Carlow, government could expect his support.

⁹⁴ *Ennis Chronicle*, 23 Mar. 1816; Malcomson, *Parliamentary Roll*, p. 31.

⁹⁵ Whitworth to Peel, 16 Mar. 1816 (BL, Peel Papers, Ms. Add 40191, f. 167).

⁹⁶ *MC*, 29 Mar. 1816; Walker, *Parliamentary election results*, p. 23.

⁹⁷ Gash, *Mr Secretary Peel*, p. 237.

⁹⁸ John Sweetman, 'Ulysses B. Burgh', *ODNB* Sub Nominee. Walter Bagenal died before Burgh's marriage to his daughter.

⁹⁹ Burke, *landed gentry of Ireland*, p. 108; Thorne (ed), *Commons*, iii, p. 795.

¹⁰⁰ Burgh to Peel, 19 June 1817, (BL, Peel Papers, Add Ms 40266 f. 317)

Bruen was apparently inclined towards the support of Latouche and Rochfort conceived that he could be persuaded to switch his support to Burgh. Rochfort dismissed Latouche as being firmly in opposition and remarked that although he had the support of some local interests, it was unlikely that he would overcome either Burgh or Bruen. Given his relationship with Burgh, Rochfort was careful to stress that he did not seek support for him alone but he sought support ‘conjointly with Bruen’ and he noted that they had not formed any pact between them yet.¹⁰¹ Clearly Rochfort saw Bruen and Burgh as ‘friends of government’ and encouraged Peel to support them as such.

Bruen was also preparing for the election. From May 1817, Bruen had engaged in the registration of both his own freeholders and those of other landowners. The estate spent £60 1s 2d between April 1817 December 1817 and a further £160 7s 4d between January and April 1818 both registering and entertaining freeholders at registration sessions. The largest single election-related expense was £108 18s 10d dated 29 February 1818 for ‘leases for tenants Lord Courtown’s, Hagerty’s, Corcoran’s and different other persons to make freeholders and cash to buy leases for Hugh Byrne’.¹⁰² Bruen had a clear strategy to consolidate his electoral base among his own tenants and those of other landowners in Carlow that were well disposed towards him. Importantly, he bore the expense involved in doing this. Bruen was also firmly committed to the government as he demonstrated in May 1817 when Henry Grattan’s motion of 9 May to have a parliamentary committee examine Catholic claims was debated.¹⁰³ Robert Latouche supported the motion and voted with the minority while Bruen opposed and paired off with the majority.¹⁰⁴ Latouche was thus identified as a ‘friend’ to the Catholic cause and Bruen as an enemy.

The Catholic question was not the only political question that saw organised agitation in Carlow where the parliamentary representatives for the county could have been expected to take a stance. The bad harvest of 1816 saw restricted supplies and rises in the price of bread and potatoes. This coupled with outbreaks of fever engendered some social unrest throughout the country that saw 1817 regarded as the worst year to date for food rioting.¹⁰⁵ Carlow was not immune to these problems. In February 1817, a meeting of magistrates at Baltinglass resolved to seek to have the Insurrection Act applied to two baronies in Wicklow and the barony of Rathvilly in Carlow if the prevention of the sale of corn and cattle under seizure for rent as well as the tendering of illegal oaths continued.¹⁰⁶ An oatmeal mill at Sleaty, just outside Carlow was raided by a mob on 2 June 1817 and the following week, an attempt to hijack cars carrying flour to a

¹⁰¹ Rochfort to Peel, 1 Sept. 1817 (BL, Peel Papers, Add Ms. 40269, f. 7).

¹⁰² Family Papers, Accounts (NLI, Bruen Papers, Apr. 1817 – February 1818 & Apr. – June 1818, (Ms. 29,773/7 & Ms. 29,773/9).

¹⁰³ *Hansard (Commons)*, 9 May 1817, vol. 36, col. 302.

¹⁰⁴ *MC*, 12 May 1817.

¹⁰⁵ James Kelly, *Food rioting in Ireland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries* (Dublin, 2017), p. 49.

¹⁰⁶ *SNL*, 4 Feb. 1817.

warehouse on the canal quay in Carlow town was frustrated by the intervention of the Cloydagh and Killeslin Yeomanry.¹⁰⁷ The authorities in Carlow were prepared to bring the full weight of the law to bear on offenders with, for example, at the Summer Assizes of 1817 eleven persons being capitally convicted by Lord Norbury for stealing potatoes, an offence he described as ‘a heinous crime’.¹⁰⁸ It is not surprising that events like these underlay a wave of activism in Carlow aimed at improving the situation of the lower orders.

Local agitation was aided by the establishment of a local newspaper, *The Carlow Morning Post*, which began publication on 1 December 1817 and was self-declared as politically neutral promising that ‘violence, party heat and personality will ever be rejected with the contempt they deserve’.¹⁰⁹ The newspaper did not abstain from political engagement however. It provided a platform for those seeking to effect changes in local governance and aided the development of a political consciousness that was centred on issues rather than dynasties. Almost immediately the newspaper took up the issue of local tolls and customs charges illegally levied by the Corporation of Carlow.¹¹⁰ It continued to highlight these abuses characterising them as ‘a system of plunder against the poor and industrious’.¹¹¹ This led to the raising, by subscription, of a fund intended to support farmers in resisting the imposition of tolls.¹¹² A Committee for Free Markets was formed in February 1818 to administer the fund and to agitate for the abolition of tolls with Thomas Haughton and Thomas Finn as secretaries.¹¹³ The committee duly called on Henry Bruen to support the effort to have the corporation abolish tolls and, exercising the influence it managed to gather, it enlisted the support of Sir Thomas Butler and John Staunton Rochfort.¹¹⁴ The committee also wrote to Lord Charleville, the proprietor of the corporation, and the *Carlow Morning Post* somewhat impudently suggested that it would take him under its protection ‘for the purpose of sheltering him from the disgrace in which the corporation of Carlow is at present involved’.¹¹⁵ The committee held regular meetings throughout March, and as well as obtaining legal opinion on the legitimacy of Carlow tolls, it continued to canvass Charleville. Eventually in March 1818 the agitation led to tolls being abolished and new weighing rates were agreed for Carlow markets.¹¹⁶ The campaign against tolls illustrates both the willingness and ability of the rising middle class in Carlow to organise and to initiate agitation on issues other than the Catholic

¹⁰⁷ Rochfort to Gregory, 3 June 1817 and 17 June 1817 (NAI, SOC 1824/4 & SOC 1824/6).

¹⁰⁸ *DEP*, 29 July 1817.

¹⁰⁹ *CMP*, 1 Dec. 1817.

¹¹⁰ *CMP*, 6 Dec. 1817.

¹¹¹ *CMP*, 8 Jan. 1818. Thomas Haughton was a Quaker and a distiller in Carlow, see John Smyth, ‘Quakers in co. Carlow’, *Carloviana*, 64 (2016) pp 153-160.

¹¹² *CMP*, 9 Feb. 1818.

¹¹³ *FJ*, 27 Feb. 1818.

¹¹⁴ *CMP*, 16 Feb. 1818.

¹¹⁵ *CMP*, 19 Feb. 1818.

¹¹⁶ *CMP*, 2 Apr. 1818.

question. The cooperation of members of the gentry indicates a recognition by them of this rising influence.

IV. The 1818 General Election

There was speculation as early as September 1817 as to the candidates likely to contest the forthcoming general election in Carlow. Sir Ulysses Bagenal Burgh was by now openly identified as a candidate. Burgh was thought to have secured the support of Walter Kavanagh on foot of promises made to support Catholic claims in parliament although apart from this issue, he was expected to support government. Robert Latouche was strongly associated with the Catholic cause and was considered ‘truly liberal, enlightened and patriotic’ and deserving of support from Carlow Catholics. Henry Bruen was noted as one who, while generous in his patronage to Catholic voters, deserved to be treated with caution.¹¹⁷ Although it seemed settled that these three candidates would go forward, Walter Kavanagh was strongly encouraged to stand by the liberal press. He was described as ‘not only the natural representative, but the natural protector of the people of Carlow’ who should be urged by the ‘independent Protestants backed by the Catholic interest’ to go forward.¹¹⁸ It was widely agreed that Kavanagh could probably secure an electoral victory utilising only his own interest.¹¹⁹ However, by December 1817, it was accepted that there would be just three candidates, even though only one had publicly declared an intention to stand, and it was felt that prospective representatives should approach the electorate to secure support sooner rather than later.¹²⁰ Burgh took note of this advice and, using his local influence, was elected to the Carlow Grand Jury for the first time at the spring assizes in 1818.¹²¹ He was accorded a spectacular welcome when he arrived in Carlow on 23 March 1818 accompanied by Lady Burgh and J.S. Rochfort.¹²² His political ambitions in county Carlow were shored up by his announcement later that he intended to reside in Carlow town and so ‘settle down’ in the constituency.¹²³

The performances of the sitting representatives, particularly that of Henry Bruen on issues that had a local impact came under scrutiny as the election approached. One issue was that of the

¹¹⁷ *DEP*, 27 Sept. 1817; *The Times*, 2 Oct. 1817.

¹¹⁸ *FJ*, 8 Oct 1817.

¹¹⁹ T.B.H. Oldfield, *The representative history of Great Britain and Ireland* (6 Vols, London, 1816), vi, p. 220.

¹²⁰ *CMP*, 11 Dec. 1817.

¹²¹ *DJ*, 3 Apr. 1818.

¹²² *CMP*, 23 Mar. 1818.

¹²³ *CMP*, 15 June 1818; *KMod*, 16 June 1818.

Window Tax which was introduced in Ireland in 1799 and applied only to households with seven or more windows.¹²⁴ This tax was not applied to ‘the window-less poor’ and was generally borne by the gentry, the middle classes and the stronger farmers, who provided the majority of electors.¹²⁵ Collection of the tax was ruthlessly efficient and when it was doubled in 1810, became even more unpopular.¹²⁶ A motion to have the issue examined by a parliamentary committee was introduced in the House of Commons on 21 April 1818 on the grounds that it was unfair to continue to levy the tax in Ireland given that several ‘war’ taxes had been discontinued in England. The motion was defeated by a margin of eight in a poorly attended house.¹²⁷ While Robert Latouche was among the fifty-one who supported the motion, Henry Bruen did not attend and was not paired off for the vote.¹²⁸ His absence, and thus his failure to oppose the tax drew criticism from the *Dublin Evening Post* which suggested that Bruen was at a race meeting in The Curragh when the vote took place, but that had he been present, he would almost certainly have voted with government contrary to the wishes of his constituents.¹²⁹

In the days following, Bruen was defended by the *Carlow Morning Post* as one ‘does not vote latterly with the ministry on any question where the interests of his country are concerned. He has become one of us’. The editorial went on to suggest that Bruen’s absence was because like many other members ‘he did not suppose he would be wanting’.¹³⁰ This spirited defence of the MP by the newly established newspaper is not surprising given that a rival Carlow printer, John Lahee was paid a stipend by the Bruen estate on 27 May 1818 ‘to retain him for the election’.¹³¹ Clearly the editor Richard Price recognised a potential rival in Lahee and was anxious not to incur the wrath of a powerful and affluent potential supporter of the fledgling newspaper in Bruen. The window tax resurfaced as a local issue. At a meeting in the Vestry of Carlow held on 9 May 1818, it was resolved to petition both houses of parliament against the ‘peculiarly obnoxious and oppressive’ tax.¹³² The petitions were duly presented by Bruen in the Commons on 19 May 1818 and by Lord Charleville in the Lords on 20 May 1818.¹³³ Bruen and Charleville showed themselves to be aware of and responsive to public sentiment.

¹²⁴ David Dickson, ‘Taxation and disaffection in late eighteenth-century Ireland’ in Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly (eds), *Irish peasants: violence and political unrest, 1780-1914* (Manchester, 1983), p. 58.

¹²⁵ Michelle D’Arcy and Marina Nistoykaya, ‘The Irish tax state and historical legacies: slowly converging capacity, persistent unwillingness to pay’ in Douglas Kantar and Patrick Walsh (eds), *Taxation, politics and protest in Ireland, 1662-2016* (Cham, 2019), p. 337.

¹²⁶ Malcomson, *John Foster (1740-1828)*, p. 246.

¹²⁷ *MC*, 22 Apr. 1818.

¹²⁸ *SNL*, 27 Apr. 1818.

¹²⁹ *DEP*, 30 Apr. 1818.

¹³⁰ *CMP*, 20 May 1818.

¹³¹ Family Papers, Accounts, (NLI, Bruen Papers, [Apr. – June 1818], Ms. 29,773/9).

¹³² *CMP*, 11 May 1818.

¹³³ *The Times*, 21 May 1818.

As the anticipated dissolution of parliament drew nearer, the *Carlow Morning Post* noted a change in the politics of county Carlow with the demise of what it termed the ‘aristocracy’ and the arrival of ‘newcomers’. Although men of property, Bruen and Latouche were not ‘descendants of those honest old fellows to whom we were naturalized, because, our great grand-fathers had been in the habit of voting for theirs’ due to ties of loyalty, friendship or blood. Electors were now ‘counted by the head, like cattle at a fair; and the point settled by the landlords of the country, without any regard or respect, to the feelings of their tenants’. These remarks were made as the political horse trading between landowners intensified as the election neared. Despite this, the editorial suggested that freeholders should exercise some independence in voting for those candidates that would be ‘most useful’ in promoting industry and improvement and protecting the peace and property of the county. The editorial encouraged freeholders to abandon established patterns of electoral support for the existing ‘interests’ and to support candidates who would promote practical improvements in the county.¹³⁴ This was a clear statement of support for Henry Bruen.

Robert Latouche addressed the electors from London on 27 May 1818, some weeks in advance of the dissolution of parliament.¹³⁵ It was expected that Ulysses B. Burgh would stand and be returned alongside Latouche who was regarded with favour by those who placed emphasis on parliamentary engagement.¹³⁶ Bruen was conspicuous by his absence from these early commentaries.¹³⁷ Popular sentiment seemed firmly in Burgh and Latouche’s favour with one commentator remarking that ‘of Colonel Bruen we shall say little, because little favourable is to be said’.¹³⁸ James Doyle, the future bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, and then Professor of Theology in Carlow College shared this negative view of Bruen. Writing in June 1818, Doyle dismissed Bruen as one who had done little in his six years in parliament that was of use to his country or his county, He hinted at Bruen’s lust for patronage and questioned the claim that he had to continue as a representative:

What are his claims then? They are of a most secret nature indeed. We should search the back benches of the treasury retainers to discover them if they exist. Such a man is not fit to be our representative.¹³⁹

This was an indication of the future prelate’s willingness to engage in political debate. Predictably, Bruen received backing from the *Carlow Morning Post* which declared that as a

¹³⁴ *CMP*, 28 May 1818.

¹³⁵ *CMP*, 1 June 1818; *DEP*, 2 June 1818.

¹³⁶ *DEP*, 6 June 1818.

¹³⁷ *DJ*, 8 June 1818; *SNL*, 9 June 1818; *KM*, 11 June 1818.

¹³⁸ *DEP*, 13 June 1818.

¹³⁹ W.J. Fitzpatrick, *The life, times and correspondence of the right reverend Dr. Doyle, bishop of Kildare and Leighlin* (2 vols, Boston, 1862), i, p. 93.

constant resident in the county, he deserved support.¹⁴⁰ It was apparent that the Kavanagh interest was set to continue to support the Latouche family as well as offering support to Burgh. However, while Burgh had the additional support of government, Latouche did not, and government support was to prove crucial to the outcome of the election.

Walter Kavanagh died suddenly in Dublin on 10 June 1818.¹⁴¹ His death, on the same day that George III dissolved parliament, changed the dynamic of the election in Carlow.¹⁴² As he was unmarried and without issue, he was succeeded in the Borris estate by his brother Thomas.¹⁴³ This unexpected development presented an opportunity to Henry Bruen he was not slow to exploit. Writing to Robert Peel from Carlow on 12 June, Bruen declared that ‘a great revolution in the politicks [sic] has taken place. Kavanagh of Borris is dead!’. Bruen went on to ask Peel to enlist the support of Lord Ormonde, whose sister was married to Thomas Kavanagh and was now the mistress of the Borris estate remarking that he ‘would be much materially benefitted’ by the support of the Kavanagh interest.¹⁴⁴ Lord Ormonde was a strong supporter of government.¹⁴⁵

The county election was set for Monday 29 June 1818.¹⁴⁶ As the canvass proceeded, it became apparent that Thomas Kavanagh had been swayed by the indirect influence of government and was set to support Bruen as well as Burgh. Robert Latouche recognised that success was impossible and resigned from the election on 20 June 1818.¹⁴⁷ Writing to Robert Peel with news of the resignation, J.S. Rochfort considered the election of Bruen to have been certain and that Latouche had realised that he would have been beaten by Burgh by ‘a 12 or 1300 majority’ and so resigned.¹⁴⁸ While there was some feeling locally that the *Carlow Morning Post* worked against Latouche’s return, the newspaper denied this claiming that ‘we should at once discontinue our paper rather than, in our own persons, become instruments in the hands of party, contrary to our own feelings or the public good’.¹⁴⁹ The election itself was held in the Sessions House in Carlow with Bruen and Burgh returned to much applause.¹⁵⁰ Although Thomas Kavanagh played no overt part in the election and did not attend, his influence and the influence of government had been

¹⁴⁰ *CMP*, 15 June 1818.

¹⁴¹ *KM*, 13 June 1818.

¹⁴² *The Times*, 11 June 1818.

¹⁴³ Burke, *the landed gentry of Ireland*, p. 228.

¹⁴⁴ Bruen to Peel, 12 June 1818 (BL, Peel Papers, Add Ms. 40278, f. 113)

¹⁴⁵ Walter Butler, 18th Earl of Ormonde had voted for the Union and was considered a strong supporter of government. This was borne out by his elevation to the English peerage in 1816 as marquess of Ormonde, see Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, iii, pp 355–6.

¹⁴⁶ *DJ*, 18 June 1818.

¹⁴⁷ *DJ*, 22 June 1818..

¹⁴⁸ Rochfort to Peel, 20 June 1818 (BL, Peel Papers, Add Ms. 40278, f. 189).

¹⁴⁹ *CMP*, 22 June 1818.

¹⁵⁰ *DEP*, 4 July 1818.

central to the return of both candidates. There is also no doubt but that both of the successful Carlow candidates were set to support government in the new parliament.¹⁵¹

Conclusion

The Catholic question became a matter of political focus in Carlow in the second decade of the eighteenth century. This was manifest from the establishment of a permanent local Catholic committee and an increasing fluency in the organisation of meetings and petitions among the Catholic middle class and their Protestant supporters. The politicisation of Carlow society was also seen from organised agitation against corporation tolls, the establishment of a local savings bank and local unrest regarding the maintenance of the Irish window tax.

Although the county gained a new parliamentary representative in Henry Bruen II at the general election of 1812, his success was the product of existing networks of political power rather than any change in the opinions or attitudes of electors. The demise of David Latouche in 1816 saw him replaced by his brother Richard in another example of the functioning of the local political structure. However, the death of Walter Kavanagh just before the general election of 1818 left a vacuum in electoral politics in Carlow that saw Ulysses B. Burgh joining Henry Bruen II in the representation of the county. Their success was due in some part to government influence that was brought to bear on existing electoral interests. The 1818 election was the first in which a local newspaper played a part. It was also the first that witnessed a contribution to political debate from James Doyle, a senior member of the Catholic clergy. The influence of the press and the clergy were to become regular facets of politics in Carlow in the decades to follow.

¹⁵¹ Memo by Robert Peel on new Irish MPs, 1 July 1818 (BL, Peel papers, Add Ms. 40298, f. 113).

Chapter 5: Continuity in an Era of Rising Tension, 1818-26

Introduction

Henry Bruen and Ulysses Burgh were elected unopposed to represent county Carlow in 1818 and again in 1820. Although this provides the firmest indication that the extant structures of Protestant ascendancy were secure, the nascent political consciousness of Catholics and the emerging Protestant middle class manifested itself through increasingly frequent public meetings. In official circles Carlow was identified as a quiet, socially stable county. This was attributed to the influence of a resident gentry that, as well as sustaining continuity in representation, was reflected in the stability of the composition of the county Grand Jury. It was not as if there were no threats to the outwardly stable social order. The visit of George IV to Ireland in August 1821 and the appointment of Richard Wellesley as lord lieutenant later that year encouraged Catholics in their quest for emancipation but disquieted Protestants of all classes. Nonetheless, interdenominational cooperation continued with gentry support for the construction of Catholic churches still in evidence. The sense of calm this manifested was not shared by the Protestant community at large, particularly smaller landholders who were increasingly conscious of the fact they were a minority. These apprehensions were fuelled in the mid-1820s by the confrontational ‘disputations’ of the bible wars, which were particularly fractious in Carlow. The activities of the Catholic Association heightened tensions further between Carlow Catholics and Protestants, particularly once the latter realised that Catholics had managed to build an effective organisation capable of raising funds. This served to heighten millenarian tensions among Protestant tenant farmers exacerbated by the contemporary Catholic enthusiasm for Pastorini’s prophecies. The apparent electoral calm in Carlow contrasted with the situation in county Waterford where Catholic freeholders came into direct and successful conflict with an influential ascendancy electoral interest.

I. Business as usual 1818-1820

Events in Carlow followed a familiar pattern in the months following the election of Bruen and Burgh in June 1818. The successful candidates hosted separate celebratory dinners for their followers, both of which provided ‘every luxury of the season, and the choicest wines that gave an overflow to the natural good humour of the guests’.¹ This show of enthusiasm contrasted with the negative reaction in Carlow borough where in the nomination on 26 June John Stanton Rochfort was proposed unsuccessfully by Robert Jackson. Several local gentlemen who claimed the franchise in the election were denied the right to vote by the sovereign. An outsider, Charles Harvey, was returned by a group of unknown voters acting under the direction of Lord Charleville, the borough patron. Harvey came from a family long associated with Norwich Corporation. A barrister, he represented Norwich from 1812 to 1818 and was a government supporter. He declined a contest in Norwich in 1818 accepting instead the seat in Carlow which Lord Charleville had put at the disposal of government.² This angered the politically conscious merchant class in Carlow and there were calls for a collective and concerted effort to overturn what was considered as Charleville’s illegal electoral monopoly of the borough.³

There was a lengthy delay between the conclusion of the general election in June 1818 and the first meeting of the new parliament on 14 January 1819.⁴ The delayed parliament was also a short one, comprising just two sessions lasting from January 1819 to July 1819 and from November 1819 to February 1820.⁵ Henry Bruen persisted in his pattern of lax parliamentary attendance and was noted as a ‘defaulter’ or non-attender no fewer than three times in March 1819 before he obtained leave of absence for a month beginning on 1 April 1819. He was noted as absent again on 7 May 1819.⁶ Ulysses Burgh was also a poor attender, but his absences were usually occasioned by his official duties as assistant military secretary to the Duke of Wellington.⁷ Indeed, within days of his election he was ordered to Aachen ‘not for the benefit of his own health

¹ Burg’s supporters held a meeting chaired by the Graigue Magistrate Robert Jackson that arranged the chairing and celebratory dinner for him, see *CMP*, 29 June; *CMP*, 2 July 1818.

² Thorne (ed), *Commons*, iv, p. 163, *DEP*, 30 June 1818.

³ *CMP*, 6 July 1818.

⁴ *The Times*, 15 Jan. 1819.

⁵ Thorne (ed), *Commons*, i, p. 388.

⁶ *JHC*, Vol. 74, 1 Mar 1819 (p. 173), 10 Mar 1819 (p. 210), 31 Mar 1819 (p. 290), 1 Apr. 1819 (p. 293), 7 May 1819 (p. 416).

⁷ Wellington had high regard for Burgh regarding him as dependable and efficient, see Arthur Richard Wellesley, *Supplementary despatches, correspondence and memoranda of Field Marshal Arthur, Duke of Wellington* (15 Vols, London, 1858-1872), xi, p. 388.

– but in the service of his country’.⁸ Although the sporadic attendance profile of the county’s MPs was not unusual amongst the Irish members, both seemed more interested in personal advancement and clientelism rather than the business of parliament.

In that vein, writing from London to Chief Secretary Peel in June 1818, Henry Bruen sought the lucrative post of Pursuivant of the Court of Exchequer for a Mr. French and a second legal post for a Mr. Malcomson and asked that the response to his request might be sent to him at Daly’s Club House in Dublin.⁹ In April 1819, Bruen sought preferment for Alderman John Kingston James as a police magistrate and by January 1820, he had communicated a list of ‘wants’ ranging from preferment in the establishment to military promotion for his friends and acquaintances.¹⁰ This forwardness was emulated by Burgh who within weeks of his election complained to Robert Peel that he was ‘besieged with applications’ as he lobbied on behalf of a tax officer who was in danger of losing his position.¹¹ A few weeks later, he put Richard Thorpe forward as a candidate for any position as he was ‘of a very respectable family in the county of Carlow’.¹² He also recommended Richard Price, the proprietor of the *Carlow Morning Post* as a printer deserving of government business and enclosed a memorial from Price promising that the paper would ‘steer such a course as will not only meet the wishes of every constitutional man in the county but will not leave me second upon the list of his warmest supporters’.¹³ Burgh clearly recognised the power of both patronage and the press and sought to use one to secure the support of the other. Both representatives were following precedent in pursuing government favour, which indicated that they were under little pressure from their constituency for action on major political matters.

This did not mean that apathy prevailed in county Carlow: public meetings and committees were a regular and increasing facet of life in the years following the 1818 election. The meetings addressed an expansive range of topics including the raising of funds for charitable purposes, commercial grievances and the question of Catholic relief. These usually attracted support from across the confessional divide and were quite often associated with the building of

⁸ *CMP*, 20 July 1818. Burgh attended the Congress of Aix-La-Chapelle (September–November 1818) and for his work there was recommended by Wellington to Prince Peter Volkonsky, aide-de-camp to Emperor Alexander to be invested in the Russian order of Saint Anne, see Wellington, *supplementary despatches*, xii, p. 821 and Alexander Mikaberidz, *The Russian officer corps in the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, 1792–1815* (New York, 2004) p. 1463.

⁹ The post of Pursuivant commanded an annual salary of £1,619 see Wade, *the black book or corruption unmasked!* (London, 1820), p. 68; Bruen to Peel, 1 June 1818, (BL, Peel Papers, Add Ms 40278, f. 3). French was an attorney and son of Robert French, political confidant of Henry Bruen II and executor to Henry I. Malcomson is unidentified.

¹⁰ Bruen to Grant, 14 June 1819, (NAI, CSORP, 1818/99) and ‘Application Book, 1819–20’, (BL, Peel Papers, Add Ms 40296, f. 9). John Kingston James was later to be knighted and was elected Lord Mayor of Dublin at Michaelmas 1821, see Jacqueline Hill, ‘Mayors and lord mayors of Dublin from 1229’ in Moody and Martin (eds) *A new history of Ireland* (9 Vols, Dublin, 1984), ix, p. 560.

¹¹ Burgh to Peel, 2 July 1819, (BL, Peel Papers, Add Ms 40279, f. 12).

¹² Burgh to Gregory, 24 July 1818, (NAI, CSORP, 1818/42).

¹³ Memorial from Richard Price, 19 July 1818 (NAI, CSORP, 42A).

Catholic chapels.¹⁴ For example when the Roman Catholics of the parish of Killeslin in Queen's County, which was just a few miles from Carlow town met on 9 August 1818 to discuss the financing and construction of a new chapel, it passed resolutions thanking local Protestant landlord and magistrate William Cooper for his support. The meeting made special mention of a donation of £20 by Henry Bruen which was 'rendered more valuable from the circumstance of his being unconnected not only with the property in the parish, but the county'.¹⁵ Burgh and Bruen contributed towards the construction of the Catholic chapel in Tullow, county Carlow in March 1819 and Sir Thomas Butler and the Protestant gentry were thanked for their help in the construction of the chapel in Tinryland in July 1819.¹⁶ It was noted with satisfaction by the *Carlow Morning Post* that an air of friendly cooperation existed between Catholics, Protestants and dissenting Protestants in Carlow and that 'the fruits of it must be beneficial to every class of society'.¹⁷

The Catholic question continued to be a fraught issue in Carlow, nonetheless. The Catholic Board, suffering from low morale following repeated disappointments, was mothballed in December 1817 due to financial issues, and a decision was taken not even to petition parliament in 1818. As Patrick Geoghegan has observed, it seemed as if O'Connell and the Catholic movement 'would soon burn itself out'.¹⁸ In an effort to stimulate interest and action, O'Connell published an open letter to the people of Ireland on the opening day of 1819.¹⁹ The letter, first published in the *Dublin Weekly Register* on 2 January 1819, was reprinted in the *Carlow Morning Post* on 7 January 1819. Intent on reviving the campaign for the petitioning of parliament, O'Connell was particularly keen to elicit Protestant support. This move culminated in a requisition to the Lord Mayor of Dublin, the liberal Thomas McKenny, in January to convene a meeting of Dublin Protestants Freeholders.²⁰ The meeting was hailed as 'a complete triumph of liberal principles' and an account of the proceedings was reproduced in Carlow.²¹ This local enthusiasm even spawned unfounded rumours in the days following that there would be a similar meeting of Protestants in Carlow.²² On 20 March some leading Catholics of the county with John Coffey, Thomas Cloney and Michael and Patrick Finn to the fore called for a meeting in Carlow town to petition parliament for relief and to express gratitude to the Lord Mayor of Dublin.²³ The ensuing meeting overwhelmingly endorsed petitioning parliament to seek relief. The meeting

¹⁴ T. P. Power, *The Apocalypse in Ireland: prophecy and politics in the 1820s* (Oxford, 2023), p. 295.

¹⁵ *CMP*, 10 Aug. 1818.

¹⁶ *CMP*, 1 Apr. 1819; *SNL*, 19 July 1819.

¹⁷ *CMP*, 4 Oct. 1819.

¹⁸ P.M. Geoghegan, 'The impact of O'Connell', p. 109.

¹⁹ MacDonagh, *hereditary bondsman*, p. 165.

²⁰ McKenny was a liberal Protestant well-disposed towards Catholic claims, see Jacqueline Hill, 'Lord mayor Thomas McKenny and Catholic emancipation 1818-19' in Ruth McManus and Lisa-Marie Griffith (eds), *Leaders of the city: Dublin's first citizens, 1500-1950* (Dublin, 2013), p. 104.

²¹ *CMP*, 15 Feb. 1819.

²² *CMP*, 18 Feb. 1819.

²³ *CMP*, 22 Mar. 1819; *DEP*, 23 Mar. 1819.

even proposed that the petition be presented in the House of Lords by Lord Clifden and in the Commons by Ulysses Burgh and Henry Bruen.²⁴ Despite the poor attendance, a core of Catholic activists in Carlow were beginning to engage with political issues in an organised manner and as part of a national impetus. The petition was one of many presented in late April and early May.²⁵

Ulysses Burgh demonstrated a ready willingness to accommodate the wishes of his Catholic constituents by readily agreeing to Patrick Finn's request.²⁶ Soon afterwards Henry Bruen and Lord Clifden agreed to support the petition in the Commons and Lords respectively.²⁷ Burgh presented the petition on 29 April 1819 and Clifden on 5 May 1819.²⁸ A motion subsequently put forward by Henry Grattan on 3 May 1819 for an amendment to the oath of supremacy that would have secured access to parliament for Catholics came too late in the parliamentary session.²⁹ It was narrowly defeated by just two votes.³⁰ While Burgh was absent, Bruen recognised the importance of the issue to his constituents and, in a rare appearance, he was present to support the measure.³¹

Following George III's death on 29 January 1820, the prime minister Lord Liverpool determined to hold an early election.³² Parliament was dissolved on 29 February 1820.³³ In Ireland there were just ten contested elections, in seven borough and three county constituencies including Queen's County.³⁴ In general, as observed by Norman Gash 'there was little to distinguish the new House of Commons from the old'.³⁵ This held true in both the borough and county of Carlow. In the borough, the composition of the electorate dictated there would never be a meaningful contest. Charles Harvey, pointedly described as 'an Englishman who never saw Carlow', was returned again.³⁶ Lord Charleville was strongly censured by the *Carlow Morning Post* for permitting 'the intrusion of any foreign snake, toad or viper whose sole abject must be to fatten on the spoils of our deserted and almost desolated country!'.³⁷ Burgh and Bruen were returned in

²⁴ The meeting voted thanks to Thomas McKenny and to 'liberal countrymen of other religious persuasions' who volunteered their services to the Catholic cause, see *CMP*, 30 Mar. 1819. There was also an exchange of letters of thanks between Patrick Finn and Thomas McKenny published afterwards, see *DEP*, 01 Apr. 1819; *SNL*, 1 Apr. 1819.

²⁵ The petition from Carlow was presented on 29 Apr. 1819 together with petitions from Queen's County and Mayo, see *JHC*, vol 74, 29 Apr. 1819, p. 364-5. Others were presented from counties Kilkenny and Cork on 28 Apr, from, Cavan, Fermanagh, Monaghan and Tipperary on 30 Apr. and from Down, Meath and Louth on 3 May 1819, see *JHC*, Vol 47, p. 353, 375-6 and 387-91.

²⁶ *CMP*, 4 Apr. 1819.

²⁷ *DWR*, 17 Apr. 1819.

²⁸ *MC*, 3 May 1819.

²⁹ Kelly, *Henry Grattan*, p. 45.

³⁰ *Hansard (Commons)*, 3 May 1819, vol. 40, col. 79

³¹ *SNL*, 12 May 1819.

³² Jeremy Black, *George III: America's last king* (Newhaven, 2008), p. 504; Norman Gash, *Lord Liverpool: the life and political career of Robert Banks Jenkinson, 1770-1828* (London, 1984), p. 155.

³³ *The Times*, 1 March 1820.

³⁴ Walker, *election results*, pp 30-33.

³⁵ Gash, *Lord Liverpool*, p. 155.

³⁶ *DEP*, 24 Feb. 1820.

³⁷ *CMP*, 16 Mar. 1820. Harvey was later criticised for not making any charitable donations in Carlow town following his return. This was in contrast to William Wigram, another Englishman who was returned at the same time as Harvey for the borough of Wexford on the interest of the Marquis of Ely, see *CMP*, 27 Mar. 1829 and Fisher (ed), *Commons*, vii, p. 753.

the county without a contest. The same newspaper welcomed this, observing that ‘we are pleased that matters are as they are: a contest might disturb our tranquillity without ensuring our future benefits’. It went on to congratulate the two members and to note that ‘we have not been their enemies’.³⁸ Both candidates were chaired following the election during when a ‘great quantity of silver’ was thrown to ‘the mob’ and supporters and candidates dined afterwards in the Assembly Rooms.³⁹

By contrast the election in Queen’s County was fiercely contested and witnessed Bishop James Doyle exerting his electoral influence through his clergy in favour of the liberal Sir Henry Parnell. Well in advance of the poll, Parnell solicited the prelate’s ‘very powerful and valuable assistance’ remarking that he would consider himself ‘under the greatest obligation’ for it.⁴⁰ As the campaign got underway, Parnell kept Doyle informed of developments, forwarding him copies of election literature that he used.⁴¹ When successfully returned, Parnell wrote promptly to Doyle thanking him for his ‘powerful’ efforts and those of his clergy.⁴² Doyle’s efforts on Parnell’s behalf in Queen’s County were in contrast to his inaction in county Carlow: electoral stability obtained in Carlow and, in the absence of any chance of success, Doyle chose to remain politically inert there.

Henry Bruen continued to behave in the manner familiar to him following his re-election in 1820, but perhaps with not as much success. In July 1820, he expressed unhappiness with the way that he had been handled as a government supporter complaining that he been ‘treated with studied neglect’.⁴³ The number of applications for preferment from him declined substantially after this although he was a repeated supporter of Rev John Hardy on whose behalf he sought the living of Kilcullen in July 1825 and the Chancellorship of Christchurch in January 1828.⁴⁴ Shortly after his re-election in 1820, Burgh was appointed by Wellington as surveyor-general of the ordnance and an executive member of the Board of Ordnance.⁴⁵ This was regarded as ‘a sinecure place of great value’.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, Burgh continued to seek positions for others, vouching for James Emmerson as a Captain of Police.⁴⁷ In addition Burgh recommended James Hozier’s reappointment as a magistrate in Carlow to Henry Goulburn in January 1822. and was still advocating on Hozier’s behalf in October 1823.⁴⁸

³⁸ *CMP*, 16 Mar. 1820.

³⁹ *CMP*, 20 Mar. 1820.

⁴⁰ Parnell to Doyle, 4 Feb. 1820 (Delany Archive, Doyle Papers, IE-DA/KL/00046).

⁴¹ Handbill issued by Parnell, 11 Mar. 1820 (Delany Archive, Doyle Papers, IE-DA/KL/00047).

⁴² Parnell to Doyle, 31 Mar. 1820 (Delany Archive, Doyle Papers, IE-DA/KL/JKL/00060).

⁴³ Bruen to Grant, 2 Jul. 1820 (NAI, Official Papers, OP/535/2).

⁴⁴ Bruen to Goulburn, 25 Jul. 1825 (NAI, CSORP, 1825/861); Bruen to Goulburn, 8 Jan. 1826 (NAI, CSORP, 1825/1786).

⁴⁵ Sweetman, ‘Ulysses B. Burgh’, *ODNB*, Sub nomine.

⁴⁶ *The Times*, 14 Nov. 1820.

⁴⁷ Emerson to Gregory, 12 May 1821 (NAI, CSORP, 1821/1444).

⁴⁸ Burgh to Hozier, 2 Jan. 1822 (NAI, CSORP, 1823/1801/1/A); Burgh to Goulburn 28 Feb. 1823 (NAI, CSORP, 1823/1801/2); Hozier to Goulburn 28 Oct. 1823 (NAI, CSORP, 1823/1970).

Bruen persisted in his poor attendance at parliament. As can be seen from Appendix E, which tabulates the voting record of Bruen and Burgh between 1819 and 1826, he did not participate in any vote of Irish interest in the sessions of 1821 and 1822.⁴⁹ Despite this, he did enough to be identified as a government supporter with one observer writing ‘When he attends, he votes with the treasury’.⁵⁰ Given his position as Surveyor General of the Ordnance, it is not surprising that Burgh was a solid supporter of government.⁵¹ As appendix 2 attests, while Bruen was a less frequent attender, both he and Burgh supported government on Irish issues.

II. A Tranquil and ‘Undisturbed’ County

County Carlow projected an appearance of tranquillity in the 1820s. This stability was afforded specific mention by judges presiding over the twice-yearly assize courts. Lord Norbury, the Chief Justice, was invariably lavish in his praise of the resident gentry when he sat in Carlow.⁵² In reviewing the list of cases to be heard at the Spring Assizes 1820, Norbury remarked that he was happy to see ‘that it was not marked by any of those offences which disgraced other parts of the country’.⁵³ At the Spring Assizes 1822 he praised the conduct of the Grand Jury in maintaining the peace and the ‘comparative tranquillity of the county’.⁵⁴ Sitting at the Summer Assizes in 1824, Norbury noted that ‘although you have the heaviest crops, you have the lightest calendar you ever had’.⁵⁵ Following Norbury’s resignation in June 1827, his replacement, Charles Kendal Bushe, was equally complimentary remarking at the Lent Assizes 1828 that he was happy to say that ‘Carlow maintained a high character for good conduct and tranquillity’.⁵⁶ Generally it was thought that the county enjoyed a ‘pacific and very gratifying civil state’.⁵⁷

The stable membership of the Carlow Grand Jury contributed to this state of affairs. Grand Juries were appointed at the assize sittings each lent and summer. In the eleven years

⁴⁹ See also John Marshall, *Alphabetical list of the members of the Commons house of parliament shewing the places they represent...Sessions of 1821 and 1822* (London, 1822), p. 10..

⁵⁰ *The black book: supplement to the black book*, p. 142.

⁵¹ Marshall, *members of the Commons 1821 and 1822*, p. 10; *The black book: supplement!*, p. 142.

⁵² John Toler, Lord Norbury presided in the Home Circuit which included Carlow Assizes, see W. N. Osborough, ‘John Toler’, *DIB*, Sub nomine.

⁵³ *FLJ*, 25 Mar. 1820.

⁵⁴ *DEP*, 30 Mar. 1822.

⁵⁵ *DJ*, 2 Aug. 1824.

⁵⁶ *FJ*, 6 Jun. 1827; *DEP*, 27 Mar. 1828.

⁵⁷ *CMP*, 27 Jul. 1829.

between 1818 and 1829, there were twenty-two grand juries empanelled in Carlow. It can be seen from table 5.1 that there was a continuity in their composition. While Robert Eustace of Newstown was the most committed; he served on all twenty-two grand juries, sixteen others were

Table 5.1: Summary of Members of Carlow Grand Jury, 1819-29

Name	Appearances	Proportion of Possible Appearances	Name	Appearances	Proportion of Possible Appearances
Eustace, Robert	22	100%	Watson, Thomas H	6	27%
Faulknier, Henry	21	95%	Bunbury, Thomas	5	23%
Cornwall, John Faulkner	20	91%	Garrett, William	5	23%
Elliot, Thomas	20	91%	Lecky, John J	5	23%
Butler, Sir Thomas	19	86%	Brown, Robert Clayton	3	14%
Whelan, John	19	86%	Eustace, Edward	3	14%
Alexander, John	18	82%	Eustace, James H (Carlow)	3	14%
Brown, William	18	82%	Latouche, Robert	3	14%
Newton, Philip	18	82%	Burton, Benjamin	2	9%
Rochfort, John S	18	82%	Butler, Edward	2	9%
Bruen, Henry	17	77%	Cooper, William	2	9%
Butler, James	17	77%	Feltus, Adam B	2	9%
Doyne, Robert	17	77%	O'Neal, B Stratford	2	9%
Duckett, William	17	77%	Stewart, John	2	9%
Stewart, William R	17	77%	Alexander, John Junior	1	5%
Whelan, Pilsworth	17	77%	Barry, John Maxwell	1	5%
Duckett, John Dawson	16	73%	Bonham, John	1	5%
Blackney, Walter	14	64%	Colclough, Beauchamp	1	5%
Bennett, John	13	59%	Doyne, CP	1	5%
Burton, William H	13	59%	Ducket, Thomas	1	5%
Burton, Sir Charles	12	55%	Fishbourne, Joseph	1	5%
Watson, John (Ballydarton)	12	55%	Hozier, James	1	5%
Humfrey, John	10	45%	Jones, Abraham	1	5%
Eustace, James (Castlemore)	8	36%	Latouche, David	1	5%
Fishbourne, William	8	36%	Rudkin, Henry	1	5%
Kavanagh, Thomas	8	36%	Rudkin, William	1	5%
Rudkin, Gilbert P	8	36%	Stopford, Lord Viscount	1	5%
Burgh, Sir Ulysses B. Burgh	6	27%	Whelan, James	1	5%
Vigors, Nicholas Alyward	6	27%	Whitty, Irvine	1	5%

Sources: *Finn's Leinster Journal*, *Freeman's Journal*, *Dublin Journal*, *Dublin Evening Post*, *Dublin Weekly Register*, *Dublin Morning Register*, *Pilot*, *Waterford Mail*, *Southern Reporter*, *Carlow County Archives*, *Kehoe Papers*

empanelled sixteen times or more. Indeed, the top twenty-three jurors accounted for 385 of the 467 appointments – an imposing 82 per cent. This underlines the continuing stability in Carlow of the landed elite into the early nineteenth century.

Since the grand juries in county Carlow in common with the rest of the country were seen as essential to the maintenance of local control and influence, the body was increasingly a target for the emerging Catholic middle class who, as Virginia Crossman has argued, sought to 'break the monopoly of power long enjoyed' through grand jury membership.⁵⁸ Carlow Grand Jury was

⁵⁸ Virginia Crossman, *Local government in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Belfast, 1994), p. 26.

one of the ‘bastions of Protestant land and ascendancy’ in the county and members of the county gentry were eager to be admitted to its ranks.⁵⁹ Membership of the Grand Jury was a prestigious boost to John Alexander of Milford who was first appointed in 1818. His selection acknowledged his rising social status as he became ‘a sworn member of a foundation of gentry life’.⁶⁰ By contrast, omission from the jury was seen as an insult. This was the case later with Walter Blackney, a local landlord and magistrate, at the spring assizes in 1832. The affront to Blackney was compounded by the sheriff not calling Blackney’s name until all places on the jury had been filled. This drew the observation from *The Carlow Morning Post* that:

his constituents look upon themselves as grossly insulted in his person by the conduct of the high sheriff, who regardless of usage and courtesy, not only refused him the place on the grand jury panel to which he was entitled, but as if to aggravate the insult, neglected calling his name at all, until thirty-two names had been announced.⁶¹

Local magistrates and gentry by and large echoed the characteristic view of Carlow as a peaceful county. Writing to William Gregory, John Staunton Rochfort reported in 1821 that Carlow and the part of Queen’s County with which he was familiar was quiet with no reports of any outrage.⁶² While there were disturbances among boatmen working on the Barrow navigation in February 1821, these were disputes between groups of workers with employers caught in the middle rather than political or ‘party’ unrest.⁶³ In May 1821, Carlow magistrates considered the barony of Rathvilly to be disturbed and asked government to have it proclaimed with the costs of policing being borne centrally rather than locally.⁶⁴ At the same time, freeholders, gentry and clergy of both denominations in the towns of the barony of Rathvilly asserted to government that as unrest was in the rural areas of the barony, any proclamation should be confined to these areas.⁶⁵ It seemed that the cost of security was the overriding consideration in Rathvilly. In any case, peace was restored within a matter of months.⁶⁶ There was, however, a divergence between the official view of Carlow and that held by Protestants living there. John Fitzmaurice of Carlow, who acted as local land agent for Ulysses Burgh, urged government in December 1821 to restrict the sale of gunpowder in order to suppress unrest.⁶⁷ Just two months later following a tour of the county, Brigade Major of Yeomanry William Cosby reported that all was quiet.⁶⁸ This was in contrast to the view of Rev Samuel Roberts, rector of Leighlinbridge who reported in March 1822 a ‘systematic plan in operation amongst the working classes to take advantage of the first

⁵⁹ Oliver MacDonagh, ‘Politics, 1830-45’ in Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland Vol. 4*, p. 180.

⁶⁰ Kinsella, ‘*Alexanders*’, p. 183.

⁶¹ *Pilot* 28 Mar 1832.

⁶² Rochfort to Gregory, 13 Jan. 1821 (NAI, SOC, 2375/2).

⁶³ Rochfort to Grant, 2 Feb. 1821 (NAI/CSORP/SC/1821/214).

⁶⁴ Memorial to Lord Lieutenant from Carlow Magistrates, 5 May 1821 (NAI, CSORP/SC/1821/262).

⁶⁵ Memorial to Charles Grant from inhabitants of Rathvilly, 5 May 1821 (NAI, CSORP/SC/1821/363).

⁶⁶ Memorial from Carlow magistrates sent by Alexander Humfrey, Clerk of the Peace, Carlow to Chief Police Magistrate Major James Tandy, 11 Jan. 1822 (NAI, SCO, 2364/2).

⁶⁷ Fitzmaurice to Chief Secretary, 21 Dec. 1821 (NAI, CSORP/1821/582).

⁶⁸ Cosby to Gregory, 28 Feb. 1822 (NAI, SOC/2377/6).

favourable opportunity that offers to disturb the peace'.⁶⁹ This view was contradicted just weeks later when Carlow town and surrounding districts were considered quiet with no 'outrages' reported.⁷⁰

Bishop Doyle's espousal of miraculous cures attributable to the intercession of Prince Hohenlohe was thought to have added to fears among ordinary Protestants that increased religious fervour among their Catholic neighbours when Pastorini's prophecies neared its peak could lead to attacks on them.⁷¹ This fear was at its strongest in 1824.⁷² Rev John Doyne, Curate at Old Leighlin writing to the Chief Secretary in October 1824 was so disturbed by the threat of rebellion, he warned that while he was not an alarmist he 'must remark that the lower orders of the people are supposed to believe implicitly in Pastorini's prophecies, and are looking forward to their immediate completion'.⁷³ Writing to Henry Goulburn, J.S. Rochford reported in November that the county was quiet and that he could find no justification for increased policing.⁷⁴ Nonetheless Protestant freeholders were nervous fearing attacks from their Catholic neighbours. Rochford related how, on Christmas eve 1824, Protestants in his area gathered together in the strongest houses, fortified the buildings, and sat up all night fearing that they were to be murdered by the Catholic masses enflamed by the prophecies of Pastorini.⁷⁵ About the same time, there were baseless rumours circulating about large groups of armed men gathering with violent intent towards Protestants in isolated areas in Carlow.⁷⁶ Fear of annihilation at the hands of the Catholic masses stalked Protestant smallholders in Carlow. The Carlow gentry manifested no such fear. For example, Lady Charles Burton of Pollacton was quite willing to enlist the assistance of Bishop Doyle when her children were ill.⁷⁷

As already noted, the early decades of the nineteenth century saw remarkable cooperation and toleration between religious denominations in Ireland in the areas of voluntary charitable ventures, participation in public ceremonies and education. This was undermined from the 1820s by a 'sharp resurgence in religious hostility' brought about by a general revival in religious

⁶⁹ Roberts to Chief Secretary, 4 Mar. 1822 (NAI, SOC, 2364/6).

⁷⁰ Grant to Chief Secretary, 1 Apr. 1822 (NAI, SOC, 2364/12).

⁷¹ For further on Hohenlohe and the adverse reaction of Protestants to the 'miracles' see Thomas McGrath, *Politics, interdenominational relations and education in the public ministry of Bishop James Doyle, 1786-1834* (Dublin, 1999) pp 109–115; Elizabeth Cronin, 'Alexander Prince Hohenlohe and his miraculous cures in early nineteenth-century Europe and America' *Archivum Hibernicum*, lxxvii (2014), pp 362–378.

⁷² Pastorini predicted that 1825 was to be the year when Protestantism would be destroyed, see Power, *The Apocalypse in Ireland*, p. 65.

⁷³ Doyne to Lord Lieutenant, 6 Oct. 1824 (NAI, SOC, 2603/1).

⁷⁴ Rochford to Goulburn, 7 Nov. 1824 (NAI, SOC, 2603/4).

⁷⁵ *State of Ireland*, p. 440.

⁷⁶ *SNL*, 4 Jan. 1825.

⁷⁷ Lady Burton asked Bishop Doyle to pray for two of her daughters who were unwell, see Lady Burton to Doyle, 10 Aug. 1825 (Delany Archive, Doyle Papers, IE-DA/KL/00366).

enthusiasm in all denominations.⁷⁸ Among many Protestants in Ireland it was thought that the Catholic peasantry laboured under the yoke of superstition for want of exposure to the bible. Additionally, many Protestants saw evangelicalism as a means of securing their role as leaders in society.⁷⁹ As part of this evangelical crusade Carlow, as a cathedral town with a Catholic seminary and a high-profile bishop, was selected as the venue for a ‘disputation’ or theological debate.⁸⁰ Consequently, a meeting scheduled to begin in Carlow on 18 November 1824 generated ‘an air of intense expectation’.⁸¹ Initial reports of a near riot at the meeting were refuted; there was general agreement that the event passed off peacefully if not decorously.⁸² Anxious to avoid unrest, Bishop Doyle subsequently forbade his clergy from engaging in public theological debate with evangelical Protestant clergymen.⁸³ While an epistolary war, principally between Rev William Clowry of Tullow and Revs Robert Daly and Joseph Singer, continued until September 1826, there were no further public debates in Carlow.⁸⁴ The episode did not cause any lasting damage to interdenominational relations between the local gentry and the Catholic clergy and middle class.

The inter-denominational cooperation manifest in county Carlow in the erection of Catholic churches in the first two decades of the nineteenth century continued with, for example, John Alexander and John S. Rochfort lending material assistance to Milford chapel and several Protestant gentlemen contributing to a fund for Hacketstown chapel in 1824.⁸⁵ This pattern of assistance continued with contributions by Protestant gentry towards the building of Borris Catholic chapel in August 1825 earning special mention for Henry Bruen, Thomas Kavanagh and Ulysses Burgh.⁸⁶ Similarly, a meeting in Tinryland Parish on 5 November 1826 thanked Field Marshal William Carr Beresford for the granting of a lease in perpetuity without charge for the site of the chapel and parochial house in the parish.⁸⁷ Indeed, Bishop Doyle himself observed that he had not ‘discerned in any class, or in any individual of the Catholic religion, either clergy or laity, I might say, any disposition hostile to the Protestant religion’.⁸⁸

⁷⁸ SJ Connolly, ‘Mass politics and sectarian conflict, 1823-30’ in Vaughan (ed), *A new history of Ireland Vol 5: Ireland under the Union I, 1801-70* (Oxford, 1989), p. 74.

⁷⁹ Irene Whelan, *The Bible War in Ireland* (Dublin, 2005), p. 164.

⁸⁰ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland, 1800-70: a study of Protestant-Catholic relations between the Act of Union and disestablishment* (Dublin, 1978), p. 99.

⁸¹ Whelan, *The Bible War*, p. 208; Conway to Doyle 19 Nov. 1824 (Delany Archive, Doyle Papers, IE-DA/KL/000333).

⁸² *DMR*, 23 Nov 1824; *FLJ*, 24 Nov. 1824.

⁸³ Circular from Bishop Doyle to Kildare and Leighlin Clergy, 28 Aug. 1825 (Delany Archive, Doyle Papers, KL-JKL-00853); *SNL*, 31 Aug. 1825. Although Rev Dr P. McSweeney did engage in further debate, he apologised for his disobedience and later resigned from his position in Carlow College eventually taking up a post in the Irish College in Paris, see Mc Sweeney to Doyle 13 Sept. 1825, (Delany Archive, Doyle Papers, KL-JKL-00375); *DEP*, 25 Oct. 1825; *LCHRON*, 14 July 1827.

⁸⁴ Clowry’s letters were published by Richard Coyne in 1827, see *The controversial letters, in reply to Rev Mr Daly, Rev Dr Singer &c by the Rev William Clowry* (Dublin, 1827).

⁸⁵ *SRCCC*, 5 June 1823, Kinsella, *Alexanders*, p. 191; *DJ*, 9 Apr. 1824; *SNL*, 9 Apr. 1824.

⁸⁶ *DMR*, 4 Aug. 1825.

⁸⁷ *DEP*, 9 Nov. 1826. Beresford, a distinguished soldier, was the illegitimate son of the Marquis of Waterford who bought an estate of 5,567 acres in Carlow for him at the end of the eighteenth century, see O’Toole, *The Carlow gentry*, p. 22.

⁸⁸ *State of Ireland 1825*, p. 216.

III. Catholic Politics in Carlow, 1821 – 1826

Meanwhile the foundations of Carlow politics were beginning to shake. Following the death of Henry Grattan, William Plunket became the champion of the Catholic cause at Westminster and on 28 February 1821, following the presentation of several petitions for relief from Catholics from England and Ireland, he introduced the now standard motion calling for a committee to look into the laws affecting Catholic participation in civic life.⁸⁹ Somewhat to his surprise, the motion was carried, 227 votes to 221, and Plunket subsequently oversaw the presentation of two bills, in March 1821.⁹⁰ The bills contained mechanisms for some government control over the appointment of Roman Catholic bishops as well as a modified oath of supremacy that was not repugnant to Catholics. However, they resurrected the old issue of ‘securities’, whereby a government commission would certify the loyalty of potential candidates for vacant Catholic sees before their appointment as well as a legislative device that would permit Catholics to take the oath of supremacy without compromising their religious beliefs. O’Connell vehemently opposed these concessions.⁹¹ This was not least because his own political credibility depended on securing emancipation without any conditions attached.⁹²

Carlow Catholics assembled to consider the matter on 12 March 1821. Chaired by Michael Finn, the meeting called on their representatives to support the second reading of the Catholic relief bill on 16 March.⁹³ It was noted that the Carlow representatives were among the 23 Irish members absent from the house for the first reading of the bill on 28 February 1821.⁹⁴ Burgh replied to Finn on 2 April 1821 letting him know that he had supported the bill on its third reading and stressed that, although he had not been in the house for the previous two readings, neither had he paired off or voted against it. Bruen had previously promised his support and voted for the measure following the third reading.⁹⁵ Despite their initial lack of interest, both members were quick to comply with the wishes of their constituents when the topic was raised by them. The local clergy, in the person of Bishop Doyle, were well disposed to this attempt to secure the relief bill. The clergy of Carlow met on 6 April 1821 and approved fully of the resolutions in

⁸⁹ *Hansard (Commons)*, 28 Feb. 1821, vol. 4, col. 988.

⁹⁰ *JHC*, vol. 76, 7 Mar. 1821 (p. 146).

⁹¹ S. J. Connolly, ‘Union government, 1812-23’ in Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland: Ireland under the union, 1801-70*, p. 67.

⁹² Geoghegan, *King Dan*, p. 189.

⁹³ *SNL*, 20 Mar. 1821.

⁹⁴ *FJ*, 12 Mar. 1821.

⁹⁵ *CMP*, 9 Apr. 1821.

favour of the bill adopted at the meeting of prelates held earlier in Dublin.⁹⁶ It seemed that the hierarchy in Leinster were prepared to pay the price of a veto to gain the ‘boon of emancipation’.⁹⁷ As an indication of his rising stature, Doyle was nominated to travel to London with Archbishop Murray to ‘attend the progress of the bills’, and to ‘be in constant communication with the friends of the Catholics in both houses’.⁹⁸ In the end, the bishops chose not to proceed for fear of aggravating the disunity over the concession of ‘securities’ that was emerging in the hierarchy.⁹⁹ In any case, the bill fell in the House of Lords on 17 April 1821.¹⁰⁰ The defeat laid the way open for the demand of emancipation without any qualifications.¹⁰¹

The air of ‘deep gloom’ created by the defeat of the Catholic relief bill was pierced in August 1821 by the visit of the recently crowned King George IV.¹⁰² The prospects of the benefits that might follow the royal visit prompted an almost hysterical outpouring of loyalty.¹⁰³ The excitement did not leave Carlow untouched with speculation that if George landed in Cobh, county Cork he was expected to travel through Carlow on his way to the capital.¹⁰⁴ Addresses to the monarch were prepared throughout the country. In another indication of Doyle’s rising standing, he was asked by Archbishop Murray to frame an address on behalf of the Catholic prelates. Doyle’s first draft was considered too assertive in the manner in which it expressed Catholic claims and he was asked to provide a second in a more conciliatory tone.¹⁰⁵ This was duly presented to the king by the Roman Catholic prelates, including Doyle, on 20 August 1821.¹⁰⁶ The laity were also active. A county meeting on 6 August 1821 approved an address to the king. At the meeting, J.S. Rochfort observed that the address reflected ‘the general good feeling of every class towards his majesty’. The corporation of Carlow met the same day and formulated a second address of welcome with Thomas Finn remarking that the king visited not from ‘heedless or idle curiosity, but that he really contemplates substantial benefits to Ireland’.¹⁰⁷ These were presented to the king on 20 August 1821 by William Browne, J.S. Rochfort and Charles Burton.¹⁰⁸ A National Testimonial Fund, established in Dublin following a meeting on 30 August 1821 to raise funds to erect a memorial of the king’s visit, elicited contributions from Ulysses Burgh, Bishop James Doyle, Daniel O’Connell and William Francis Finn.¹⁰⁹ Such demonstrations of loyalty among Catholics were prompted by the expectation of George IV supporting relief for

⁹⁶ *CMP*, 9 Apr. 1821, *FJ*; 9 Apr. 1821.

⁹⁷ McGrath, *Bishop James Doyle*, p. 2.

⁹⁸ *FLJ*, 6 Apr. 1821; *British Press*, 9 Apr. 1821.

⁹⁹ McGrath, *James Doyle*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Connolly, ‘Union government, 1812-23’, p. 67.

¹⁰¹ Bartlett, *fall and rise*, p. 328.

¹⁰² Fitzpatrick, *Doyle Correspondence*, i, p. 182; E. A. Smith, *George IV* (New Haven, 2000), p. 244.

¹⁰³ Karina Holton, ‘“All our joys will be completed”: the visit of George IV to Ireland, 1821’ in *IHS*, 44:166 (2020), pp 248-269.

¹⁰⁴ *MH*, 24 July 1821.

¹⁰⁵ McGrath, *James Doyle*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ *FJ*, 21 Aug. 1821; *DEP*, 21 Aug. 1821.

¹⁰⁷ *DEP*, 7 July 1821.

¹⁰⁸ *BN*, 24 Aug. 1821.

¹⁰⁹ *FJ*, 31 Aug. 1821.

them.¹¹⁰ Only Henry Bruen did not share in the general enthusiasm surrounding the visit; when invited he did not attend one of the levees given by the king. Although careful to be seen as publicly supportive of the Catholic cause, his failure to support the visit was an indication of his private reservations on the issue.¹¹¹ Although his interest in horseracing prompted him to subscribe £100 towards the construction of a stand at the racecourse in commemoration of George's visit to the Curragh, unlike Bishop Doyle, Ulysses B. Burgh, W.F. Finn and Daniel O'Connell, he did not subscribe to the fund initiated to raise a monument in Dublin to mark the king's visit.¹¹² This further underlined his disenchantment with the expected move towards Catholic relief.

The arrival of Richard Wellesley as Lord Lieutenant in early 1822 provided Carlow Catholics with another opportunity to express their loyalty to the crown through the medium of an address of welcome. A requisition for a meeting to frame a congratulatory address to the new viceroy, published in February 1822, was signed by leading members of the local gentry, including Henry Bruen, William Browne, J.S. Rochfort and supporters of the Catholic cause, including Michael and Thomas Finn, Thomas and John Haughton and Simeon Clarke.¹¹³ The meeting was duly arranged by William Steuart, the High Sheriff for 27 February in Carlow Court house.¹¹⁴ It was addressed by John S. Rochfort who, as well as congratulating the new viceroy, urged his fellow landlords to consider abatements of rents for industrious tenants in order to alleviate suffering among the peasantry and so preserve the peace of the county. In taking this liberal stance he remarked

Let us look around this country and say whether the patience and submission with which the lower orders bear their privations, are not subjects of admiration? We should bear and forbear: and should we not be worse than brutes, if we did not, by an abridgement of some of our luxuries, or by giving up a few of our leisure moments, do our utmost to ameliorate the condition of our fellow creatures?

William Francis Finn praised Rochfort's liberal stance while cautioning the peasantry to be wary of those clandestine groups of 'armed banditti' who were active at night attempting to sow discord among them. Finn also observed that he felt it his duty as a Roman Catholic to acknowledge 'the kindly feelings and concord that subsist in this county among all classes'.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Holton, "'All our joys'", p. 252.

¹¹¹ Harriette Bruen to Henry Bruen, 27 Aug. 1821 (NLI, Bruen Papers, Ms. 29-775/2/11).

¹¹² *FJ*, 11 Aug. 1821, 31 Aug. 1821.

¹¹³ *CMP*, 21 Feb. 1822.

¹¹⁴ *CMP*, 25 Feb. 1822.

¹¹⁵ *CMP*, 4 Mar. 1822.

The harmony that greeted Wellesley did not endure. His liberal stance and opposition to Orange parades culminated in ‘The Bottle Riot’ of 14 December 1821 at the Theatre Royal, Dublin.¹¹⁶ This prompted a series of loyal addresses from around the country, but Carlow did not join in. A requisition for a meeting was refused despite the presence of ‘nothing of the spirit of party’ in the request.¹¹⁷ Carlow Corporation was one only one of two bodies in the country to refuse such a meeting.¹¹⁸ Most of the signatories to the requisition were Protestants of the merchant and professional classes but none of the gentry was in evidence. The lack of involvement by the gentry and the peremptory refusal to facilitate a meeting indicate that established interests within the county were singularly unhappy with Wellesley.

The emergence of the Catholic Association in Carlow added to unease. Founded by Daniel O’Connell in 1823 with the aim of agitating for emancipation, it became for Catholics ‘the redresser of their grievances, the defender of their rights’.¹¹⁹ Initially a fledgling organisation with a small membership, the Catholic clergy remained detached from the organisation until Bishop Doyle joined in early 1824, his action drawing both the hierarchy and the bulk of the clergy into membership.¹²⁰ Doyle was actively supportive of efforts to collect the Catholic rent and several chapels were used to host gatherings to that end.¹²¹ At a meeting at Tullow Chapel on 29 August 1824, Rev William Clowry assured his parishioners that the fund was quite legal and urged them to contribute. In a fiery address he decried the ‘dominant faction’ as the only group opposed to the rent and urged the meeting not to ‘relax our constitutional efforts until we obtain liberty of conscience and our rights’.¹²² Michael Finn chaired a meeting in Carlow chapel on 4 September 1824 at which his brother W.F. Finn lauded the Catholic Association and urged the collection of the rent to support it in the struggle against an Orange faction formed ‘in the abysses of hell’.¹²³ Although the amount returned in Carlow was a little below that collected in other counties in Leinster, the system for its collection functioned successfully.¹²⁴

The new organisation and its attempt to establish a financial foundation added to the anxiety of Carlow Protestants. Writing to the Lord Lieutenant, William Henry Tudor from Painestown reported that the £20 in rent collected that day by ‘men of indifferent character’ was to be used to pay lawyers to ‘impede the sword of justice or obstruct the balm of peace’. He demanded action from government to stop this ‘dark plot which is in motion with the crashing

¹¹⁶ Hugh O’Reilly, ‘The Theatre Royal bottle riot of 1822 and the Orange Order in Dublin’ *Dublin Historical Record*, 72:2 (2019), p. 178.

¹¹⁷ *FJ*, 14 Jan. 1823.

¹¹⁸ *SNL*, 20 Jan. 1823.

¹¹⁹ D.G. Boyce, *Nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 2005), p. 42.

¹²⁰ Oliver MacDonagh, ‘The politicization of the Irish Catholic Bishops, 1800-1850’ *Historical Journal*, 18:1 (1975), p. 42.

¹²¹ McGrath, *James Doyle*, p. 28.

¹²² *DEP*, 2 Sept. 1824.

¹²³ *SNL*, 7 Sept. 1824; *DEP*, 11 Sept. 1824.

¹²⁴ Keyes, *Funding the nation*, p. 24.

powers of parliament'.¹²⁵ Consistent with the negative perception, Rev John Whitty, a magistrate and incumbent of the parish of Rathvilly, was equally disposed to see matters this way when his church was broken into on 15 July 1825 and the poor box taken. He observed that 'this circumstance occurred immediately on the commencement of the collection of the Catholic rent'.¹²⁶ There were sections of Protestant society in Carlow who felt threatened from the outset by the appearance of a well organised Catholic body.

Meanwhile the 'Wings' bill of Catholic relief exposed O'Connell to sharp criticism. There was little dissent in Carlow on the issue and a meeting was called for to adopt resolutions to promote the passage of the measure through parliament.¹²⁷ The meeting which followed at Carlow Court House on 15 March 1825 was very well attended, the crowd swollen by the presence of Richard Lalor Sheil. The meeting approved a number of resolutions thanking the sheriff and those Carlow Protestants who supported the Catholic claims and instructing the chairman to write to the two county representatives to thank them for their past support and elicit their support in the future.¹²⁸ Although the bill was rejected in the Lords, with a general election in the offing, both representatives considered it wise to act in accordance with the wishes of their constituents. The wisdom of this support was confirmed afterwards when the local Catholic Association passed a motion of thanks to Bruen and Burgh for their support at a meeting in Carlow on 28 November 1825.¹²⁹ This meeting also agreed resolutions affirming the loyalty of Carlow Catholics, their intention to persist in petitioning parliament with the help of Earl Grey in the Lords and Bruen and Burgh in the Commons but, while commending the 'disinterested zeal and incessant labours' of Daniel O'Connell, they expressed their displeasure at the proposed 'wings' or securities that he was prepared to accept the previous March.¹³⁰ This was in effect a rebuke for O'Connell who had insinuated earlier that he had the backing of Bishop Doyle for accepting the wings, a claim denied by the prelate.¹³¹ Carlow Catholics, it seemed, had more faith in their prelate than in the politician.

It was therefore with some trepidation that O'Connell faced the Leinster provincial meeting of Catholics in Carlow on 15 December 1825.¹³² In the event, he was warmly welcomed. He accepted a presentation of silver plate from a deputation from Wexford and had his carriage

¹²⁵ 'William Tudor, Carlow', 7 Sept. 1824, (NAI, CSORP, 1824/651).

¹²⁶ 'John Whitty, Castledermot', 17 July 1825, (NAI, CSORP, SC, 1825/491).

¹²⁷ *DMR*, 12 Apr. 1825.

¹²⁸ *SRCCC*, 21 Apr. 1825.

¹²⁹ *DEP*, 29 Nov. 1825.

¹³⁰ *DMR*, 1 Dec. 1825.

¹³¹ For a full account of the exchanges between Rev William Kinsella and O'Connell, see McGrath, *James Doyle*, pp 42–44.

¹³² Writing on 4 Dec. 1825, O'Connell's wife Mary noted that there would be opposition at the Carlow meeting while O'Connell anticipated a 'most violent party raised against' him at the meeting, see Maurice O'Connell (ed.), *The correspondence of Daniel O'Connell correspondence* (8 vols, Dublin 1972–80) iii, p. 210 & 212

pulled through the streets.¹³³ At the meeting itself, O’Connell, in calling for unity rather than division, was cheered enthusiastically and ‘sat down among loud cheers’.¹³⁴ In writing to his wife the following day, he did not mask his relief; telling her ‘in short, darling, I never in my life was so delighted with any meeting’.¹³⁵ However, he recognised that he had offended Doyle and, realising the importance of the support of the increasingly influential prelate, he sought to repair the damage. Writing on 18 December 1825 to Dr Jeremiah O’Donovan in Carlow College, O’Connell asked O’Donovan if he could discover the cause of coolness and, while not to letting Doyle know that he had written, to let it be known that ‘It is, indeed, painful to me that a man whom I so unfeignedly respect and reverence should entertain towards me sentiments of an adverse nature’.¹³⁶ As noted by Brian Fleming, the ‘wings’ episode introduced an extra note of caution into relations between Doyle and O’Connell.¹³⁷

IV. The 1826 Elections

County Carlow hosted a by-election and a general election over the space of three months in 1826. Both elections were uncontested but appeared to signal the arrival of the new political dominance of the combined Bruen and Kavanagh electoral interests. The county had not seen a contested election since 1812, and the apparently effortless installation of Thomas Kavanagh alongside Henry Bruen seemed to confirm the political hegemony by the two largest landowning families in the county.

Ulysses Burgh succeeded his cousin as the second Baron Downes on 3 March 1826.¹³⁸ Burgh’s elevation to the peerage created a vacancy in the representation of county Carlow.¹³⁹ When the writ for the byelection was issued in parliament on 13 March 1826, Thomas Kavanagh was quick to put himself forward.¹⁴⁰ Kavanagh’s first wife Elizabeth had died following a ‘bilious fever’ on 14 December 1823 and he married Lady Harriet Margaret Le Poer Trench, daughter of the 2nd Earl of Clancarty on 28 February 1825.¹⁴¹ As previously pointed out, his first wife came

¹³³ *FJ*, 17 Dec. 1825.

¹³⁴ *DMR*, 17 Dec. 1825.

¹³⁵ O’Connell (ed), *Correspondence*, iii, p 213.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p 215.

¹³⁷ Brian Fleming, *Irish education and Catholic emancipation, the campaigns of Bishop Doyle and Daniel O’Connell* (New York, 2017), p. 110.

¹³⁸ H.M. Stephens. ‘Úlysses B. Burgh’, *ODNIB*, Sub nominee.

¹³⁹ *DEM*, 3 Mar, 1826; *BNL*, 7 Mar. 1826.

¹⁴⁰ *JHC*, Vol. 81, 13 Mar 1826 (p. 163).

¹⁴¹ *DCorr*, 16 Dec. 1823; *SNL*, 3 Mar. 1825.

from a family of staunch government supporters, a trait shared by the family of his second wife.¹⁴² The marriage of his daughter Anne to Henry Bruen on 14 September 1822 served to combine the two largest electoral interests in the county.¹⁴³ Given this combined and overwhelming electoral interest, it is not surprising that there were no other contenders.¹⁴⁴ Kavanagh was returned without a contest.¹⁴⁵ His parliamentary career did not begin well; his post-election dinner was poorly attended and several walked out when the divisive toast to the ‘Glorious, Pious and Immortal memory of King William III’ was proposed.¹⁴⁶ This fuelled Liberal suspicions surrounding his commitment to Catholic relief.¹⁴⁷ Kavanagh was denigrated as an Orangeman and freeholders were urged to take note of the political agitation underway in Waterford and to depose him at the next election.¹⁴⁸

Parliament was dissolved on 2 June 1826.¹⁴⁹ The Carlow election was called for 19 June.¹⁵⁰ The result in County Carlow was regarded as a foregone conclusion with the county ‘as closely tied up as the borough of Carlow itself by the family compact of Mr. Kavanagh and Colonel Bruen’.¹⁵¹ This was reflected in Thomas Kavanagh’s election address where he displayed an almost arrogant confidence in informing freeholders that as he had been elected by them very recently and as he remained in poor health, he would not undertake a canvass in person. Bruen was a little more humble and stressed his ‘constant residence’ in Carlow promising freeholders that he would support measures ‘best adapted to promote your interests and to preserve our excellent constitution’.¹⁵² Given that a byelection was held just two months before, it was unsurprising that no new candidates came forward and it was widely expected that the existing representatives would be returned without a contest.¹⁵³ The authorities expected that there would be no public unrest during the election and were confident enough in this assessment to send 28 of the Carlow police establishment to Waterford on 15 June.¹⁵⁴ They were correct in their

¹⁴² Thorne (ed), *Commons*, v, p. 414; P.M. Geoghegan, ‘Richard La Poer Trench’, *DIB*, Sub nominee.

¹⁴³ *MH*, 28 Sept. 1822.

¹⁴⁴ *Ccon*, 16 Mar. 1826.

¹⁴⁵ Walker, *election results*, p. 35.

¹⁴⁶ *FJ*, 19 Apr. 1826. The offensive toast was associated with the maintenance of Protestant dominance in Ireland, see James Kelly, ‘“The Glorious and Immortal Memory”: Commemoration and Protestant Identity in Ireland 1660-1800’ *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 94C: 2 (1994), p. 32.

¹⁴⁷ *DMR*, 12 Apr. 1826.

¹⁴⁸ The *Dublin Evening Post* urged Kavanagh to look to Waterford, *DEP*, 13 Apr. 1826. The Waterford Election campaigns were well underway by April 1826. It developed into a struggle between the ascendancy Beresford landed interest and Henry Villiers Stuart, a liberal Protestant with the backing of Waterford Catholic Association activist Thomas Wyse and local clergy, see Fergus O’Ferrall, ‘“The Only Lever . . .”? The Catholic Priest in Irish Politics 1823-29’ *Studies*, 70:280 (1981), pp 311-312, MacDonagh, *hereditary bondsman*, pp 223-227 and Eugene Broderick, ‘Protestants and the 1826 Waterford County election’ *Decies*, 53 (1997), pp 45-66 for fuller accounts

¹⁴⁹ Fisher (ed), *Commons*, i, p. 222.

¹⁵⁰ *DEP*, 10 June 1826.

¹⁵¹ *SRCCC*, 3 June 1826.

¹⁵² *DEM*, 9 June 1826.

¹⁵³ *St James’s Chronicle*, 8 June 1826; *DMR*, 13 June 1826.

¹⁵⁴ *SNL*, 20 June 1826.

prediction; the election was a quiet affair that took place on 19 June 1826. Unsurprisingly both candidates were returned without opposition.¹⁵⁵

The election in the borough, as always dominated by the Earl of Charleville, attracted continued criticism. It was sarcastically observed that ‘Lord Charleville has kindly taken that trouble from the good citizens of that corporation’ in choosing a representative, and having returned an Englishman in 1820, he might choose to return ‘a resident of Van Diemen’s Land or an inhabitant of the Esquimaux Territory’ on this occasion.¹⁵⁶ Charleville arrived in Carlow before the election ostensibly still undecided as to who to nominate for the seat.¹⁵⁷ Lord Viscount Tullamore, Charles Bury, the Earl of Charleville’s son, was afterwards returned without attending the election.¹⁵⁸ In an effort to placate the inhabitants of the town after his display of nepotism, there was no chairing ceremony and Charleville authorised Edward Butler, the town sovereign to donate 80 guineas to local charities.¹⁵⁹

Although Bishop Doyle did not have the opportunity to exert his influence with freeholders in the general election in Carlow in 1826, as had been the case in the 1820 election, his influence was recognised.¹⁶⁰ His espousal of Prince Hohenlohe’s miracle, his public letters and his impressive appearance before the Select Committee on the State of Ireland had raised his public profile.¹⁶¹ His performance in Westminster gained him a reputation ‘as one of the most important figures in Irish public life’.¹⁶² He was viewed as an accomplished orator and was frequently called on to deliver sermons including one at the dedication of the Catholic Cathedral in Marlborough Street, Dublin on 14 November 1826.¹⁶³ It is not surprising that he was frequently the subject of adverse comment by Protestant conservatives concerned by his rise to prominence. He was accused of dishonesty in forbidding his priests to engage in further theological debate by Rev Robert Daly, one of the best known of the Protestant evangelicals.¹⁶⁴ He was described by the outspoken George Dawson as ‘a chameleon character with a hatred of Protestants’.¹⁶⁵ The purchase of Braganza House in Carlow for Doyle was another indication of his value in the eyes

¹⁵⁵ *DEP*, 20 June 1826.

¹⁵⁶ *DMR*, 13 June 1826.

¹⁵⁷ *DEP*, 15 June 1826.

¹⁵⁸ *WHJ*, 22 June 1826.

¹⁵⁹ *DEP*, 27 June 1826.

¹⁶⁰ Doyle was congratulated by Sir Henry Parnell and General Sir John Doyle on the Catholic ‘successes’ in the 1826 elections, see Parnell to Doyle, 7 Jul. 1826; Doyle to Doyle, 11 Jul. 1826 (Delany Archive, Doyle Papers, KL-JKL-00415-6).

¹⁶¹ O’Connell considered that Doyle made ‘a most powerful impression in our favour’ through his evidence to the Westminster committee, see O’Connell (ed), *Correspondence*, iii, p. 142. Doyle’s evidence was described as ‘candid, eloquent and learned’, see *FJ*, 8 Apr. 1825.

¹⁶² McGrath, *James Doyle*, p. 42.

¹⁶³ *FJ*, 11 Nov. 1825.

¹⁶⁴ *DEP*, 13 Sept. 1825. Daly held a very high profile among upper and middle-class Protestants and was described as ‘a country-house legend’, see D.H. Akenson, *Discovering the end of time: Irish Evangelicals in the age of Daniel O’Connell* (London, 2016), p. 227.

¹⁶⁵ *BCC*, 2 Jan. 1826.

of the Catholic body and caused some surprise among conservative Protestants.¹⁶⁶ Doyle was recognised as a latent political force in Carlow who could be expected to exert his undoubted influence when the opportunity presented.

There was no such opportunity in Carlow in 1826. The electoral strength of both Bruen and Kavanagh, who held sway over the vast bulk of the 40 shilling freeholders in the county made the prospects of success for a third candidate remote. This was in contrast to County Waterford where, although the Catholic question was not the sole focus of opposition, after a long-planned and well executed campaign, County Waterford experienced a political upheaval. The general election campaign in Waterford began as early as 1824 with vigorous collection of the Catholic Rent.¹⁶⁷ Under the supervision of Thomas Wyse and Father John Sheehan, a central committee was established with sub-committees in each barony and agents in each parish that gathered lists of registered freeholders. The objective of the campaign was to oust Lord George Beresford, one of the sitting MPs whose family commanded an extensive electoral interest in the county. For months before the election, these freeholders were canvassed to go against the wishes of their landlord, to reject the bribes being offered in the assurance that there was a local fund available to support those who might be punished for their disobedience.¹⁶⁸ Henry Villiers Stuart, who commenced an active canvass as early as August 1825 was the embodiment of a liberal, Protestant in contrast to Beresford who was the epitome of Protestant conservatism on the Catholic question.¹⁶⁹ The spirited and intense local agitation in advance of the general election in Waterford was in contrast to the muted and uncontested return of Kavanagh in Carlow in the March byelection. The upset in Waterford was not unique; there revolts of Catholic freeholders in counties Louth, Monaghan, Westmeath and Cavan that were ‘all the more shocking for being more sudden and apparently less organised than Waterford’.¹⁷⁰ While political structures in Carlow received no such shock and the 1826 election was uncontested as expected, it was to be last that did not go to a poll for almost two decades.

¹⁶⁶ *WM*, 15 Nov. 1826.

¹⁶⁷ Fergus O’Ferrall, ‘“The Only Lever . . .”? The Catholic Priest in Irish Politics 1823-29’ in *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, lxx, no. 280 (1981), p. 312.

¹⁶⁸ MacDonagh, *The hereditary bondsman*, p. 224.

¹⁶⁹ Eugene Broderick, ‘Protestants and the 1826 Waterford county election’ in *Decies: Journal of the Waterford Archaeological & Historical Society*, no. 53 (1997), p. 51.

¹⁷⁰ O’Ferrall, *Catholic emancipation*, p. 133; for a summary of events in 1826 in Armagh, Cavan, Louth and Monaghan see Allan Blackstock, *Loyalism in Ireland, 1789-1829* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp 199–202.

Conclusion

Carlow county returned the same representatives in uncontested elections in 1820 and 1826. The borough of Carlow remained 'closed' with the selection of a representative remaining in the gift of the Earl of Charleville, this continuing monopoly causing discontent but no conflict. Both county representatives persisted as they had before with lax attendance and the pursuit of patronage for their followers. However, a politically aware class had emerged in the county. Public meetings to consider social, political and commercial matters became common. The Catholic Question emerged as a major political issue. This was recognised by both county representatives obliging them to support Catholic relief measures. While interdenominational relations between the gentry and the Catholic middle classes remained cordial, the same was not true among the lower orders where suspicion and fear was formented by popular millenarianism among Catholics and the increase in evangelical fervour among Protestants.

Although Bishop James Doyle emerged as a public figure of some stature, he resiled from attempting to influence electoral events in Carlow against the background of increased sectarian tensions among the lower orders occasioned by Catholic agitation and the arrival of the 'Bible War' in Carlow. Electoral politics in county Carlow in 1826 remained calm and predictable in contrast to turbulent events in Waterford, Wexford, Cavan and Louth. The returns of Bruen and Kavanagh in 1826 seemed to signal the beginning of an unassailable family dynasty in a politically quiescent county where deference to the landholding elite was still maintained.

Chapter 6: The 1830 General Election: First Challenge to the Established Order

Introduction

The interval between the general elections of 1826 and 1830 witnessed far reaching changes in the complexion of electoral politics in Carlow county and borough. Intensified agitation in the wake of the Catholic successes elsewhere in 1826 fuelled the increase in the political temperature in Carlow prompting the reluctant support of both county members for Catholic relief measures. For the first time, Carlow politicians were held to account in the expanding public sphere. The election of Daniel O’Connell in Clare in July 1828 added to political tensions. Faltering efforts to establish a Brunswick club in the county tainted the political credentials of Henry Bruen with his Catholic constituents. This prompted Bruen to support efforts to open Carlow borough in an effort to salvage his political prospects. In doing this he underlined the growing realisation among the political oligarchy that voters were becoming increasingly assertive. The shift in political power was reinforced by Catholic emancipation. The resulting abolition of the 40-shilling franchise drastically reduced the number of Catholic freeholders in the county but did little to stifle the opposition to the established order. This was reflected in the support for a liberal candidate who challenged the well-established county representatives in the 1830 general election, the first contested election in over a decade.

I. The Catholic Association and its impact on county Carlow, 1826-29

Although the 1826 general election in Carlow resulted in no change, electoral successes elsewhere for O’Connellite candidates in 1826 fostered an intensification of agitation on the Catholic question in the county that was notable for the level of involvement of Roman Catholic clergy. The Catholic Association was enthusiastically embraced by the clergy in Carlow. It elicited public declarations of support from Rev Daniel Cahill, Rev James Maher and Bishop Doyle.¹ Catholic meetings were commonplace in the autumn of 1826 with the *Freeman’s Journal* observing that

¹ Cahill addressed a letter to the New Catholic Association which was read publicly at a meeting on 15 July 1826, see *DMR*, 17 July 1826.

it did 'not recollect to have ever witnessed so extensive an excitement of that spirit which animates the Catholic body in the pursuit of equality'.² The petitions framed at these meetings were generally forwarded to Bruen and Kavanagh for presentation in the Commons and to Lord Clifden for presentation in the Lords.³ The two county representatives were careful to avow that they were willing to support Catholic relief measures in the Commons.⁴ When they failed to live up to expectations, their neglect was publicly highlighted. When Thomas Kavanagh was not in London for the vote on Francis Burdett's motion on Catholic relief that was narrowly defeated by four votes on 6 March 1827, it was reported that he, together with two other Irish MPs were 'detained in Dublin due to sickness or *something else*' [writer's emphasis].⁵ At a meeting of the Catholic Association chaired by Thomas Cloney on 10 March, Frederick William Conway publicly identified one of these errant MPs as 'Mr. Kavanagh, who was returned by the Catholics of Carlow.' Kavanagh was defended by Cloney who assured the meeting that 'Mr. Kavanagh was seriously indisposed, and had been for some time confined to his room'.⁶ This defence was prompted by the longstanding and close relationship between the Kavanagh and Cloney families.⁷ Nonetheless, the perception that Kavanagh failed to represent the views of his constituents reinforced the impression that the county would be better represented by another.

Despite the fact that Bruen and Kavanagh were government supporters, visible support for Catholic relief was necessary for their continued electoral success.⁸ The support of the clergy in Carlow for the Catholic Association illustrated this necessity notwithstanding Bishop Doyle's reluctance to permit his priests to engage directly in the collection of the Catholic Rent. While stressing that he had subscribed to the rent, Doyle made it clear to O'Connell in January 1827 that although he felt that his clergy were willing to allow the collection of funds in their parishes, they were unwilling to actively participate in the collection as there were too many other calls on the slim resources of most parishioners.⁹ Further underlining this in April, Doyle noted that rent collections in county Carlow were delayed not through lack of effort or commitment, but as there were already heavy financial demands on the 'industrious and benevolent' that were 'expected principally to contribute to the Catholic rent'.¹⁰ Whatever about the motives of his flock, the

² *FJ*, 10 Oct. 1826. Separate meetings were held in Carlow on 5 Oct., Tinryland and Borris on 5 Nov., Bagenalstown, Leighlinbridge on 18 Nov. and St Mullins on 3 Dec.: see *SRCC*, 10 Oct. 1826; *DMR*, 15 Nov. 1826; *DEP*, 9, 21 Nov. 1826; 12 Dec. 1826.

³ Emancipation Rent, Petitions, Register of Books Sent 1826-1828 (DDA, Letters to Edward Hay, Section 56-1 Nos. 4-9); *FJ*, 1, 12 Mar. 1827.

⁴ *DEP*, 16 Jan. 1827.

⁵ *Hansard (Commons)*, 6 Mar. 1827, vol. 16, col. 1009; *DMR*, 10 Mar. 1827; *The Times*, 13 Mar. 1827.

⁶ *DEP*, 13 Mar. 1827.

⁷ Cloney had been active in the 1798 rebellion and had engaged in an attempted arms raid on the Kavanagh estate in Borris. He regretted this as he considered Walter Kavanagh, Thomas's brother, to be 'a decided enemy to bigotry and oppression', see Thomas Cloney, *A personal narrative of those transactions in the county Wexford in which the author was engaged, during that awful period of 1798* (Dublin, 1832), p. 51.

⁸ After the general election in 1826, Bruen and Kavanagh were listed by Joseph Planta as supporters of the ministry (BL, Peel Papers, Add Ms 40398, ff 3-12).

⁹ *DMR*, 15 Jan. 1827.

¹⁰ Doyle to L'Estrange, 23 Nov. 1827 (Delany Archive, Doyle Papers, KL-JKL-00499).

commitment of his clergy was not dampened and, as can be seen from table 6.1, between 1826 and 1828 almost all parochial clergy and the staff of Carlow College subscribed to the Association. Several parishes participated in ‘simultaneous meetings’ held to petition for Catholic relief on 13 January 1828 including Graigue, Carlow, Leighlinbridge, Rathvilly, Rathoe, Tinryland and Tullow. This reinforced the link between the Catholic clergy and politics.¹¹ Fergus O’Feerrall observed that this set a ‘fearsome precedent’ and was a local demonstration of popular will that did not fail to make an impression.¹²

II. The Catholic Association and Protestant Angst

The increased political activity of the Catholic clergy was viewed with suspicion within Protestant circles. In July 1827 Ulysses Burgh, now Lord Downes, enquired of John Fitzmaurice his land agent in Carlow on the amounts of Catholic rent being collected on his estate there. Fitzmaurice replied without any foundation that there was a ‘reluctance’ among tenants on the Bagenal estate to pay ‘that imposition called the Catholic Rent’. He claimed also that Rev William Kinsella of Carlow College had made the unlikely admission that several of the ‘Pope’s men were of the worst and most abandoned characters’ who ‘had not the power to forgive sins’.¹³ This is unlikely but it points to the atmosphere of denominational suspicion. The Rev Samuel Roberts of Leighlinbridge, who was also a magistrate, expressed grave concern to the lord lieutenant when the daughters of a Protestant widow were compelled to attend mass by her Catholic in-laws. He had the transgressors arrested but they were soon released. The local Catholic parish priest had written to him promising that his ‘conduct should be arraigned before the Tribunal of Public Opinion (sic) and that he would make application to the Catholic Association’. Roberts rather testily asked whether he was answerable to government or to the Catholic Association. Frustratingly for Roberts, the Castle replied that there was no basis for the intervention of the lord lieutenant.¹⁴

¹¹ *CMP*, 17, 21 Jan. 1828; *SRCCC*, 26 Jan. 1828.

¹² Fergus O’Ferrall, *Catholic emancipation: Daniel O’Connell and the birth of Irish democracy* (Dublin, 1981), p. 176.

¹³ Fitzmaurice to Downes, 10 Jul. 1827 (NLI, Fitzmaurice Papers, Ms. 23,525/6).

¹⁴ Roberts to Anglesey, 5 Sept. 1828 (NAI, CSORP, 1828/1344).

Table 6.1: New Catholic Association Subscriptions from Carlow Clergy 1826-27

Parish	Clergyman	Date	Amount
Arles	Rev P Hickey PP	06/09/1828	1-0-0
	Rev Kelly CC	06/09/1828	1-0-0
Bagenalstown	Rev M Prendergast PP	19/07/1828	1-0-0
	Rev Andrew Phelan CC	19/07/1828	Unknown
Ballon	Rev Mr Kinsela PP	18/09/1828	1-0-0
Borris	Rev John Walsh PP	17/07/1826	3-0-0
Carlow	Rev DW Cahill	14/07/1826	1-0-0
	Rev James Maher	14/07/1826	1-0-0
	Dr Doyle	02/07/1828	10-0-0
Carlow College	Dr Nolan	02/07/1828	1-1-0
	Dr Fitzgerald	02/07/1828	1-0-0
	Rev Kinsella	02/07/1828	1-0-0
	Rev Cahill	02/07/1828	1-0-0
	Rev Nolan	02/07/1828	1-0-0
Clonegal	Rev Mr Dolan PP	11/09/1828	1-0-0
	Rev Mr Fitzpatrick CC		1-0-0
Clonmore			
Doonane	Rev Mr Kelly PP	30/08/1828	1-0-0
	Rev Thomas Kelly CC		1-0-0
Graigenamanagh	Rev Patrick Kehoe PP	16/09/1826	1-0-0
	Rev Martin Doyle CC	16/09/1826	1-0-0
Hacketstown	Denis Lawlor PP	15/03/1828	1-0-0
	Rev Denis Lawlor PP	16/08/1828	1-0-0
	T Furlong CC		Unknown
Leighlinbridge	Rev James Maher PP	19/07/1828	Unknown
Paulstown	Rev James Whelan CC	15/03/1828	1-0-0
	Rev P Doyle	12/07/1828	0-10-0
Rathvilly	Rev John Gahan CC	13/11/1826	1-0-0
St Mullins	Rev P. Dolan PP	26/07/1828	1-0-0
	Rev Thomas Moyland CC		0-10-0
Tinryland	Rev Thomas Tyrrell PP	02/08/1828	1-0-0
	Thomas Tyrrell PP (2nd)	27/09/1828	1-0-1
Tullow	Rev Wm Clowry PP	18/01/1828	1-0-0

Sources: *CMP*, 8 Sept. 1828, 15 Sept 1828; *DEP*, 22 Jul. 1828; *DEM*, 26 Jul. 1828; *DMR* 17 Jul. 1826, 7 Jul. 1828, 29 Jul. 1828; *MT*, 13 Nov. 1826; *DWR*, 26 Jan. 1828.

The strength of such feeling should not be exaggerated. In the months following the general election in 1826, co-operation between the conservative Protestant gentry and Catholics continued. This is illustrated by the judicial career of Walter Blackney, a member of a long-established Carlow Catholic family, who was appointed as a magistrate for county Carlow in 1818 on the recommendation of John Staunton Rochfort, appointed a magistrate for Kilkenny by Lord Norbury in April 1821 and by Norbury and Thomas Kavanagh for Wexford in September 1826.¹⁵ This was significant as Blackney was a well-known supporter of the Catholic Association.¹⁶ Evidently, Blackney's Catholic activism was not regarded as an obstacle to his appointment to the bench by either the local Protestant gentry or the wider judiciary. Considerations surrounding law and order outweighed Catholic politics.

III. Brunswickism in Carlow

Daniel O'Connell's decision to offer himself as a candidate on 24 June 1828 in the county Clare by-election has been correctly described as the beginning of 'a new epoch in Irish politics and in Anglo-Irish relations'.¹⁷ O'Connell recognised the value of public support from Bishop Doyle and approached him through Richard Coyne, the bishop's favoured publisher. O'Connell clearly regarded Doyle's support for his electoral effort as crucial. Writing to Doyle, who was visiting Maynooth, on 26 June 1828, Coyne related that:

Counsellor O'Connell requested nay, I may say supplicated me to write and send my young man, in the hope that your Lordship will write to him by the bearer approving and encouraging the undertaking. He should be off in the morning, but waits your Lordship's letter, upon which, he calculates, that it will procure him ultimate success, the great object in its publication.¹⁸

Doyle lost no time in responding to O'Connell, writing to him on 27 June 1828 endorsing his electoral efforts in Clare as being 'as useful as they must be important'.¹⁹ The letter was read by O'Connell at a meeting of the Catholic Association in Dublin that same day remarking that 'the

¹⁵ Henry Blackall, 'The Blackneys of Ballyellen' *The Irish Genealogist*, 3:2 (1957), p. 45; Ryan, *Carlow*, p. 359; Rochfort to Manners, 29 June 1818 (NAI, CSO/RP/1818/560); Norbury to Gregory, 4 April 1821 (NAI, CSO/RP/1821/1036)

¹⁶ He was regarded as a local 'manager' of Catholic petitions as early as 1811, was included in a published list of members of the Catholic Association in December 1823 and was frequently associated with Catholic meetings in Carlow; see MacDonagh, *hereditary bondsman*, p. 106; List of Catholic Rent Collectors, (DDA, Murray Papers, Section 54-2, File I, 27); *DMR*, 21 Dec. 1823; *DEP*, 13 Dec. 1825; *DEP*, 12 Oct. 1826.

¹⁷ O'Ferrall, *Catholic emancipation*, p. 188.

¹⁸ Coyne to Doyle, 26 June 1828 (Delany Archive, Doyle Papers, KL-JKL-00543).

¹⁹ Fitzpatrick, *Doyle Correspondence*, ii p. 77.

approbation of Dr Doyle will bring to our cause the united voice of Ireland'.²⁰ As observed by Thomas McGrath, Doyle's backing 'made it very difficult for any other prelate or priest to disapprove publicly of O'Connell's campaign'.²¹ The conservative press both in England and Ireland was predictably outraged.²² Doyle was cast as 'a political incendiary' that took 'pains to sow the seeds of discord among his flock' and criticised for what was described as assisting in the attempt to 'dissever all bonds of dependence and affection among a peaceable and hitherto united people'.²³

O'Connell's victory in Clare left the British government with little option other than to yield to the demand for Catholic relief.²⁴ Government realised that the 40-shilling freeholders' franchise meant future electoral success for any Protestant candidate in counties with a large number of Catholic voters would be unlikely.²⁵ This realisation prompted Irish Protestants to rally in a last-ditch opposition to emancipation giving rise to the formation of the Brunswick Constitutional Club of Ireland on 15 August 1828 with the aim of 'preserving the integrity of [our] Protestant Constitution'.²⁶ The Brunswickers priority was to impress upon government the hazards of granting emancipation to Catholics by using public meetings and petitioning parliament. They were also intended as a counter to the O'Connellite Liberal Clubs that had sprang up around the country and to O'Connell's semi-military 'Order of Liberators' which was thought to have access to arms and to possess the potential to become an 'instrument of force'.²⁷ Bishop Doyle was not in favour of political clubs and opposed the establishment of a pro-emancipation Liberal Club in Carlow. This meant the county was identified as politically inert in the wake of the Clare election; one observer noted that the county was 'the only one that has not exhibited some symptom of life or energy'.²⁸ At a meeting of the Catholic Association in Dublin on 4 August 1828 W.F. Finn suggested that he would establish a club in Carlow to aid, among other things, the collection of the Catholic rent.²⁹ No such club was established in Carlow. Bishop Doyle's opposition was not concealed and continued into the autumn. Writing on 28 October 1828 to Rev Nicholas O'Connor, the parish priest of Maryborough, having read that a Liberal club was to be formed there, he observed that such clubs tended to be divisive and counselled the Catholic body to 'avoid everything which tends to create jealousy, distrust, or fear in our neighbour'.³⁰ The letter was subsequently circulated widely including in the *Carlow Morning*

²⁰ *DEP*, 28 June 1828.

²¹ McGrath, *James Doyle*, p. 60.

²² *DEM*, 30 June 1828; *Mayo Constitution* 3 July 1828.

²³ *SJC*, 1 July 1828; *KM*, 9 July 1828; *LC*, 3 July 1828; *SNL*, 7 July 1828.

²⁴ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland, 1798-1998: war, peace and beyond* (Chichester, 2010), p. 35.

²⁵ Hereward Senior, *Orangeism in Ireland and Britain 1795-1836* (London, 1966), p. 224.

²⁶ *DEP*, 22 Aug. 1828.

²⁷ Senior, *Orangeism in Ireland and Britain*, pp 226-7.

²⁸ *DEM*, 18 July 1828.

²⁹ *DEP*, 5 Aug. 1828.

³⁰ Fitzpatrick, Doyle *Correspondence*, p. 92. The meeting to discuss the formation of the club was held in the chapel of Maryborough on 7 Oct. 1828, see *FJ*; 16 Oct. 1828.

Post.³¹ It was later implied that Doyle's opposition to the establishment of a Liberal Club in Maryborough was rooted in the apprehension that such a club would oppose the return of the two sitting MPs in Queen's County at the next election, which would have damaged Doyle's confidante Sir Henry Parnell.³² Whatever the case, Bishop Doyle's intervention was enough to quash the establishment of a Liberal Club in Maryborough and it is telling that there were no moves to establish a Liberal club in Carlow.

Attempts to establish a Brunswick Club in Carlow met with a mixture of opposition and apathy. Bishop Doyle's opinion on political clubs was mirrored by the *Carlow Morning Post* which denounced Brunswick Clubs as intended 'to revive old prejudices, to foment long existing dissensions and promote political disunion'.³³ In the first week of October 1828 it was noted that Carlow and Clare were the only two counties in which Brunswick Clubs had not been established.³⁴ Rumours persisted in the county towards the end of October that, although a club was to be established with Henry Bruen as president, there was little appetite for it among the local gentry with Thomas Kavanagh, John Staunton Rochfort, Sir Thomas Butler, Charles Doyne of Tullow, William Duckett and Charles Browne, then a governor of the county, all against the idea. The *Carlow Morning Post* reacted with mock horror to the suggestion that Bruen would become involved and act 'in hostility to his own recorded votes in Parliament'.³⁵ It was common knowledge that Bruen was willing to preside over a Brunswick Club in Carlow, but only if backed by the local gentry.³⁶ Reports in the *Dublin Evening Mail* that Bruen was appointed a committee member of the Brunswick Constitutional Club of Ireland were at first endorsed and then dismissed by the suddenly supportive *Carlow Morning Post*.³⁷ Discounting the earlier report, the newspaper suggested that Bruen had been the victim of a 'shameful imputation' on his character but still calling on him to clarify the matter.³⁸ Bruen declined to do this and despite his refusal to attend a Brunswick meeting, the feeling prevailed that he secretly approved of the movement.³⁹ The rejection by the county sheriff John James Duckett of a requisition for a meeting to discuss a Brunswick Club in late November 1828 added to speculation that a minority of the gentry in Carlow were frustrating efforts to establish a club.⁴⁰ A meeting was eventually set for 16 January 1829, the notice announcing the meeting unsigned and the venue unspecified.⁴¹ This was welcomed by ultra-conservative Protestants who opposed any concession who described the delay

³¹ *CMP*, 27 Nov. 1828; *KEP*, 26 Nov. 1828.

³² *CMP*, 1 Dec. 1828.

³³ *CMP*, 25 Aug. 1828.

³⁴ *DEM*, 3 Oct. 1828.

³⁵ *CMP*, 23 Oct. 1828.

³⁶ Fitzmaurice to Downes, 24 Nov. 1828 (NLI, Fitzmaurice Papers, Ms. 23,525/6).

³⁷ *CMP*, 3 Nov. 1828.

³⁸ *CMP*, 6 Nov. 1828.

³⁹ *DEP*, 22 Nov. 1828.

⁴⁰ *WHJ*, 4 Dec. 1828.

⁴¹ *CC*, 8 Jan. 1829; *KM*, 14 Jan. 1829.

as ‘culpable carelessness’ on the part of those Carlow Protestants who had heeded ‘the urgent solicitations of the divine of the alphabet – JKL – and the professors of Carlow College’.⁴² Postponed until 26 January, the conflicting and predictably partisan reports of the meeting carried in the liberal and conservative press made no mention of either Henry Bruen or Thomas Kavanagh attending.⁴³ Controversially, the meeting was attended by four policemen stationed in the Carlow-Graigue district, which prompted disciplinary action.⁴⁴ The errant policemen claimed to be unaware of the nature of the meeting.⁴⁵ They were suspended without pay and the Leinster Constabulary were circulated with a warning against participating in such political meetings.⁴⁶ In Carlow, it seemed that the local gentry and the apparatus of state were unwilling to involve themselves in the Brunswick movement.

In the months following the Clare election, sectarian tensions heightened dramatically across Ireland. The assertiveness of the Catholic Association, signalled by John Lawless’s ‘mission’ to the north to collect the Catholic rent that ended in a potentially violent standoff in Ballybay increased unease among liberal Protestants who had up until then supported Catholic claims.⁴⁷ Liberal moderate Protestants saw themselves sandwiched between ultra-Protestant Brunswick Clubs on one side and the Catholic Association on the other.⁴⁸ This led to the production of a ‘Protestant Declaration’ of support for Catholic Emancipation that liberal Protestants were invited to sign.⁴⁹ The declaration was forwarded to Carlow where it was made available for signature in the offices of the *Carlow Morning Post* prior its circulation to other towns in the county.⁵⁰ Henry Bruen and Thomas Kavanagh, as representatives for the county and ostensible supporters of Catholic relief in parliament, were expected to sign on a point of principle.⁵¹ In the event neither did and, disappointingly for the Catholic body in Carlow, neither did most of the Protestant gentry of the county. It was observed that the declaration did ‘not seem to have held out attraction in our climate’ attracting just eight signatures.⁵² This was widely reported.⁵³ If the Carlow gentry were reluctant to join a divisive Brunswick club, they were now equally reluctant to support Catholic claims.

⁴² *WM*, 14 Jan. 1829.

⁴³ The *Waterford Mail* reported events with gravitas observing that ‘there was never a more enthusiastic feeling or expression of sound loyalty evinced at any meeting’ while *The Carlow Morning Post* lampooned the proceedings later suggesting that ‘The Catch Beggars Club’ would be a more appropriate name for the gatherings. Attention was also drawn to the lack of local gentry, clergymen and magistrates at the meeting; see *WM* 28 Jan. 1829; *CMP*, 29 Jan, 5 Feb. 1829, *DEP*, 27 Jan. 1829.

⁴⁴ Wright to Wray, 29 Jan. 1829 (NAI, COSRP, 1829/143/3).

⁴⁵ Harvey to Gregory, 31 Jan. 1829 (NAI, CSORP, 1829/143/2).

⁴⁶ Circular from Chief Inspector Harvey, Portarlinton to Leinster Constabulary, February 1829 (NAI, CSORP, 1829/143/1).

⁴⁷ Karina Holton, *Valentine Lawless, Lord Cloncurry, 1773-1853: from United Irishman to liberal politician* (Dublin, 2018), p. 181; O’Ferrall, *Catholic emancipation*, p. 213.

⁴⁸ Thomas Wyse, *Historical sketch of the late Catholic Association of Ireland* (2 vols, London), ii, pp 14–15.

⁴⁹ *FJ*, 29 Sept. 1828.

⁵⁰ *CMP*, 3 Nov. 1828.

⁵¹ *CMP*, 20 Oct. 1828.

⁵² Sir Thomas Butler alone among the Carlow gentry signed together with several members of the Protestant merchant class such as Thomas and Samuel Haughton, John Meyler and Francis Montgomery, see *CMP*, 17 Nov. 1828.

⁵³ See for example *CC*, 20 Nov. 1820; *KM*, 26 Nov. 1828.

As ultra-Protestantism struggled in vain to establish a Brunswick Club in county Carlow, agitation in support of Catholic relief continued. Agitators convened large crowds of Catholics throughout the country; these gatherings often featuring inflammatory and barely legal speeches.⁵⁴ Conventional meetings of Catholics persisted and adopted a series of ‘pledges’ to be used to consolidate support for emancipation, repeal of the sub-letting act and parliamentary reform while questioning the bona fides of existing parliamentary representatives.⁵⁵ A meeting chaired by the Catholic magistrate Walter Blackney on 19 January 1829 was the largest gathering in Carlow since the provincial meeting of the Catholic Association in December 1826. The electoral upsets witnessed in counties Waterford, Louth and Clare were held up as examples of the power of the franchise and freeholders were exhorted to register.⁵⁶ Echoing a claim made at a meeting of the Catholic Association in Dublin a few days earlier, Bruen was openly criticised for his apparent involvement with Brunswickism.⁵⁷ The two sitting MPs were compared unfavourably to previous representatives and accused of only grudging support for relief.⁵⁸ The series of resolutions published after the meeting stressed the importance of the electoral franchise, urged all freeholders to register and emphasised the importance of both the Catholic Association and the collection of the Catholic rent.⁵⁹ The gathering in Carlow was followed by others elsewhere in the county. Bruen was criticised openly at a meeting in Leighlinbridge on 8 February with W.F. Finn declaring that ‘the man who professes Brunswickism in Dublin, and pares down his principles in Carlow, is a disgrace to his name, and should be cast out from among us’.⁶⁰ While Carlow was not unique in hosting such meetings in the run up to the enactment of emancipation, there was clearly unhappiness among Catholic freeholders there with Bruen’s questionable commitment to their cause despite his previous support in parliament for relief.⁶¹ Influenced by the demonstrations of electoral independence by their peers in Waterford and Louth, Carlow freeholders openly considered the possibility of a similar freeholder ‘revolt’ in the county. The meetings in Carlow and Leighlinbridge were the opening salvos in a political power struggle that was to overturn the established and stable political power structures in the county in the following decade.

⁵⁴ Karina Holton, ‘A turbulent year: Lord Anglesey’s first viceroyalty and the politics of Catholic emancipation, 1828’ in *Studia Hibernica*, 43 (2017), p. 71.

⁵⁵ MacDonagh, *hereditary bondsman*, p. 215.

⁵⁶ *Pilot*, 23 Jan. 1829.

⁵⁷ *DMR*, 16 Jan. 1829, *CMP*, 22 Jan. 1829.

⁵⁸ *DEP*, 27 Jan. 1829; *CMP*, 22 Jan. 1829.

⁵⁹ *DEP*, 29 Jan. 1829.

⁶⁰ *CMP*, 16 Feb. 1829.

⁶¹ Similar meetings were held for example in New Ross on 12 Jan. 1829, Kilkenny on 15 Jan. 1829 and Mountrath on 28 Jan. 1829, see *WWC*, 17 Jan. 1829, *DEP*, 20 Jan. and *DWR*, 31 Jan.

IV. The Politics of the Enactment of Catholic Emancipation, 1829

The introduction of Catholic relief legislation was signalled in the King's speech at the opening of parliament on 5 February 1829.⁶² The relief bill and its progress was monitored closely in Carlow with the *Carlow Morning Post* promising to publish details of the bill as soon as they came to hand.⁶³ The complete text and an analysis of the bill was published on 16 March.⁶⁴ Petitions in support from Carlow were presented: from Myshall on 20 February, St Mullins on 10 March, Leighlinbridge on 13 March and Borris on 16 March.⁶⁵ There was particular interest in the activities of the two county members as the bill progressed. The third reading of the bill took place on 30 March 1829 and while Bruen was in parliament to support it, it was noted that Kavanagh was absent.⁶⁶ This was despite the fact that Kavanagh had arrived in London almost three weeks beforehand.⁶⁷ Once again the public gaze was on the parliamentarians.

Unsurprisingly, the prospect of relief was not welcomed in the Bruen household. Writing to her husband Henry who was in London attending to parliamentary business on 7 March, Anne Bruen commented on a letter from Rev Hugh McNeile published earlier in the *London Evening Standard*.⁶⁸ McNeile insisted that he would 'oppose popery in every shape or form' and repudiate his church living should the church countenance official recognition of Roman Catholicism.⁶⁹ Although Anne considered that Dr McNeile was 'in an awful fuss', she agreed with his anti-Catholic stance.⁷⁰ As the relief bill was being debated, Anne reluctantly resigned herself its enactment. Writing to Henry on 16 March, she accepted that he had decided to support 'the measure' even if she did not agree with him. She suggests that while he might regard it as a matter of 'political expediency', she questioned 'whether it is for the honor [sic] of the God who for so long protected and shepherded us' and remarked that 'there are many excellent people who have a horror of it on the same ground'.⁷¹ It is clear that in supporting the Catholic Relief Bill, Henry Bruen was acting contrary to the convictions of his family. He did so for purely political reasons. Given his refusal to publicly deny his support for Brunswickism, he realised that he would have

⁶² *The Times*, 6 Feb. 1829; *JHC*, 5 Feb. 1829, Vol 84 p. 5.

⁶³ *CMP*, 6 Mar. 1829.

⁶⁴ *CMP*, 16 Mar. 1829.

⁶⁵ *JHC*, Vol. 84, p. 72, p. 121, p. 133 and p. 141.

⁶⁶ *CMP*, 6 Apr. 1829.

⁶⁷ *MH*, 7 Mar. 1829.

⁶⁸ McNeile was rector of Albury and son-in-law to Archbishop William Magee of Dublin. He was rabidly anti-Catholic and held that any measure of relief for Catholics would draw down divine retribution, John Wilfe, see 'Hugh Boyd McNeile', *ODNB*, Sub Nomine.

⁶⁹ *LES*, 26 Feb. 1826.

⁷⁰ Anne Bruen to Henry Bruen, 7 Mar. 1829 (NLI, Bruen Papers, Ms. 29,775/2/1).

⁷¹ Anne Bruen to Henry Bruen, 16 Mar. 1829 (NLI, Bruen Papers, Ms. 29,775/2/4).

to be seen to support the Catholic cause if he was to enjoy future electoral success. Additionally, unlike Kavanagh, Bruen did not have recourse to the residual good feeling in the county that attended the Kavanagh name and that might serve to mitigate any political uncertainty.

Oliver MacDonagh observed that the passage of the Catholic Relief Bill demonstrated that O'Connell was 'perpetually resilient, flexible, fertile in device and ready for accommodation within the grand circle of the negotiable'. His jettisoning of the 40 shilling freeholders and his refusal to countenance exuberant public celebrations on the passage of the emancipation bill all formed part of his overall effort to foster conciliation with the government and with conservative Protestants.⁷² O'Connell himself cautioned against triumphal displays lest they gave 'an excuse to cause a disturbance to the public peace'.⁷³ While the initial welcome for the measure in Carlow was effusive, with the *Carlow Morning Post* proclaiming that 'the land will be hallowed with harmony at home, and may now, indeed, bid defiance to the enmity of a world', O'Connell's caution prevailed over the euphoria. By 20 April, the *Carlow Morning Post* was 'decidedly opposed to the project of illumination'.⁷⁴ While anxious to avoid conflict, the political class in Carlow followed the lead given nationally by O'Connell in avoiding actions that might be taken as provocative.

The growing subordination of the local to the national of which this was a manifestation was further illustrated by 'conciliation dinners' that were held across the country in April 1829.⁷⁵ These post-emancipation events were intended to promote harmony.⁷⁶ A dinner chaired by Walter Blackney held in Carlow on 23 April, was intended 'to celebrate the late and immortal Act of the Legislature for healing up our sectarian disputes'.⁷⁷ The dinner drew about 50 attendees among whom there were few Protestants, no Catholic or Protestant clergymen and no members of the gentry. There were conciliatory overtures however, with Blackney stressing that division was not the object of the dinner. The irascible Thomas Finn controversially proposed 'The immortal and glorious memory' to William III whom he claimed had been 'as much misrepresented as any man that ever existed' and who was a 'friend of civil and religious liberty in the just acceptance of the word'.⁷⁸ It was reported that the toast was greeted 'with enthusiasm'.⁷⁹ Even so, the failure of even liberal members of the gentry, such as John Staunton Rochford and Sir Thomas Butler

⁷² MacDonagh, *hereditary bondsman*, p. 271.

⁷³ *DEP*, 14 Apr. 1829.

⁷⁴ *CMP*, 20 Apr. 1829.

⁷⁵ One of the first was held in Cashel on 21 Apr. 1829, see *CH*, 15 Apr. 1829. Others were held in Castleisland on 21 Apr., Belfast on 23 Apr., Waterford and Killarney on 28 Apr, see *CWH*, 27 Apr., *WM*, 28 Apr., *DROJNL*, 22 Apr. 1829.

⁷⁶ Robert Huish, *The memoirs, personal and political of Daniel O'Connell Esq* (London, 1836), p. 116.

⁷⁷ *CMP*, 23 Apr. 1829.

⁷⁸ *CMP*, 27 Apr. 1829.

⁷⁹ *TFP*, 6 May 1829.

echoed the wider Protestant reluctance to identify with the success of the Catholic agitation and anxiety about what would flow from future agitation.

Bishop Doyle too was anxious to disassociate himself from further political activity. Having initially supported a scheme to establish a National Testimonial Fund to recompense O'Connell for the financial losses that he had suffered while advocating the Catholic cause, Doyle had second thoughts.⁸⁰ Through the medium of a published letter to Walter Blackney, while expressing his approval of the fund and enclosing his subscription of ten pounds, he distanced himself from what he saw as a politically motivated initiative remarking that 'I consider the term of my political labours to have expired when the Royal Assent was given to the Catholic Relief Bill'.⁸¹ Aware that the support of conservative Protestants was necessary to progress the improvements in health, education and poor relief he promoted, as he had done earlier in opposing the establishment of Liberal clubs in his diocese, he sought now to distance himself from O'Connell's radical repeal politics.

V. A Restructured Electorate

One of the measures that accompanied Catholic Emancipation was the raising of the minimum property qualification for franchise qualification from 40 shillings to £10. This new class of freeholder was required to inform the Clerk of the Peace in advance of their intention to register. They were then required to appear at special sessions (or Quarter Sessions thereafter) where they would face questioning by the county Assistant Barrister on the basis for their qualification.⁸² As can be seen from Table 6.2, there were 727 intentions to register submitted, yet just 110 freeholders were successfully registered. Martin McElroy's study of the special sessions held in June 1829 in county Tipperary shows a similar pattern of failure by potential freeholders to pursue the process to completion. He suggested 'the initial rush to register may have been an expression of solidarity or identification with the success of the campaign for Catholic emancipation' but when it came to actually registering, many felt that they had not the means to qualify.⁸³ Freeholders in Carlow were encouraged to register by both press and prelate. The *Carlow Morning Post* provided an interpretation of the legislation and exhorted freeholders to register as 'indolence can furnish no excuse to the inactive for their neglect'.⁸⁴ Bishop Doyle also encouraged

⁸⁰ Fergus O'Ferrall, *Daniel O'Connell* (Dublin, 1981), p. 68; *CMP*, 23 Apr. 1829.

⁸¹ *DMR*, 28 Apr. 1829.

⁸² *FJ*, 25 Apr. 1829.

⁸³ McElroy, 'The impact of the parliamentary elections (Ireland) act (1829) on the Irish electorate c. '829-32' in Allan Blackstock and Eoin Magennis (eds), *Politics and political culture in Britain and Ireland 1750-1850* (Belfast, 2007), p. 30.

⁸⁴ *CMP*, 30 Apr. 1829.

registration. He published his interpretation of the freeholder's oath, ostensibly to help applicants avoid perjury, but actually, as observed by Sir Thomas Butler, to provide 'the most intelligible and best explication of all that was really important in that act'.⁸⁵ Whatever his motivation, it did not result in a major surge in Catholic freeholder registration. Many felt that the vote left them vulnerable to the competing pressures exerted by landlord and co-religionist producing a situation where 'moral pressure competed with economic pressure, and the tenant found himself in a no-win situation.' For these, the loss of the vote was almost welcome.⁸⁶ Additionally potential freeholders did not relish the prospect of having to prove they were qualified before James

Table 6.2: Freeholder Registration Applications and Successes in Carlow by Barony 1829

Barony	Special Session June 1829		Quarter Sessions July 1829		Quarter Sessions October 1829	
	Applications	Successes	Applications	Successes	Applications	Successes
Carlow	118	25 (21%)	41	12	4	2
Idrone East	196	37 (19%)	18	13	23	10
Idrone West	38	8 (21%)	5	0	6	4
Forth	33	1 (3%)	16	4	2	0
St Mullins	221	28 (13%)	3	0	29	5
Rathvilly	121	11 (9%)	40	9	5	1
Totals	727	110 (15%)	123	38 (31%)	69	22 (32%)

Sources: *Carlow Morning Post*, 14 May 1829; 29 June 1829; 24 Sept. 1829; 24 Dec. 1829; 24 Dec. 1829; 29 Mar. 1830; 17 June 1830; 23 Sept. 1830; *County of Carlow: List of freeholders registered in the year ending 31 December 1829 & 31 December 1830* (CCA, Kehoe Papers, Box 63a)

Bessonnet, the assistant barrister for Carlow, as provided for by law. Bessonnet was son-in-law to Thomas Kavanagh and had obtained his post in Carlow through the influence of Henry Bruen.⁸⁷ His impartiality was thought to be questionable.⁸⁸ Indeed the high failure rate in Carlow was attributed to Bessonnet and 'the minute scrupulosity with which candidate freeholders are interrogated'.⁸⁹ Therefore only those who were strongly committed appeared at the session to register.

⁸⁵ *CMP*, 4 June 1829.

⁸⁶ Keyes, *Funding the nation*, p. 39.

⁸⁷ *Pilot* 22 June 1829.

⁸⁸ *LG*, 24 June 1829.

⁸⁹ *WM*, 6 June 1829.

Applications made after the special sessions were made to the usual Quarter Sessions sittings subject to the payment of a considerable fee of 2s 6d. If successful in their application, new freeholders had to wait six months before they could vote.⁹⁰ The effect of this on the electorate was striking. Table 6.3 shows the reductions in the county electorates of Carlow and neighbouring counties between January 1829 and January 1830. It can be seen that in Carlow there was a drop of almost 65% overall, but a drop of 88% in the lowest class of freeholder from 1,162 40-shilling voters to just 139 £10 voters. While there were increases in the £20 and £50 categories, these were not large in absolute terms. However, the elimination of those freeholders thought to have been most malleable did not provide much comfort to conservatives in Carlow. This is despite the electoral upsets that these freeholders had been responsible for in Waterford and then Clare. The remaining £10 freeholders promised to be even more ‘independent’ than the discarded 40shilling freeholders who were compared to ‘sheep’ that were driven to the polls ‘where absolute submission to the landlord was a condition of their tenures’.⁹¹ The remaining freeholders were more independent and, having been energised by O’Connell’s campaign, they had ‘been given a sense of control over their own future’.⁹² The superintendence of the register was to become central to the electoral conflicts to come.

County	1st January 1829					1st January 1830					Change				
	40s	£20	£50	£100	Total	£10	£20	£50	£100	Total	40s / £10	£20	£50	£100	Total
Carlow	1,162	67	281	0	1,510	139	93	298	0	530	-1,023	26	17	0	-980
Kildare	496	80	376	0	952	25	86	385	0	496	-471	6	9	0	-456
Kilkenny	2,353	210	698	0	3,261	118	234	726	0	1,078	-2,235	24	28	0	-2,183
Queen's County	1,427	140	718	0	2,285	229	199	756	0	1,184	-1,198	59	38	0	-1,101
Wicklow	835	58	246	0	1,139	393	113	279	0	785	-442	55	33	0	-354

Sources: Return of the number of freeholders who stood registered and qualified to vote in each county in Ireland on 1st January 1829 and 1st January 1830 [cd 556-1830]

VI. The 1830 election and Opening Carlow Borough

Despite the removal of the reputationally troublesome 40-shilling freeholders from the electorate, Carlow’s existing county representatives recognised that political change was in the wind. Bruen particularly sought to rehabilitate himself in the eyes of the electorate, sensing that a credible

⁹⁰ 10 Geo IV, 7, 12.

⁹¹ William Fagan, *The life and times of Daniel O’Connell* (2 vols, Cork, 1848), i, p. 380.

⁹² Jackson, *Ireland, 1798-1998*, p. 36; Geoghegan, ‘The impact of O’Connell, 1815-1850’, p. 104.

challenge was in the offing. In common with other smaller corporations where there was unhappiness with the monopolisation of representation, the ongoing attempt to open the borough of Carlow continued.⁹³ These efforts were bolstered by the activities of Daniel O'Connell. He acquired a copy of a return dated 2 April 1829 from the Clerk of the Peace, Alex Humfrey, to William Gregory which stated that 'the borough of Carlow is the property of Lord Charleville, and that the member is returned by him'.⁹⁴ O'Connell raised the matter in the House of Commons on 18 March 1830 and succeeded in having a motion passed to secure a return confirming the 'number of persons entitled to vote for Members to serve for the Town of Carlow, distinguishing the resident from the non-resident'.⁹⁵ A 'Commonality Club' was subsequently formed in Carlow under the presidency of Simeon Clark with the objective of 'opening' the borough or, failing that, disenfranchising it altogether.⁹⁶ At the petty sessions held in Carlow on 22 April 1830, several members of the Commonality Club attempted to have themselves admitted to the corporation as freemen which would enfranchise them in parliamentary elections for the borough. The magistrates present included the town sovereign Edward Butler and Henry Bruen, pleading ignorance of the regulations governing the admittance of freemen, declined the request.⁹⁷ A meeting was duly requisitioned for 28 April to frame a petition to parliament 'touching on the present corrupt state of the borough'.⁹⁸ It was held in Cullen's Hotel as Henry Faulkner, the sheriff, refused the use of the courthouse. The well-attended meeting agreed to raise a petition to be presented by O'Connell with Bruen and Kavanagh among others to be asked to support it. The meeting was not over-critical of lord Tullamore but observed that he worked in the interests of his patron, his father, rather than the interests of the inhabitants of Carlow.⁹⁹ The *Carlow Morning Post* gave great credit to Thomas Haughton for framing the petition noting that while Henry Bruen had promised his support, the county member would do well to distance himself from 'the little gentry and petty tyrants of the country' and to avoid chairing biblical meetings in order to 'rise above certain religious prejudices'.¹⁰⁰

As well as residual resentment among voters caused by his suspected association with the Brunswick movement in 1829, Bruen had come to be identified with a number of Protestant evangelical organisations arising out of his attendance at meetings of the Carlow Auxiliary Bible

⁹³ Peter Jupp, 'Urban politics in Ireland, 1801-31', p. 121.

⁹⁴ *Pilot*, 22 Mar. 1830; *CMP*, 25 Mar. 1830. The language used by Humfrey was not calculated to endear him to Lord Charleville and was later described as 'more untechnical than untrue', see *LS*, 20 July 1830.

⁹⁵ *Hansard* (Commons), 18 Mar. 1830, vol. 23, col. 544.

⁹⁶ *CMP*, 5 Apr. 1830; *Pilot*, 5 Apr. 1830.

⁹⁷ *CMP*, 26 Apr. 1830. The aspirant freemen included including Thomas Haughton, Simeon Clarke, John Meyler and Patrick Finn, all of whom had come to prominence during the campaign for emancipation.

⁹⁸ *DMR*, 27 Apr. 1830.

⁹⁹ *CMP*, 3 May 1830.

¹⁰⁰ *CMP*, 6 May 1830.

Society and the Carlow Reformation Society.¹⁰¹ He was also considered to be almost a lackey of government. In March 1830 it was reported in a London newspaper in unflattering terms that Bruen, described as a ‘mere ministerial hack’, had been summoned to London by government very much against his will while at least Kavanagh displayed some independence in resisting the summons.¹⁰²

Perhaps more seriously, Bruen sat on the bench at the petty sessions in Carlow on 22 October 1829 when ‘Captain’ Thomas Woodcock, an officer of the 4th Dragoon Guards on half-pay and recent arrival in Leighlinbridge, was convicted of trespass and fined twenty pounds.¹⁰³ Woodcock considered himself treated harshly and appealed to the Quarter Sessions. A fund, widely supported by the local Catholic body was raised to defray his costs.¹⁰⁴ But his appeal, which was heard on 12 and 13 January 1830, was unsuccessful.¹⁰⁵ By then a ‘Liberal and Commercial Club’ had been established in Carlow and the dinner held the night that Woodcock’s appeal failed provided a platform for Liberal activists to attack both Bruen and Kavanagh. Woodcock, an Englishman, struck a popular note when he expressed surprise that Carlow had chosen representatives ‘unworthy in point of public character and unqualified in point of intellect to represent them in parliament’ and insisted that both members were ‘worse than useless’. Thomas Finn endorsed this sentiment: he declared himself ‘the public enemy of Colonel Bruen’ and Patrick Finn urged the assembly to oust Bruen at the earliest opportunity. There were several other calls to ‘put Bruen out of the county’ and an editorial in *The Carlow Morning Post* warned both representatives that they should not rely on the votes of their Catholic tenantry remarking that

they are not likely to recline on a bed of roses whenever the County of Carlow shall again be opened by a dissolution of parliament.¹⁰⁶

The sentiments expressed at the dinner were widely reported together with the expectation that Sir Thomas Butler and Horace Rochfort would oppose Bruen and Kavanagh at the next general election.¹⁰⁷ Woodcock acted as a lightning rod for the discontent of the liberal political class with their conservative representatives in Carlow.

¹⁰¹ For example, Bruen chaired meetings of the Carlow Auxiliary Bible Society on 3 Oct. 1827 and 21 Aug. 1828 and attended meetings of the Carlow Reformation Society on 19 Oct. 1827, 18 Sept. 1828 and 1 October 1829, see *DEM*, 5 Oct. 1827, *FJ*, 30 Aug. 1828, *DEP*, 23 Oct. 1827, 6 Oct. 1829 *SNL*, 23 Sept. 1828.

¹⁰² *LES*, 18 Mar. 1830.

¹⁰³ Woodcock used the title of Captain but in fact held the rank of Lieutenant when he went on half-pay from the 4th Royal Irish Dragoon Guards on 25 May 1815, see Henry Stooks Smith, *An alphabetical list of the officers of the fourth (Royal Irish) dragoon guards, from 1800 to 1856* (London, 1856), p. 24.

¹⁰⁴ *CMP*, 17 Dec. 1829.

¹⁰⁵ *CMP*, 14 Jan. 1830.

¹⁰⁶ *CMP*, 18 Jan. 1830.

¹⁰⁷ See for example *CC*, 21 Jan 1830, *SRCCC*, 21 Jan 1830 & *TFP*, 23 Jan. 1830. Horace Rochfort was the son of John Staunton Rochfort of Clogrennane and Sir Thomas Butler the son of Sir Richard Butler former MP for county Carlow.

As the election neared, the lax attendance of both MPs in parliament provoked further comment. Both were absent on 18 May 1829 for the vote on whether O'Connell should be permitted to take his seat in Westminster and they were again absent from the house on 8 February 1830 according to the Parliamentary Intelligence Office established by Edward O'Dwyer to monitor the performances of Irish MPs.¹⁰⁸ It was reported also that neither was present to sign the declaration against extra taxation that was put forward at a meeting of Irish MPs at the Thatched House Tavern in London on 4 May 1830.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, both were absent for the vote on the repeal of Irish coal taxes on 13 May 1830, an omission that the 'people' would greet with 'surprise and indignation'.¹¹⁰ There was no doubt but that Bruen and Kavanagh faced, perhaps for the first time, an uncertain political future. However, Bruen displayed his political acumen days later when, at the Carlow Petty Sessions on 6 May 1830, the group that had been refused admission to the corporation earlier again applied. Having obtained legal advice following the refusal of Edward Butler (the sovereign of the corporation) to accept the initial applications, Bruen agreed to the admission of thirty-two new freemen and issued the necessary certificates.¹¹¹ This provided Bruen with a lifeline. He was acclaimed by the *Carlow Morning Post* which applauded his 'manly, upright conduct' that entitled him 'to the gratitude of the country at large'. The newspaper went on to observe that 'this single act ought to cover a multitude of political offences'.¹¹² In a single stroke, Bruen had resuscitated his political prospects at little cost to himself, but at the cost of exposing Lord Charleville, as patron of the borough of Carlow, to electoral uncertainty though they shared the same conservative outlook. In doing this, he recognised the latent power of the emerging liberal middle class in Carlow and contrived to protect his own political future.

Kavanagh too realised that action was needed. He travelled to London arriving with his family in the last week of April.¹¹³ An increasingly hostile press now monitored the attendance of representatives in parliament. The *Pilot* characterised parliamentary absence as a 'species of political delinquency' and warned members that parliamentary attendance was essential for re-election.¹¹⁴ Bruen and Kavanagh were singled out for criticism by the *Freeman's Journal* which regarded both as constant supporters of the Treasury and wondered if they would ever 'give even one vote for their constituents?'.¹¹⁵ Aware of this criticism, Kavanagh presented a petition to parliament from the letter press printers of Carlow against increases in stamp duty on newspapers

¹⁰⁸ *DMR*, 9 Feb. 1830.

¹⁰⁹ *LS*, 5 May 1830; *BNL*, 11 May 1830.

¹¹⁰ *DMR*, 20 May 1830.

¹¹¹ *DMR*, 11 May 1830.

¹¹² *CMP*, 10 May 1830.

¹¹³ *NTL*, 26 Apr. 1830.

¹¹⁴ *Pilot*, 3 May 1830.

¹¹⁵ *FJ*, 7 May 1830.

on 29 May 1830.¹¹⁶ He ensured that letters from him opposing the tax were widely published.¹¹⁷ However, the illness and sudden death of his daughter Eleanor, who had travelled to London with him effectively ended his attempt at public rehabilitation.¹¹⁸

VII. A Challenger from Within

Horace Rochfort, son of John Staunton Rochfort of Clogrennane, formally announced his intention to stand in the 'independent interest' even before the election date was set.¹¹⁹ Rochfort was educated at Eton and then Trinity College, Dublin, and he was both well-known and well regarded locally among gentry and peasantry.¹²⁰ Rochfort managed to secure the oblique support of Bishop Doyle. Despite the prelate's public eschewal of politics following emancipation, he was discreetly active. This was evidenced by the platform given to Rochfort at the dinner following the academic exercises held in Carlow College on 1 July 1830. In a veiled criticism of the electoral advantage expected to accrue to Bruen and Kavanagh because of their large tenantry, Rochfort used the opportunity to flatter the electorate. He praised the new class of £10 freeholders as men who were 'well educated, who possess a considerable stake in the country, and who ought to be independent'.¹²¹ Writing on 12 July 1830, Sir Henry Parnell privately acknowledged Bishop Doyle's support for Rochfort noting that 'I hear that you have taken my friend Mr. Rochfort under your protection'.¹²² Continuing to display political flair, in his electoral address dated 30 June 1830, Rochfort stressed his youthful vigour promising 'close attendance on parliament' and hoping that with his 'labour and zeal, supplying the place of ability' he would be an effective representative.¹²³ He contrasted his vigour with the inertia of Bruen and Kavanagh and his desire to break away from the established electoral pattern in Carlow that had come to be dominated by the two main landowners in the county.¹²⁴

¹¹⁶ *MP*, 31 May 1830.

¹¹⁷ *DMR*, 4 June 1830, *Pilot*, 4 June 1830, *CMP*, 4 June 1830.

¹¹⁸ Eleanor died in London on 30 June 1830, see *DMR*, 6 July 1830; *CMP*, 6 July 1830; *KM*, 7 July 1830. She was buried in St James, Piccadilly on 5 July 1830.

¹¹⁹ On 26 June Rochfort informed Richard Dunne, a Carlow -based Catholic activist, that he would certainly be standing, see *CMP*, 28 June 1830; *DEPKT*, 29 June 1830.

¹²⁰ George Burtchaell and Thomas Sadlier, *Alumni Dublinenses. A register of the students, graduates, professors, and provosts of Trinity College, in the University of Dublin* (London, 1924), p. 711; Among his achievements, Rochfort obtained a premium in Classics in Trinity in 1825, was on hand to rescue a drowning man from the river Barrow in December 1824, and was lavishly praised for his work in the re-establishment of Carlow Fever Hospital where despite his youth, he was appointed treasurer in July 1829; see *WM*, 12 Feb. 1825; 1 Jan. 1825, 23 Mar. 1825; *KKMod*, 12 Nov. 1828; *CMP*, 13 Nov. 1828, 6, 30 July 1829, 6 Aug. 1829.

¹²¹ *CMP*, 5 July 1830.

¹²² Parnell to Doyle, 12 July 1830 (Delany Archive, Doyle Papers, KL-JKL-00671).

¹²³ *DEP*, 8 July 1830.

¹²⁴ Geoghegan, 'The impact of O'Connell', p. 114.

At the same time, he actively engaged in ‘old style’ electioneering, utilising both his own and his father’s contacts to canvass landowners with an electoral ‘interest’ in Carlow. He approached the Whigs Lord Milton, Sir Richard Heron and Earl Fitzwilliam in early June 1830 all of whom had a considerable electoral interest in the county. In his correspondence with Milton, Rochfort was critical of the sitting members whom he characterised as lazy government supporters and assured him that if he were returned he would ‘follow a conscientious and liberal line of politics’.¹²⁵ John Staunton Rochfort was active on his son’s behalf and sought the support of Lord Farnham who had a considerable tenantry in the south of county Carlow. Writing to Farnham on 30 June 1830, he reported that Horace’s canvass was going well and that while he had the support of the freeholders of Sir Thomas Butler and Philip Newton, any influence that could be brought to bear on the McClintock and Pepper estates would be welcome.¹²⁶ In the run up to the election and to bolster local support, there were weekly meetings of Horace’s supporters increasing to bi-weekly as the campaign progressed.¹²⁷ As the election neared, his supporters held a dinner in his honour in Cullen’s Hotel as a means of re-affirming their resolve to ‘promote the cause of independence’ in the county.¹²⁸

Kavanagh published an address from London where he awaited the funeral of his daughter. He chose, perhaps unwisely, to hold up his past performance as a recommendation and, while mentioning that his recent bereavement would delay his appearance in person, he scotched rumours that he was not going to stand.¹²⁹ Bruen addressed his constituents with characteristic brevity from London on 2 July 1830 stressing that his parliamentary duties would prevent him from canvassing their support for him in person.¹³⁰ Not content to proceed thus, Bruen was back in Carlow by 10 July and was ‘feeling the pulse of his constituents’ while Kavanagh remained in London, and despite this apparent lack of interest in the election, his friends in Carlow were ‘still sanguine of his success’.¹³¹ As the campaign continued in the county, both Bruen and Kavanagh sustained criticism for their parliamentary non-performance.¹³² Locally the *Carlow Morning Post* was supportive of Bruen, mainly because of his role in ‘opening’ Carlow borough. Kavanagh attracted searing criticism. Urging freeholders not to penalise Kavanagh in ‘exciting a religious mode of warfare against him’ for conforming to the established church, the newspaper discounted

¹²⁵ Rochfort to Milton, 6 June 1830 (SCA, Fitzwilliam Mss, No Reference), quoted in Philip Salmon, ‘Co. Carlow’ in Fisher (ed), *Commons*, iii, p. 678.

¹²⁶ Rochfort to Farnham, 30 June 1830 (NLI, Farnham Papers, Ms. 41,146/29/3).

¹²⁷ *CMP*, 12 July 1830.

¹²⁸ *CMP*, 22 July 1830.

¹²⁹ *CMP*, 5 July 1830.

¹³⁰ *DEP*, 8 July 1830; *CMP*, 8 July 1830.

¹³¹ *CMP*, 12 July 1830.

¹³² It was observed of them that although both were ‘most estimable members of society; but, as members of parliament, a more ineffective pair represent no county’. They were ridiculed for their parliamentary performances since on questions of Irish interest they were found ‘absent altogether, or voting on the side of the ministers and against their country’. It was also suggested that they had created a ‘family compact’ and effectively ‘converted the county into a contemptible borough’ with Kavanagh allegedly holding the seat until his son attained his majority. See *MH*, 16 July 1830; *WC*, 24 July 1830.

his lineage as worthless and drew attention to his absences from parliament for important divisions:

One time he was sick in Dublin, on another occasion he was bed-ridden with the gout. These afflictions were real or affected, and in either case Mr. Kavanagh is disqualified from representing the people of Carlow. If the illness was merely pretended, he is to be indicted for tergiversation; if it was real, and if he be such a martyr to the gout as he is said to be, then he is also unfit, being unfit to attend to his parliamentary duties.¹³³

Rochford saw fit to issue a revised electoral address on 28 July in which he made a series of pledges on his attendance in parliament, his opposition to fresh taxes, his support for the freedom of the press and his commitment to promote the introduction of capital into the country.¹³⁴ These specific pledges were in contrast to the vague generalisations offered by Bruen and Kavanagh. Furthermore, Rochford declared that he was willing to answer any question when he appeared at the hustings encouraging voters 'to put him through what ordeal they think proper on the day of election.'¹³⁵ This was a novel approach and quite at odds with that adopted by the aloof Bruen and the absent Kavanagh. As the election neared, it was anticipated that Bruen and Rochford would prevail at the expense of Kavanagh. Rochford was applauded as a 'young gentleman of high spirit and first-rate ability' from a family that had 'always approved themselves the staunch friends of Ireland' and who would prove to be 'a chip off the old block'.¹³⁶ The pledges he offered were thought to be a deciding factor in his effort 'to secure his success over the imbecile family corporation which had rendered Carlow a borough in all respects'.¹³⁷

Meanwhile, John Staunton Rochford continued to canvass actively on behalf of his son. Soliciting support from Lord Farnham again in July, he was careful to counter rumours that he encouraged Catholic freeholders in Carlow to vote against the wishes of their landlords. Writing to Farnham on 23 July 1830, he declared that:

Any reports that you may have respecting my having too anxiously sought the assistance of the Catholics is totally unfounded. I have called on all men who are independent of the ties of personal friendship and interest to support me and naturally when the population is three fourths Catholic, many of their religion give me their support. But I solemnly deny having used any undue influence with them, or having endeavoured to force tenants to vote against their landlords.¹³⁸

¹³³ *CMP*, 22 July 1830.

¹³⁴ *DMR*, 29 July 1829. The addresses published in *DMR* and *Pilot* on 29 July and subsequently were erroneously dated 30 June 1830 instead of 28 July 1830. The version published in the *CMP* on 29 July 1830 carries the correct date.

¹³⁵ *CMP*, 29 July 1830.

¹³⁶ *WM*, 31 July 1830.

¹³⁷ *MH*, 2 Aug. 1830.

¹³⁸ Rochford to Farnham 23 July 1830 (NLI, Farnham Papers, Ms. 41/146/9/2).

Rochfort senior trod a delicate path between Liberal and Conservative factions attempting to serve one while not ostracising the other. As a result, when Bishop Doyle sought his support for the liberal Catholic candidate Henry Lambert in county Wexford in early August, Rochfort declined due to his family connexion with Viscount Valentia. Even so, he promised to do what he could for Lambert ‘consistent’ with his support for Valentia, who was also a candidate. While assuring Doyle of his son’s success, he related that Colonel Bruen had manipulated rent arrears among his tenants to enable them to register as freeholders, and that some of the tenants intended to decline proving the value of their freeholds when administered the oath before polling. Meanwhile, among the Kavanagh tenants, the agent Charles Doyne was forced to offer rent abatements of £10 per year to encourage them to register.¹³⁹ Mollified by these shared confidences, Doyle on the eve of the election had a letter published under the initials ‘J.D.’ supporting Rochfort and critical of Kavanagh.¹⁴⁰ In this he questioned Kavanagh’s intellectual capacity and his eschewal of debate suggesting that ‘his limited capacity has unfitted [sic] him to appear on the intellectual field’ while Rochfort possessed both ‘the learning of the scholar and the urbanity of the gentleman’ qualifying him to represent the county in parliament.¹⁴¹

O’Connell meanwhile finally presented the petition from Commonality Club to parliament on 4 June 1830.¹⁴² As the petition included complaints on the diversion of corporation funding, it was referred to the Select Committee on Tolls and Customs (Ireland) which took evidence between 8 June 1830 and 12 July 1830 but failed to make a full report and did not consider the petition from Carlow at all.¹⁴³ O’Connell communicated the outcome to Thomas Haughton on 5 June 1830 and published the letter in the *Pilot* on 18 June, just in advance of the Charter Day of Carlow corporation on 24 June.¹⁴⁴ O’Connell was given credit locally for his parliamentary assault on Lord Tullamore and the corporation.¹⁴⁵ However, given it was expected that the corporation would shortly admit a host of new freemen effectively ending the electoral monopoly, his antics in parliament were unnecessary, ineffective and solely calculated to enhance his political influence in Carlow.

¹³⁹ Rochfort to Doyle, 5 Aug. 1830 (Delany Archive, Doyle Papers, KL-JKL-00675).

¹⁴⁰ Doyle used the letters ‘J.D.’ in June 1829 to publish a letter calling for Brunswickers to reconcile with their Catholic neighbours, see McGrath, *James Doyle*, p. 76.

¹⁴¹ *CMP*, 5 Aug. 1830.

¹⁴² *JHC*, Vol. 85, p. 513.

¹⁴³ *Report from the select committee on tolls and customs in Ireland*, HC, 1834 [603].

¹⁴⁴ *Pilot*, 18 June 1830. Charter Day was the annual opportunity for the admission of new freemen.

¹⁴⁵ *CMP*, 17 June 1830.

VII. Carlow Borough

In the absence of Bishop Doyle, who was away, Carlow Liberals sought to muster as many applicants as possible to apply for freedom of the borough on Charter Day, the 24th June each year when a sovereign was elected and when new freemen might be admitted to the corporation. It was further agreed that Lord Tullamore should be opposed at the next election.¹⁴⁶ There was serious disagreement on who the candidate should be. Francis Bruen, brother to Henry, offered to contest the borough at his own expense. While Bruen was regarded as a less than ideal candidate and the risk of putting too much power into the hands of the Bruen family was recognised, his ample means rendered him an attractive option. However Patrick Finn and John Meyler after some thought found their voices and sought to sow the seeds of discontent in Carlow about Bruen's suitability, their objection apparently based solely on antipathy towards Henry Bruen.¹⁴⁷ The *Carlow Morning Post* echoed Haughton's view on Bruen observing that he was 'the least bad, or the best that circumstances will present to us' again crediting his brother Henry with 'dissolving the spell of monopoly by admitting thirty-two persons to the freedom of the borough'.¹⁴⁸

Those who opposed Bruen's candidacy found an accommodating platform in the *Weekly Waterford Chronicle*.¹⁴⁹ An anonymous correspondent reported that the meeting in Carlow on the 16 June had adopted Bruen as a candidate by a single vote and that eight of the eighteen that supported him 'were mere boys, without either permanent residence or present inheritance in the town'.¹⁵⁰ Appeals for unity in Carlow followed with all being reminded 'Nothing can be more pleasing to the monopolists than to witness our petty dissention'.¹⁵¹ Just days later the *Weekly Waterford Chronicle* carried accusations that the *Carlow Morning Post* was influenced by Henry Bruen and was publishing 'the production of one of those indefatigable runners to Oak Park House'.¹⁵² By then it was common knowledge that Francis Bruen was willing to contest the borough and that he would bear the expense.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁶ Bishop Doyle was absent from Carlow between 28 May 1830 and 30 June 1830. At this time, he was making his way back to Ireland having given evidence in front of the Select Committee on the State of the Poor in Ireland on 3 and 4 June 1830. Illness delayed his return until 30 June 1830, see *CWH*, 31 May 1830, *Pilot*, 18 June 1830, *DEPKT*, 1 July 1830.

¹⁴⁷ Thomas Haughton to Daniel O'Connell, 16 June 1830 (NLI, O'Connell Papers, Ms. 13,468 (3)).

¹⁴⁸ *CMP*, 17 June 1830.

¹⁴⁹ Thomas Finn edited the *Waterford Chronicle* up to Nov. 1830, see *DMR*, 27 Nov. 1830.

¹⁵⁰ *WWC*, 19 June 1830.

¹⁵¹ *CMP*, 21 June 1830.

¹⁵² These accusations were contained in a letter published from 'No Pretender to Patriotism' and was obviously composed by Thomas Finn, see *WWC*, 26 June 1830. It also illustrates how adversarial press commentary had become a feature of Carlow politics.

¹⁵³ *CC*, 22 June 1830; *TFP*, 23 June 1830; *WM*, 23 June 1830.

VIII. The Old Order Prevails

At the Charter Day meeting in Lenon's Hotel on 24 June, attended by Lord Tullamore, and convened to determine the admission of new freemen, Thomas Finn displayed his anti-Bruen sympathies once more suggesting that any freemen admitted would support the re-election of the sitting member. This failed to sway Tullamore and all ninety-seven applications for admission made at the meeting were refused.¹⁵⁴ Applications were made again at the next petty sessions in Carlow when sixty-seven freemen were at last admitted.¹⁵⁵ Preparations for the election began in earnest, although finding a candidate other than Bruen posed a problem.¹⁵⁶ At a meeting of the freemen of the borough on 13 July 1830, it was at last agreed to formally ask Francis Bruen to contest the borough.¹⁵⁷ Bruen predictably accepted the offer and, denying ever having had any parliamentary ambition, he vowed it his duty to rescue his fellow townsmen from 'the grip of corporate monopoly'.¹⁵⁸ The borough election was duly held in the Court House in Carlow on 6 August 1830. The newly sworn freemen all voted for Francis Bruen while the eight burgesses present voted for Lord Tullamore. The votes of the freemen were disallowed and, amid raucous scenes, Tullamore was declared elected.¹⁵⁹ In the borough, despite stringent local opposition, the old order had prevailed.

Just days before the county election and directly after being informed of the methods being employed by Bruen and Kavanagh to produce an electorally compliant tenantry, Bishop Doyle published a letter outlining to freeholders the moral and legal dangers of perjury. Reminding them of the oaths that they would be asked to take at the poll, he warned of the evils of bribery and admonished them that they should disregard threats and bribes and vote for the candidate they consider 'most worthy':

An elector may be advised, may be counselled, he may be instructed, he may be solicited, but the freedom of his judgement will and never can be encroached on or violated without a commission of moral guilt.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁴ *CMP*, 28 June 1830.

¹⁵⁵ *CMP*, 5 July 1830.

¹⁵⁶ Thomas Haughton discussed the candidates considered before Francis Bruen was formally invited to stand. Neither Sir Thomas Butler, Sir John Milley Doyle or William Francis Finn were prepared to finance a campaign while Nicholas Philpot Leader, later MP for Kilkenny would stand only if the local committee could guarantee success. See O'Connell (ed.), *correspondence*, iv, p. 171.

¹⁵⁷ *CMP*, 15, 19 July 1830.

¹⁵⁸ *DMR*, 20 July 1830.

¹⁵⁹ *Pilot*, 11 Aug. 1830.

¹⁶⁰ Doyle's letter was written on 6 Aug., the day after he received information from Rochfort on how Bruen and Kavanagh were attempting to manipulate their tenants *CMP*, 9 Aug. 1830.

Doyle was clearly encouraging freeholders to be guided by conscience and so to support Rochfort.

The county election commenced on Monday 9 August in Carlow courthouse. Rochfort and Bruen were strongly recommended by the *Carlow Morning Post*, Rochfort as an 'independent' candidate and Bruen for his part in 'opening' the borough. Kavanagh's physical weakness was highlighted and it was observed that although he was 'respectable as a gentleman', his frailty disqualified him as a public representative.¹⁶¹ Bruen was proposed by William Browne, Kavanagh by Bruen and Rochford by Sir Thomas Butler. The nominations of Bruen and Kavanagh were greeted with groans and hisses.¹⁶² Thomas Finn launched a sustained and splenetic attack on the parliamentary performances of both men concluding that it was only 'in this age of stupidity, credulity and impudence' that they would seek to be returned again as county representatives.¹⁶³ It was in vain however: astute political observers noted the weakness in the registry from the Liberal standpoint in advance of the election. Alexander Humfrey, the clerk of the peace for county Carlow, advised Rochfort to employ an agent to prepare freeholder affidavits for the next freeholder registration sessions the following October 'to prevent errors occurring'.¹⁶⁴ Having overseen registrations to date, Humfrey sagely recognised that the 'independent' interest was not electorally strong enough to overcome the Bruen interest. Henry Bruen spent just over £1,600 mainly on inspectors, clerks and carriages. The sum also included £204 to various publicans, £200 to Lenon's Hotel and £11 to Mrs Sarah Price, the proprietress of the *Carlow Morning Post*.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ *CMP*, 12 Aug. 1830.

¹⁶² *DEP*, 12 Aug. 1830.

¹⁶³ *WWC*, 14 Aug. 1830.

¹⁶⁴ Humfrey to Rochfort, 2 Aug. 1830 (NLI. Rochfort Papers, Ms. 8682/1/2).

¹⁶⁵ Election Expenses Heading in Henry Bruen account with Henry Carey June-Dec 1830 (NLI, Bruen Papers, Ms. 48,336/3).

Polling began on Monday afternoon and ended on Wednesday evening. A daily

Table 6.4: Polling Pattern County Carlow General Election 1830

	Bruen	Kavanagh	Rochfort
Monday 9th	24	18	26
Tuesday 10th	184	161	133
Wednesday 11th	34	37	15
Totals	242	216	174

Sources: *Carlow Morning Post*, 16 Aug. 1830; Walker *Parliamentary Election Results*, p. 200

breakdown of the poll is carried in Table 6.4. Bruen attracted 242 votes, Kavanagh 216 and Rochfort 174.¹⁶⁶ Although there was a minor riot at the close of polling which saw windows broken in the courthouse and in Bruen's adjoining committee room, the election passed off more peacefully than expected.¹⁶⁷ Afterwards there were accusations of the intimidation of voters, including tenants, shopkeepers and tradesmen by the sitting candidates.¹⁶⁸ Dissatisfaction at the pattern of voting focussed on the pact that seemed to have operated between Bruen and Kavanagh. At the close of the election, Rochfort claimed that he had polled 98 'plumpers' with Bruen and Kavanagh polling just 9 and 2 respectively suggesting that the tenants of one had been pressurised to support the other with their second vote. This accusation was vehemently denied by Bruen but Rochfort urged 'a general registry of freeholders to continue without relaxation' to prepare for the next election.¹⁶⁹ Indeed the notion of a 'coalition' against him was a familiar trope in the weeks following the election. Writing to Lord Milton on 23 August, Horace Rochfort complained that he had:

failed in my effort to assert the independence of the County, because I was opposed by one of the most disgraceful coalitions that ever yet was formed to put down the free will of any body of electors.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Walker, *election results*, p. 41.

¹⁶⁷ Police Report: James Battersby to James Harvey, 13 Aug. 1830 (NAI, CSORP, 1830/420); *DEP*, 12 Aug. 1830. Repairs to Bruen's committee room windows cost £ 1-7-6, see Estate Accounts 1830 (NLI, Bruen Papers, Ms. 48,336-3).

¹⁶⁸ *WWC*, 14 Aug. 1830.

¹⁶⁹ *CMP*, 16 Aug. 1830.

¹⁷⁰ Rochfort to Milton 23 Aug. 1830 (SCA, Wentworth Woodhouse Muniments, WWM-G-2-30).

Calls to encourage the registration of freeholders in preparation for the next election were also made at a dinner held in Rochfort's honour in Carlow on 2 September.¹⁷¹ Other dinners in support of Rochfort and 'independence' were held in Hacketstown on 22 September and in Tullow on 23 October.¹⁷² While Bruen and Kavanagh had survived, it was clear that a determined opposition now existed and that the political tectonic plates in Carlow were beginning to shift.

Conclusion

The five years between the general elections of 1826 and 1830 saw an increase in the level of Catholic agitation in Carlow. This resulted in some anxiety among smaller Protestant landholders, but did not seriously affect interdenominational co-operation between the gentry, Catholic clergy and the emerging middle class. The parliamentary behaviour of Henry Bruen and Thomas Kavanagh was subjected to increased scrutiny with both members realising that their support for Catholic relief was necessary for their re-election. Bruen found himself associated with conservative Protestantism, but in supporting efforts to open the borough, he spectacularly salvaged his political fortunes. The 1830 general election saw a serious challenge to the long-standing MPs from a member of the Carlow gentry in Horace Rochfort, a youthful and popular candidate. While the abolition of the lowest class of freeholder saw a huge decrease in voter numbers, the influence of the county's two largest landowners in Bruen and Kavanagh was enough to maintain their electoral control. The aftermath of the election saw calls for freeholders to register in anticipation of the next election. While the old order had managed to prevail, political upheaval was in the offing.

¹⁷¹ *CMP*, 6 Sept. 1830.

¹⁷² *WM*, 22 Sept. 1830; *DMR* 26 Oct. 1830.

Chapter 7: The 1831 General Election: From Calm to Conflict

Introduction

The 1830 general election was just the third to proceed to a poll in county Carlow in three decades. It was also the first in which political principle confronted political principals. Freeholders were asked to support Horace Rochfort and thus to elect an 'independent' candidate rather than extend the political dominance of Bruen and Kavanagh. Although Rochfort was unsuccessful, it signalled that change was in the wind. Liberals, disappointed by Francis Bruen's failure to dislodge Lord Tullamore in the borough, were energised by Catholic emancipation and motivated to redouble their efforts to gain an electoral foothold. This was reflected in the post-election surge in Liberal voter registration fuelled by the knowledge that the failure to do so in advance of the 1830 election had contributed to their defeat. Liberal activists who supported O'Connell's first repeal campaign, continued on to espouse tithe reform and then threw their support behind the demand for electoral reform. Conservative elements were alert to these developments and comparable efforts were made by them in the wake of the 1830 election victory to manage the electoral registry. Conservatives viewed the surge in activism in 1831 and 1832 in support of repeal, tithes and then electoral reform as nothing less than a revolt from below and a reckless attempt to overturn venerable structures of political power based on the traditional bond between landlord and tenant. More shocking still was the fact that Thomas Woodcock, an army officer, and Walter Blackney, a magistrate, both of whom could have been expected to support the status quo were prominent in these radical and dangerous campaigns. The agitation gave rise to great anxiety among Protestants and in particular their clergy. In general the unrest crystalised conservative tendencies among the Carlow gentry which brought hitherto liberal activists such as Horace Rochfort back into the Conservative fold.

While Daniel O'Connell loomed large on the political horizon in county Carlow, Bishop James Doyle's more subtle and measured influence ultimately carried more weight. As a result, O'Connell played a peripheral part in the 1831 general election in Carlow which whereas Doyle was instrumental in sourcing and endorsing the two successful Liberal candidates. It was the first election in Carlow where popular political opinion rather than electoral 'interests' determined a result.

I. The Aftermath of the 1830 Election and Voter Registration

The general election in the county in 1830 saw the independent candidate Horace Rochfort withdraw after three days of polling recognising that he could not succeed in the face of the ‘coalition’ of Bruen and Kavanagh. In the borough, the peremptory refusal of a poll initially raised hopes that the return of Lord Tullamore might be overturned by petition. While a petition in the name of Francis Bruen was presented to the Commons on 4 November 1830, there was some doubt as to the financial commitment needed to pursue the process.¹ This prompted speculation that the whole effort to ‘open’ the borough and the election there had been a political ploy and no more than ‘a temporary display of patriotism’ that led many potential supporters of Rochfort to support Bruen and Kavanagh in the county.² Following a visit from the Liberal Commercial Club, Henry Bruen agreed to underwrite his brother’s petition.³ While

Table 7.1 : Freeholder Registrations at Quarter Sessions in Carlow 1830								
Barony	January 1830		April 1830		July 1830		October 1830	
	Intentions Published	Successful Applications	Intentions Published	Successful Applications	Intentions Published	Successful Applications	Intentions Published	Successful Applications
Carlow	2	1	18	4	3	0	72	21
Idrone East	2	1	3	2	2	1	39	5
Idrone West	1	0	2	1	0	0	64	9
Forth	0	0	1	1	2	0	32	3
St Mullins	0	0	0	0	0	0	87	11
Rathvilly	2	2	2	0	2	0	34	4
Totals	7	4	26	8	9	1	328	53
<p><i>Carlow Morning Post</i>, 24 Dec. 1829; 29 Mar. 1830; 17 June 1830; 26 Sept. 1831; Sources: <i>County of Carlow: list of freeholders registered in the year ending 31 December 1830</i> (CCA, Kehoe Papers, Box 63a)</p>								

the petition was ultimately unsuccessful, the affair served to heighten political tension as well as sowing some dissent within Liberal circles.⁴

¹ *CMP*, 11 Oct. 1830; *WWC*, 11 Sept. 1830; *The Times*, 5 Nov. 1830.

² *WWC*, 27 Nov. 1830.

³ *WWC*, 25 Dec. 1830.

⁴ There were some resignations from the Liberal Commercial Club following the affair with Patrick Finn asserting that county Carlow ‘was as rotten in its political state as the Carlow corporation’, see *CMP*, 18 Jan. 1831.

As previously described, after an initial surge in freeholder registration following emancipation in 1829, the number of applicants fell steadily. This remained the case in 1830 when, as illustrated by table 7.1 only thirteen out of forty-two applications to register at the quarter sessions were successful between January and September 1830. There was a surge in applications to 328 coincident with the heightened political atmosphere that followed the 1830 election. Henry Bruen was most active. On his instruction his agent prepared a list of 78 tenants who, meeting the property threshold for the franchise, were considered as ‘freeholders to be made’.⁵ In fact this list was misleading as 27 of Bruen’s tenants had already registered by September 1829 and another 24 more who published an intention to register were either refused

	Intensions Published	Estimated No. of Potential Freeholders*	Published Intentions as % of Potential Freeholders
Carlow	328	1520	22%
Kildare	276	2877	10%
Louth	296	1729	17%
Meath	227	3119	7%
Westmea	219	2063	11%
Wicklow	114	2300	5%

Sources: *Carlow Morning Post*, 23 Sept. 1830; *Dublin Evening Packet*, 29 Sept 1830; 30 Sept 1830, *Pilot*; *Dublin Evening Post*, 30 Sept. 1830.

*** Calculated from aggregating census returns for occupiers of land with labourers and professionals for each county provided in *Abstract of answers and returns under the population acts, enumeration 1831* [cd 634-1831]**

or did not pursue their applications.⁶ Nonetheless, Bruen’s actions signalled that he recognised the importance of maximising his freeholder registration.

On the Liberal side, Horace Rochfort was not alone in exhorting Carlow freeholders to register. ‘Independence Clubs’ were established throughout the country, including in Carlow to assist freeholders to navigate the registration process.⁷ Table 7.2 compares of freeholder

⁵ Carey to Bruen, London, 5 Sept. 1830 (NLI, Bruen Papers, Ms 29,778-1).

⁶ It has not been possible to identify all tenants on Bruen’s list; only those that could be identified have been included, see *CMP*, 29 Mar. 1830, 14 May, 17 June, 29 June, 24 Sept., 24 Dec 1830., and *County of Carlow: list of freeholders registered in the year ended 31st December 1829* and *County of Carlow: list of freeholders registered in the year ended 31st December 1830* (CCA, Kehoe Papers, Box 63a).

⁷ For examples of the activities of these clubs see *Pilot*, 13 Sept. 1830 for Meath Independence Club; *DROJNL* 11 Sept. 1830 for county Louth.

registration in Carlow and surrounding counties in October 1830.⁸ As can be seen, more potential freeholders declared their intention to register in Carlow than in the neighbouring counties. The success rate among applicant freeholders was low; just 53 of the 328 that applied at the October Quarter Sessions were successful.

II. Repeal, Bishop Doyle and Counsellor O'Connell

O'Connell effectively launched his campaign for the repeal of the union with Britain at a dinner in Killarney on 7 October 1830, following which, he embarked on a busy tour of the south to raise support and encourage the framing of petitions.⁹ The campaign for repeal attracted immediate support in Carlow with the *Carlow Morning Post* calling for a campaign of petitioning to 'convey their wishes to the legislature and weary them into compliance by a constitutional violence'.¹⁰ Political campaigners moved quickly and published a requisition calling for a public meeting to be held on 2 November in Carlow. The signatories included many associated with the Catholic Association among its more than 260 names.¹¹ Signally, it did not include any member of the gentry. The sub-inspector of the Carlow Constabulary James Battersby reported that while the general population and the Catholic clergy supported the repeal movement, the Carlow gentry had 'not formed any decisive opinion on the subject'.¹²

On the eve of the Carlow meeting, W.F. Finn in an effort to invoke the considerable influence of Bishop Doyle suggested that the prelate was 'favourable to a repeal of the Union' and would be attending the meeting in Carlow the following day.¹³ At the meeting itself, Finn lavished praise on Horace Rochfort, still the 'independent' flag bearer of Liberal politics in Carlow, who publicly backed a 'gradual' repeal of the union at a public dinner held in his

⁸ The potential number of freeholders was calculated by totalling land occupiers who employed labourers and the numbers of 'educated men' for the counties listed using data from the 1831 census. Notwithstanding the inherent inaccuracies of the 1831, these figures still provide a good comparison, see *Abstract of answers and returns under the population acts, enumeration 1831*, HC, 1831 [Cd 634]; E. Margaret Crawford, *Counting the people: a survey of the Irish censuses, 1813-1911* (Dublin, 2003), p. 16.

⁹ *FJ*, 12 Oct. 1830; MacDonagh, *The emancipist*, p. 39.

¹⁰ *CMP*, 14 Oct. 1830.

¹¹ *CMP*, 28 Oct. 1830.

¹² Confidential report of Lieutenant James Battersby (Sub-Inspector Carlow Constabulary) to Colonel William Gosset, 18 Oct. 1830 (NAI, CSORP, CSO/RP/1831/2814/12).

¹³ *FJ*, 2 Nov 1830.

honour in Tullow on 21 October 1830.¹⁴ A petition was framed to be presented by Lord Charlemont in the Lords and O'Connell in the Commons.¹⁵ Consideration was not given to either Bruen or Kavanagh. Carlow Liberals affirmed their commitment to repeal when the local Commercial News Club announced the termination of their subscription to the *Dublin Evening Post* because the newspaper was not supportive of O'Connell's policy.¹⁶

The repeal agitation in Ireland in 1831 took place as England experienced political and civil unrest stoked by revolutions in France in July and in Belgium in October.¹⁷ While the calls for repeal were doggedly resisted by the Tory government, Wellington's resignation on 16 November and his replacement by the Whig Earl Grey brought about a new approach.¹⁸ The new government sought O'Connell's support and offered him office in an effort to discontinue the repeal agitation in Ireland.¹⁹ O'Connell refused this offer and several more besides, prompting Lord Anglesey, the new Lord Lieutenant, to employ coercive measures instead. No less than four proclamations were issued against repeal meetings in order to suppress agitation within a week of Anglesey's arrival in Dublin in late December.²⁰ At the same time, government reached out to Bishop Doyle who had come to regard outright repeal as unattainable given that in Britain, it was regarded as 'akin to treason'.²¹ Doyle felt that it would be better to pursue more achievable objectives such as an overhaul of the tithe system or the reform of municipal corporations rather 'than chasing the chimera of repeal'.²² However judging that O'Connell's hold on Irish political and popular opinion was so strong as to render any opposition futile, he remained tactfully silent on the issue of repeal.²³

There were other differences between Bishop Doyle and O'Connell at this time. Doyle supported the Subletting Act of 1826 which sought to discourage the subdivision of small holdings on the grounds that it led to wretched conditions and the gradual impoverishment of

¹⁴ *CMP*, 25 Oct. 1830. Rochfort was careful to make it known that his father, although absent, was still supportive of his policies. Rochfort Senior, now sixty-seven, had opposed the union at its inception, but recognised, in common with most of the gentry, that repeal would strengthen the Catholic influence at the expense of the Protestant interest, see Paul Bew, *Ireland: the politics of enmity, 1789-2006* (Oxford, 2007), p. 127.

¹⁵ *CMP*, 4 Nov. 1830, *FJ*, 6 Nov. 1830.

¹⁶ The *Dublin Evening Post* and its editor F.W. Conway was always supportive of Catholic claims and O'Connell. Its failure to endorse the repeal movement first led O'Connell to suggest that Conway was in the pay of government, see *DMR*, 20 Oct. 1830. Conway considered repeal to be unachievable and that there were other more practical issues more worthy of agitation, while O'Connell accused the editor of behaviour amounting to treason see *DEP*, 19 Oct. 1830. The Carlow Commercial News Club was very public in the manner in which it dropped the *Dublin Evening Post* leaving no doubt as to the commitment in Carlow to O'Connell's campaign, see *CMP*, 28 Oct. 1830, *FJ*, *WWC*, 30 Oct., 2 Nov. 1830, *CH*, 3 Nov. 1830.

¹⁷ Peter Jupp, *British Politics on the Eve of Reform: the Duke of Wellington's Administration, 1828-30* (London, 2016), p. 427.

¹⁸ For an account of events leading to the fall of the Wellington administration see Rory Muir, *Wellington* (New Haven, 2013), pp 391-99; for details of Grey's appointment see E. A. Smith, *Lord Grey, 1764-1845* (Oxford, 1990), p. 258.

¹⁹ Geoghegan, *Liberator*, p. 24.

²⁰ MacDonagh, *The emancipist*, p. 43.

²¹ G.P. Anglesey, *One-leg: the life and letters of Henry William Paget, First Marquess of Anglesey K.G. 1768 - 1854* (London, 1996), p. 242.

²² McGrath, *James Doyle*, p. 62.

²³ Fitzpatrick, *Doyle Correspondence*, ii, p. 237.

the small tenant class.²⁴ O'Connell disagreed and, referring to the legislation as 'The Dog Butcher's Bill', he claimed that it facilitated land clearances by unscrupulous landlords leading to the starvation and death of dispossessed tenants.²⁵ He further held that it stood in the way of paupers who wished to become farmers.²⁶ By January 1830 its abolition had become a political priority for him as it was 'founded on the worst possible principle'.²⁷ The pair disagreed too on the establishment of a poor law. Ireland relied instead on what has been termed 'the informal solidarity of rural society' that provided for the poor 'more or less generously, through local collection of funds'.²⁸ Doyle believed that the poor had a right to support from the state and that the state had an obligation to assist those 'who are rendered unable, either physically or morally, to provide for themselves'.²⁹ O'Connell's opposition to a formal system of poor relief was in keeping with the mainstream political thought of the time which was 'deeply antipathetic to state intervention'.³⁰ Like many landlords, he feared that the cost would cripple an already weak Irish economy.³¹ He also considered that a formal system of poor relief would smother 'the best kind of civilisation – the civilisation of Christian charity'.³²

These differences caused Bishop Doyle to be less than accommodating when it came to the collection of the 'O'Connell Tribute' in his diocese.³³ While he had tolerated the collection of the Catholic rent in 1827, he was less amenable in 1831. By then construction of the cathedral in Carlow was underway and Doyle prioritised finance for this project. On Sunday 9 January 1831, the date nominated for the national collection, it did not take place in the county. Official reports indicated that Doyle, to the dismay of his clergy, forbade its collection.³⁴ Following local representations, Doyle relented and a date for the collection was set for 20 February.³⁵ Despite this Doyle still attracted criticism and it was later claimed that his unwillingness to promote the fundraising was reflected in the relatively poor return from county Carlow.³⁶ Despite their differences, O'Connell was eager to be seen to be on good terms with Doyle. When in March 1831, in his pamphlet *A Letter to Thomas Spring Rice Esq., MP on the*

²⁴ O'Ferrall, *Catholic emancipation*, p. 170; *Second report of evidence from the select committee on the state of the poor in Ireland*, HC, 1830 [cd. 13], p. 392.

²⁵ *DEP*, 24 Dec. 1827.

²⁶ McGrath, *Bishop James Doyle*, p. 56.

²⁷ *DEP*, 12 Jan. 1830.

²⁸ Peter M. Solar, 'Occupation, poverty and social class in Ireland, 1740-1850' in Eugenio F. Biagini and Mary E Daly (eds), *The Cambridge social history of modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 36.

²⁹ J.K.L., *Letters on the state of Ireland addressed by J.K.L. to a friend in England* (Dublin, 1825), p. 318.

³⁰ Helen Burke, *The people and the poor law in 19th century Ireland* (Littlehampton, 1987), p. 14.

³¹ MacDonagh, *The emancipist*, p. 157.

³² William J. O'Neill Daunt, *Personal recollections of the late Daniel O'Connell* (2 vols, London, 1848), p. 275.

³³ The 'tribute' was an annual collection that began in spring 1831 and was conducted on a parochial basis. The funds collected were intended to recompense O'Connell for the income that he had foregone from his legal career and to sustain him in his political career, see Geoghegan, *Liberator*, p. 22. The system was largely overseen by P.V. Fitzpatrick and saw Catholic bishops approached with a view to soliciting their support for a 'collection Sunday' to gather the funds, see Keyes, *Funding the nation*, p. 52.

³⁴ It was reported that sums of £700 were collected in Kilkenny, £400 in Queen's County, £1,500 in Wicklow and £650 in Kildare. File of confidential reports concerning the state of poverty and collection of the O'Connell tribute in certain counties primarily in the south, west and midlands of Ireland, (NAI, CSORP, 1831/144).

³⁵ *CMP*, 24 Feb. 1831.

³⁶ *WC*, 17 Mar. 1831.

establishment of a legal provision for the Irish poor, Doyle directly challenged O'Connell on the notion that a poor law would extinguish natural charity, O'Connell revised his stance.³⁷ Writing to Doyle on 29 March 1831, O'Connell declared that he had quite changed his mind and was now 'an unwilling, but nevertheless sincere, convert to your opinions'.³⁸ Sudden changes in opinion for O'Connell were not uncharacteristic and such inconsistencies made it difficult for newspapers seeking to lend him political support.³⁹ It has been observed also that O'Connell's views on poor relief changed in order to retain the support of the Catholic clergy who generally favoured some measure of relief.⁴⁰ There is no doubt that Doyle was well aware of this opportunistic impulse on O'Connell's part or that it was a factor in the how the prelate exerted his influence over the choice of parliamentary candidates in the coming elections.

III. Rising Tensions: Tithes, 1830-31

The commencement in 1830 of organised opposition to the collection of tithes in the south of his diocese provided a more urgent and immediate focus for Bishop Doyle. The parish priest of Graiguenamanagh Rev Martin Doyle, first cousin to Doyle, instigated a series of public meetings on 24 and 31 October and 7 November to oppose the payment of tithes.⁴¹ The priest had previously denounced the payment from the altar.⁴² This was prompted by the fact that he was at odds with the Protestant curate, Rev Luke Gardiner MacDonald, over payment on his own quite considerable landholdings.⁴³ Bishop Doyle too was a known opponent of tithes having commented some years earlier that 'from the day of their introduction, we may date the history of our misfortunes'.⁴⁴ He was critical of what he saw as the extortionate levels of tithe levied when compared to the income of Catholic clerics and he questioned how this income was used by Protestant clergymen.⁴⁵ Referring to the established church as 'this mighty Babylon', he suggested that the Tithe Composition Act would unveil the extent of tithes being collected thus possibly prompting its dissolution.⁴⁶ Although in the initial stages of tithe unrest in his diocese, he chose once again to remain silent, he made his opposition clear in 1831 by publicly opposing

³⁷ James Doyle, *A letter to Thomas Spring Rice Esq., M.P. on the establishment of a legal provision for the Irish poor* (Dublin, 1831), p. 30. The pamphlet was advertised as 'just published' in mid-March 1831, see *BNL*, 25 Mar. 1831.

³⁸ Fitzpatrick, *Doyle Correspondence*, p. 283.

³⁹ Brian Inglis, *The freedom of the press in Ireland, 1784-1841* (Dublin, 1976), p. 223.

⁴⁰ Angus Macintyre, *The liberator: Daniel O'Connell and the Irish party 1830 - 1847* (New York, 1965), p. 209.

⁴¹ Michael O'Hanrahan, 'The tithe war in county Kilkenny, 1830-1834' in Nolan and Kevin Whelan (eds), *Kilkenny history and society* (Dublin, 1990), p. 487.

⁴² *Report from the select committee on tithes in Ireland*, HC, 1832 [cd 177], p. 46.

⁴³ David Patrick Reid, "'The tithe war' in Ireland, 1830-1838' (PhD Thesis, TCD, 2013), p. 38.

⁴⁴ J.K.L., *A vindication of the religious and civil principles of the Irish Catholics*, (Dublin, 1823), p. 34.

⁴⁵ J.K.L., *A defence by J.K.L. of the vindication of the religious and civil principles of the Irish Catholics* (Dublin, 1824), p. 63, pp 105-6, p. 110.

⁴⁶ J.K.L., *Letters to a friend in England*, p. 34.

the legality of the law of tithe, remarking that the Irish people 'have always been at war with it and, I trust in God, they will never cheerfully submit to it'.⁴⁷

That is not to say that the bishop did not support the protesters. Doyle wrote to his cousin, Fr Martin Doyle, after the first tithe meeting and, offering moral and practical counsel, he advised him on how the resolutions should be framed, counselling firmness without harshness.⁴⁸ And when Fr Doyle's horse and some cattle were seized in default of payment, he declined the request of Sir John Harvey, the Inspector General of Police for Leinster, to intervene.⁴⁹ Appraising his cousin of this, he advised him to proceed cautiously in his dealing with the magistracy and to make it plain that unrest would end only when the cause (tithes) was addressed. He also observed that the new government would soon learn that 'no coalition can ever flow between those who plunder and those who are plundered'.⁵⁰ Doyle's advice proved sound. When the magistrates convened at Graiguenamanagh on 12 December in advance of the scheduled auction of Fr Doyle's cattle, they declined to use force to recover the cattle. The following day, a large crowd dispersed peacefully when it transpired that two further months was to be given for the payment of the outstanding tithes.⁵¹ At a meeting of parishioners held later that day, votes of thanks were passed to 'the enlightened magistracy' and to Rev Doyle for 'preserving the peace and good order of this district'.⁵² Despite Bishop Doyle's known opposition to tithes, he preferred to engage behind the scenes.

This unrest sent shockwaves through the county prompting magistrates to meet behind closed doors in Carlow on 27 December to 'deliberate as to the best method of preserving the peace of the county'.⁵³ The resolutions agreed were not made public. It was assumed, however that an unauthenticated notice that appeared on the door of the police office in Carlow banning all meetings of more than twelve persons on pain of death 'without benefit of clergy' originated at the meeting.⁵⁴ The actual resolutions, signed by twenty-four magistrates and forwarded to government, were more benign and simply asked for advice as to what they could do to preserve the peace. It is noteworthy that Walter Blackney, the only Catholic magistrate in the county, was not among the signatories.⁵⁵ A subsequent meeting on 31 December which resulted in public resolutions advised the populace of their determination to uphold the law while cautioning against the malign influence of 'strangers'. The resolutions were welcomed as 'mild and

⁴⁷ Doyle, *Letter to Thomas Spring Rice*, p. 120.

⁴⁸ James Doyle to Martin Doyle, 28 Oct. 1830 (Delany Archive, Doyle Papers, KL-JKL-00681).

⁴⁹ Patrick O'Donoghue, 'Causes of the opposition to tithes, 1830-38' *Studia Hibernica*, no. 5 (1965), p. 11; Harvey to Doyle, 9 Dec. 1830 (Delany Archive, Doyle Papers, KL-JKL-00689).

⁵⁰ James Doyle to Rev Martin Doyle, 19 Dec. 1830 (Delany Archive, Doyle Papers, KL-JKL-00694).

⁵¹ *First report tithes in Ireland*, p. 7.

⁵² *CMP*, 16 Dec. 1830.

⁵³ Battersby to Harvey, 23 Dec. 1830 (NAI, CSORPOR, 1830/488/3).

⁵⁴ *CMP*, 30 Dec 1831.

⁵⁵ Resolutions of Carlow Magistrates, 27 Dec 1830 (NAI, CSORPOR/488/4).

conciliatory' by Thomas Harris Carroll, editor of the *Carlow Morning Post*.⁵⁶ This was significant as the newspaper had strongly supported the tithe protest in Graiguenamanagh, even printing a ballad lampooning the incumbent and his curate.⁵⁷ In response, the newspaper was threatened with prosecution by the Bishop of Ferns for a libel connected with anti-tithe placards that Carroll printed.⁵⁸ In anticipation of legal action, Carroll sought to cast himself as a moderate. This more measured approach chimed with efforts by O'Connellites to combine anti-tithe and repeal agitation and to engage politically rather than physically.⁵⁹ Indeed, in Kilkenny there was a concerted effort by O'Connellites to 'infiltrate' the anti-tithe movement to harness the unrest and channel its energy into repeal agitation.⁶⁰

While there were a number of further confrontations between crowds of protesters and magistrates, most notably in Fenagh and Leighlinbridge on 6 January and in Myshall on 26 January, by the spring of 1832 open protest had all but died down.⁶¹ The *Carlow Morning Post* observed 'that tranquillity has been generally restored throughout the county'.⁶² Despite this, reports to government in January 1831 of pike making in Leighlinbridge indicated that the mood was uneasy.⁶³ Tithe agitation continued to fuel angst, particularly among the clergy of the established church. Rev Hector Vaughan reporting non-payment of tithes in his parish of Myshall, reminded the authorities of two failed arson attacks on his glebe in 1826; he remarked that 'he had every reason to be nervous in these times'.⁶⁴ Rev Samuel Roberts of Leighlinbridge also alerted government to seditious behaviour informing them of the activities of 'Captain' Thomas Woodcock who once more was the focal point of popular disaffection and of gentry reaction to unrest.⁶⁵

While Woodcock's conduct was shocking given his status as a half-pay officer, the activities of Walter Blackney were even more upsetting. Addressing a crowd in Skeagh chapel in January, Blackney urged parishioners not to pay tithes and to keep cattle under lock and key so that they could not be seized.⁶⁶ He addressed a meeting in Ballinkillen chapel on 13 March again advising the withholding of tithes and, while speaking favourably of the police and the

⁵⁶ *CMP*, 3 Jan. 1830.

⁵⁷ *CMP*, 13 Dec. 1830.

⁵⁸ *CMP*, 23 Dec. 1830.

⁵⁹ O'Connell published a letter to the Kilkenny tithe protestors promising them that repeal of the union would address all ills and that anything other than 'a peaceable, legal and constitutional course' would imperil this, see *FJ*, 4 Jan. 1831; *CMPt*, 6 Jan 1831.

⁶⁰ Reid, "'The tithe war' in Ireland, 1830-1838", p. 46.

⁶¹ *DEP*, 6 Jan. 1831; *DMR*, 16 Jan. 1831; *DEM*, 31 Jan. 1831.

⁶² *CMP*, 24 Jan. 1831.

⁶³ Watson to Stanley, 9 Jan. 1831 (NAI, CSORP 1831/46).

⁶⁴ Vaughan to Gossett, 25 Feb. 1831 (NAI, CSORP, 1831/424).

⁶⁵ Roberts took several statements that portrayed Woodcock as the ringleader in tithe riots, see affidavits of John Fitzpatrick (NAI, CSORP, 1831/3529/35) and Jacon Little (NAI, CSORP, 1831/3529/36) both taken on 5 Jan. 1831 and affidavit of Caleb Tyndall and second affidavits of Jacob Little and John Fitzpatrick (NAI, CSORP, 1831/3529/36) all taken on 12 Mar. 1831.

⁶⁶ Lloyd to Vigors, 12 Jan. 1831 (NAI, CSORP, 1831/750/2).

military, he volunteered that people were entitled to defend themselves ‘using sticks’.⁶⁷ Alarmed, several clergymen of the established church with benefices in the Leighlinbridge area sent a memorial to Lord Anglesey on 23 March 1831 outlining the ‘nefarious spirit’ that had been instilled in the local population by Blackney and that the peasantry accepted that what he said ‘must be right, for he is a magistrate’.⁶⁸ Samuel Roberts followed up with a statement sworn before him by a witness claiming that Blackney, when speaking in Ballinkillen, had forecast the abolition of tithes within the year if the populace resisted.⁶⁹ Fuelled by the fear of a mass insurrection in Carlow, there were panic driven reports that a crowd, 8,000 strong, had assembled in Leighlinbridge and cut down a forestry plantation on land owned by Rev Roberts with the constabulary as helpless bystanders.⁷⁰ The report turned out to be a gross exaggeration, but its ready acceptance illustrated the depth of Protestant unease. The Conservative mindset drew a clear connection between tithe agitation, Liberal politics, the Catholic clergy and attempts to subvert the established church and the system of government that supported it. It was all the more worrying that an English army officer and a magistrate had partaken in this seditious behaviour.

IV. Parliamentary Reform to the Fore

Political agitation intensified apace in Carlow against this background. Repeal and tithes were linked ‘by and through O’Connell with the full radical reform programme’ prompting political activity on all three issues.⁷¹ At a political dinner hosted by John Meyler on 24 January toasts calling for repeal and the continuation of constitutional agitation preceded a decision to raise petitions for repeal of the union, the abolition of tithes, the repeal of the Algerine Act (legislation used to suppress the Catholic Association in 1825) and the removal of Anglesey as Lord Lieutenant. O’Connell was lauded at the meeting.⁷² A meeting in Ballon on 9 February framed petitions calling for reform of the tithe and vestry systems to be presented in the Lords by the Earl of Shrewsbury and in the Commons by Nicholas Leader, the representative for

⁶⁷ Harvey to Gossett, 19 Mar. 1831 (NAI, CSORP, 1831/652).

⁶⁸ Memorial of Richard Boyle Bernard, Thomas Vigors, Joseph Chapman and George Alcock to Lord Anglesey, 13 March 1831 (NAI, CSORP 1831/750/2).

⁶⁹ Statement sworn by John Hannon in front of Rev Samuel Roberts, 17 Mar. 1831 (NAI, CSORP, 1831/750/3).

⁷⁰ *Pilot*, 1 Mar. 1831. The report was also carried in *DMR* 11 Mar. 1831, *The SRCCC*, 12 Mar. 1831, *DWR*, 12 Mar. 1831 and *DEP*, 15 Mar. 1831.

⁷¹ Oliver MacDonagh, ‘O’Connell’s Ideology’ in Laurence Brockliss and David Eastwood (eds), *A union of multiple identities, the British Isles, c. 1750-c.1850* (Manchester, 1997), p. 154.

⁷² *WWC*, 29 Jan. 1831. A lengthy report of the dinner was carried in the *Weekly Waterford Chronicle* from a ‘special correspondent’, probably the *Chronicle*’s editor Thomas Finn who attended, but there was no mention of it in *The Carlow Morning Post* even though it’s editor, Thomas Harris Carroll also attended. Carroll was facing a libel prosecution and probably wanted to avoid any controversy.

Kilkenny.⁷³ It was an indication of the continuing erosion of regard for Bruen and Kavanagh that neither was approached to present being merely asked ‘to support the prayer of the petition’.⁷⁴ A meeting in Leighlinbridge saw a petition later presented to parliament on by O’Connell.⁷⁵ A further petition for reform from Thomas Haughton and Edward M. Fitzgerald, two ardent Carlow O’Connellites, was lodged by O’Connell on 26 February indicating that reform as a political issue quickly overshadowed tithes and repeal in Carlow.⁷⁶ Indicatively, the *Carlow Morning Post* endorsed O’Connell’s support for reform as a measure that deserved ‘the ardent and decided support of every friend of national liberty’ and called for an immediate meeting in Carlow to frame a petition.⁷⁷

The pursuit of reform imbued Liberals with a sense of unity. A requisition for a public meeting on 15 March was duly published.⁷⁸ A crowded meeting held in the courthouse on 15 March framed an address to the King and a petition to be duly presented by Bruen in the Commons on 25 March and by Lord Clifden in the Lords on 15 April.⁷⁹ The address to the king was presented on 30 March by Lord Grey.⁸⁰ By then Russell’s first reform bill had been introduced into the Commons and had passed its second reading by a single vote on 23 March 1831 giving rise to widespread public unrest in England.⁸¹ It was noted that neither of the county Carlow representatives supported the bill with Bruen voting against and Kavanagh absent. Lord Tullamore, the representative for the borough also voted against it.⁸² The public support for reform in Carlow was ignored by all three parliamentary representatives.

Criticism directed at the two county members encouraged speculation on their political future.⁸³ Although Kavanagh was absent for the vote, he confirmed afterwards that he would not have supported the reform bill observing that it would give undue weight to urban over agricultural interests and that it would be a step towards the dangerous notion of universal suffrage.⁸⁴ While Kavanagh managed to avoid strident criticism, Bruen did not fare as well. Described as one who had fought for ‘the boroughmongers and the corrupt corporators’, the *Carlow Morning Post* advised freeholders of the desirability of electing a representative ‘who is

⁷³ The petitions were presented in the Lords on 24 June and in the Commons on 22 June, see *JHL*, Vol 63, p. 751; *Hansard (Lords)*, 24 June 1831, vol. 4, col 280; *Hansard (Commons)*, 22 June 1831, vol. 4, col 238.

⁷⁴ *CMP*, 14 Feb. 1831.

⁷⁵ *JHC*, Vol 86 Pt 1, p. 323; *DMR*, 4 Mar. 1831.

⁷⁶ *JHC*, Vol 86, Part 1, p. 310; *Mirror of Parliament*, i, 1831, p. 513

⁷⁷ *CMP*, 10 Mar. 1831.

⁷⁸ *DEP*, 12 Feb. 1831; *CMP*, 14 Mar. 1831.

⁷⁹ *CMP*, 21 Mar. 1831; *The mirror of parliament*, ii, p. 1247 and p. 1435.

⁸⁰ *Times*, 31 Mar. 1831; *CMP*, 7 Apr. 1831.

⁸¹ Boyd Hilton, *A mad, bad, and dangerous people?*, p. 421; George Rudé, ‘English Rural and Urban Disturbances on the Eve of the First Reform Bill, 1830-1831’ *Past & Present*, no. 37 (1967), pp 87–102.

⁸² *The Times*, 24 Mar. 1831.

⁸³ *DMR*, 26 Mar. 1831; *DEP*, 26 Mar. 1831.

⁸⁴ *DEM*, 30 Mar. 1831.

willing and competent to represent them'.⁸⁵ Bruen wrote to Thomas Haughton, before he presented the petition and remarked that the reform measure was 'too violent' and would lead to 'changes which no well-wisher to our constitution can approve'. The response was unambiguous. Bruen's letter was dismissed as 'a production in every respect stamped with political deception' and Sir Thomas Butler whose family, it was claimed, had always acted in the best interests of the county was suggested as a suitable candidate to contest the country election in the Colonel's place.⁸⁶ This was no surprise; together with Horace Rochfort, Butler had been mooted as a suitable candidate in the popular interest in January 1830.⁸⁷ On that occasion, despite the apparent backing of Bishop Doyle, Butler did not put himself forward.⁸⁸ The upsurge in popular opposition was worrying, especially for Bruen. In the last election he had been lauded as the one that overturned vested interests and opened the borough; he now stood accused of duplicity and siding with those very vested interests he had opposed.⁸⁹ Additionally Sir Thomas Butler's pedigree, both as a member of the Carlow gentry and as a parliamentarian, eclipsed Bruen's 'claim' on the county.⁹⁰

Walter Blackney emerged as a political activist first supporting the pro-repeal candidate Pierce Butler in the county Kilkenny byelection in February 1830 and then organising a pro-reform meeting in Carlow in March 1830. These activities served to accentuate the chasm that had opened between him and his fellow landholding magistrates. In the end he was touted by Liberals as a candidate in the next general election who would go forward 'free of expense'.⁹¹ Recognising that his electoral prospects were dwindling, Bruen sought to ingratiate himself with the public. On 19 April in parliament, he voted in support of government against Isaac Gascoyne's amendment to the reform bill.⁹² Kavanagh was again absent for the vote.⁹³ However, the move did not impress as it was suggested that Bruen had 'been compelled to writhe beneath the powerful lash of public opinion'.⁹⁴ Further, he was afforded little opportunity for other political manoeuvres as the defeat of the government on Gascoyne's motion prompted a dissolution of parliament and a general election.⁹⁵ Almost immediately and unsurprisingly, Thomas Kavanagh announced that he did not intend to seek re-election, because, he maintained,

⁸⁵ *CMP*, 28 Mar. 1831.

⁸⁶ *CMP*, 31 Mar. 1831.

⁸⁷ *CMP*, 18 Jan. 1830; *CC*, 21 Jan 1830.

⁸⁸ *LES*, 2 July 1830.

⁸⁹ *WWC*, 2 Apr. 1831.

⁹⁰ Unlike the Kavanaghs and the Butlers, John Ryan writing in 1835 did not consider the Bruens to be among 'the respectable families long residing in county Carlow', Ryan, *Carlow*, p. 375. Butler himself considered that he had a 'claim' on the county. Applying to E.G. Stanley for appointment as a Deputy Lieutenant for county Carlow, he outlined to the Chief Secretary the property he held in Carlow, the parliamentary service of his father and the 'respectability' of his family as qualifications for the post, see Butler to Stanley, 10 Jul. 1831 (NAI, CSORP, 1831/1752).

⁹¹ *WC*, 5 Apr. 1831.

⁹² *Hansard (Commons)*, 19 Apr. 1831, cols. 1689-1693. Gascoyne's amendment sought to prevent any reduction in the number of parliamentary seats allotted to England and Wales.

⁹³ *MC*, 21 Apr. 1831.

⁹⁴ *CMP*, 25 Apr. 1831.

⁹⁵ Norman Gash, *Politics in the age of Peel: a study in the technique of parliamentary representation, 1830-1850* (London, 1953), p. 34.

his poor health would prevent him from ‘future effectual service as a representative’.⁹⁶ On the Liberal side, Sir Thomas Butler issued an election address on 25 April in which he referred to the ‘untarnished honour’ of his ancestors and pledged to support reform measures.⁹⁷ In the face of this popular opposition, a major shift in the political landscape in Carlow was signalled when it emerged that Butler, who had until then used his electoral interest to support Kavanagh, could not anticipate reciprocal support from the retiring member. Kavanagh let it be known that he intended to support Walter Newton who was expected to stand as a second Conservative candidate.⁹⁸ Kavanagh was breaking with political precedent by deploying his electoral interest in opposition to the policy of parliamentary reform rather than supporting his family’s traditional political ally. He was also following the lead of his son-in-law Henry Bruen. Newton was an associate of Bruen whose father Philip Newton chose to break another established political alliance by supporting Henry Bruen against Walter Bagenal in the 1812 general election. This indicates the overpowering and enduring political influence wielded by Bruen in Carlow Conservative circles.

V. The 1831 Election: ‘Slaying the Great Hydra of Corruption’

The issue of ‘Reform’ encompassing both parliamentary reform and ‘the removal of abuses that by any standards – except Irish Tory standards – needed remedying’ was the central issue of the 1831 election in Carlow as elsewhere.⁹⁹ Reform was seen, as emancipation had been in the 1820s, as a panacea for all ills: ‘the project for parliamentary reform trumped everything’.¹⁰⁰ While this was straightforward, finding candidates in county Carlow was not. Thomas Butler had committed to stand but Walter Blackney, who had been thought of as a second Liberal candidate, declined to go forward. So too did Sir John Milley Doyle, nephew of General Sir John Doyle and associate of Bishop Doyle.¹⁰¹ Sir John Milley Doyle was from a Protestant, military family with connections to county Carlow. As a professional soldier, he saw considerable service overseas, particularly in Portugal. He enjoyed a high public profile following his recent release from apparently arbitrary imprisonment in Portugal following intense British diplomatic intervention.¹⁰² Horace Rochfort who stood in the independent

⁹⁶ *DEM*, 27 Apr. 1831.

⁹⁷ *Pilot*, 27 Apr. 1831.

⁹⁸ *DMR*, 27 Apr. 1831.

⁹⁹ Boyce, *Nineteenth-century Ireland*, p. 64.

¹⁰⁰ Bew, *Ireland*, p. 134.

¹⁰¹ *Pilot*, 27 Apr. 1831.

¹⁰² James Lunt, ‘Sir John Milley Doyle’, *ODNB*, Sub nomine.; *British and foreign state papers, 1830-1831*, (London, 1833), pp. 45-130; *Globe*, 4 Oct. 1828.

interest just nine months earlier, was dismissed as a candidate as his lukewarm support for reform discounted him as a Liberal candidate.¹⁰³ Although Bruen was viewed dimly by Liberals, all need not have been lost. One view was that if Bruen pledged to support reform he might be returned without opposition. However, other quarters considered him a ‘political weathercock’ who should be replaced even if it meant returning ‘an honest reforming Orangeman’ as a county representative.¹⁰⁴ Bruen was defiant. He rebuffed all approaches to commit to support the reform measures. In his election address, he promised that he would support ‘moderate and reasonable measures’ but would not ‘sanction’ anything he considered to be a danger to the constitution.¹⁰⁵

Bruen’s reiteration on his arrival in Carlow on 21 April of his unwillingness to support reform measures served to consolidate popular opposition. This was reflected in the poor results of a canvass of Carlow town when just six from the sixty freeholders promised him support.¹⁰⁶ However, while Bruen’s prospects and those of Carlow Conservatives seemed glum, Carlow Liberals experienced a serious setback when, at a meeting of freeholders on 29 April, Thomas Butler made it known that due to the delicate state of his wife’s health, he would not participate in a contested election.¹⁰⁷ Butler declared that he would only go forward if he could be guaranteed that he would be returned without a contest. As this could not be guaranteed, he resigned his candidacy. Walter Blackney was quickly nominated in his place. Having been encouraged by Bishop Doyle’s public support for reform, Blackney published his election address urging freeholders to be wary of ‘the intrigues of a domineering faction’ who opposed reform.¹⁰⁸ Milley-Doyle was eventually persuaded to stand also. In his election address, he remarked that ‘you have summoned me to the breach, I obey your call, you demand my services at this eventful crisis’.¹⁰⁹ Bishop Doyle was a supporter of Milley-Doyle’s candidacy. He wrote assuring him that he would continue to supply ‘all the aid in my power’ and urging him ‘Do not, I pray you, relax in your exertions. You may depend on mine’.¹¹⁰ Daniel O’Connell played no part in the selection of Milley-Doyle in Carlow but on hearing of his possible candidacy, was quick to congratulate him as the ‘second’ candidate and to offer any help that he could.¹¹¹

¹⁰³ *DEP*, 30 Apr. 1831.

¹⁰⁴ *CMP*, 28 Apr. 1831.

¹⁰⁵ *DEM*, 29 Apr. 1831.

¹⁰⁶ *Pilot*, 29 Apr. 1831.

¹⁰⁷ Butler’s 10-year-old son was killed in a shooting accident in Ballintemple on 1 April a circumstance that affected her badly. She also gave birth to a son (Henry William Paget) on 28 Apr. 1831 and there were fears that she might not survive. In the event, she survived dying in Scarborough in 1868, see *The Times*, 8 April 1831; *Burke’s peerage and baronetage of the British empire*, (1915), p.362; *DEM*, 4 Apr. 1868.

¹⁰⁸ *DEP*, 30 Apr. 1831; *CMP*, 2 May 1831.

¹⁰⁹ *CMP*, 5 May 1831.

¹¹⁰ Fitzpatrick, *Doyle Correspondence*, ii, p. 295.

¹¹¹ W.J. Fitzpatrick, *Correspondence of Daniel O’Connell*, i, p. 260.

Rochfort had by now placed himself firmly on the Conservative side and back within the fold of the local gentry. At a meeting of fifty of the county's resident gentry on 4 May, he was promised full support as one who was 'able to cope with Dr Doyle and his two popish candidates'.¹¹² In his election address, he declared himself 'averse to all violent or sudden remedies, or to the organization of a completely new constitution, such as has been contemplated in the late Bill of Reform'.¹¹³ Like Bruen, Rochfort ignored the now openly liberal *Carlow Morning Post* and published his address in the Conservative *Dublin Evening Mail*. In following Bruen's lead on publicity, Rochfort displayed some deference to the more experienced politician as well as recognising the increasingly important role played by newspapers in shaping public opinion.¹¹⁴ In Ireland, such shifts in allegiance were not uncommon then among the landed elite as fears of isolation from other Protestant landowners combined with anxiety about the growing forces of Catholic self-determination changed the political perspective of formerly Liberal individuals like Horace Rochfort.¹¹⁵

Intensive canvassing by both sides stoked the political temperature in Carlow. The *Carlow Morning Post* was central to Liberal electioneering and did not hold back describing the Tory candidates as 'the great hydra of corruption'.¹¹⁶ The strength of Liberal organisation was demonstrated when the congregations in all Catholic chapels throughout the county were addressed simultaneously on Sunday 1 May by representatives from the Liberal Club.¹¹⁷ A few days later, O'Connell received a rapturous welcome when he visited Carlow town on 4 May which was not calculated to soothe Conservative nerves.¹¹⁸ There were moves towards 'exclusive dealing' whereby farmers agreed not to deal with anyone that would vote for Bruen or Rochfort.¹¹⁹ In a provocative move, the 'popular' candidates were chaired through the village of Borris 'the stronghold of the anti-reform faction'.¹²⁰ Personal abuse was directed at the Conservative candidates. Henry Bruen was described as an 'intellectual fungus' whose qualities did not 'justify even a community of Cherokee Indians in returning him to be their representative in a national or provincial legislature'.¹²¹ Horace Rochfort was castigated for his abandonment of reform and described as one who had become 'an everlasting monument of disappointed ambition'. In a reference to the activities of his uncle Robert Rochfort who had taken an active part as a member of the Cloydagh yeomanry in suppressing rebel activity in

¹¹² Rochfort to Farnham, 6 May 1831 (NLI, Farnham Papers, Ms 41/146/29/5).

¹¹³ *DEM*, 6 May 1831.

¹¹⁴ The Mail was founded by William Saurin in 1823 as a Conservative newspaper that supported the Protestant ascendancy and was noted for its 'diehard' anti-Catholic and anti-Liberal stance, see Patrick Maume, "'This proteus of politics": the *Dublin Evening Mail* on Gladstone, 1868-98' in Mary E. Daly and K. Theodore Hoppen (eds), *Gladstone: Ireland and beyond* (Dublin, 2011), p. 103; John S. North, *The Waterloo directory of Irish newspapers and periodicals, 1800-1900* (Waterloo, 1986), p. 166.

¹¹⁵ Kinsella, 'Alexanders', p. 233.

¹¹⁶ *CMP*, 5 May 1831.

¹¹⁷ *WC*, 3 May 1831.

¹¹⁸ *FJ*, 6 May 1831.

¹¹⁹ *WWC*, 7 May 1831.

¹²⁰ *TM*, 7 May 1831.

¹²¹ *WC*, 5 May 1831.

1798, Rochfort was described as ‘having an ill-omened name’.¹²² Events in Carlow elicited comment from Conservative newspapers outside the county with Bishop Doyle attracting particularly stinging criticism. His contribution of ten pounds to the Liberal election fund was described as the means ‘to carry on the war against the protestant [sic] constitution of England’.¹²³ He was considered to be ‘right reverend, right pious and right political Dr Doyle’ whose letter to the meeting of Carlow freeholders was calculated to encourage the peasantry to violence.¹²⁴

The election in the borough generated little fuss. It was accepted that Lord Tullamore would be returned to represent ‘the little knot who constitute the burgesses of this place’ and agitation was dampened by the expectation that the reform bill would end the electoral monopoly that prevailed there.¹²⁵ Tullamore was duly returned without contest on 7 May 1831.¹²⁶ The date for the county election was set for 11 May.¹²⁷ In contrast to 1826 when troops were moved to Waterford, the expectation of civil unrest prompted the drafting of reinforcements of police and military into the county.¹²⁸ Members of the Liberal election committee were also concerned magistrates would absent themselves from the election and thus impede the administration of the oath to Catholic freeholders to permit them to vote. They sought temporary magistrates from Lord Anglesey for the duration of the election¹²⁹ Anglesey took note and wrote immediately to Bishop Doyle outlining his plans for extra police and magistrates ‘for the double purpose of preserving the freedom of election and the administration of the register of freeholders’.¹³⁰ This was revealing: Anglesey recognised the political importance of the prelate. For their part, Conservatives accused their opponents of intimidation. Thomas Kavanagh accused the agents of John Milley-Doyle of ‘unjustifiable coercion’ while canvassing in the Borris area.¹³¹ Rev Hector Vaughan from Myshall reported that ‘the rancour and violence of the R.C. priests and their deluded followers increased right up to the eve of the Carlow election’ with a mob visiting his residence to demand that he vote for John Milley-Doyle.¹³²

Capitalising on experience gained during the emancipation campaign, the Liberal election committee persisted with public meetings and benefitted from the publicity they were

¹²² *CMP*, 9 May 1831. For an account of the anti-insurgency activities of Rev Robert Rochfort see Kinsella, ‘The “*slashing parson*”’, pp 117–139.

¹²³ *CH*, 7 May 1831.

¹²⁴ *LRG*, 7 May 1831.

¹²⁵ *DEP*, 5 May 1831.

¹²⁶ Walker, *Election results*, p. 46.

¹²⁷ *DEP*, 6 May 1831.

¹²⁸ Harvey to Gosset, 6 May 1831 (NAI, CSORP, 1831/1098); *KM*, 11 May 1831.

¹²⁹ Memorial from Carlow Freeholders to Lord Anglesey, 8 May 1831 (NAI, CSORP, 1831/1112).

¹³⁰ Anglesey to Bishop Doyle, 9 May 1831 (Delany Archive, Doyle Papers, KL-JKL-00717).

¹³¹ *CMP*, 12 May 1831.

¹³² Vaughan to Anglesey, 27 May 1831 (NAI, CSORP, 1831/1571/6).

afforded in the local newspaper and the overt backing of the Catholic clergy. Their efforts in Carlow mirrored those of O'Connell, who ran what amounted to a national campaign with reform as the central issue.¹³³ By comparison, the Tory election campaign was barely visible. They relied on what had served them well up to this: the electoral interests of the landed gentry. Realising the glum electoral prospect, Conservative interests met in Carlow on 9 May and proposed to the Liberal election committee that they would agree to Blackney's unopposed return if Bruen too was returned without a poll. The reformers, realising the strength of their position, rebuffed the offer.¹³⁴ Recognising his impossible position, Bruen resigned on the eve of the election; Rochfort's resignation followed next morning. The gentry backing Rochfort realised that without Bruen's support, he had no chance of success, forcing them to withdraw their candidate.¹³⁵ Blackney and Milley-Doyle were returned without a poll.¹³⁶ This was a complete inversion of the electoral order in Carlow, and difficult for the hitherto ascendant gentry class to accept. Protestant Conservatives concluded that 'priests and intimidation frightened the aristocracy of the county from their propriety'. Amid rumours of freeholders being kidnapped by Liberals. The Tory candidates gave way when it was clear that the Liberal campaign had rendered the chance of success 'doubtful, blood-shed and battery certain'.¹³⁷

There were also sinister insinuations regarding the political influence of 'the cabinet of Braganza' headed by Bishop Doyle.¹³⁸ The strength of popular feeling on the Liberal side seriously unsettled and alarmed the gentry. Lord William Carr-Beresford even invoked the shadow of the 1641 Rebellion when, writing to the Duke of Wellington of the election in county Carlow, he claimed that government had encouraged Bishop Doyle to put his priests at the head of mobs thereby:

Obliging the lower orders of Protestants who have no protection against their open and midnight violence, to emigrate and it is nearly effected in all but the very noble and the gentry and landed proprietors will soon find themselves alone and soon after driven out.¹³⁹

While Beresford was an alarmist, political observers recognised the political influence of Bishop Doyle. He was increasingly identified as central to the election campaign in Carlow with success or failure largely depending on him.¹⁴⁰ Doyle was credited with engineering the return of Blackney and Milley-Doyle: 'with a single touch of his magic crosier' he had 'without stretch

¹³³ MacDonagh, *The emancipist*, p. 53.

¹³⁴ *CMP*, 12 May 1831.

¹³⁵ *RLG*, 14 May 1831.

¹³⁶ *DEP*, 12 May 1831.

¹³⁷ *KM*, 14 May 1831.

¹³⁸ *DEM*, 18 May 1831.

¹³⁹ Beresford to Wellington, 19 May 1831 (USA, Wellington Papers, MS61/WP1/1185/7).

¹⁴⁰ Michael Corcoran to Doyle, 10 May 1831 (Delany Archive, Doyle Papers, KL-JKL-00718). Corcoran was a barrister who was later appointed crown clerk in Donegal. Writing to Doyle, he remarked that "We shall be disgraced if you are beaten in Carlow".

or effort, but by the simple intimation of his will, managed that which not a peer in the empire could have effected'.¹⁴¹ While this was an exaggeration, the fact that the successful candidates visited Doyle at Braganza House as part of the 'chairing' after the election was testament to the political power wielded by him at that time in county Carlow.

¹⁴¹ 'The Irish Elections' in *Colburn's New Monthly Magazine*, (London, 1831), p. 10. Although published anonymously at the time, it was later attributed to Richard Lalor Shiel, see M.W. Savage (ed), *Sketches legal and political by the late Richard Lalor Shiel* (2 vols, London, 1855), ii, p. 348.

VI. An Enduring Animosity

Divisive talk and action from both sides following the election served to further polarise political feeling. Press coverage fed resentment, and indeed anxiety, among the gentry.¹⁴² Unsubstantiated claims of the kidnapping of the tenants of Bruen, Kavanagh and Lord Downes by the Carlow Independence Club required denial; it was claimed that the tenants sought protection from their landlord's agents.¹⁴³ At a dinner held in Carlow after the election, the lack of support for reform among members of the grand jury was again highlighted and the victory over 'those influential persons who had monopolised the county' was lauded.¹⁴⁴ Emotive and pejorative language continued at a celebratory dinner attended by Milley-Doyle and Blackney in Leighlinbridge on 2 June.¹⁴⁵ There was an unsavoury incident when Leighlinbridge yeomanry (many of them employees of Rev Samuel Roberts) assaulted attendees on their way home from the function.¹⁴⁶ This together with other incidents involving the yeomanry in Carlow strengthened the calls already being led by O'Connell for the abolition of the 'Orange' yeomanry.¹⁴⁷ For their part, Conservatives, aggrieved by the election result, maintained that the election had been decided by the undue influence of Bishop Doyle accompanied by intimidation.¹⁴⁸ It was considered that government, the clergy and 'the rabble menace' had combined to prostrate 'before the lowest of the mob the property, the influence, and the intelligence of a county, eminently distinguished by the number of its resident gentry'.¹⁴⁹ A meeting of magistrates was convened in early June without public notice with the presumed intention of portraying the county to be in a disturbed state in order to elicit additional powers and police from government.¹⁵⁰ These efforts were considered part of a Tory plan to provoke unrest and so hinder reform.¹⁵¹

The frustration, fear and alienation felt by certain Protestants and the gentry were expressed by the actions of Captain William Graham who commanded detachments of yeomen

¹⁴² For example, the election was described as struggle 'between the priests and people on one side, and a set of the basest and most aristocratical oligarchs in Europe' where 'the people of Carlow rose in their moral might and annihilated for ever the faction that had so long insulted them', see *WWC*, 11 June 1831.

¹⁴³ *CMP*, 19 May 1831.

¹⁴⁴ *FJ*, 21 May 1831.

¹⁴⁵ *CMP*, 6 June 1831.

¹⁴⁶ *CMP*, 27 June 1831.

¹⁴⁷ MacDonagh, *The emancipist*, p. 63. For example, John Milley-Doyle sought a government investigation into the firing of shots at Rev P Dolan and his curate by a yeoman while they were canvassing for him in Myshall, see J.M. Doyle to E.G. Stanley 14 May 1831 (NAI, SOC, 2994/4) and the Cloydagh Yeomanry were reported to have terrorised the countryside on their nocturnal journey home from the election in Carlow on 11 May (see *CMP*, 16 May 1831).

¹⁴⁸ *CWH*, 21 May 1831.

¹⁴⁹ *DEM*, 18 May 1831.

¹⁵⁰ *CMP*, 30 May 1831.

¹⁵¹ *WC*, 4 June 1831.

including one from Myshall at a tithe demonstration in Newtownbarry, county Wexford on 18 June 1831. The yeomanry fired on the crowd killing thirteen and wounding twenty-three.¹⁵² The coroners' inquiry into the deaths failed to produce a verdict because the jury was divided along sectarian lines.¹⁵³ The affair received widespread but predictably partisan press coverage.¹⁵⁴ As another indication of the shift in political power, speaking in parliament the recently elected members for county Carlow were critical in the extreme. Blackney highlighted the lack of confidence in the magistracy as the offenders had not been arrested and complained of the conduct of the yeomanry. Doyle expressed a lack of confidence in the Irish yeomanry and urged that they be disarmed.¹⁵⁵ Parliament was no longer the preserve of Conservative Carlow opinion. Locally, popular feeling unnerved the magistracy and, meeting on 2 July at the quarter sessions, they agreed to seek an increase in the police establishment of the county 'in case they should unfortunately be needed' thereby confirming the Liberal view that they hoped for unrest even though none existed.¹⁵⁶ This was shortly before Rev Roberts' yeomanry were acquitted at Bagenalstown Petty Sessions where magistrates considered their violence a 'trifling assault'.¹⁵⁷ At the Summer assizes in Carlow on 13 July, the grand jury declined to prosecute a member of the Myshall yeomanry for firing on the local parish priest as he was canvassing for Sir John Milley-Doyle before the election in May.¹⁵⁸ The grand jury further enraged Liberals when it was reported that a toast to 'Captain Graham and the Newtownbarry yeomanry' was proposed at a dinner during the assizes.¹⁵⁹ Although John Staunton Rochfort and Sir Thomas Butler denied that they had witnessed the toast, silence reigned from the other members of the grand jury.¹⁶⁰ The bitterness and division resulting from this episode was testament to the political division that was now a feature of Carlow electoral politics.

¹⁵² *CMP*, 23 June 1831.

¹⁵³ *CMP*, 4 July 1831.

¹⁵⁴ The *Dublin Evening Mail* initially described the incident as 'a most wanton outrage committed by the peasantry on the civil authorities' while the *Freeman's Journal* called it 'one of the most frightful massacres of which there is any record in a civilized country', see *DEM*, 20 June 1831; *FJ*, 21 June 1831.

¹⁵⁵ *Hansard (Commons)*, 30 June 1831, vol. 4, cols 562-3.

¹⁵⁶ Memorial from Carlow magistrates to Lord Anglesey, 2 July 1831 (NAI, CSORP, 1831/1693/9).

¹⁵⁷ *CMP*, 7 July 1831; *Pilot*, 8 July 1831.

¹⁵⁸ Milley-Doyle asked government to investigate the incident on 14 May 1831, see Doyle to Stanley, 14 May 1831 (NAI/CSORP/SOC/2995/4). The grand jury declined to prosecute the case as Baillie, the errant yeoman, had fired the shots from his own yard which did not constitute a public riot.

¹⁵⁹ *CMP*, 25 July 1831. The incident was widely reported and was mentioned in parliament by O'Connell, see *FJ*, 29 July 1831; *DEP*, 2 Aug. 1831; *TFP*, 2 Aug. 1831, *Hansard (Commons)*, 25 July 1831, Vol. 5, Col 270.

¹⁶⁰ Both denials were made through the *CMP* on 4 Aug. 1831.

Conclusion

The disappointment of the Catholic interest in Carlow after the 1830 election was reinforced by their perception that Francis Bruen's candidacy in the borough had been a ploy to shore up the Conservative candidates in the county. Demonstrating renewed political determination, they looked to future electoral success as evidenced by organising voter registration. The Conservative interest, and Henry Bruen in particular, also recognised the part that management of the registry would play and, if not as coherently as the liberals, he sought to boost the numbers of sympathetic freeholders within the ranks of his own tenantry. Politics in Carlow had moved from uncontested or barely contested elections where established and recognised ascendancy interests decided the outcome to one where the broader electorate would dictate outcomes.

Parliamentary reform became the central issue in county Carlow in the general election in 1831. Reform acted as an umbrella for popular disaffection, emulsifying itself with tithe unrest and repeal agitation. The election was the first to see popular public opinion confront established political and social interests and the fact that it did not proceed to a poll did nothing to diminish the scale of the upset that followed. The familial alliance of the Bruen and Kavanagh interests was unable to sustain their hegemony in the face of the concerted challenge of the emerging politically conscious middle classes supported by the Catholic clergy. This was inevitably of major consequence. The election saw a polarisation and hardening of political attitudes among larger landholders, the gentry and the clergy of the established church in opposition to what they saw as the emergence of dangerous liberal political opinion. Although both sides recognised the importance of cultivating the register of freeholders, the Liberal side excelled in cultivating public opinion through meetings and the press. The election marked a new departure in politics in Carlow, the commencement of an era of tightly fought and increasingly bitter electoral contests hallmarked by the moral and economic manipulation of freeholders, the use of increasingly partisan newspapers and actual and imagined intimidation by both sides. It heralded a new era of competition that produced unrest, uncertainty and conflict.

Chapter 8: The Demise of Deference and the Age of Contestation, 1831-32

‘We can assure the County of Carlow, that the day when an oligarchical junta could dispose of the representation in their parlours as they thought proper has gone by’¹

Introduction

The 1832 general election, occasioned by the passing of the Great Reform Act, signalled a fundamental change in the conduct of electoral politics in Carlow borough and county. The monopoly of the representation of the borough held by the Earl of Charleville was ended by the Reform Act. In the borough the first open election witnessed the return of a Liberal candidate following a competitive poll. In the county, Liberals managed to field two candidates who, opposed by Conservative candidates who commanded the two largest electoral interests in Carlow, prevailed in a contested poll.

The successful Liberals continued to agitate even after the election and questioned the manner in which both the magistracy and the yeomanry discharged their duties. The two Liberal representatives for the county were active in parliament and their activities were reported by a largely sympathetic local press. The landed gentry and middle-class Conservatives realised that while the deference that they had enjoyed up until then had not totally evaporated, it had certainly diminished and that new tactics such as managing the electoral registry, encouraging a Protestant tenantry and fostering a sympathetic press would be needed for success in the future.

¹ CS, 22 Dec. 1832.

I. The Assault on Ascendancy Institutions

While the issue of reform continued to underlie political activity in Carlow as the Reform bill made its way through parliament in 1832, the activities of the yeomanry and the administration of justice in the county provided a focus for local agitation. As observed by Allan Blackstock, 'the yeomanry remained a dynamic political symbol'. As Irish Protestants realised their ascendancy was threatened, the now fully Protestant organisation was regarded as a key tool in maintaining this hegemony.² Even before the Newtownbarry Massacre, O'Connell viewed the yeomanry as a partisan, vindictive and cruel 'Orange' force in whom Catholics held no confidence.³ After the Massacre he described them as 'the most objectionable force that could be kept up'.⁴ Opposition emerged quickly in Carlow with calls for meetings to frame petitions to parliament calling for their abolition. A meeting chaired by Captain Woodcock in Leighlinbridge on 7 August agreed to frame such petitions and urged people to engage in 'exclusive dealing' and avoid any commercial contact with members of the yeomanry.⁵ The vast bulk of the magistracy, gentry, governors of the county and the Dean of Leighlin reacted by framing resolutions that endorsed the yeomanry as 'an excellent force'.⁶ At a meeting in Bagenalstown on 18 September, Liberals went further both criticising the yeomanry and calling for the removal of those magistrates who attended the dinner at the last assizes where 'orange' toasts had been drunk.⁷ The meeting effectively named nineteen magistrates as potentially unfit to hold a commission of the peace.⁸ The meeting was dismissed by the conservative press as a gathering of 'rabble' and 'sabbath breakers' engaging in 'inflammatory abuse of the yeomanry'; but the pointed and co-ordinated criticism that emerged was nothing less than an attack on two pillars of gentry ascendancy in the county.⁹ Furthermore it was observed that the actions of the gentry were an illustration of the 'disconnect' that existed between 'those called the upper and those designated the lower ranks of society'.¹⁰ This in turn provoked a Conservative response contrasting the Carlow gentry who held rank, wealth and intelligence with those radicals, who

² Allan Blackstock, *the Irish Yeomanry*, p. 280.

³ MacDonagh, *The emancipist*, p. 63; O'Connell (ed.), *correspondence*, iv, p. 338.

⁴ Hansard (Commons), 27 June 1831, vol. 4, cols 388-391. For O'Connell, 'Orange' had become a pejorative to describe ultra-Protestants.

⁵ *CMP*, 11 Aug. 1831.

⁶ *DEPKT*, 15 Sept. 1831.

⁷ *CMP*, 22 Sept. 1831.

⁸ *CMP*, 22 Sept 1831; *Return of the number and names of the magistracy at present in the commission of the peace in each county, city and town in Ireland*, HC, 1831 [cd 171], p. 8; *WM*, 16 July 1831.

⁹ See for example *KM*, 21 Sept. 1831 and *DEPKT*, 22 Sept. 1831.

¹⁰ *DEP*, 22 Sept. 1831.

did not.¹¹ This served to reinforce the emerging distinction between the old political order in Carlow and the expanding middle class who, supported by an increasingly vocal Catholic clergy, were beginning to have a profound political impact.

Equally upsetting for the gentry was the manner in which the behaviour of magistrates, particularly with regard to policing and the collection of tithes, was now subject to scrutiny. J.S. Rochfort complained that public correspondence between Bishop Doyle and Lord Farnham increased local resistance to the payment of tithes and the dean of Leighlin, Richard Boyle Bernard, warned that extra police were a necessity to prevent loss of life and property.¹² Although local magistrates sought an increase in police numbers by forty at the July quarter sessions, the increase was not endorsed by the local and regional leaders of the constabulary until early August.¹³ Action thereafter was swift. On foot of a proclamation from Dublin Castle published on 12 August, magistrates met in Carlow on 23 August and officially approved the increase.¹⁴ The Liberal interest was not happy and sent a memorial to government complaining of the extra costs on landholders and disputing the need for the augmentation, pointing to the habitually low numbers of cases tried in the assize courts as proof. The memorial was signed by Bishop Doyle, the Liberal Protestant magistrate Nicholas Alyward Vigors, Thomas Haughton and almost two hundred of the larger Catholic landholding freeholders in the county.¹⁵ Speaking in Westminster on a bill intended to change the way in which magistrates were appointed, Walter Blackney criticised the existing governors of county Carlow and the magistrates appointed by them.¹⁶ He considered the attempt by magistrates to augment the constabulary as nothing less than ‘an outrage on the character of so peaceable a county’.¹⁷ In Ireland, Nicholas Aylward Vigors raised concerns directly with government and, in what was considered a victory for Liberals, the proposed augmentation of forty constables was not permitted.¹⁸ Table 8.1 carries details of the numbers of police in Carlow and surrounding counties that as well as showing the modest increase in Carlow, reveals significant increases in Kilkenny and Queens County driven by tithe unrest. Conservatives in Carlow had reason to feel aggrieved that their attempts to strengthen policing were portrayed by Liberals as nothing less than a Tory backlash against the recent Liberal electoral victory.¹⁹

¹¹ CC, 24 Sept. 1831.

¹² Rochfort to Gosset, 3 Aug. 1831 (NAI, CSORP/1831/2059); Bernard to Gosset, 18 Aug 1831 (NAI, CSORP/1831/1187/8).

¹³ Battersby to Harvey, 1 Aug. 1831 (NAI, CSORP/1831/1693/6); Harvey to Gosset, 4 Aug. 1831 (NAI, CSORP/1831/1693/5).

¹⁴ CC, 20 Aug. 1831; Memo from Carlow magistrates (signed by Henry Bruen as chairman) to Gosset, 23 Aug 1831, (NAI, CSORP/1831/1693/3).

¹⁵ Memorial from Carlow Freeholders to Lord Anglesey, August 1831 (NAI, CSORP/1831/1693/10).

¹⁶ Blackney spoke during a debate on a bill intended to replace county governors with more accountable Lord Lieutenants which would give government more direct control over the appointment of magistrates. The bill was enacted as 2 Will IV – 113 of 1831, see *Hansard (Commons)*, 15 Aug. 1831, Vol. 6, Col. 32.; *DEP*, 23 Aug 1831. The governors in question were J.S. Rochfort, William Browne, Henry Bruen, Lord Downes and Thomas Kavanagh, see *Royal Kalendar 1831* (London, 1831), p. 389.

¹⁷ Blackney to Doyle, 29 Aug. 1831 (Delany Archive, Doyle Papers, KL-JKL-00738).

¹⁸ *CMP*, 29 Aug. 1831; *FJ*, 30 Aug. 1831.

¹⁹ *DMR*, 8 Sept. 1831.

Table 8.1: Strength of Constabularies in Carlow and Surrounding Counties, 1827 to 1832

County	1827	1828	1829	1830	1831	1832
Carlow	75	75	75	75	99	99
Kildare	229	229	229	229	227	253
Kilkenny	198	198	198	197	297	402
Queens Co.	158	160	182	182	279	337
Wexford	147	147	147	147	147	154
Wicklow	134	134	134	134	134	134

Sources: *Return of the constabulary police of Ireland, during each of the last three years*, HC, 1830 [cd 498]; *A return of the constabulary police of Ireland, showing the numbers and distribution thereof in each county, in the years 1830, 1831 and 1832*, HC, 1833 [cd 518]

The behaviour of magistrates on the bench was also questioned. The refusal to grant a licence to John Murphy of Carrigbeg to work as a blacksmith on foot of allegations that he had made a pike head and uttered seditious statements in his forge was an example as, rather than accept the judgement, Murphy sent a memorial to government seeking an investigation.²⁰ The case was seen by Liberals as an effort to portray unrest and sedition where none existed.²¹ Nicholas Alyward Vigors's efforts on Murphy's behalf earned him praise as a 'defender of the oppressed'.²² This too was viewed with alarm as it appeared to Conservatives that a fellow magistrate, who was a member of the gentry, had joined the ranks of the agitators. All of this was compounded when the government appointed the Kilkenny Whig Lord Duncannon to the newly created post of lord lieutenant of the county in October.²³ Duncannon's appointment was welcomed by Liberals who anticipated that 'the commission in the county will be purged' and rid of 'Orange parsons, or pettifogging trading justices'.²⁴ Conservatives by contrast regarded the appointment as an insult to the resident gentry of the county with Lord Tullamore pointing

²⁰ *CMP*, 1 Aug. 1831.

²¹ *CMP*, 8 Aug. 1831.

²² *CMP*, 22 Aug. 1831.

²³ The new position was intended to provide a clear channel of communication between government and counties bypassing existing county governors who were thought to be inefficient. The new deputy lieutenants also had a role in appointments to and oversight of the magistracy, see Crossman, *local government*, p. 16.

²⁴ *DEP*, 4 Oct. 1831.

out that Lord Downes and Thomas Kavanagh were equally suitable candidates.²⁵ Duncannon's appointment was regarded as another assault on Conservative Protestant hegemony in Carlow.²⁶ These events combined to persuade the Conservative Protestant gentry in Carlow that they were faced with a concerted effort to deprive them of privilege and power; betrayed by British Tories with the concession of Catholic emancipation while popular political agitation forced them to surrender their monopoly on parliamentary representation. The Whig government seemed unable or unwilling to counter tithe agitation, which they saw as an attack on the established church. Finally their angst was deepened by an apparent onslaught on their role as local administrators of justice. All of this combined to contribute to a political and social atmosphere for Irish Protestants in the early 1830s that, as Jay Roszman notes, was 'one of profound anxiety and frenzied reaction'.²⁷

Measures to spread and support the Protestant religion were pursued as part of the Conservative reaction. Both J.S. Rochfort and Henry Bruen were active in the Carlow Hibernian Bible Society.²⁸ Rochfort frequently chaired meetings in Carlow while Bruen was a keen attender and supporter.²⁹ Bruen was also a member of the Protestant Colonization Society, established in 1830, with the aim of stemming the emigration of Protestants from Ireland.³⁰ As a member, Bruen arranged the visit of a deputation to Carlow, Newtownbarry and Leighlinbridge to canvass for public support for the society, but 'from the distracted state of the country ... it was found impracticable to hold meetings'.³¹ In supporting a general Protestant resettlement, Henry II was clearly displaying an anxiety for social and political conditions in the country as a whole as well as in county Carlow.

The apocalyptic angst experienced by English Protestants who perceived the Reform Act was as an assault on the Protestant church, state and constitution, was even more acute in Ireland.³² This contributed to an attempt to foster 'pan-Protestant unity' through the formation in

²⁵ *Hansard (Commons)*, 6 Oct. 1831, vol. 8, col. 147.

²⁶ Protestant opinion would have been even more outraged had they known that Duncannon sought the advice of Bishop Doyle on the appointment of new magistrates even before he was appointed Deputy Lieutenant and that Walter Blackney had provided him with the names of four suitable candidates, see Viscount Duncannon to James Doyle, 11 Sept. 1831 (Delany Archive, Doyle Papers, KL-JKL-00740).

²⁷ J.R. Roszman, *Outrage in the Age of Reform: Irish Agrarian Violence, Imperial Insecurity, and British Governing Policy, 1830–1845* (Cambridge, 2022), p. 195.

²⁸ Rochfort chaired the inaugural meeting and both he and Bruen were named as vice-presidents and subscribers, see *CMP*, 30 July 1818.

²⁹ Annual meetings of the society were usually held in later summer or early autumn and attended by Bruen and Rochfort, see *CMP*, 5 Aug. 1822, 25 Aug. 1828, 8 Sept. 1831; *SNL*, 26 Sept. 1823, 30 July 1825; *DEM*, 19 Nov. 1825, 31 July 1826, 5 Oct. 1827; *BCC*, 26 Sept. 1825.

³⁰ Roszman, *Outrage in the Age of Reform*, p. 194; David Hempton and Myrtle Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster society 1740–1890* (London, 2005), p. 90.

³¹ *Transactions of the Protestant Colonization Society of Ireland reported at a public meeting of subscribers in the Dublin institution on Thursday May 24 1832*, (Dublin, 1832), p. 7.

³² Robert Saunders, 'God and the Great Reform Act: Preaching against Reform, 1831–32' *Journal of British Studies*, 53:2 (2014), p. 396.

the winter of 1831-2 of the Protestant Conservative Society.³³ In acknowledgement of his perceived importance to the Protestant cause in Carlow, Bruen was seated on the platform and proposed one of the resolutions at the inaugural meeting in the Mansion House, Dublin on 17 January 1832.³⁴ The society encouraged active political participation by Protestants.³⁵ It initiated a 'Protestant Rent' intended to underwrite the costs of registering voters and furthering the aims of the organisation.³⁶ Although it has been observed that that the need for funds among Conservatives was 'almost in inverse proportion' to that of Liberal O'Connellites, the collection of the Protestant rent was intended to promote activity and a sense of purpose among Protestants.³⁷

Henry Bruen, Thomas Kavanagh and Lord Downes were strong supporters of the Society, all having subscribed by 25 February 1832.³⁸ Bruen was an original member and Kavanagh elected to membership on 27 March.³⁹ Once the reform bill had passed, circular letters emanated from the Protestant Conservative Society drawing attention to threats to persons and property, the connivance among the peasantry to withdraw their labour from Protestant employers, the increasing amounts of vexatious but expensive litigation being taken against Protestants and the slanders of an increasingly libellous press. The society sought funds 'to resist a ruinous and wicked conspiracy which if unchecked must terminate in the destruction of the religious establishments and property of Protestants in Ireland'.⁴⁰

Although individual members of the gentry and clergy in Carlow joined the society from the start, these numbers were not large.⁴¹ As winter and the general election approached, there was an increase in the numbers from Carlow in September with six new members, including High Sheriff John Whelan joining on 4 September.⁴² The following week the admission of what was described as practically all of the remaining gentry in Carlow was announced when no fewer than twenty-one new members from the county joined together in a planned display of strength.⁴³ This show of solidarity was replicated by the Queen's County

³³ Roszman, *Outrage in the Age of Reform*, p. 191.

³⁴ *DEM*, 18 Jan. 1832; *SNL*, 18 Jan. 1832.

³⁵ *Plain and practical hints, for the serious consideration of all Protestants and particularly of Conservatives by a member of that society*, (Dublin, 1832), p. 11.

³⁶ This was an obvious borrowing from the Catholic Association, see Alvin Jackson, 'The origins, politics and culture of Irish unionism, c.1880-1916' in Thomas Bartlett (ed.), *The Cambridge history of Ireland, 1880 to the present* (4 vols, Cambridge, 2018), p. 91.

³⁷ Keyes, *Funding the nation*, p. 113.

³⁸ *DEPKT*, 15 Mar. 1832.

³⁹ *DEPKT*, 29 Mar. 1832.

⁴⁰ Circular letter from Protestant Conservative Society, signed Joseph Napier, 7 Aug. 1832 (NLI, Ephemia, EPH D317).

⁴¹ Rev John Whitty of Ricketstown and Wm Duckett of Russelstown were admitted on 10 Apr. 1832, Robert Clayton Browne was admitted on 1 May 1832, Rev Hector Vaughan of Myshall was admitted on 26 June 1832 and John D and Joseph F. Duckett of Duckett's Grove were both admitted on 21 Aug. 1832, see *DEPKT*, 12 Apr., 3 May, 28 June, 23 Aug 1832.

⁴² *DEM*, 4 Sept. 1832.

⁴³ *DEM*, 12 Sept. 1832.

gentry who joined *en masse* two weeks later.⁴⁴ As well as revealing a level of co-ordination and organisation among Conservatives, the united action by the gentry in Carlow signalled that they realised that the political climate demanded a degree of organisation and mobilisation not seen before. As noted by T.K. Hoppen, Conservatives were determined 'to operate the new system as advantageously as possible'.⁴⁵

II. Protestant Politics and Public Opinion

After the May 1831 election, it was apparent in Carlow Tory circles that their cause was weakened in the absence of a Conservative newspaper. The *Carlow Morning Post* was decidedly liberal in outlook and was joined by a new publication in late 1831, the *Carlow Sentinel* edited by T.H. Carroll, the former *Post* editor, which also professed liberal sympathies.⁴⁶ In anticipation of the support of 'the leading gentlemen in the county', John Ryan launched the *Carlow Standard* in late 1831, it was intended to be 'the organ and advocate of Conservative principles'.⁴⁷ Ryan was already a well-known ultra-Protestant polemicist and author of several anti-Catholic pamphlets.⁴⁸ The *Standard* ceased publication after just five months, although given the precarious finances of most Irish newspapers in the 1830s, this was not unusual.⁴⁹ Afterwards Ryan attributed its failure to, among other things, a failure of the 'aristocracy' to provide promised material support.⁵⁰ Whatever the cause, the need for a Conservative news platform remained and attention turned to the *Carlow Sentinel*. Following a change in ownership where Henry Malcomson, a Protestant of Conservative opinions bought the title and, as T.H. Carroll later admitted, a consultation with Henry Bruen, the paper adopted a Conservative outlook.⁵¹ Carroll's salary was paid not by the newspaper, but 'by Conservative interests in the county'.⁵² The changes in newspaper ownership and allegiance illustrates the importance of the press and publicity and of the intensification of the contest for political supremacy in the county.

⁴⁴ *DEM*, 28 Sept. 1832.

⁴⁵ K. Theodore Hoppen, *Elections, politics, and society in Ireland, 1832-1885* (Oxford, 1984), p. 278.

⁴⁶ *Bribery*, p. 676.

⁴⁷ John Ryan, *Popery unmasked: a narrative of twenty years' popish persecution* (London, 1845), pp 63–64.

⁴⁸ Ryan's pamphlets included *Reflections on the demands of the Romanists: shewing the disastrous consequences which must result from a concession of political power to them* (Dublin, 1827), *An inquiry into the nature and effects of Popery* (Dublin, 1830) and *A letter to the protestants of Ireland; on the present state of their affairs* (Dublin, 1831).

⁴⁹ Inglis, *freedom of the press*, p. 160.

⁵⁰ Ryan, *Popery unmasked*, p. 65.

⁵¹ *Bribery*, p. 665, p. 679.

⁵² *LR*, 22 July 1840.

Newspapers carried reports of diligent parliamentary performances and attendance of the two new Liberal MPs which compared very favourably with their predecessors and added to Conservative woes. Both Blackney and Doyle were frequent attenders with the former particularly vocal in parliament on the issues of tithes and the introduction of a poor law for Ireland. Both were already closely associated with the popular issue of reform.⁵³

Table 8.2: Blackney and Doyle: Parliamentary Attendance 1831 & 1832, Reform and Matters of Irish Interest				
	1831		1832	
	Blackney	Doyle	Blackney	Doyle
Voted	28	29	25	32
Absent	6	11	11	11
Paired off	1	2	0	2
Contributions	1	0	11	3
Sources: Hansard, Dublin Evening Packet, The Times, London Sun, True Sun, Mercury, Morning Herald, Globe, Evening Mail, Morning herald, Morning Chronicle, JHC, Nottingham and Newark Mercury, The Comet.				

Table 8.2 carries a summary of parliamentary divisions of Irish interest and the contributions to debates by the two members between January 1831 and July 1832.⁵⁴ One or both of the members were present for practically every division on a matter of Irish interest. This was more remarkable in Blackney's case as, unlike Doyle, he was based in Carlow. Blackney's movements were widely reported in the press with particular emphasis on his 'active attendance to his parliamentary duties'.⁵⁵ The maiden speeches of both were received favourably with Doyle in particular speaking 'with firmness, clearness and dignity'.⁵⁶ The Conservative press by

⁵³ Both attended a 'Grand Reform Dinner' in the mansion House on 31 May 1831 where Doyle was called on to preside and Blackney was toasted, see *Pilot*, 1 June 1831.

⁵⁵ *CMP*, 4 July 1831.

⁵⁶ *FJ*, 4 July 1831.

contrast associated them with Bishop Doyle and O'Connell and considered them members 'of whom the rabble entertain the most absurd expectations'.⁵⁷ Among Liberals, Blackney was feted locally with, for example, his neighbours cutting his corn for him in August without charge as a mark of their appreciation of his parliamentary efforts.⁵⁸ This jarred with those members of the gentry and magistracy considered to be 'Orange' who encountered grave difficulty at the same time securing labour at any cost.⁵⁹ Blackney's appointment as a deputy lieutenant was greeted by Liberals with enthusiasm and he was characterised as one who had:

contended single-handed with the oppressors of the people: as an upright magistrate, he was detested by the Orange squirearchy and who now as an MP fulfilled his duties with that courage and perseverance which have marked his career throughout life.⁶⁰

When Blackney arrived in Carlow after his first session in Westminster, he received a rapturous welcome and was greeted by crowds of well-wishers numbering, it was claimed, some thirty thousand with the town was illuminated.⁶¹ While the replacement of the two long-serving Conservative representatives gave rise to concern among the gentry, the adulation the new MPs received among Liberals and the peasantry gave rise to distaste.

III. Intrigue in the Borough

The Irish Reform Bill introduced in March 1831 presaged the end of the domination of the electoral representation of Carlow borough by the interest of the Earl of Charleville.⁶² In introducing the bill, the Chief Secretary specifically mentioned Carlow, its population of 8,000 and 13 electors, as he laid out plans to drastically widen the franchise.⁶³ Although the Irish bill was overshadowed by the principal reform bill, the implications were quickly recognised by Liberals in Carlow.⁶⁴ The realisation that the borough would be 'open' prompted a number of candidates to offer themselves in advance of the announcement of a general election. These

⁵⁷ *CC*, 5 July 1831, 18 Aug. 1831.

⁵⁸ *WWC*, 3 Sept. 1831. The same courtesy was extended to Captain Paul Carter, a liberal Protestant of St Austen's Abbey, Tullow with the reapers refusing to accept even refreshment at his expense, see *CS*, 18 Aug. 1832.

⁵⁹ It was reported that landholders could not secure harvest labour at rates of 7s 6d per day; at the harvest in 1819, rates of 3s 6d were considered 'enormous' sum. Generally agricultural labourers could expect 1s per day; see *SNL*, 20 Aug. 1819, *Second report of evidence from the select committee on the state of the poor in Ireland*, HC, 1830 [cd 654], p. 374; *WWC*, 20 Aug. 1831; *CMP*, 25 Aug. 1831; *Comet*, 4 Sept. 1831.

⁶⁰ *FJ*, 14 Sept. 1831; *CMP*, 19 Sept. 1831.

⁶¹ *CMP*, 20 Oct. 1831.

⁶² Peter Jupp, 'Urban politics in Ireland, 1801-31', p. 121.

⁶³ *Hansard (Commons)*, 21 Mar. 1831, Vol. 3, Cols. 862-65.

⁶⁴ Gash, *Politics in the age of Peel*, p. 34.

included an unnamed member of the Latouche family who, writing from London on 14 July, asked electors to ‘keep themselves disengaged’ and local barrister and ardent O’Connellite Patrick R. Welch who published several electoral addresses in August 1832, but did not persist in his bid.⁶⁵ Two candidates with more immediate connections to the area revealed the division in the borough between O’Connellites and more moderate Liberals who looked to Bishop Doyle for leadership. W.F. Finn, an O’Connellite, was invited by a meeting of inhabitants of Carlow borough to stand following a meeting on 8 August. He addressed the borough immediately stressing his commitment to ‘self-legislation’. Nicholas Aylward Vigors followed soon afterwards and while averring his support for reform, quoting Dr Doyle directly, he signalled his strong support for the introduction of a poor law. The conflict between Finn and Vigors became a proxy for disagreements between Doyle and O’Connell concerning the need for a poor law and on the bona fides of Lord Anglesey. Thomas Finn, the outspoken and splenetic brother of W.F. Finn further heightened tensions when he published a scurrilous open letter to bishop Doyle in the *Carlow Standard* in defence of O’Connell. Finn questioned Doyle’s political integrity and declared that he was neither consistent nor trustworthy and claimed that he had engaged in nepotism.⁶⁶

This was not the first time that Finn engaged in personal abuse of Doyle and contributed to emerging tensions among Liberals.⁶⁷ They were manifest later in the summer when it was suggested that Vigors had agreed to stand in the county rather than the borough. It was also alleged that Thomas Haughton, chairman of the Liberal election committee for the 1831 contest, had misappropriated funds provided by Francis Bruen and was discouraging Bruen from standing again in the 1832 contest. Recognising that he had no chance of success in Carlow borough, W.F. Finn eventually opted to stand in Kilkenny despite the exhortations of the *Carlow Sentinel* not to let the ‘jobbers’ and the ‘faction’ win. It was not until November that the long-anticipated contender emerged.⁶⁸ On the invitation of the householders of Carlow borough, Francis Bruen eventually announced his candidacy on 9 November 1832. This was the culmination of his covert campaign to split the Liberal vote with the intention of harvesting the support of the erstwhile O’Connellite supporters of W.F. Finn.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ *CMP*, 18 July 1831, *SRCCC*, 21 July 1831. The address appeared in the following three issues of the *Carlow Morning Post* and did not reappear. It has not been possible to identify the individual. Welch approached O’Connell in October 1830 with a view to establishing a Liberal Club in Carlow. His zeal for repeal sprang from the fact that his father, who sat for Callan in the Irish parliament, voted for union, see *CMP*, 20 Aug. 1832; Welch to O’Connell, 5 Oct 1830 (NLI, O’Connell papers, Ms. 13648 (4); Johnson-Liik, *HIP*, vi, p. 511.

⁶⁶ *CSTD*, 2 Feb. 1832. It was additionally hurtful that Finn chose the rabidly Tory *Standard* to carry his invective although this was probably because neither of the other two local papers would have carried it.

⁶⁷ Fitzpatrick, *Correspondence*, ii, p. 380.

⁶⁸ *CS*, 1 Sept. 1832.

⁶⁹ *CS*, 10 Nov. 1832.

IV. Candidates for the County

Horace Rochfort claimed to have revised his political opinions and spoke in favour of reform at a reform meeting in Carlow on 16 November 1831.⁷⁰ However, he was summarily rejected as a Liberal candidate in the election that was imminent at a dinner held that evening where his dalliance with Conservatives in the election just a few months earlier was characterised as unforgiveable.⁷¹ Rumours that Milley-Doyle was to return to military life, although initially denied, proved accurate.⁷² Walter Blackney's candidacy was confirmed at a meeting of freeholders on 5 October and it was agreed that he would go forward free of expense. A committee was formed at the same meeting to find a second Liberal candidate.⁷³ Among those considered was J.J. Bagot of Castle Bagot, a Catholic with a considerable interest in Carlow and who had been active in the emancipation campaign and John G.B. Ponsonby, son of Lord Duncannon.⁷⁴ Richard Lalor Sheil was approached by Edward Fitzgerald, a stalwart of the Liberal Club, and peremptorily refused.⁷⁵ The Conservative press delighted in the difficulties faced by the Liberal Club.⁷⁶ It was also sarcastically suggested that the liberal candidacy was available to anyone who could raise £1,000 provided they were prepared 'obey the commands of his nominee in every particular'.⁷⁷ Conservatives contended that the Liberals would have to:

Ransack every rotten borough, and hunt every outcast politician in the country, in order to discover some crazy tool to serve their purposes, for it is now well known that their petitions and solicitations were rejected by every man of honor [sic], principle or character in the country.⁷⁸

Although Bishop Doyle was careful not to engage publicly in electioneering or politics in Carlow, the effort to find a suitable candidate was driven and steered largely by him.⁷⁹ Thomas Wyse, a stalwart of the Catholic Association was approached by Doyle. Writing to him

⁷⁰ *CMP*, 17 Nov. 1831.

⁷¹ *CMP*, 21 Nov. 1831.

⁷² *CMP*, 2 July, 1 Oct 1832; *LKC*, 4 Aug. 1832.

⁷³ *CMP*, 8 Oct. 1832.

⁷⁴ *WXF*, 5 Oct. 1832, *WM*, 24 Oct. 1832, *CMP*, 25 Oct. 1832.

⁷⁵ *CS*, 27 Oct. 1832.

⁷⁶ See for example the *LE*, 13 Oct 1832 which ridiculed efforts to find a candidate as well as mocking the manner of Milley-Doyle's departure for Portugal.

⁷⁷ *CS*, 3 Nov. 1832.

⁷⁸ *CS*, 8 Dec. 1831.

⁷⁹ Writing to his long time correspondent Mary Coney on 22 December 1832, Doyle remarked of the imminent county election that 'I have taken no part in it, except to preserve united the Liberal interest', see Fitzpatrick, *Correspondence*, ii, p. 448. Following emancipation, Doyle had also announced that he would end his involvement in politics, see p. 115 above.

just before the election, Doyle remarked ‘I regret exceedingly that you were not able to accede to our wishes communicated through Mr. Vigors. You would without doubt have been returned for this county and at a very small expense’.⁸⁰ Vigors continued to be the bishop’s conduit through which Thomas Wallace was eventually recruited.⁸¹ His candidacy was greeted with enthusiasm.⁸² It was public knowledge that the invitation had been at the behest of Bishop Doyle.⁸³ Wallace was a high-profile Dublin-based barrister who, as representative for Yarmouth in the Isle of Wight and then Drogheda, supported emancipation and was broadly liberal in outlook.⁸⁴ Like Doyle, he had an uneasy relationship with O’Connell. He had publicly disagreed with O’Connell over his controversial conduct of the libel trial of Henry Magee in November 1813, and the ill-feeling between the two was augmented some years later when Wallace, a Protestant, was called to the inner bar when O’Connell felt that he had been passed over.⁸⁵ While O’Connell supported Wallace in his electoral campaign in Drogheda in May 1831, describing his career at the bar as ‘manly and independent’, he also acknowledged the past political differences that ‘would only terminate with our lives’.⁸⁶ Although Wallace was acknowledged as an able representative for Drogheda, O’Connell did not support his candidacy in 1832 as he refused to take the ‘Repeal Pledge’.⁸⁷ This was an electoral device used by O’Connell in the 1832 election where only candidates who vowed to support repeal of the Act of Union would be supported by him.⁸⁸ Indicatively, none of the candidates considered by Doyle for Carlow were in the orbit of O’Connell or took the pledge.⁸⁹

V. Electioneering in the County

The passing of the Irish Reform Bill admitted new classes of leaseholders to the franchise in county and borough constituencies although it was soon apparent that government had little idea of the increase in the electorate that would result.⁹⁰ In boroughs, the new ten pound

⁸⁰ Doyle to Wyse, 11 Dec. 1832 (NLI, Wyse Papers, Ms 15,024 (14) (b)).

⁸¹ *Report from the select committee on Carlow election petitions*, HC, 1836 [cd 89], p. 103.

⁸² *CMP*, 6 Dec. 1832.

⁸³ *The Times*, 8 Dec. 1832.

⁸⁴ Fisher (ed), *Commons*, vii, p. 619.

⁸⁵ Geoghegan, *King Dan*, p. 136; p. 245.

⁸⁶ *DMR*, 5 May 1831.

⁸⁷ Wallace held that a reformed imperial parliament should be given a chance before repeal was pursued and declined to go forward for Drogheda as he wished to avoid a contest on that basis, see *DROJNL* 13 Oct. 1832; *DEP*, 18 Oct. 1832.

⁸⁸ Macintyre, *The liberator*, p. 53; MacDonagh, *The emancipist*, p. 71.

⁸⁹ Rev James Maher later denied that candidates had been selected in opposition to the views of O’Connell as neither he nor bishop Doyle consulted with or cared what his views were, see *Report from the select committee on bribery at elections*, HC, 1835, [547], p. 592.

⁹⁰ K. Theodore Hoppen, ‘Politics, the law, and the nature of the Irish electorate 1832-1850’ *The English Historical Review*, 92:65, (1977), p. 747.

householders became the largest group of voters exceeding resident freeman who retained the franchise.⁹¹ As before in the county and now also in the borough, it was up to freeholders or leaseholders to apply for registration at special registration sessions overseen by the county assistant barrister.⁹² Once a freeholder registered successfully, he was granted a 'certificate' which entitled him to vote for eight years without further investigation regardless of whether he retained possession or occupation of the property that provided the basis for qualification.⁹³ Liberals and Conservatives were actuated to take an intense interest in registration sessions as in effect all voters were disenfranchised until they registered under the new act.⁹⁴ Summaries of and detailed guidance on the regulations surrounding registration were published in both Liberal and Conservative newspapers.⁹⁵ In Carlow there were calls for the formation of Liberal Clubs in each barony to assist potential freeholders to register and to 'inspire the fearful with courage; win back the recreant to the cause of his country and by expostulation and remonstrance shame the waverer to his duty'.⁹⁶ While Carlow already hosted an Independence Club, Liberal Clubs were quickly established in Leighlinbridge and Borris.⁹⁷ Nicholas Aylward Vigors also opened a committee room in Carlow in September to assist freeholders with registration.⁹⁸

Conservatives were equally active in calling for the establishment of committees in each county to ensure the registration of Conservative voters.⁹⁹ Joseph Napier of The Protestant Conservative Society in Dublin wrote to William Burgess, a lay impropiator of tithes in Carlow, and suggested that a Conservative Club be established in the county and:

that it should raise funds through a subscription linked to land ownership and that it should engage a professional man whose business it shall be to attend the Quarter Sessions, there to investigate the leases of all freeholders offering themselves to register, and to oppose or assist them according to the interest they may be likely to support.¹⁰⁰

There were also moves towards establishing a Conservative Club in the county located in a new establishment to be called the Club House Hotel.¹⁰¹ Recognising the value of such a base for political purposes, Henry Bruen funded renovations to the premises.¹⁰²

⁹¹ Gash, *Politics in the age of Peel*, p. 53.

⁹² Hoppen, *Elections, politics, and society in Ireland, 1832-1885*, p. 8.

⁹³ K. Theodore Hoppen, 'The Franchise and electoral politics in England and Ireland 1832-1885' *History*, 70:229, (1985), p. 207.

⁹⁴ Macintyre, *The liberator*, p. 88.

⁹⁵ *FJ*, 11 Aug., 16 Aug. 1832; *CMP*, 13 Aug., 20 Aug. 1832; *DEM*, 7 Sept. 1832.

⁹⁶ *CMP*, 9 July 1832.

⁹⁷ *CS*, 19 May, *CMP*, 2 Aug., 27 Aug. 1832.

⁹⁸ *CMP*, 10 Sept. 1832.

⁹⁹ *DEM*, 15 Sept. 1832.

¹⁰⁰ Burgess experienced great difficulty in collecting tithes and frequently complained to government about it. He gave evidence to the Select Committee on Tithes in Ireland in March 1832 and feared that he would be murdered as a result. See Burgess to Lindsay (Bp of Kildare), 28 Dec. 1831 (NAI, CSORP, 1831/3314/2), *CMP*, 26 July 1832.

¹⁰¹ *CS*, 7 April 1832.

¹⁰² *Estate Accounts July-December 1832*, (NLI, Bruen Papers, Ms 48,336-5).

Preparations among Conservatives were well underway when the candidacy of Thomas Wallace was announced. It was clear that Henry Bruen would be a parliamentary candidate.¹⁰³ Bruen began canvassing in the absence of a second Conservative candidate in May.¹⁰⁴ Initially unwilling, Thomas Kavanagh was persuaded to go forward on 23 November following an address to him by almost the entirety of the gentry in Carlow, prominent among whom was the sheriff John Whelan and fifteen magistrates.¹⁰⁵ It was noted that his candidacy was aided by ‘his health so much recovered’ and that he, together with Bruen, would be supported by the ‘influence and respectability of the resident gentry’ which would ensure that the county would no longer be ‘disgraced by returning the nominees of Mr O’Connell and Dr Doyle’.¹⁰⁶ Kavanagh’s announcement was unusual and the propriety of the sheriff’s endorsement drew comment from O’Connell, who suggested that it provided grounds for Whelan’s removal from office.¹⁰⁷ The announcement was a powerful statement by Conservatives in Carlow who, by choosing and very publicly endorsing the candidacy of the two largest landholders in the county, appealed to traditional electoral influence based on landholding to regain political ascendancy.

Even before his announcement, Kavanagh embarked on electoral preparations. While confident that he could command at least one of his tenants’ votes, the attempt by his agent Charles Doyne to extract pledges from them to use their second vote to support Henry Bruen at a meeting in Borris on 19 October proved less successful. Many either didn’t attend or refused to sign the address and supportive resolutions presented to Kavanagh later that day.¹⁰⁸ The resolutions expressed attachment to Kavanagh and the intention to look to him for political advice rather than, in what was a clear reference to the local clergy, the ‘unconstitutional bodies’ that had before ‘unconstitutionally intruded’ into the barony and intimidated freeholders preventing them from freely exercising the franchise. In reply, Kavanagh stressed the ‘identity of interest’ that existed between him and the tenantry and he promised to obstruct the actions of agitators by all legal means.¹⁰⁹ Within days, another meeting of a large group of the Kavanagh tenantry disavowed the address and, insisting that they could not pledge their votes to their landlord, they affirmed their respect for their ‘revered, patriotic and much calumniated clergy’. Many whose names were added to the address denied all involvement in either the meeting or the resolutions that followed it.¹¹⁰ In the event, while Kavanagh did not make any effort to

¹⁰³ CS, 31 Mar. 1832.

¹⁰⁴ CS, 19 May 1832.

¹⁰⁵¹⁰⁵ CS, 24 Nov. 1832. Signatories included Lords Courtown, Beresford, Stopford, Aldborough and Frankfort who were all landholders in county Carlow. The list contained an impressive number of magistrates given that there were just forty-four holders of the commission of the peace in the county at the time and that six of these were either military or stipendiary and a further four (Bruen, Kavanagh, Blackney & Vigors) were declared parliamentary candidates, see *A return of the names of magistrates included in the Commission of the Peace in Ireland up to the latest period, corrected up to the 1st May 1832*, HC, 1832 [cd 531], p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ *Warder*, 1 Dec. 1832, *WM*, 1 Dec. 1832.

¹⁰⁷ *KKJ*, 1 Dec. 1832; *DUBOVR*, 1 Dec 1832.

¹⁰⁸ *CMP*, 25 Oct. 1832.

¹⁰⁹ CS, 27 Oct. 1832.

¹¹⁰ *CMP*, 15 Nov. 1832.

distance himself from the matter, it was still plain that a fundamental change had occurred in the attitude of his tenantry and that they were no longer the loyally malleable electoral resource that they had once been.

Not all landlords appealed, as Kavanagh did, to the well-established idea of the benevolent bond between landlord and tenant. Others attempted to adopt the approach fostered by the Protestant Conservative Society of replacing Catholic tenants with more politically reliable Protestants.¹¹¹ In the wake of the 1831 election, Field Marshal Beresford issued ejectment notices to a number of his tenants in Slyguff whose holdings had fallen out of lease. He made it plain that those who would not vote in accordance with his wishes could not expect new leases.¹¹² Henry Bruen too evicted uncooperative tenants so that by the end of February 1832 it was claimed that 463 Catholic tenants had been ejected from the Beresford and Bruen estates.¹¹³ In addition, Bruen threatened to evict those tenants that did not pay their tithes.¹¹⁴ Bruen also adopted the tactic of demanding rents in full from his tenants at short notice as a means of influencing their votes.¹¹⁵ More immediately, Bruen summoned his tenants to a meeting in Strawhall on 11 September 1832 and told them that he expected both of their votes on pain of eviction.¹¹⁶ The ultimatum was not well received by the tenantry: the *Carlow Morning Post* commented that times had changed and ‘these vagabonds (his tenantry) will give their votes to whom they please’.¹¹⁷ As the election neared, the spectre of a recalcitrant tenantry did not dematerialize: Bruen called a meeting of his tenantry of the large townland of Ballyhacket to be held in Carlow on 2 December, but none appeared.¹¹⁸ Bruen realised that the deference that his tenants had formerly shown to him could not be relied on in the future.

¹¹¹ Landlords were advised to avoid granting leases to Catholics through which they might qualify for the electoral franchise and subsequently vote against them. It is better, the Society counselled ‘to spike these guns which we know we cannot bring with us and which the enemy will turn on ourselves’, see Anon, *Plain and practical hints for Protestants*, p. 13.

¹¹² *CMP*, 18 Aug. 1832.

¹¹³ *LKC*, 22 Feb. 1832.

¹¹⁴ *CS*, 25 Feb. 1832.

¹¹⁵ *CMP*, 15 Oct. 1832. These details were used against Bruen at the opening of the election in December 1832 and were not subsequently contradicted, see *CMP*, 20 Dec. 1832, *bribery*, p. 570.

¹¹⁶ In the 1832 contest, Bruen insisted that his tenants’ second vote should be given to Thomas Kavanagh, see *Bribery*, p. 626.

¹¹⁷ *CMP*, 13 Sept. 1832.

¹¹⁸ *CMP*, 3 Dec. 1832.

VI. The 1832 General Election

When W.F. Finn withdrew from the contest in the borough, most of his supporters moved to support Francis Bruen.¹¹⁹ This was underlined by a canvass conducted in Carlow borough by Francis Bruen in mid-November when he was accompanied by his brother Henry, Edward Dowling the former owner of the *Carlow Sentinel*, magistrate William Fishbourne, Thomas Fisher and Simeon Clarke, the latter two both supporters of W.F. Finn.¹²⁰ Earlier in the summer, Henry Bruen insinuated himself with the local Trades' Union on its formation by promising to support them with the caveat that they should guard against infiltration by those who would have them act illegally.¹²¹ He assured the Union of his continued support as 'a friend and neighbour' in May.¹²² This unexpected support from Bruen was seen by those allied to Bishop Doyle as another attempt to sow dissent within Carlow Liberals.¹²³ By November, it was apparent that the support of the Trades' Union for W.F. Finn transferred to Francis Bruen.¹²⁴ This was copper fastened at a meeting of the Trades' Union in Carlow on 26 November when Henry and Francis Bruen were admitted as honorary members together with other well-known Conservatives.¹²⁵ Bruen recognised the need for some 'popular' support in the borough where there was no landed 'interest' and he secured this by patronising the local Trades' Union.

While the winter of 1831-32 saw a constant stream of requests from magistrates and clergymen in Carlow for military and police assistance mainly connected with the collection of tithes, tensions heightened in the spring and summer of 1832.¹²⁶ The temperature was raised by a failed auction of cattle distrained for non-payment of tithes in May 1832.¹²⁷ Before the summer assizes in July 1832, John Whelan the high sheriff was successful in his request for

¹¹⁹ CS, 17 Nov. 1832.

¹²⁰ CMP, 19 Nov. 1832.

¹²¹ CS, 21 Apr. 1832.

¹²² CS, 2 June 1832.

¹²³ CMP, 7 June 1832. Bruen's activity was later characterised by James Maher as 'skulking' and his association with the Trades' Union little more than to use it as a means 'to bully and intimidate in the streets of Carlow', see CMP, 20 Dec. 1832.

¹²⁴ CMP, 1 Oct. 1832, 15 Nov. 1832.

¹²⁵ CMP, 13 Dec. 1832. It was rumoured that either Carroll or Dowling had been presented with a horse by Henry Bruen as a reward for their services, see CMP, 6 Dec. 1832.

¹²⁶ Rev Samuel Roberts of Leighlinbridge was particularly active in making representations to government. For example, he warned of the danger of the county slipping into 'complete anarchy' in September 1831 and he sought authority to conduct a general search for arms in November 1831. Rev John Whitty was aggrieved when he was refused permission to raise a corps of yeomanry in Rathvilly 1831, see Roberts to Gosset, 21 Sept. 1831 (NAI, CSORP, 1831/1187/1); Roberts to Stanley 18 Nov. 1831 (NAI, CSORP, 1831/872); Whitty to Gosset, 16 Dec. 1831 (NAI, CSORP, 1831/3180/1).

¹²⁷ The distrained cattle were offered for sale in Carlow on 21 May 1832. Although the estimate of a crowd of 20,000 at the auction was an exaggeration, the real figure being closer to 10,000, it was nonetheless a significant gathering. After 5 days, no buyers came forward. The cattle were returned to their owner in what was seen as a victory for the anti-tithe campaign, see CS, 25 May 1832, *Report from the select committee on the state of Ireland*, HC, 1832 [cd 677], p. 313.

military aid as he feared unrest due to ‘party feeling’ in the county.¹²⁸ Meanwhile, Sir Thomas Butler sought detachments of military to counter possible unrest due to combinations among harvest workers in August.¹²⁹ By November, complaints of unrest had assumed a political character. Thomas Kavanagh requested a military force in St Mullins to counter the ‘nighttime gangs’ from Graigue (Co. Kilkenny) ‘under the command of the sufficiently notorious priest Martin Doyle’ who sought to intimidate the people into non-payment of tithes.¹³⁰ Anticipating unrest, William Fishbourne, the sovereign of Carlow borough, requested extra police for the borough election as he expected ‘a large crowd from the Queen’s County side’ as did the county sheriff John Whelan, who forecast that ‘a very serious disturbance is likely to occur’.¹³¹ It was agreed to send a chief constable and fifty constables to Carlow for the borough election.¹³² The sheriff subsequently requested that they remain until after the chairing in the county election.¹³³ The gentry were not prepared to leave matters in official hands: at a meeting on 6 December at which they agreed that Kavanagh and Bruen were suitable candidates, they voiced dissatisfaction with the behaviour of Liberals in the last election and undertook to ‘use all lawful means to secure to every elector the fullest opportunity of voting for the candidate whom he prefers’. This they intended to do by exercising their power as magistrates or through the use of special constables.¹³⁴ Conservatives clearly expected robust tactics from Liberals and the Catholic clergy at the poll and were prepared to counter any popular unrest with force if necessary.

The borough election which began on 13 December and concluded two days later, saw Vigors victorious with 145 votes to Bruen’s 120. From the Liberal viewpoint, this was a success, the result welcomed with ‘no shouting, no uproar; all was calm and tranquil: no surprise’. Unrest emanated from the Conservative side with Bruen reported as having ‘delivered a violent phillipic against the clergy of Carlow’.¹³⁵ The chairing of Vigors took place on 17 December, the procession visiting both bishop Doyle’s residence at Braganza and Carlow College, thus acknowledging the influence and exertions of the prelate and his clergy.¹³⁶ Conservatives regarded proceedings as having been less decorous and it was reported that the first day of the election ended in a riot when some Catholic freeholders arrived to cast their votes in Francis Bruen’s favour. This resulted in the court house being cleared by police and a

¹²⁸ Whelan to Gosset, 16 July 1832 (NAI, CSORP, 1832/3353).

¹²⁹ Butler to Gosset, 10 Aug. 1832 (NAI, CSORP, 1832/3863).

¹³⁰ Kavanagh to Gosset, 17 Nov. 1832 (NAI, CSORP, 1832/6171/5).

¹³¹ Fishbourne was referring Graigue which is that part of Carlow municipal area that was in Queens County whose inhabitants were considered to be rougher, see Fishbourne to Singleton (Police Magistrate), 1 Dec. 1832 (NAI, CSORP, 1832/5958/8); Whelan to Battersby, 9 Dec. 1832 (NAI, CSORP, 1832/7849/7).

¹³² Singleton to Gosset, 9 Dec. 1832 (NAI, CSORP, 1832/5958/7).

¹³³ Whelan to Gosset, 14 Dec. 1832 (NAI, CSORP, 1832/5958/3).

¹³⁴ CS, 8 Dec. 1832.

¹³⁵ *CMP*, 17 Dec. 1832.

¹³⁶ *CMP*, 20 Dec. 1832.

detachment of the special constables that had been sworn in that morning.¹³⁷ The incident prompted John Whelan, the sheriff, to ask again that the extra police remain in Carlow until the conclusion of the county election.¹³⁸ It was alleged throughout the election, that Catholic clergy used undue influence on Catholic voters even threatening to withhold the sacraments from them if they supported Bruen.¹³⁹ Thomas Harris Carroll insisted afterwards that priests had behaved very improperly in the polling booths, openly coercing freeholders to vote for Vigors regardless of their own preference.¹⁴⁰ In general, the victory of Vigors in the borough was seen by Liberals as a vindication of Liberal ideas but it was viewed by Conservatives as the product of clerical activism and intimidation.

Table 8.3: County Carlow Daily Poll - December 1832				
	Bruen	Kavanagh	Blackney	Wallace
Wednesday 19th	290	286	263	264
Thursday 20th	142	137	158	157
Friday 21st	49	45	115	115
Saturday 22nd	2	2	121	121
Gross	483	470	657	657
Sources: Walker, <i>election results</i> , p. 51; <i>Carlow Morning Post</i> , 22 Dec. 1832, <i>Belfast Newsletter</i> , 25 Dec. 1832				

The county election, which began on 18 December, commenced with an extraordinary invective against Henry Bruen by Fr James Maher.¹⁴¹ Maher criticised Bruen on the grounds of intellectual capacity, his principles and his conduct as a landlord accusing him of enriching himself ‘from the bowels, sweat and rags of his serfs’. Maher’s conduct drew a warning from the presiding assessor as well as expressions of outrage from Bruen and from Thomas Finn.¹⁴² The assault on Bruen as a landlord was continued by Fr Thomas Tyrrell who cited several

¹³⁷ CS, 20 Dec. 1832.

¹³⁸ Whelan to Gosset, 24 Dec. 1832 (NAI, CSORP, 1832/6261/2).

¹³⁹ CS, 17 Dec. 1832.

¹⁴⁰ *Bribery*, p. 641

¹⁴¹ Maher was PP of Goresbridge and Paulstown and a close associate of Bishop Doyle. He acted as Doyle’s secretary in the closing months of the prelate’s life and would become even more outspoken on political and social matters, see Comerford, *Kildare and Leighlin*, i, p. 177.

¹⁴² CMP, 20 Dec. 1832.

instances of tenantry being unfairly coerced in the exercise of their electoral franchise.¹⁴³ Tyrrell also accused Bruen of being central to the Orange toasts proposed during the summer assizes. In contrast Bruen was lauded by his proposer Captain William Paul Butler of Bloomfield who urged freeholders ‘to preserve those ties which hitherto existed between you and a resident gentry, who are your natural protectors’. The caustic contributions of the two priests were later attributed by Conservatives to the influence of Bishop Doyle who had instilled

the political virus into the minds of men, some of whom, were, before (they) came into his diocese, the mildest, the most unobtrusive, and the most inoffensive clergymen in Ireland.¹⁴⁴

From the outset, there was a sharp, adversarial edge to the contest that had not been seen previously in an election in Carlow. From the details of the poll carried in table 8.3 it can be seen that the Conservative candidates made a promising start but as the contest went on, their performance faltered before collapsing on the final day of polling. While the Liberals also saw their numbers fall after the initial rush on the first day, support remained steady and actually increased slightly on the final day suggesting a greater level of underlying organisation. The Liberals achieved a notable victory, but the combative character of electoral politics in Carlow town and county that persisted for the following decades had been inaugurated.

¹⁴³ Tyrrell was initially a reluctant participant in politics but would become more prominent after the death of Bishop Doyle, see P.J. Kavanagh, ‘A priest in politics: Rev Thomas Tyrrell, pp, Tinryland 1823-43’ *Carlovana*, 2:25 (1976), p. 19.

¹⁴⁴ *CS*, 22 Dec. 1832.

Conclusion

The general election in 1832 saw the return of three Liberal candidates in contests in both borough and county producing victories for popular opinion. The long-established system, where political interest linked to land ownership decided representation was overturned without being tested in the uncontested 1831 election when Conservatives fielded just a single, credible candidate. In the 1832 election, Conservatives fielded three well-seasoned and well-resourced candidates, but they too could not contain the surge in popular opinion. Liberals won a convincing victory and doubly so in the county as they fielded a candidate in Thomas Wallace, who had no connection beyond having the approval of Bishop Doyle. At the beginning of 1833, it seemed in Carlow that the electoral dominance of the ascendancy in Carlow had come to an end.

Chapter 9: Enmity and Entrenchment: The Pendulum of Political Power, 1832-41

Introduction

Radicalism and priestcraft have triumphed – we hope but for a season – over rank, property and constitutional principles, and the wholesome and legitimate influence of the kind and resident landlord has been blasted by the fetid breath of popish corruption.¹

The Liberal victories in Carlow and county Carlow in the 1832 general election were received with consternation by Conservatives who bemoaned the fracturing of ‘those ties that mutually existed between landlord and tenant’ and the manner in which freeholders were ‘dragged to the hustings like sheep to the slaughter’.² The Liberal successes in Carlow were described by the Protestant Conservative Society as the product of ‘the exertions of the priests backed by a system of intimidation of the worst possible description’.³ A publicly-funded petition against the result was raised citing intimidation of voters, improper registration of voters and that neither Blackney nor Wallace were landholders in Carlow thus rendering them ineligible to sit as members for the county. Particular blame was attached to the activities of the Catholic clergy in general and to the utterings of Fr James Maher in particular.⁴ It was decided that the return of Wallace and Blackney would be defended by the electors themselves rather than the elected members, with costs to be defrayed by public subscription.⁵ Conservatives immediately suggested that the Catholic clergy resorted to practical extortion to raise funds and imposed a ‘poll tax’ on farmers based on the

¹ *KM*, 26 Dec. 1832.

² *CS*, 22 Dec. 1832.

³ *Warder*, 2 Jan. 1833.

⁴ The petition fund was administered by Henry Bruen and collected £1,320 from 79 individuals, see *A notebook listing subscribers and subscriptions for Carlow Election Petition Fund (1833)*, (NLI, Bruen Papers, Ms 48,338/13), *JHC*, Vol. 88, pp 114-117 (26 Feb. 1833).

⁵ *DEP*, 23 Mar. 1833. George Latouche was expected to carry the bulk of the cost of the petition and had expressed the intention of standing as a candidate in the county if, or when, Walter Blackney chose to stand aside, see Fermor to Gosset, 12 Mar. 1833 (NAI, CSORP, 1833/1153/1).

numbers employed by them.⁶ It was observed that the Conservative challengers were better resourced financially ‘and can afford to give annoyance – but their sun is set in Carlow’.⁷ A committee was appointed to examine Conservative claims and was swift in its decision to uphold the return of the two Liberals.⁸ The manner in which both sides raised funds and arranged representation indicated a sophistication of organisation that was new. It also reflected the polarisation that was now a feature of political discourse in Carlow. This set the tone for elections for the next decade.

I. Conflict in the Civil Sphere

Bitterness extended to nervousness among the gentry in the opening months of 1833 when, as they had done after the 1831 election, they renewed their efforts to buttress the machinery of justice in the county. They were justified this time; even before the election, an increase in ‘outrages’ involving attacks on houses and the theft of firearms was apparent.⁹ A meeting in Carlow on 9 January agreed that the state of the county was ‘becoming most alarming’ and called for an increase in the numbers of police and military to assist in upholding the law.¹⁰ This was agreed on a temporary basis. Unhappy with the temporary nature of the increase, Henry Bruen advised Dublin Castle that the Catholic clergy sought unsuccessfully to prevail on the ‘misguided peasantry to desist’ from lawbreaking in an effort to thwart a permanent increase and concluded that this demonstrated ‘how much easier it is to incite the people to violate the laws than to bring them back to habits of obedience’.¹¹ A permanent increase had been sanctioned by then.¹² It was clear that the gentry, magistracy and the constabulary saw themselves in opposition to the Liberals led by the Catholic clergy. As Bishop Doyle’s health disimproved and he withdrew from the political scene, Fr James Maher replaced him as the focus of ascendancy disenchantment.¹³ Maher continued to agitate on civil matters in a very public manner. For example, he was accused in open court in December 1833 by the police magistrate Matthew Singleton of interfering and

⁶ CC, 14 May 1833.

⁷ FJ, 26 Mar. 1833.

⁸ W.E. Cockburn & W. Carpenter Rowe, *Cases of controverted elections, determined by the eleventh parliament of the United Kingdom* (London, 1833), pp 438–451, JHC vol. 88, p. 385 (14 May 1833), JHC vol. 88, p. 414 (20 May 1833).

⁹ Battersby to Duncannon, 8 Dec. 1832 (NAI, CSORP, 1832/6147/2), Returns covering the period October 1832 to 8 January 1833 and a separate return for January 1833 show marked increases in crime, see Gosset to Harvey, 18 Jan. 1833 (NAI, CSORP, 1833/214/6).

¹⁰ Memorial of Carlow Magistrates, 9 Jan. 1833 (NAI, CSORP, 1833/214/8). It is noteworthy that the resolutions were not signed by Liberal magistrates such as Walter Blackney, Thomas Haughton or Howard Moore.

¹¹ Bruen to Gosset, 14 Feb. 1833 (NAI, CSORP, 1833/214/2).

¹² Harvey to Gosset, 13 Feb. 1833 (NAI, CSORP, 1833/214/3).

¹³ Fitzpatrick, *Correspondence*, ii, p. 462.

threatening the crown witness Bridget Carthy.¹⁴ Maher, supported by Liberal magistrates Vigors and Moore, denied the charge.¹⁵

This was viewed by the local gentry as a conspiracy against Singleton by ‘local incendiaries’.¹⁶ Maher brought the matter to the attention of government who duly dispatched William H. Curran to Carlow to conduct an inquiry.¹⁷ Rather than face a full inquiry, Singleton offered an apology in open court on 22 January 1834.¹⁸ The apology was hailed by Liberals as a great victory over the Conservative ascendancy in Carlow.¹⁹ Unsurprisingly, Conservatives viewed it as an example of where the Catholic clergy again dictated to the Whig government and their ‘mobocracy’ and was:

a just conception of Liberty we would enjoy under the ruffian domination of a lawless and brutal rabble, who even upon this occasion, could not conceal their hatred to every individual who presumes to form a different opinion from their leaders²⁰

The Conservative mindset in Carlow in the early 1830s saw the gentry locked in an apocalyptic battle with a ‘priest-ridden’ Liberal party supported by newly appointed magistrates who were intent on nothing less than anarchy. These magistrates N.A. Vigors, Howard Moore, Thomas Haughton and Walter Blackney were regarded as a ‘Quadruple Alliance’ [sic] of renegade magistrates who had set themselves ‘in opposition to the general body of magistrates of this county’,²¹ Maher’s persistence in his advocacy of the rights of the ‘people’ were significant; he was, for example, instrumental in the dismissal of Sub-Constable Thomas Sands from the police for threatening behaviour towards a woman during the quarter sessions in October 1834.²² Conservatives deemed it ‘a monstrous case’ that could only encourage the mob to insolence towards the police.²³ In the same vein, following representations to government regarding a perceived Conservative religious and political bias in the composition of the board of governors of Carlow Lunatic Asylum, four Liberals and the Catholic bishop, Edward Nolan, were appointed.²⁴ This was regarded as another assault on what was considered a politically

¹⁴ Carthy accused Thomas and John Prandy of Carlow of entering into a conspiracy contrary to the Whiteboy Act. Carthy had been forced to move from Queen’s County to Carlow for her safety as she had previously given information against suspected Whiteboys. It was alleged that Maher had attempted to persuade Carthy to withdraw her charge against the Prandys, see *DMR*, 27 Jan. 1834.

¹⁵ *CC*, 19 Nov. 1833.

¹⁶ Singleton was regarded as an active magistrate who played a leading role in the suppression of unrest in Carlow and the colliery district adjoining Carlow, see Singleton to Gosset, 15 June 1832 (NAI, CSORP/OR, 1832/950). Conservatives regarded the affair to be no less than an assault on the magistrate, see *CS*, 16 Nov. 1833. Liberals considered his behaviour extraordinary and his apology to be a vindication of Maher, see *Pilot*, 27 Jan. 1834.

¹⁷ Littleton to Harvey, 26 Dec. 1833 (NAI, CSORP, 1833/6332).

¹⁸ *Pilot*, 27 Jan. 1834.

¹⁹ *CMP*, 25 Jan. 1834.

²⁰ *CS*, 25 Jan. 1834.

²¹ e *CS*, 8 Nov. 1834.

²² *TFF*, 12 Nov. 1834.

²³ *FJ*, 11 Nov. 1834, *DEP*, 11 Nov. 1834.

²⁴ Memorial from Carlow freeholders to the Lord Lieutenant, 7 Nov. 1834 (NAI, CSORP, 1834/4506), *CMP*, 6 Dec. 1834.

Conservative body.²⁵ As the general election of January 1835 approached, Conservatives in Carlow felt themselves under siege.

II. The 1835 Elections²⁶

Nicholas Aylward Vigors was successfully opposed by Francis Bruen in the general election in Carlow borough in January 1835. After three days of voting, Bruen was declared elected with a majority of sixteen. The political vacuum left by the death of Bishop Doyle in June 1834 had been filled by then by Daniel O'Connell who sought to use Vigors as a conduit to Carlow borough and county.²⁷ The borough election passed off without incident with Bruen's return viewed by the opposing factions in predictably partisan terms. Conservatives hailed it as 'the overthrow of that many headed monster, sacerdotal despotism'.²⁸ Liberals considered it a temporary victory for 'bribery, fraud and intrigue' and consoled themselves that it was apathy towards registration of franchises in the borough had lost them many votes.²⁹

The contest in the county proved to be a closer affair and was marked by difficulties in candidate selection followed by widespread intimidation by both sides.³⁰ While Henry Bruen was again a willing candidate for the Conservative interest in the county, Thomas Kavanagh agreed to stand only in the absence of another candidate.³¹ On the Liberal side it was widely accepted that Walter Blackney would not put himself forward again. Thomas Wallace indicated his willingness to stand and so was joined on the platform by the English Whig Richard De Lacy Evans.³² Fearing unrest, following representations from Conservatives, the town and county was inundated by 155 extra policemen and 525 extra members of the military as the election approached.³³ The already tense atmosphere was exacerbated by the bloody confrontations that occurred in Keady, Co.

²⁵ Catherine Cox, *Negotiating Insanity in the Southeast of Ireland, 1820-1900* (Manchester, 2019), p. 24. The new appointees were described as 'Whigs and Radicals', see *DEPKT*, 9 Dec. 1834.

²⁶ These elections, and particularly the part played in them by Daniel O'Connell in the absence of Bishop Doyle, have already been examined in detail by the author, see Michael Grant, *Daniel O'Connell, Bishop James Doyle, Alexander Raphael - the Politician, the Prelate and the Pastry-Maker: Politics in County Carlow, 1829 – 1835* (Unpublished MA Thesis, DCU, 2020).

²⁷ O'Connell discussed possible candidates for the county constituency with Vigors in November 1834 and described him as 'honest, independent Vigors' to Archbishop McHale when proposing him as a potential candidate for Mayo should his bid in Carlow fail, see O'Connell (ed.), *correspondence*, p. 210, p. 251.

²⁸ *CS*, 17 Jan. 1835.

²⁹ *CMP*, 17 Jan. 1835.

³⁰ There were intense discussions among the gentry in Carlow to find a candidate from within their own ranks. Both Sir Thomas Butler and Robert Clayton declined on grounds of expense and delicacy (Butler was related to Lord Anglesey and did not wish to be in collision with government). In the absence of another, Walter Newton was considered and a subscription fund was to be initiated in his support. Kavanagh pleaded ill-health but was eventually persuaded, see Rochfort to Farnham, 22 Dec. 1834 (NLI, Farnham Papers, Ms 41,146,29 (4)).

³¹ Kavanagh remarked that he agreed to stand only after a deputation of the 'principal gentlemen of the County of Carlow' had asked him, see Kavanagh to Farnham, 5 Jan. 1835 (NLI, Farnham Papers, Ms 18,612 (22) a).

³² *FJ*, 5 Jan 1835. De Lacey Evans was brother to Colonel George De Lacy Evans, MP for Westminster, see . Fisher (ed), *Commons*, v, p. 56.

³³ *Copies of correspondence between Lieutenants of counties ..., with reference to the distribution and employment of the military force*, HC 1835, [cd 170], p. 2, p. 17.

Table 9.1: Daily Poll - County Carlow General Election January 1835

Day	Candidate	Poll	Gross Poll
Tuesday	O'Connell	17	17
	Cahill	17	17
	Bruen	30	30
	Kavanagh	29	29
Wednesday	O'Connell	178	195
	Cahill	178	195
	Bruen	177	207
	Kavanagh	176	205
Thursday	O'Connell	150	345
	Cahill	150	345
	Bruen	206	413
	Kavanagh	207	412
Friday	O'Connell	93	438
	Cahill	92	437
	Bruen	108	521
	Kavanagh	108	520
Saturday	O'Connell	116	554
	Cahill	116	553
	Bruen	67	588
	Kavanagh	67	587

Sources: *CMP*, 17 Jan. 1835; Walker, *election results*, p. 50

Armagh on 1 December and in Rathcormac, Co. Cork on 18 December when police and military clashed with the peasantry resisting the distraint of cattle for tithes resulting in several deaths. The public outcry resulted in changes to government policy on tithe collection that further heightened anxiety among Conservatives in Carlow that government was abandoning them to the 'mob'.³⁴

³⁴ Higgins-McHugh, 'The 1830s tithe riots' in Sheehan and Cronin (eds), *Riotous assemblies, rebels, riots and revolts in Ireland* (Cork, 2011), pp 91–4.

**Table 9.2: Daily Breakdown of Poll - County Carlow General Election
June 1835**

Day	Candidate	Poll	Gross Poll
Tuesday	Vigors	214	214
	Raphael	214	214
	Bruen	207	207
	Kavanagh	207	207
Wednesday	Vigors	259	473
	Raphael	259	473
	Bruen	237	444
	Kavanagh	238	445
Thursday	Vigors	99	572
	Raphael	98	571
	Bruen	108	552
	Kavanagh	108	553
Friday	Vigors	55	627
	Raphael	55	626
	Bruen	19	571
	Kavanagh	18	571

Sources: *LI*, 20 June 1835; *Walker, Parliamentary Election Results*, p. 31

Given the strong military presence and the large force of police in Carlow, Wallace and Evans re-assessed their position on the eve of the election and, concluding that the chance of success was slim, both withdrew from the contest.³⁵ Fortunately for the Liberal interest, two replacement candidates in the persons of Michael Cahill (son of a Catholic merchant from Queen's County) and Maurice O'Connell (eldest son of Daniel O'Connell) were found in time for the opening of the poll on 13 January. Polling extended over five days, the poll closing with O'Connell and Cahill outpolling Bruen and Kavanagh by almost two to one on the final day. Table 9.1 provides a daily breakdown of the votes cast and shows that as the election progressed, the Liberal turnout easily surpassed that of the Conservatives. The tightness of the final gross poll also attests to the high level of organisation on each side and the prevalence of 'straight ticket

³⁵ *FJ*, 15 Jan 1835.

voting' in the constituency.³⁶ A petition against the return of Bruen and Kavanagh was lodged with parliament on several grounds including that freeholders had been subject to intimidation and that polling had been deliberately slowed down by Conservatives to exclude many Liberal voters. The committee declared the election void and a writ for a new election was moved.³⁷

While the two failed Conservative candidates agreed almost immediately to stand again, following his defeat in the borough election, Nicholas Aylward Vigors was the only obvious candidate on the Liberal side. Daniel O'Connell demonstrated his expanding political influence in Carlow when, the local Liberal Club having looked to him for guidance, he produced an affluent candidate in the person of Alexander Raphael, a former sheriff of London. The election began on 14 June and, as can be seen from table 9.2, both sides again displayed admirable organisation in producing their freeholders at the hustings. At the close of the poll, the two Liberal candidates were declared elected.

Carlow was then in what *The Times* called a 'frightful state of social disorganization'.³⁸ Agitation against tithes continued. Details of inflammatory evidence given before the Select Committee on Bribery at Elections and the suspicious death on 31 July of Fr John Walsh, the curate of Borris parish, all served to heighten sectarian and political tensions in the county.³⁹ Fr James Maher persisted in his efforts to hold the police and military to account for what he regarded as their partisan behaviour and remained the focus for Conservative invective as a result. He prompted an enquiry into the provocative actions of Sub-Constable Joseph Bates, who had whistled a sectarian tune and gestured aggressively towards Maher as he crossed Milford Bridge on 12 April 1835. The hearing found that Bates had acted improperly and he was severely reprimanded and removed to a 'remote' county.⁴⁰ Maher was also responsible for a military inquiry into the behaviour of members of the 91st Regiment which was stationed in Carlow and who had engaged in threatening nocturnal behaviour.⁴¹ Although the inquiry found no military wrongdoing, Maher's activities reinforced the Conservative characterisation of him as a 'clever intriguer' who preferred 'foul accusation' against the military in collusion with O'Connell and the Whig ministry.⁴² Given the toxic political atmosphere in Carlow, it is unsurprising that Conservatives refused to accept the county election result. A petition was lodged asserting that the Catholic clergy exerted undue influence over freeholders, that Alexander Raphael was an

³⁶ McCartney, 'Parliamentary representation', p. 496. Straight Ticket voting is a ballot where votes are cast for members of the same party, see https://www.oed.com/dictionary/straight-ticket_n?tab=meaning_and_use#1399297610.

³⁷ *JHC*, vol 90, p. 291 (27 May 1835).

³⁸ *The Times*, 4 Sept. 1835.

³⁹ Thomas Harris Carroll in his evidence to the committee claimed that Rev James Maher of Carlow and Fr James Kehoe had incited mobs to violence, see *Bribery*, HC, 1835 [cd 547], pp 638-649. For details on the death of John Walsh and the controversial and divisive court case that followed, see Cronin, *The death of Fr John Walsh*.

⁴⁰ *LI*, 16 May 1835.

⁴¹ *LI*, 17 Oct. 1835.

⁴² *The Times*, 27 Oct. 1835.

ineligible alien and that several freeholders who voted should not have qualified for the franchise.⁴³ A committee was appointed which struck off the votes of about sixty tenants on the estate of N.A. Vigors as they had not held leases for the required six months before they registered.⁴⁴ As a result, Vigors and Raphael were unseated and were replaced by Bruen and Kavanagh.⁴⁵

Rumours began to circulate shortly afterwards that Raphael had ‘purchased’ the seat in county Carlow from O’Connell and that he, the unseated candidate, had refused to provide adequate funds to defend the petition.⁴⁶ In an effort to counter this impression, Raphael published his correspondence with O’Connell in *The Times* on 31 October.⁴⁷ This caused an immediate sensation earning Raphael the odium of Liberals in Carlow while O’Connell’s status as ‘leader of the Irish nation’ was enhanced.⁴⁸ Conservatives in Carlow were quick to condemn O’Connell as ‘the Kerry mendicant’ and the Carlow Liberal Club as ‘mercenary agitators’ who had abused the trust of an electorate which had been ‘betrayed and disgracefully sold in the London market to the highest bidder’ having ‘cast off their natural protectors’.⁴⁹ Since parliament was prorogued between September 1835 and February 1836, the matter was allowed to fester.⁵⁰ When parliament resumed, Henry Bruen presented a petition from Carlow freeholders calling for an inquiry into the transactions between O’Connell and Raphael.⁵¹ O’Connell robustly denied any wrongdoing. Days later, Charles Buller presented a petition from N.A. Vigors denying any wrongdoing by Liberals and alleging that Conservative landlords in Carlow had engaged ‘in the most scandalous corruption and human intimidation’ of their tenancies by adopting a policy of the forced replacement of Catholic tenants with Protestants who would vote in accordance with their wishes.⁵² Bruen denied this and described the printing of the petition as ‘the circulation of a calumny’.⁵³ The duly appointed committee reported on 11 March finding that ‘no charge of a pecuniary charge can be attached to Mr. O’Connell’.⁵⁴ Conservative opinion was outraged and considered that regardless of the conclusions of the committee, there were grounds for the prosecution of O’Connell.⁵⁵ Liberal opinion held that the affair had strengthened rather than

⁴³ *JHC*, vol 90, p. 479, (22 Jul. 1835).

⁴⁴ Jerome William Knapp and Edward Ombler, *Cases of controverted elections in the twelfth parliament of the United Kingdom* (London, 1837), p. 469.

⁴⁵ *Report from the select committee on Carlow election petitions; together with the minutes of evidence taken before them*, HC, 1836 [cd 89], p. 10.

⁴⁶ *FJ*, 31 July 1835; *CS*, 22 Aug. 1835; *The Times*, 19 Sept. 1835.

⁴⁷ *DEPKT*, 25 Oct. 1835; *The Times*, 31 Oct. 1835.

⁴⁸ *Pilot*, 11 Nov. 1835.

⁴⁹ *CS*, 7 Nov. 1835.

⁵⁰ *JHC*, Vol 90, p. 662, (10 Sept. 1835).

⁵¹ *Hansard (Commons)*, 11 Feb. 1836, vol. 31, cols 274-276.

⁵² *JHC*, Vol 91, p. 38 (15 Feb. 1836).

⁵³ *Hansard (Commons)*, 15 Feb. 1836, Vol. 31, Cols 433-438. Vigors went on to publish a pamphlet rebutting the arguments that Bruen put forward in his speech in the Commons’ and giving parish by parish details of the ejectments, see N.A. Vigors, *a statement of the persecutions on the part of Tory landlords in the county of Carlow referred to in a petition of Nicholas Aylward Vigors Esq.* (1836, London).

⁵⁴ *Carlow election*, HC, 1836 [cd 89], p. iii.

⁵⁵ *LES*, 9 Mar. 1836; *The Times*, 14 Mar. 1836.

weakened O'Connell's standing as happens 'when a public man's character passes with impunity, or rather brightens in its progress through the crucible of public inquiry'.⁵⁶ The affair gave added edge to the ongoing jockeying for power between Liberals and Conservatives in Carlow.

III. The 1837 General Election

Thomas Kavanagh died after a long illness on 20 January 1837.⁵⁷ In anticipation of this event and the contested by-election that would follow, Conservatives held a public dinner to the two county members chaired by Lord Downes in Carlow on 17 January.⁵⁸ At the dinner, the siege mentality of Carlow Conservatives, who felt themselves to be under attack by Liberals, was evident from Captain Frizell's characterisation of Carlow as the 'Sparta of Ireland'.⁵⁹ O'Connell's arrival the following day did nothing to ease this view when he spoke at Carlow College and at a public dinner in Hanlon's Hotel. His widely reported remarks on the impending demise of Thomas Kavanagh reinforced the Conservative view of him as an unprincipled, uncouth and fiendish agitator who appealed to the baser instincts of the mob.⁶⁰ Vigors declared himself a candidate, now with the imprimatur of O'Connell, and as a result was promised support by W.F. Finn, his former adversary in the borough. The election was given an elevated significance in the O'Connellite press as another 'Clare' providing an opportunity 'to strike a blow for Irish freedom and punish the oppressors'.⁶¹ Conservatives recognised the importance too with the *Leinster Express* comparing it to the glorious revolution and calling on voters to 'cherish then those ties under which yourselves have prospered and your forefathers flourished' by supporting the gentry candidate.⁶² Thomas Bunbury of Moyle, a well-regarded local landlord, agreed to go forward as the Conservative candidate following a meeting of the 'landed proprietary' of the county in the Club House on 30 January.⁶³ His electoral address promised his 'best exertions' to advance the interests of county.⁶⁴

⁵⁶ *FJ*, 14 Mar. 1836.

⁵⁷ *DEP*, 21 Jan. 1837.

⁵⁸ *The Times*, 5 Jan. 1837.

⁵⁹ *CS*, 21 Jan. 1837. Captain Frizell from Enniskillen, but holding an electoral interest in Carlow, was a prominent supporter of Colonel Bruen and a founder member of the Protestant Conservative Association, see *Warder*, 26 Nov. 1836.

⁶⁰ *CS*, 21 Jan. 1837. O'Connell urged Catholic women to 'spit in the faces' of Bruenites and to leave their husbands if they supported Bruen. At a public dinner given to him that evening, he alluded to the ailing Kavanagh and suggested that his conversion to Protestantism would cause his tenantry to throw dead cats and dogs into his grave. These remarks were widely reported in the conservative press with *The Times* calling him a 'fiend' asking 'Did the horrible French revolution, amongst all its upturnings [sic] from the bottomless pit, throw up and one miscreant more polluted in soul – more devilish in suggestion – more restless in defilement than this same Daniel O'Connell, the right-hand man of priestcraft, and the autocrat of Ireland?', see *The Times*, 26 Jan. 1837; *SNL*, 23 Jan. 1837; *KEP*, 25 Jan. 1837; *FJ*, 26 Jan. 1837; *KKJ*, 25 Jan. 1837.

⁶¹ *Pilot*, 28 Jan. 1837.

⁶² *LE*, 4 Feb. 1837.

⁶³ *The Times*, 2 Feb. 1837.

⁶⁴ *CS*, 4 Feb. 1837. Bunbury's father sat for Carlow from 1776 until his death on 18 Apr. 1778, see *FLJ*, 22 April 1778; Johnston-Liik, *HIP*, iii, p. 302. Thomas Bunbury of Moyle should not be confused with Thomas C. Bunbury of Bunbury Lodge, Carlow who was a Liberal activist and was classified as a 'Protestant-Radical', see *CMP*, 30 Nov., 14 Dec. 1833; *CS*, 7 Dec. 1833; 15 July 1837.

Canvassing got underway against the backdrop of the last days of the Melbourne administration.⁶⁵ Demonstrating a degree of forward planning, Vigors was accompanied on his canvass by William Ashton Yates who had accepted an invitation from the Carlow Liberal Club to stand as a candidate in the county in the forthcoming general election.⁶⁶ In a bid to smother possible civil unrest, a large force of extra police supported by 108 cavalrymen and 350 infantrymen were drafted into the county for the election.⁶⁷ Electioneering was intense as the election neared. It was reported that Robert Chaloner, agent to Earl Fitzwilliam, called upon the Earl's tenantry 'using the most direct and violent threats' to support 'the priest's nominee'.⁶⁸ Vigors, Ashton-Yates and Walter Blackney accompanied by Richard O'Connell and Arthur French from the General Association attended meetings and rallies in Ballyellen, Borris, St. Mullins, Drummin and the Slyguff fair in the days immediately before the election in an effort to woo the tenants of the late Thomas Kavanagh.⁶⁹ Conservatives were alive to the challenge and Charles Doyne, Kavanagh's land agent, secured many of the freeholders in Borris House for a number of days where they were plied with alcohol prior to being escorted to Carlow by several magistrates and a detachment of military on the eve of the election.⁷⁰ The election drew groups of 'well armed' Orangemen from Durrow and Abbeyleix to 'do whatever work might be waiting for them there'.⁷¹ It was reported that on the day of the election, that 'the town presented an animated appearance from an early hour'.⁷² There was great interest in the election nationally with *The Pilot* viewing the contest as important enough to warrant extra expense arranging 'expresses' from Carlow so they could give readers up-to-date news.⁷³

There were chaotic scenes when the election opened on 14 February with scuffles and a stand-off in the courthouse gallery between supporters of Bunbury and Vigors that even saw a pistol being presented by William St. George, a local Conservative who was duly arrested.⁷⁴ Stipendiary Magistrate Samuel Vignoles took an active part in quelling the riot with a cudgel, concentrating his efforts on Liberal supporters. It was reported that shortly afterwards, Vignoles was embroiled in an altercation with the Liberal magistrate Captain Howard Moore that nearly ended in a duel.⁷⁵ Conservatives hailed him as a hero who had prevented bloodshed.⁷⁶ Liberal

⁶⁵ L.G. Mitchell, *Lord Melbourne, 1779-1848* (Oxford, 1997), p. 190; The King was also known to be in failing health and was distanced from government, see Philip Ziegler, *King William IV* (New York, 1973), p. 319.

⁶⁶ *FJ*, 2 Feb. 1837; *The Times*, 3 Feb. 1837.

⁶⁷ Two troops of the 15th Huzzars, 2 companies of the 23rd Fusiliers and 3 companies of the 75th regiment were deployed, see *Leinster Express*, 28 Feb. 1837. Troop numbers are calculated on estimates of unit strength given in Harold E. Raugh, *The Victorians at war, 1815 - 1914: an encyclopaedia of British military history* (Oxford, 2004), p. 85, p.181.

⁶⁸ *KEP*, 11 Feb. 1837, *The Times*, 13 Feb. 1837.

⁶⁹ *MP*, 13 Feb. 1837, *FJ*, 15 Feb. 1837. Thomas Kavanagh's heir, also Thomas (1828-1852) was a minor.

⁷⁰ *KM*, 15 Feb. 1837.

⁷¹ *KKJ*, 15 Feb. 1837.

⁷² *LE*, 18 Feb. 1837.

⁷³ *Pilot*, 15 Feb. 1837.

⁷⁴ St. George was described as 'one of the would-be aristocracy of Carlow, and a fair specimen of the lawless and infuriated disposition of his party', see *DMR* 15 Feb. 1837.

⁷⁵ *FJ*, 17 Feb. 1837.

⁷⁶ *CS*, 18 Feb. 1837.

opinion viewed Vignoles as partisan and heavy-handed and as information was sworn against him by Arthur French, secretary to the General Association, his conduct was considered as approximating that of Captain Rock and ‘ill-calculated to sustain the sheriff’.⁷⁷ Once the riot abated, political tensions were ratcheted up by aggressive electoral invective from Revs Tyrrell and Maher. Attacking the well-used idea of the bond between landlord and tenant, Tyrrell sought to negate landlord influence over tenant electoral behaviour and assured freeholders that landlords

Table 9.3: Daily Breakdown of Poll - County Carlow Byelection February 1837

Day	Candidate	Poll	Gross Poll
Wednesday	Vigors	244	244
	Bunbury	239	239
Thursday	Vigors	296	540
	Bunbury	258	497
Friday	Vigors	129	669
	Bunbury	136	633

Sources: *CS*, 18 Feb. 1837; *Pilot*, 15 Feb. 1837; 17 Feb. 1837, 20 Feb. 1837, *FJ*, 20 Feb. 1837; Walker, *Parliamentary results*, p. 62

had no more rights to their votes ‘than they had to use your wives or daughters!’ and warned Bruen that divine vengeance was at hand as punishment for his policy of the eviction of non-compliant tenants.⁷⁸ Tyrrell praised Bunbury’s private character and that of his proposer, Sir Thomas Butler, but claimed that Conservatives had “lugged in” the pair as a cover-slut to their own vices’.⁷⁹ He was followed by James Maher who criticised the Carlow aristocracy and the management of the *Carlow Sentinel* ‘in words it would not be safe to publish’ before he was

⁷⁷ *FJ*, 18 Feb. 1837.

⁷⁸ *CS*, 18 Feb. 1837.

⁷⁹ *The Times* 20 Feb. 1837. A cover-slut is an outer garment worn to cover sluttishness or untidy attire.

interrupted by the sheriff.⁸⁰ Bunbury did not speak throughout or before the business of the day concluded.⁸¹

The heavy military and police presence ensured that there was no public disorder in the following days. Table 9.3 outlines daily breakdown on the poll. The enthusiasm and determination of the electorate can be judged from the pattern of polling that saw more than half of the total votes cast on the first day and over nine-tenths cast by the end of the second day. Vigors outpolled Bunbury for the first three days with the latter's majority of seven on the last day due to the arrival from Dublin of a group of fifty-pound freeholders.⁸² When the poll closed, Vigors was elected with a majority of thirty-six. Objections to Vigors' return were voiced immediately as seventy of his tenants whose votes were struck off by the 1836 election petition committee and freeholders that had registered as recently as October 1836 were permitted to vote.⁸³ Conservatives suggested that Liberals were aware that a petition against the return was inevitable but that they still polled the ineligible freeholders in order to achieve a cosmetic victory in the knowledge that a general election was imminent.⁸⁴ Although two petitions were lodged against the return, just one was examined and, as well as questioning the eligibility of voters, it also claimed bias by George Rouse Keogh, the sheriff.⁸⁵ Following the pattern set after the 1832 petition, Vigors declined to defend the petition himself leaving that to the electors.⁸⁶ A petition to this end was duly lodged on 5 April.⁸⁷ A Commons' committee was appointed and confirmed Vigors' return while exonerating Sheriff Keogh.⁸⁸ Once again, Carlow Liberals demonstrated themselves capable of matching the political dexterity of their Conservative rivals.

The long expected general election was eventually occasioned by the death of William IV on 20 June 1837.⁸⁹ In the Liberal interest, Nicholas Aylward Vigors and John Ashton Yates came forward in the county and W.H. Maule offering in the borough. Maule was an English barrister who had defended Vigors' return in front of the parliamentary committee in May.⁹⁰ O'Connell's influence on the choice of Liberal candidates was obvious by reports on the progress of the candidate's canvasses he received from Thomas Haughton.⁹¹ Their were opposed by Conservatives Henry Bruen and Thomas Bunbury in the county and Francis Bruen in the borough.

⁸⁰ *SRCCC*, 16 Feb. 1837.

⁸¹ *Pilot*, 15 Feb. 1837.

⁸² *The Times*, 21 Feb. 1837.

⁸³ *The Times*, 20 Feb. 1837.

⁸⁴ *The Times*, 21 Feb. 1837.

⁸⁵ *JHC*, Vol 92, p. 124-27 (6 Mar. 1837).

⁸⁶ *JHC*, Vol. 92, p. 186 (18 Mar. 1837), *The Times*, 21 Mar. 1837.

⁸⁷ *JHC*, Vol. 92, p. 226 (5 April 1837).

⁸⁸ *The minutes of evidence taken before the committee on the Carlow county election petition*, HC, 1837 [cd 307], *JHC*, 92 p. 342 (8 May 1837).

⁸⁹ Ziegler, *King William IV*, p. 324; Hilton, *A mad, bad, and dangerous people?*, p. 499.

⁹⁰ S. Ball, 'MAULE, William Henry', in *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1832-68*, ed. P. Salmon and K. Rix (forthcoming) <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1832-1868/member/maule-william-henry-1788-1858>.

⁹¹ Haughton to O'Connell, 17 July 1837 (NLI, O'Connell Papers, Ms 13,648 (16).

The election was marked by the same ill-feeling that characterised the recent by-election, as tension between the factions persisted in the interval. For example, the High Sheriff, who was by now identified with Liberal politics, was publicly rebuffed by Chief Justice John Doherty at the spring assizes, something that caused consternation and led O'Connell to hope that it might bring about the judge's downfall.⁹² In June, Sheriff Keogh was criticised for being apologetic to the crowd assembled in Carlow at an auction of cattle distrained for tithes when he told the assembled body that while he did not agree with the law, he was obliged to uphold it.⁹³ Conservatives viewed the role of the Catholic clergy in previous elections as an exercise in browbeating the simple while Liberals viewed Carlow landlords as 'master-hands in endeavouring to influence honest freeholders in the discharge of an honest duty – by persecution, by bigotry and intimidation'.⁹⁴ Conservatives continued to stress the value and legitimacy of their candidates, all of whom were members of the resident gentry compared with Vigors, Maule and Ashton-Yates who, like Alexander Raphael, had turned Carlow into a 'depot for foreign speculators and adventurers' dominated by O'Connell the clergy.⁹⁵

Table 9.4: Daily Breakdown of Poll - General Election Carlow Borough August 1837

Day	Candidate	Poll	Gross Poll
Thursday	Maule	72	72
	Bruen	72	72
Friday	Maule	36	108
	Bruen	9	81
Saturday	Maule	72	180
	Bruen	77	158
	Bagenal	2	2

Sources: *Pilot*, 4 Aug. 1837, *Warder*, 5 Aug. 1837, *CS*, 5 Aug. 1837, Walker, *Parliamentary results*, p. 62, McCalmont, *Parliamentary Poll Book*, p. 48

⁹² *The Times*, 30 Mar. 1837. While attending the Carlow Election Committee in May he was described as 'a melancholy specimen of mob popularity in his own person', see *CS*, 6 May 1837.

⁹³ *CS*, 10 June 1837.

⁹⁴ *CS*, 24 June 1837; *DEP*, 3 Aug. 1837.

⁹⁵ *LE*, 22 July 1837.

The election for the borough was fixed for 3 August and in the county for 7 August.⁹⁶ As in April, extra police and military were drafted in to maintain the public peace during the election.⁹⁷ Beforehand there were allegations of clerical involvement in the kidnapping of voters and that tradesmen and merchants in the town were subjected to veiled threats reminding them of the importance of the custom of the gentry to continued prosperity.⁹⁸ Although witnessing some unruliness and strong language particularly from Fr James Maher, the election largely passed off peacefully.⁹⁹ The pattern of polling indicated in Table 9.4 illustrates the tactical approach adopted by both sides. The candidates were level after the first day, but Maule out-pollled Bruen by 36 to 9 on the second day. Displaying a newly found sophistication in electoral tactics, Conservatives introduced Philip Bagenal as a third candidate in an attempt to take advantage of residual goodwill

Table 9-5: Daily Breakdown of Poll - County Carlow General Election August 1837			
Day	Candidate	Poll	Gross Poll
Tuesday	Vigors	353	353
	Ashton Yates	353	353
	Bruen	351	351
	Bunbury	351	351
Wednesday	Vigors	286	639
	Ashton Yates	286	639
	Bruen	201	552
	Bunbury	201	552
Thursday	Vigors	81	720
	Ashton Yates	81	720
	Bruen	79	631
	Bunbury	79	631
Friday	Vigors	10	730
	Ashton Yates	10	730
	Bruen	12	643
	Bunbury	12	643
Sources: <i>FJ</i> , 9 Aug. 1837, <i>DEP</i> , 10 Aug. 1837, <i>KEP</i> , 12 Aug. 1837, <i>SNL</i> , 12 Aug. 1837, <i>CS</i> , 12 Aug. 1837, Walker, <i>Parliamentary results</i> , p. 62			

⁹⁶ *CS*, 29 July 1837.

⁹⁷ *SNL*, 8 Aug. 1837.

⁹⁸ *KM*, 9 Aug. 1837.

⁹⁹ *CS*, 5 Aug. 1837; *SNL*, 8 Aug. 1837.

towards his family and to have a 'safe' candidate in the event of successful petitions against the return of both of the existing candidates.¹⁰⁰ Maule prevailed, however, and was declared elected on 5 August. In advance of the county election, Conservatives continued to stress the 'natural' suitability of their candidates and to cast the Liberal candidates as shallow speculators and mercenaries who were willing to pay the 'Romish priesthood' and 'the pawnbroker' for their seats.¹⁰¹ There were claims from both sides of voter intimidation and 'cooping'.¹⁰² One freeholder claimed that he had been offered and accepted £100 from a Conservative agent for both of his votes.¹⁰³

As in 1835, the county election commenced with a riot and a minor scuffle outside the courthouse between Stipendiary Magistrate Samuel Vignoles and police sub-inspector Thomas Gleeson.¹⁰⁴ This minor altercation led to a scandal, several police inquiries and court cases and an investigation by a Commons' select committee.¹⁰⁵ However there was no significant public unrest during the election. The pattern of support for each side remained remarkably consistent over the four days of polling and there were no 'plumpers' with, as illustrated by Table 9.5, electors casting both votes for either the Conservative or Liberal candidates. The second day delivered a decisive lead for the Liberals, one that they maintained until the polls closed at the end of day four. In what had become standard practice, Conservatives lodged petitions against both the return in the borough and the county on the by now well-worn grounds of undue interference, the intimidation of electors and the inclusion of unqualified freeholders.¹⁰⁶ Committees formed to investigate both petitions heard evidence in March 1838.¹⁰⁷ The main argument in both cases centred on the improper registration of freeholders by William Elliot Hudson, the assistant barrister for Carlow in 1836.¹⁰⁸ Both committees refused to open the registries and following consultation with the petitioners, it was decided not to pursue the matter in order to avoid extra expense.¹⁰⁹ Carlow Conservatives viewed this as another assault on them and the Protestant constitution and another

¹⁰⁰ This tactic had been used before in, for example, the Dublin City election in August 1830 when Edward Cottingham and John Milley-Doyle were put forward at the last moment as Conservative and Liberal candidates respectively as 'security' in the event of the unseating of William Shaw-Mason, see Fisher (ed), *Commons*, iii, pp 748–9, *Pilot*, 30 Aug. 1830.

¹⁰¹ The 'pawnbroker' was Edward Michael Fitzgerald of Browne Street in whose premises Independent Club meetings took place. He had been a pawnbroker in Dublin before moving to Carlow about 1830, see P.J. Kavanagh, *Carlow Newspapers 1828-1841, Carlowania*, (1975), ii, p. 22. A 'hate figure' for local Tories, it was also suggested maliciously by the *Carlow Sentinel* that his brother was Dr Andrew Fitzgerald of Carlow College see CS, 10 Jan 1835, Hoppen, *Elections, politics, and society in Ireland*, p. 63.

¹⁰² Cooping was the practice where freeholders were confined and usually 'treated' with food and alcohol by one party in the days before a poll to insulate them from influence that might alter their voting intention to the other party, see *bribery*, p. 141.

¹⁰³ Moses Magee of Ballybrack made the claim of bribery before the election, see *Pilot*, 9 Aug. 1837.

¹⁰⁴ Vignoles was regarded by Conservatives as an exemplary magistrate while Gleeson was seen as a Liberal, see for example *FJ*, 5 July 1837; *DMR*, 10 Aug 1837 for critical views of Vignoles and CS, 15 July, 22 July, 29 July 1837 for criticism of Gleeson.

¹⁰⁵ For a comprehensive account including the political implications on a wider scale that flowed from it, see Malcolm, "'The Reign of Terror in Carlow'", pp 59–74.

¹⁰⁶ *JHC*, Vol 93, pp 58–61 (27 Nov. 1837), *JHC*, Vol 93, pp 168 – 172 (7 Dec. 1837).

¹⁰⁷ *JHC*, Vol 93, p. 344 (8 Mar. 1838), *JHC*, Vol 93, p. 353 (13 Mar. 1838).

¹⁰⁸ Hudson was considered locally to be liberal and it was suggested that during his absence due to illness that the Liberal Club delayed attempting to register new freeholders until his return, the local Liberal Club were see *LE*, 7 Jan 1837; *The Times*; 14 Feb. 1837; *CS*, 5 Aug. 1837. This was despite the fact that Hudson had published a well-regarded handbook on electoral law in 1832 as it stood after the reform act, see Linde Lunney, 'William Elliot Hudson', *DIB*, Sub Nomine. The book in question is William Elliot Hudson, *A treatise on the elective franchise and the registration of electors in Ireland: under the Reform act, with an appendix, containing all the acts in force and unrepealed relative to electors and elective rights in Ireland*, (Dublin, 1832).

¹⁰⁹ *The Times*, 15 Mar. 1837; 19 Mar. 1837.

victory for the Whig government and ‘the Romish Priesthood who wield their prerogative with a degree of rampancy unparalleled in modern times’.¹¹⁰ The use of petitions highlighted a clear pattern where neither Liberal nor Conservative were willing to accept an election result and both were willing and able to use electoral law in attempts to overturn results.

IV. The 1839 By-election

Rumours of the elevation of William Henry Maule to the bench as Baron of the Exchequer began to circulate in January 1839.¹¹¹ The string of electoral successes imbued Carlow Liberals with a new confidence. Carlow borough was regarded as a ‘safe’ Whig seat, a factor that was thought to have influenced the decision to promote Maule.¹¹² The result of the by-election was almost considered to be a foregone conclusion presenting Carlow, as one observer noted, with ‘another opportunity of asserting their independence’.¹¹³ As Francis Bruen declined a Conservative invitation the Liberal barrister Richard Moore had also stood aside, it seemed that the way was open for local O’Connellite Patrick R. Welch (who considered contesting the borough in 1832) to be returned unopposed.¹¹⁴ As the Carlow Independence Club prepared to meet, there was mention of the English radical Thomas Gisborne being proposed.¹¹⁵ Given the extensive repercussions of the Raphael Affair, and despite the overwhelming support for O’Connell in the Independence Club, there was an understandable reluctance among Carlow Liberals to embrace another ‘alien’ candidate.¹¹⁶ But a letter from O’Connell read at the meeting in Carlow on 4 February declared that ‘the candidate for Carlow is Mr Gisborne’ and that he hoped that ‘there will be no idle jealousies to prevent the unanimity of the good people of Carlow’. Welch informed the meeting that he would step aside in deference to O’Connell’s wishes and Gisborne was endorsed.¹¹⁷ Conservatives were quick to draw parallels with the Raphael affair suggesting that the seat had been sold to a ‘foreigner’, that the borough was corrupt, that Carlow Liberals were

¹¹⁰ *CS*, 17 Mar. 1838.

¹¹¹ *DMR*, 11 Jan. 1839; *Pilot*, 14 Jan 1839; *DEP*, 15 Jan. 1839.

¹¹² *JBull*, 3 Feb. 1839.

¹¹³ *KKJ*, 2 Feb. 1839.

¹¹⁴ Francis Bruen was by now in dire financial straits and in constant communication with his brother Henry on pecuniary matters and was unlikely to have seen a return to parliament as an attraction, see for example Francis Bruen to Henry Bruen, 19 Sept. 1838 (NLI, Bruen Papers, Ms 29,775/3/13) and Francis Bruen to Henry Bruen 21 Nov. 1838 NLI, Bruen Papers, Ms 29,775/3/15). Although mentioned in connection with Carlow borough, Moore did not pursue a political career and was eventually appointed as a justice of the Queen’s bench in 1847, see F.E. Ball, *The judges in Ireland, 1221-1921* (2 vols, London, 1926), ii, pp 357–8.

¹¹⁵ *LI*, 2 Feb. 1839, *DWR*, 9 Feb. 1839.

¹¹⁶ Following public accusations in January 1839 against O’Connell concerning the misuse of Precursor Society funds, Carlow Independence Club met promptly and passed resolutions of confidence in his leadership, see *LI*, 26 Jan. 1839. For background to the accusations made against O’Connell, see Geoghegan, *Liberator*, pp 107–8; Keyes, *Funding the nation*, pp 79–80.

¹¹⁷ *LI*, 9 Feb. 1839.

in thrall to O’Connell in welcoming more ‘speculators and swindlers’.¹¹⁸ O’Connell’s imposition of his candidate on the constituency underlined his dominance of politics in Carlow at that time.

The writ for the by-election was moved on 12 February and the election fixed for 25 February.¹¹⁹ There was no expectation of a Conservative candidate and Gisborne’s return seemed certain.¹²⁰ There was great surprise when Francis Bruen was also proposed, his Conservative

Table 9.6: Daily Poll Carlow Borough February 1839

Day	Candidate	Poll	Gross Poll
Monday	Gisborne	67	67
	Bruen	66	66
Tuesday	Gisborne	83	150
	Bruen	93	159
Wednesday	Gisborne	14	164
	Bruen	8	167

Sources: *LI*, 23 Feb. 1839, *DEPKT*, 26 Feb. 1839, *Handbill: State of the Poll Tuesday Evening* (CCA, Jackson Collection, Jack12) FJ (2nd Ed) I, 27 Feb. 1839, *LEXP*, 2 Mar. 1839, Walker, *Parliamentary results*, p. 67. There are many conflicting reports of the daily polls - the above represents a best estimate

supporters urging electors to support the local candidate rather than a stranger.¹²¹ Bruen was not in attendance and was apparently unaware of this move which caused him to be regarded as no more than ‘a creature of the infuriated ascendancy party’.¹²² Polling continued over three days with, as shown in Table 9.6, Bruen securing the return by just three votes. While Bruen’s return was hailed as ‘a great Protestant and Conservative victory’, more moderate opinion held that ‘a great moral lesson has been read to Mr O’Connell’ and that the practise of ‘thrusting place-hunting Englishmen on Irish constituencies’ should cease.¹²³ The *Carlow Sentinel* did not usually carry cartoons, but made an exception when it gleefully published a cartoon (Figure 9.1) showing

¹¹⁸ *LE*, 9 Feb. 1839; *CS*, 9 Feb. 1839; *DEPKT*, 12 Feb. 1839; *DUBMTR*, 14 Feb. 1839.

¹¹⁹ *JHC*, Vol 94, p. 23 (12 Feb. 1839); *LI*, 23 Feb. 1839.

¹²⁰ *CS*, 23 Feb. 1839.

¹²¹ *DEP*, 26 Feb. 1839.

¹²² *DMR*, 27 Feb. 1839.

¹²³ *DEPKT*, 28 Feb 1839; *DUBMTR*, 28 Feb 1839.

Gisborne's corpse joining that of Raphael in a coffin with the a caption suggesting that like the latter, the former had paid O'Connell for the seat, and had been duped. The election was not without controversy with the unsuccessful candidate asserting that he was certain to be returned on petition.¹²⁴ Gisborne duly lodged a petition on 11 March. A group of freeholders lodged a second petition on 15 March. Both petitions alleged bribery, corruption and the illegal refusal by the returning officer to accept the votes of nine electors.¹²⁵ Following precedent, Bruen declined to defend his return and allowed the task to fall to his supporters.¹²⁶ The committee sat between 1 May and 11 July, taking evidence on 53 days and reputedly costing £20,000. The scrutiny of the



vote of a single elector, John Carpenter was said to have accounted for £1,200 in costs alone.¹²⁷ The committee eventually unseated Bruen and declared Gisborne elected.¹²⁸ The willingness to spend such sums on electoral petitions underlines how important electoral success in Carlow was.

Fig. 9.1: 'Ghost-Bornes Last Exhibition'

Source: *Carlow Sentinel*, 2 Mar. 1839.

¹²⁴ *DEP*, 28 Feb. 1839.

¹²⁵ *JHC*, Vol. 94, p. 97 (11 Mar. 1839), *ibid* p. p. 118 (15 Mar. 1839).

¹²⁶ *JHC*, Vol. 94, p. 139 (22 Mar. 1839), *Ibid*. p. 142 (22 Mar. 1839).

¹²⁷ *The minutes of evidence and proceedings taken before the select committee on the Carlow borough election petitions, parts I and II*, HC, 1839 (cd 414); *MC*, 12 July 1839..

¹²⁸ *MH*, 12 July 1839.

V. The 1840 By-Election: A Death and a Resurrection

I.

Nicholas Aylward Vigors unexpected death in London on 26 October left a vacancy in the representation of county Carlow.¹²⁹ The Melbourne administration in Westminster was moribund by then as ‘cancerous problems had slowly eaten into the government’s coherence’.¹³⁰ O’Connell too had reached a political impasse as the reaction to his campaign for ‘pure’ repeal was ‘unenthusiastic, perhaps even apathetic’.¹³¹ In this uncertain political climate, the by-election in county Carlow assumed a wider political importance as a ‘rallying point’ for Whig and Tory upon which ‘the eyes of the British Empire are now closely fixed’.¹³² For Irish Conservatives, county Carlow had become a political cockpit and weathervane to be ‘watched with unutterable interest; it will be received by the Protestants of Ireland as the herald of their own’.¹³³ Henry Bruen was first to declare his candidacy with a characteristically brief address to electors framed and published within days of Vigors’ death.¹³⁴ The speed with which Bruen offered himself is indicative of the forward-planning undertaken by Carlow Conservatives. Bruen was obviously regarded as the natural Conservative candidate and, certain of success with a ‘purged registry’, it was thought early on that he would be returned unopposed.¹³⁵ The local Liberal Club was not prepared for the sudden contest and was riven by disunity over the repeal issue that hampered efforts to settle on a candidate and even presented the prospect of an uncontested election.¹³⁶ Eventually Frederick Ponsonby of Bishop’s Court, Co. Kildare agreed to go forward on 8 November.¹³⁷ Ponsonby’s candidacy was retrospectively endorsed by the Carlow Liberal Club on 12 November.¹³⁸ In contrast to the by-election in the borough not two years before, O’Connell and the Repeal Association played no part in the identification of the Carlow candidate. Conservatives were untroubled by the selection of Ponsonby dismissing him as a subsidised government ‘stalking horse’ who had been put forward merely as an expensive inconvenience to Colonel Bruen.¹³⁹

¹²⁹ *Gentleman’s Magazine*, Vol 2, (Dec., 1840), p. 659.

¹³⁰ Mitchell, *Lord Melbourne*, p. 207.

¹³¹ MacDonagh, *The emancipist*, p. 188.

¹³² *FJ*, 1 Dec. 1840.

¹³³ *Warder*; 31 Oct. 1840.

¹³⁴ Bruen’s address was published with what was regarded as ‘indecent haste’ and was characterised by Liberals as ‘a proclamation from a despot rather than a respectful request for support’, see *CS*, 31 Oct. 1831; *LR*, 4 Nov. 1840.

¹³⁵ The eight-year certificates granted to freeholders under the Reform Act of 1832 had expired and Conservative interests in Carlow headed by Bruen were diligent in having their freeholders re-register, see *LE*, 31 Oct 1840; *DEM*, 2 Nov. 1840. Confidence among all classes of Conservatives was high in November: Wellington himself was assured that Bruen would be returned unopposed, see Gurwood to Wellington, 10 Nov. 1840 (USA, Wellington Papers, MS61/WP2/72/106-7).

¹³⁶ Several possible candidates were mentioned including William Tighe of Woodstock and J.G. Ponsonby. O’Connell was aghast at the prospect of Bruen being accorded a ‘walk-over’ and that help from the Repeal Association had been rejected, see *FJ*, 5 Nov. 1840; *DMR*, 5 Nov. 1840; O’Connell (ed), *Correspondence*, vi, p. 377.

¹³⁷ *LI*, 14 Nov 1840. Ponsonby was in his sixty-sixth year and had already represented Galway from March 1811 until June 1813, see Thorne (ed), *Commons*, vi, p. 850.

¹³⁸ *FJ*, 12 Nov. 1840; *DWR*, 14 Nov. 1840; *LR*, 14 Nov. 1840.

¹³⁹ *DEPKT*, 10 Nov 1840; *CS*, 14 Nov. 1840.

The delay in settling on Ponsonby as a candidate afforded Bruen and his supporters an opportunity to canvass the county to secure pledges of support from many otherwise Liberals who anticipated an uncontested election.¹⁴⁰ The election, with the by now customary large military and police presence, opened on 30 November.¹⁴¹ Polling extended over five days. Table 9.7 gives the daily polls and shows that Bruen outperformed Ponsonby each day. Displaying electoral caution, Bruen insisted on continuing the poll into the fifth day, in order to increase his majority thereby reducing the possibility of a petition against his return.¹⁴² The Conservative campaign

Table 9.7: Daily Poll County Carlow December 1840

Day	Candidate	Poll	Gross Poll
Tuesday	Bruen	280	280
	Ponsonby	201	201
Wednesday	Bruen	218	498
	Ponsonby	199	400
Thursday	Bruen	182	680
	Ponsonby	137	537
Friday	Bruen	40	720
	Ponsonby	18	555
Saturday	Bruen	2	722
	Ponsonby	0	555

Sources: CS, 5 Dec. 1840, 12 Dec. 1840, Walker, *Parliamentary Results*, p. 68, Vincent & Stenton, *McCalmont's*, p. 48

was better organised and by the time the poll opened, many tenants felt that they had no option but to support the gentry in order to preserve their leases.¹⁴³ This was seen as coercion or, alternatively, as an indication that the tenantry had realised that their best interests lay with their landlords and that once more they were ‘bound by those ties of mutual interest and united for each other’s protection’.¹⁴⁴ The result was also seen as what was termed by *The Times* as ‘the end of

¹⁴⁰ LR, 7 Nov. 1840.

¹⁴¹ DEPKT, 24 Nov. 1840.

¹⁴² FJ, 7 Dec. 1840.

¹⁴³ DEP, 3 Dec. 1840.

¹⁴⁴ DEM, 4 Dec. 1831; LE, 5 Dec. 1840.

priestly prestige' when freeholders could resist 'the priests and the bludgeonmen'.¹⁴⁵ Apathy was considered to have been the hallmark of the Liberal campaign. It was not well supported either by the Catholic clergy or the Whig gentry with Lord Duncannon a particular target for criticism.¹⁴⁶ The decision by Liberals in Carlow to decline the help offered by the Repeal Association and to avoid agitation of any kind was also a mistake, one considered by O'Connell to be fatal.¹⁴⁷ Conservatives were jubilant at Bruen's return and although confident that they had 'purged' the register of Liberal voters, they recognised the need to continue to attend to registration.¹⁴⁸ The Liberal Club also realised that before the looming general election, a big effort was needed in the registry courts.¹⁴⁹ It seemed that the arena of conflict had moved from the hustings to the registry courts.

VI. The 1841 General Election: The Old Order Revived

Bruen's return to parliament contributed to the further weakening of Melbourne's Whig administration and following the defeat of his budget in May and the passing of a vote of no confidence in June, the prime minister sought and was granted a dissolution of parliament on 22 June.¹⁵⁰ Liberals expected that Thomas Gisborne would stand in the borough until, proving Conservative observers to be correct, he announced in early June that the state of his health precluded him from 'any considerable electioneering exertion'.¹⁵¹ By then, the Carlow Liberal Club with help from O'Connell had identified Captain Brownlow Villiers Layard as a candidate and he seemed suitable when he assured electors that he was 'alive to the wants and wishes of the people'.¹⁵² Layard was portrayed by Conservatives as another duped Englishman, covertly inveigled into standing in Carlow by a Liberal Club that was anxious to avoid the appearance of engaging in 'political jobbing'.¹⁵³ It was further suggested that he had come to Carlow on the promise that votes were available at a tariff of seven pounds per head.¹⁵⁴ Influenced by his by now

¹⁴⁵ *The Times*, 7 Dec. 1840.

¹⁴⁶ It was estimated that Duncannon alone could have registered 80 of his tenants in Carlow, see *LR*, 5 Dec. 1840.

¹⁴⁷ *LR*, 9 Dec. 1840; O'Connell, *Correspondence*, vi, pp 379–80, p 389.

¹⁴⁸ *CS*, 2 Jan. 1840, *DEM*; 4 Jan. 1841. In advance of the January registry sessions, the *CS* published a list of those freeholders who had given notice of their intention to register expressly to afford Conservatives the opportunity to prepare any objections in advance, see *CS*, 19 Dec. 1840.

¹⁴⁹ *FJ*, 20 Dec. 1840.

¹⁵⁰ *JHC*, vol 96, p. 459 (22 June 1841), Betty Kemp, 'The General Election of 1841' *History*, 37:130 (1952), p. 147.

¹⁵¹ *LR*, 9 June 1841, 19 June 1841; *CS*, 12 June 1841. Conservatives claimed that Gisborne was not willing to bear the costs, preferring instead to contest Newport in the Isle of Wight. He was not elected in Newport on 1 June 1841 and also stood unsuccessfully in South Leicestershire on 16 July, lending some credence to the Conservative view of him, see McCalmont, *Parliamentary Poll Book*, p. 212, p. 167.

¹⁵² *LR*, 16 June 1841.

¹⁵³ *WM*, 23 June 1841.

¹⁵⁴ It was suggested that Layard had bought the seat through O'Connell at the 'London market' and, in a clear reference to Alexander Raphael and the questionable dealings of Carlow Liberals; Layard's origins as 'Turk, Jew, Greek or Maronite' were questioned, see *CS*, 12 June 1841; *MP*, 14 June 1841.

dire financial position, Francis Bruen was hesitant to provide opposition in the borough.¹⁵⁵ His tardy address of 17 June advanced the well-worn notion of the known local candidate in contrast to Layard.¹⁵⁶ But Layard was exceptionally well resourced, and he spent freely during his canvass.¹⁵⁷ This led Francis Bruen to announce his resignation on the eve of the poll claiming that entering into a contest was pointless as Liberal bribery had secured a certain majority.¹⁵⁸ Layard was returned unopposed on 5 July.¹⁵⁹

Long before the dissolution of parliament, it was recognised that county Carlow would present a severe contest demanding the attention of O'Connell himself who attributed Liberal defeat in December 1840 to the absence of repeal as an issue and agitation as a tactic in the campaign.¹⁶⁰ Registration of freeholders had also been lax prompting O'Connell to take 'the necessary steps to effect an extensive registration'.¹⁶¹ Taking a keen interest in county Carlow and recognising the hold that Carlow landlords had over their enfranchised tenants, he stressed the need for an 'indemnity fund' to support tenants who voted against their landlords.¹⁶² O'Connell decided to put his son Dan forward alongside Ashton Yates declaring that he intended to 'make Carlow the Clare of repeal'. This catchphrase was used at the public announcement made at a meeting of the Loyal National Repeal Association on 1 June when Tom Steele targeted Henry Bruen for particular criticism.¹⁶³ Yates went forward on the understanding that he would provide £2,000 towards expenses.¹⁶⁴ While Ashton Yates was mentioned simply as a non-repealer and the second Carlow candidate, care was taken not to make any mention of the financial arrangements.¹⁶⁵ This was O'Connell's first foray into the electoral politics of county Carlow since the disastrous Raphael affair; he was keen to avoid associating himself with yet another fee-paying candidate.

The news was well received in Carlow with the *Leinster Reformer* urging 'repealers and non-repealers to merge all differences' and 'rally for retrenchment, cheap bread and good government'.¹⁶⁶ Speaking before he travelled to the county, demonstrating an appreciation of the

¹⁵⁵ Francis Bruen recently completed the construction of a lavish house on his estate in Coolbawn, Co. Wexford. The house proved to be very expensive earning itself the moniker 'Bruen's Folly', see Delaney, *Oak Park*, p. 84.

¹⁵⁶ *CS*, 26 June 1841.

¹⁵⁷ It is thought that his return was financed by Josiah John Guest, Liberal MP for Methyr Tydfil who was married to Layard's first cousin Lady Charlotte Guest, see <https://victoriancommons.wordpress.com/2015/09/17/captain-brownlow-layard-the-soldiers-friend/>.

¹⁵⁸ *CS*, 10 July 1841.

¹⁵⁹ *LR*, 7 July 1841.

¹⁶⁰ *DM*, 22 Dec. 1840.

¹⁶¹ *LR*, 23 Dec 1840; *FJ*, 28 Dec. 1840. O'Connell sent Edward Clements to assist Liberals in registering, see *WWC*, 2 Jan. 1841.

¹⁶² O'Connell (ed.), *correspondence*, vii, p. 75.

¹⁶³ Steele compared the Clare election of 1829 with the impending one in Carlow and remarked that 'Bruen will, like Vesey Fitzgerald, be flabbergasted, and spiflicated and even exflunctified [sic], and that another chap of the name of Daniel O'Connell will leave Bruen to lick his paws!', see *FJ*, 1 June 1841.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹⁶⁵ *DMR*, 1 June 1841.

¹⁶⁶ *LR*, 2 June 1841.

power of the gentry in Carlow, O'Connell once more stressed the importance of the provision of funds to indemnify tenants there as well as the important part non-electors could play.¹⁶⁷ He also sought, largely successfully, to ensure at least the neutrality of Bishop Haley in the campaign.¹⁶⁸ O'Connell threw himself headlong into campaigning in Carlow, spending almost the entire period from mid-June to mid-July in the county.¹⁶⁹ Large meetings were held almost daily with, for example, an estimated 100,000 gathering in Newtown, near Borris on 21 June and a further 50,000 gathering in St. Mullins on 22 June.¹⁷⁰ O'Connell was ably assisted at every meeting by the local Catholic clergy.¹⁷¹ His campaign was viewed with disdain by Conservatives who viewed it as 'the furtherance of the agrarian campaign in the county of Carlow'.¹⁷² For their part, Conservatives continued to stress the importance of the bond between landlord and tenant, the consequences that flowed from breaking it and the unreliability of promises of post-election help from O'Connellites.¹⁷³ The announcement of Thomas Bunbury as a second Conservative candidate was done almost certainly without his agreement.¹⁷⁴ His electoral address of 23 June did not extend beyond two sentences. He mentioned the 'very flattering' invitation he received and made a vague promise to act as a guardian to 'rights and interests' in parliament.¹⁷⁵ It was widely reported afterwards that when approached, Bunbury positively refused to go forward and it was insinuated that the address had been published without his knowledge.¹⁷⁶ Bunbury's candidacy was clearly concocted by Conservatives and his return would be one achieved largely through the influence of Henry Bruen.

There was a strong military and police presence at the opening of the election on 13 July. In order to discourage disorder, it was agreed by both sides that there would be no speeches on the opening day.¹⁷⁷ The pattern of daily polling is outlined in Table 9.8. Over the election, Conservatives lead the daily polls for the first two days when the bulk of votes were cast, falling into arrears only in the third and fourth days. The Conservatives did not relinquish the lead however, and when polls closed, Bruen and Bunbury were declared elected. Liberals found cause for complaint with the closing of the poll claiming that the military imposed siege-like conditions

¹⁶⁷ *DMR*, 16 June 1841; *DWR*, 16 June 1841.

¹⁶⁸ Francis Haly succeeded Edward Nolan as bishop of Kildare and was consecrated on 25 Mar. 1838, see Comerford, *Kildare & Leighlin*, i, p. 144; O'Connell (ed.), *correspondence*, vii, p. 90.

¹⁶⁹ MacDonagh, *The emancipist*, p. 197.

¹⁷⁰ *LR*, 23 June 1841; *DMR*, 24 June 1841.

¹⁷¹ For example, he dined with Rev Maher, the parish priest of St. Mullins and the clergy from the surrounding parishes after the meeting held there on 17 June, see *LR*, 19 June 1841.

¹⁷² *DEM*, 21 June 1841. It was characterised later as 'the reign of terror' where O'Connell's agitation begot agrarian outrages, see *The reign of terror in Carlow, comprising an authentic detail of the proceedings of Mr. O'Connell and his followers* (London, 1841).

¹⁷³ Accounts of the treatment of William Shanahan, a Kerry freeholder who voted against his landlord and was subsequently penalised. His claim for assistance was dismissed by O'Connell with little ceremony. Correspondence concerning this was published widely and was held up as a warning to Carlow and other freeholders, see *CS* 19, 26 June 1841; *KEP*, 19 June 1841; *LE*, 3 July 1841.

¹⁷⁴ *CS*, 12 June 1841.

¹⁷⁵ *CS*, 26 June 1841.

¹⁷⁶ *FJ*, 28 June 1841; *DEP*, 29 June 1841; *DMR*, 29 June 1841.

¹⁷⁷ *DUBMTR*, 17 July 1841.

Table 9.8: Daily Breakdown of Poll - County Carlow July 1841

Day	Candidate	Poll	Gross Poll
Tuesday	Bruen	311	311
	Bunbury	311	311
	Ashton Yates	281	281
	O'Connell	281	281
Wednesday	Bruen	207	518
	Bunbury	207	518
	Ashton Yates	199	480
	O'Connell	199	480
Thursday	Bruen	159	677
	Bunbury	159	677
	Ashton Yates	163	643
	O'Connell	163	643
Friday	Bruen	28	705
	Bunbury	27	704
	Ashton Yates	54	697
	O'Connell	53	696

Sources: *CS*, 17 July 1841, *DEPKT*, 15 Jul. 1841, Walker, *Parliamentary results*, p. 62

on the town, that Conservatives engaged in delaying tactics and that the poll was closed early preventing Liberal freeholders from voting.¹⁷⁸ At the close of the election, Bruen was quite open in threatening those of his tenants whose rent was in arrears and who had voted against him. In his victory speech he was reported as saying that

He had incurred great expense in defending that which was dearest to them all – their liberties – but this expense could now be defrayed by the recovery of debts which might otherwise never have been demanded, if they [tenants who were freeholders] paid him the debts they owed him, well and good. If not, at least he hoped that he would be allowed to get his land, and he would take care to place on it men who would respect law and order, and who would not join their enemies and the enemies of the country. They had been deliberately sacrificed, and their votes would not gain the election, and now he

¹⁷⁸ *DMR*, 15 July 1841; *LR*, 17 July 1841,

hoped their new friends would make suitable provision for them, and renumerate them for the great sacrifices that they had made.¹⁷⁹

Bruen's influence was not limited to his own tenantry. Such was the pressure from Conservatives, several members of the gentry who might have been expected to support the Liberal candidates absented themselves or even voted for the Conservatives. They included Ferdinand Vigors (son of the late Nicholas Aylward Vigors) who did not vote and Rev Charles Miley Doyle and his son (brother and nephew to Sir John Milley Doyle) who voted for Bruen and Bunbury.¹⁸⁰ From the first day of polling, it was plain that the Bruen's influence based on land ownership would be the decisive factor in the election. This is underlined by the return of Thomas Bunbury, who made no appearance before, during or after the election but prevailed nonetheless. The Bruen dominance was acknowledged by the eventual withdrawal of the by now customary petitions against the return, despite the narrow margin of victory of just eight votes.¹⁸¹

Conclusion

The result of the 1832 election heightened the apprehension and anxiety among the landed gentry in Carlow that had already been stoked by Catholic emancipation and the passage of the Great Reform Act. Popular politics descended into bitter sectarian wrangles. The bond between landlord and tenant was sundered and with it, Conservatives contested, the whole basis of stable agrarian society. Unwilling to allow this to continue, the Protestant gentry led by Henry Bruen combined and mounted co-ordinated electoral campaigns. Their strategy rested in utilising their power as landowners and landlords to exert pressure on errant tenants in arrears. The demise of Bishop Doyle allowed Daniel O'Connell to take a more central role in parliamentary politics in Carlow and he was responsible for sourcing three of the four candidates that stood, eventually with disastrous consequences, in the county constituency in 1835. O'Connell's influence then waned in Carlow until after the disappointing Liberal showing in the 1840 by-election when Bruen managed to assert his dominance once more. The 1841 election saw O'Connell and repeal welcomed into the county once more, but despite an intense public campaign, much of it led by O'Connell himself, the Liberal interest could not match Bruen's ability to dictate the disposal of the votes of his tenantry not only in his own favour, but also to support a second candidate. It seemed as if the Protestant gentry of Carlow had regained their ascendancy.

¹⁷⁹ CS, 17 July 1841.

¹⁸⁰ DMR, 20 July 1841.

¹⁸¹ JHC, Vol 96, pp. 549-50 (7 Sept. 1841); JHC, Vol 97, p. 31 (15 Feb. 1841).

The 1841 contest saw a virtual collapse of Liberal activism in Carlow as underlined by the discontinuation of the local Liberal newspaper the *Leinster Reformer* immediately after the election. Despite the well-intentioned promises of the Kilkenny Journal (the successor to Finn's Leinster Journal) to lend support to Carlow Liberals, the demise of the Reformer effectively left them without a voice. Their 1841 electoral success attracted much publicity afterwards in Conservative circles with an anonymous pamphlet describing the mob violence allegedly perpetrated by O'Connell's supporters during his campaign in Carlow. There were reports of violence and intimidation perpetrated against tenants who had supported Bruen months after the election and calls for action from government to counter lawlessness. Henry Bruen was elevated in standing, approaching that of O'Connell in the Liberal sphere. This was reflected by the raising of the Bruen Testimonial Fund, which received support from all Irish counties together with reports of £4,000 being subscribed by members of the Carlton Club in London. Originally intended to be used to purchase a piece of commemorative plate for the Colonel, reflecting his religious inclinations and further enhancing his reputation among Conservatives, Bruen elected to have it used to build an additional Protestant church in Carlow. The 1841 election victory even became a subject for poetic flights of fancy reproduced in the Carlow Sentinel, some penned by the as yet unknown John Tyndall, who compared the victory to that of the Greeks at Thermopylae.¹⁸² Even the outspoken firebrand Fr James Maher was dispirited after the landmark electoral loss causing his nephew, the future Cardinal Paul Cullen, to remark that of him that he had 'abandoned politics altogether and never says a word about them now'.¹⁸³ Liberals in county Carlow were dispirited and demoralised. This despondency, combined with the economic importance of a stable landholding made it foolhardy for settled tenants to contemplate opposition to the re-established order.

¹⁸² Roland Jackson, Nicola Jackson and Daniel Brown (Eds), *The poetry of John Tyndall* (London, 2020), p. 10. The victory was also the subject of more lowbrow balladry, see *Ballad to Colonel Bruen on his election in Carlow* (NLI, Bruen Papers, Ms. 29,778/7).

¹⁸³ Cullen to Kirby, 25 June 1842, (Archives Pontifical College, Rome, Kirby Collection, KIR/1836-1861/98).

Conclusion

This study is the first to provide a narrative of the nature and operation of electoral politics in Carlow between 1761 and 1841. In doing this, it contrasts the turbulent electoral politics of the 1830s with the seven decades of tranquil electoral politics that preceded it. In the mid- and later-seventeenth century, electoral politics in Carlow was the pursuit of the local elite and parliamentary representation was dominated by the larger landholding families of Burton, Butler and Bagenal. Where consensus could not be reached, contested polls saw members of these families in competition for the representation. The small county electorate, usually numbering no more than seven hundred, was acquiescent in this political hegemony. The county contained the two ‘closed’ boroughs of Carlow town and Old Leighlin, with both constituencies returning members uninfluenced by, and unconnected to, Carlow. The major political events that occurred such as the ‘Patriot’ and Volunteer movements, the enfranchisement of Catholics and the subsequent expansion of the electorate and the activities of the United Irishmen and the 1798 rebellion had no effect on the political monopoly in the county. The Act of Union resulted in the abolition of Old Leighlin borough and a reduction in the representation of Carlow borough to a single member, but it made little difference to the nature of the representation of the county. The first three decades of the nineteenth-century witnessed changes in personnel rather than changes in profile; the Latouche, Bagenal, Bruen and Kavanagh families supplied all of the county representatives for the period.

Change did eventually come to county Carlow, driven by the popular politicisation of the 1820s that led to the temporary loss by the Protestant ascendancy of their long-standing electoral hegemony. Liberal successes in 1831, 1832 and 1837 as well as two controversial and hotly contested elections in 1835 witnessed what seemed to be the end of the dominance of electoral politics by the landed elite in County Carlow. However, Conservative interests had not been eclipsed and Henry Bruen and Conservatives resurrected an electoral dominance starting with Bruen’s victory in the 1840 byelection and continuing with the high-profile victory in the 1841 general election. The resurrected dominance was to endure for a further four decades. This was manifest by the fact that of the ten elections in the county between 1846 and 1874, just one was contested with Liberals recognising the futility of trying to oust the firmly entrenched Conservatives.¹ Even after the introduction of the secret ballot in 1872, this hold remained firm.² The electoral dominance of the Conservative interest is illustrated in figure 10.1.

¹ The Liberal John Ball was successful in the general election of 1852 and was the sole Liberal returned between 1841 and 1880. The same period saw nineteen Conservative returns.

² Hoppen, *Elections, politics, and society in Ireland*, p. 73.

Figure 10-1: Comparison of Electoral Results in Carlow and Neighbouring Counties, 1841 - 1874

County / Year	1841	1847	1852	1857	1859	1865	1868	1874
Waterford	U	U	C	U	U	U	U	C
Kilkenny	U	C	C	C	C	C	U	C
Kildare	U	C	C	U	U	U	U	C
Carlow	C	U	C	U	U	U	U	U
Wicklow	C	U	U	C	U	U	U	C
Wexford	C	U	C	C	C	C	U	C
Queens	U	U	U	C	U	C	U	C

Source: Brian M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978), pp 68 - 119

Carlow borough was controlled first by the Burton family and then by Lord Charleville from the 1790's until the Great Reform Act. The Reform Act of 1832 'opened' the constituency and the contested elections there saw stern competition between Conservatives and Liberals. The borough presented a different political landscape to that of the county:: from 1846 to 1874 seven of the eight elections saw contested polls with a Conservative returned as a 'protest' candidate in a by-election in 1853 and again in the general election in 1857.³ While it has been suggested that this 'independent' spirit was the product of resistance to the Earl of Charleville's unpopular tenure as patron of the borough coupled with the change in the urban franchise qualification on foot of the Irish Reform Act of 1832, this was not the case in Carlow.⁴ The smaller electorates of post-reform boroughs, Carlow among them, were ripe for corruption and bribery.⁵ Conservatives maintained the borough seat to be for sale 'to the highest bidder' prior to the 1841 general

³ John Alexander defeated John Sadleir in 1853 and Alexander retained the seat in 1857. Sadleir had promised to oppose government based on opposition to the Ecclesiastical Act of 1853 and pledged himself to support tenant right. However, he accepted preferment as Commissioner of the Treasury in 1853 forcing him to seek re-election. He was rejected at the poll following a concerted campaign against him by the Tenant League Press that portrayed him as a traitor. Sadlier was exposed as politically corrupt and as a financial swindler eventually taking his own life in 1856. This served to maintain support for Alexander. See <https://www.dib.ie/biography/sadleir-john-a7895>.

⁴ Jupp, 'Urban politics in Ireland, 1801-31' p. 121.

⁵ Hoppen, *Elections, politics, and society in Ireland*, p. 77.

election.⁶ While the Protestant gentry once more enjoyed electoral supremacy in the county, the Catholic clergy held sway in the borough.

The politically disturbed decade of the 1830s in Carlow is a striking contrast to the Conservative certainty that prevailed for the seventy years before, and then for the forty years afterwards. This thesis has examined the structure of electoral politics and found that in Carlow, it was hallmarked by calm co-operation among the landed elite for the last four decades of the eighteenth and the first three decades of the nineteenth centuries. In the pre-union era, politics in Carlow was characterised by consensus and by local loyalties. Political influence rested with the landowning elite in Carlow; the Burton, Bagenal and Butler families were to the fore. At this stage, parliamentary politics operated at a remove from the electorate, with the representation of the county arrived at by consensus among the gentry rather than through a competitive poll. When polls did occur, the small and exclusively Protestant electorate did not deliver any shocks. While there were moves towards reform, principally surrounding the introduction of the Octennial Act in 1768 and the ‘Patriot’ and Volunteer movements that were both visible and active in the 1770s and 1780s, there were no radical shifts in parliamentary representation and it remained the preserve of the landed gentry. Neither the enfranchisement of the Catholic majority in the county following Catholic Relief in 1793 nor the upheaval of the 1798 Rebellion altered this settled political state. This was reflected by the enduring dominance of the Butler, Burton and Bagenal families who provided an impressive fourteen of the fifteen MPs elected in the county between 1761 and 1797. The exception to this familial hegemony was Henry Bruen I, an *arriviste* to Carlow who had amassed a considerable landholding accompanied by a large electoral interest. His tenure as an MP for the county was cut short by his death.

The Act of Union, potentially a very disruptive development in electoral politics that gave to bitter dispute elsewhere, caused little upset in Carlow. It saw some division within the gentry and between the county’s MPs. William Burton was resolutely opposed to the measure and Richard Butler, after some vacillation, supported it. In the event, neither of these members attended the Westminster parliament and were unseated in the first post-union election. Their replacements, David Latouche (a large landholder) and Walter Bagenal enjoyed the significant support of the estate of Henry Bruen I and together represented the county between 1802 and

⁷ C.F. McGleenon, *A very independent county, parliamentary elections and politics in county Armagh, 1750-1800* (Belfast, 2011); Malcomson, *John Foster*.

1812. In both county and borough, political consensus rather than conflict reigned. Henry Bruen II replaced Bagenal in 1812 and was joined in the representation in 1818 by Ulysses Bagenal Burgh following an uncontested election. Both were supporters of Catholic relief and both were returned without a contest again in 1820 thus continuing the pattern of parliamentary representation being decided by the gentry of the county, albeit with the acquiescence of the mainly Catholic electorate.

This is not to say that the Catholic question was not a political issue in Carlow in the 1820s: unlike in other counties, it manifested itself in meetings and petitions rather than overt electoral upset. When compared to the electoral turbulence seen in the 1826 general election in Louth, Monaghan, Cavan, Westmeath and, most spectacularly in Waterford, Carlow remained politically tranquil. The seismic political shock delivered by O'Connell's victory in the Clare byelection in July 1828 also did little to alter the political balance in Carlow. However, following Catholic Emancipation, the general election of 1830 did see a challenge to the established order. It was in the person of the the reform-minded Horace Rochfort, himself a member of the local gentry, rather than a newly emancipated Catholic.. Rochfort's challenge fell short, and by the general election of 1831 he had jettisoned his Liberal notions, choosing to contest the election as a Conservative alongside Henry Bruen II. Rochfort chose what he saw as the certainty Conservatism over an unproven Liberalism. The groundswell of public opinion was firmly on the Liberal side however, and Bruen and Rochfort's decision not to continue to a poll recognised this. This allowed Walter Blackney and John Milley-Doyle to be returned unopposed. This inaugurated a series of bad-tempered elections throughout the thirties where intimidation, mass mobilisation and a well-organised Liberal political apparatus seemed to have overwhelmed Carlow Conservatives. Carlow borough also became a battleground between the gentry and the newly politicised Catholic body supported by their clergy. However steady management of the registry coupled with the flexing of the economic power held by the gentry gradually redressed the balance and the general election of July 1841 saw Conservatives in the ascendancy in the county once more. They managed to maintain their electoral superiority for the following three decades.

The focus of this thesis has been to contrast the political upheaval of the 1830s with the settled state of politics that prevailed in the seventy years before. An examination of the consensual nature of electoral politics in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries brings the tumult of the thirties into sharp relief. Equally remarkable is the manner in which the Protestant ascendancy in the county managed to re-assert their political control following the high-profile general election of 1841. However, the examination of politics in Carlow has not been without difficulty principally due to the dearth of sources. There are few family or personal archives; the papers of the Bruen and Kavanagh families do not contain significant amounts of

political material. The Burton papers collection held by Carlow County Archive is small and contains nothing of political interest. Apart from tangential references to politics in the papers of Bishop James Doyle, there are no papers extant from William Blackney, Nicholas Aylward Vigors, the Finn family, David Latouche or the Bagenal family. This is in contrast to the rich archives of the Gosford Peers in County Armagh used by G.F. McGleenon in his study of politics in county Armagh, or the Foster-Masserene papers used by A.P.W. Malcomson in his study of John Foster.⁷ Required to look elsewhere, it was possible to glean some material from extensive searches of other contemporary archives such as the Rebellion Papers, the Peel Papers, the Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers as well as comprehensive surveys of newspapers and parliamentary sources such as Hansard and the Journals of the House of Commons. They provide limited access to the thinking or organisation of the main interests, and although limited, they permit an examination of electoral politics such as this work has pursued.

This thesis has outlined how Carlow provides an illustration of the nature of change in the character of electoral politics in a relatively prosperous inland county. The Protestant ascendancy exercised total electoral control in the mid-seventeenth century, a control that was not challenged by the dramatic expansion of the electorate occasioned by Catholic enfranchisement in 1793 or by the Act of Union. Emboldened by Catholic emancipation and undeterred by the reduction in the electorate that accompanied it, the rising Catholic middle asserted themselves politically in the 1830s. This tumultuous political period spurred the Protestant Conservative interest to regroup and through the exploitation of their economic strength rooted in land ownership, they managed to regain political control. This resurgence might not have been possible had access to land for tenant freeholders not been a virtual guarantee of prosperity. It is probable that this link between prosperity and tenancy underpinned the political hegemony that endured after the 1841 election, a dominance that did not falter until the ownership of the land itself became a political issue. It seems that in Carlow, unlike surrounding counties, tenant prosperity dampened parliamentary political change. It might also be argued that Carlow Poor Law Union (established in 1844) presented a local forum for political and social contestation. Local and parliamentary electoral politics in the decades following the 1841 election are areas where further historical research might be usefully conducted.

⁷ C.F. McGleenon, *A very independent county, parliamentary elections and politics in county Armagh, 1750-1800* (Belfast, 2011); Malcomson, *John Foster*.

Appendices

Appendix A: Electoral Results Carlow County and Borough, 1761-1797					
Year	Polling Dates	Type	Constituency	Candidate	Votes
1761	June	General Election	County Carlow	Benjamin Burton Thomas Butler	NC
			Carlow Borough	Colonel Robert Burton Sir Richard Wolseley	NC
			Old Leighlin Borough	Francis Andrew John Bourke	NC
1765	31 October	Byelection (death of Colonel Robert Burton)	Carlow Borough	Robert Doyne Junior	
1767	9 November	Byelection (death of Benjamin Burton)	County Carlow	John Hyde	NC
1768	18 July	General Election (following septennial act)	County Carlow	Beauchamp Bagenal William Burton	NC NC
			Carlow Borough	James Somerville Edward Hoare	NC
			Old Leighlin Borough	Sir Fitzgerald Alymer Thomas Monck (replaced by John Blaquiére following death of Monck)	NC

Year	Polling Dates	Type	Constituency	Candidate	Votes
1776	18 May	General Election	County Carlow	William Burton	417
				William Bunbury	338
				William Paul Warren	246
			Carlow Borough	John Prendergast Arthur Dawson	NC
			Old Leighlin Borough	Sir John Blaquiere Robert Jephson	NC
1778	20 May	Byelection (following death of William Bunbury)	County Carlow	Beauchamp Bagenal	NC
1783	13 August	General Election	County Carlow	William Burton	508
				Sir Richard Butler	351
				John Rochfort	337
			Carlow Borough	Sir John Brown Charles Desvaux	NC
			Old Leighlin Borough	Lord Luttrell Arthur Acheson (Luttrell replaced by Sir Edward Leslie)	NC

Year	Polling Dates	Type	Constituency	Candidate	Votes
1790	28 April	General Election	County Carlow	William Burton Henry Bruen	NC
			Carlow Borough	Augustus Cavendish Bradshaw John Ormsby Vandeleur	NC NC
			Old Leighlin Borough	Arthur Acheson Edward Cooke (Acheson elevated to the peerage in September 1790 and replaced by Patrick Duigenan)	
1796		Byelection (death of Colonel Henry Bruen)	County Carlow	Sir Richard Butler	NC
1797	25 July - 4 August	General Election	County Carlow	William Burton	1072
				Sir Richard Butler	1069
				Philip Newton	936
				Walter Kavanagh	922
			Carlow Borough	Henry Sadlier Prittie William Elliot (replaced by Col John Wolfe)	NC
			Old Leighlin Borough	Edward Cooke Sir Boyle Roche	NC
<p>Sources: Compiled from Robert Malcomson, <i>The Carlow parliamentary roll, comprising lists of knights of the shire and members for the borough of Carlow</i> (Dublin, 1872), <i>Return of the names of every member returned to serve in each parliament from the year 1696 up to the present time, specifying the names of the county, city, university, borough, or place for which returned</i> HC, 1878 [cd 69-I] and Edith Mary Johnston-Liik, <i>History of the Irish parliament 1692-1800</i>, (6 Vols, Belfast, 2002).</p>					

Appendix B: Electoral Results Carlow County and Borough, 1802 - 30					
Year	Polling Dates	Type	Constituency	Candidate	Votes
1802	26 July	General Election	County Carlow	Col. David Latouche	524
				Walter Bagenal	479
				William Burton	437
				Sir Richard Butler	426
	24 July		Carlow Borough	Charles Montague Ormsby	NC
1806	13 November	General Election	County Carlow	Col. David Latouche	NC
				Walter Bagenal	NC
	13 November		Carlow Borough	Frederick John Robinson	NC
1807	20 May	General Election	County Carlow	Col. David Latouche	NC
				Walter Bagenal	NC
	26 May		Carlow Borough	Andrew Strahan	NC
1812	30 October	General Election	County Carlow	Col. David Latouche	680
				Col. Henry Bruen	597
				Walter Bagenal	256
	24 October	General Election	Carlow Borough	Frederick John Falkiner	NC
1816	18 April	Byelection (death of David Latouche)	County Carlow	Robert Latouche	NC
1818	29 June	General Election	County Carlow	Col. Henry Bruen	NC
				Sir Ulysses Bagenal Burgh	NC
	26 June		Carlow Borough	Charles Harvey	NC
1820	18 March	General Election	County Carlow	Col. Henry Bruen	NC
				Sir Ulysses Bagenal Burgh	NC
	16 March		Carlow Borough	Charles Harvey	NC

Year	Polling Dates	Type	Constituency	Candidate	Votes
1826	6 April	Byelection (elevation of Burgh to peerage)	County Carlow	Thomas Kavanagh	NC
1826	19 June	General Election	County Carlow	Col. Henry Bruen Thomas Kavanagh	NC NC
	15 June		Carlow Borough	Lord Tullamore (Charles William Bury)	NC
1830	12 August	General Election	County Carlow	Henry Bruen (Cons) Thomas Kavanagh (Cons) Horace Rochfort (Lib)	242 216 174
	6 August		Carlow Borough	Lord Tullamore (Cons)	NC
<p>Sources: Compiled from Robert Malcomson, <i>The Carlow parliamentary roll, comprising lists of knights of the shire and members for the borough of Carlow</i> (Dublin, 1872), <i>Return of the names of every member returned to serve in each parliament from the year 1696 up to the present time</i>, HC, 1878 [cd 69-I]; R.G. Thorne, <i>The House of Commons, 1790-1820</i> (5 Vols, London, 1986); D.R. Fisher (ed), <i>The House of Commons, 1820-1832</i> (7 Vols, Cambridge, 2009); B.M. Walker, <i>Parliamentary elections in Ireland, 1801-1922</i>, (Dublin, 1978).</p>					

**Appendix D: Bruen Estate Payments to Alex Humfrey to Register
Tenant's Freeholds 1805-1812**

	£	s	d
10 July 1805	5	10	0
18 February 1806	4	19	8
15 August 1806	3	0	0
29 July 1807	6	7	0
9 June 1808	7	11	2
9 December 1808	22	17	19
10 October 1810	9	8	5
3 October 1813	19	3	0
15 January 1818	30	14	5

Bruen Papers Ms. 32,483/1, Ms
Sources: 29,773/2, Ms 29,773/5, Ms
29,773/7

**Appendix E: House of Commons Voting Record on Irish Issues of Henry Bruen
and Ulysses B. Burgh, 1819-26**

Date	Division	Bruen	Kavanagh
3 May 1819	Catholic Relief (Grattan)	For	Absent
5 May 1819	Repeal of Irish Widow Tax	Absent	Absent
1 July 1819	Parliamentary Reform	Absent	Absent
13 Dec. 1819	Seditious Meeting (Exemption of Ireland)	Absent	Absent
14 June 1820	Irish Union Duties	Absent	Absent
28 Feb. 1820	Catholic Relief Bill (Plunkett)	Absent	Absent
3 Apr. 1821	Malt Tax	For	For
15 Apr. 1821	Parliamentary Reform	Absent	Absent
9 May 1821	Parliamentary Reform	Absent	Against
30 May 1821	Irish Treasury Bills	Absent	Absent
15 June 1821	Irish Revenue Inquiry	Absent	Absent
18 June 1821	Irish Glebe Houses Grant	Absent	Absent
7 Feb. 1822	Irish Habeus Corpus Suspension	Absent	For
7 Feb. 1822	Irish Insurrection Bill	Absent	For
8 Feb. 1822	Irish Insurrection Bill	Absent	For
8 Feb. 1822	Irish Insurrection Bill	Absent	For
8 Feb. 1822	Irish Insurrection Bill	Absent	For
8 Feb. 1822	Irish Habeus Corpus Suspension	Absent	For
25 Apr. 1822	Parliamentary Reform	Absent	Absent
30 Apr. 1822	Catholic Peers Relief	Absent	Absent
7 June 1822	Irish Constables Bill	Absent	Absent
19 June 1822	Irish Tithes (John Newport)	Absent	Against
2 July 1822	Repeal of Window Tax	Absent	Absent
8 July 1822	Irish Insurrection Bill	Absent	Absent
8 July 1822	Irish Insurrection Bill (Limiting Duration)	Absent	Absent
22 July 1822	Grant for Irish Proclamations	Absent	Against
4 Mar. 1823	Irish Church	Absent	Absent
24 Mar. 1823	Plot to Murder Irish Lord Lieutenant	Absent	Absent
11 Apr. 1823	Irish Glebe Houses Grant	Absent	For
22 Apr. 1823	Inquiry into prosecution of Dublin Rioters	For	Against
24 Apr. 1823	Parliamentary Reform	Absent	Absent
2 May 1823	Irish County Treasures Bill	Absent	Absent
12 May 1823	Irish Insurrection Bill	Absent	Absent
16 June 1823	Irish Tithes Bill	Absent	Absent
24 June 1823	Dublin Disturbances	Absent	Absent
26 June 1823	Administration of Justice in Ireland	Absent	Absent
1 July 1823	Irish Glebe Houses	Absent	Absent
6 Feb. 1824	Roman Catholic Burials	Absent	Absent
19 Feb. 1824	Catholic Office-Holders	Absent	Against
2 Mar. 1824	Repeal of Window Tax	Absent	Absent

Date	Division	Bruen	Kavanagh
15 Mar. 1824	Irish Protestant Charter Schools	Absent	Absent
4 May 1824	Advance of Capital to Ireland	Absent	Absent
5 May 1824	Reduce Irish Militia	Absent	Absent
6 May 1824	Inquiry into Irish Church	Absent	Absent
26 May 1824	Irish First Fruit Revenues	Absent	Absent
27 May 1824	Irish Clergy Pluralities (Irish Clergy Residence Bill)	Absent	Absent
14 June 1824	Irish Insurrection Bill	Absent	For
15 Feb. 1824	Irish Unlawful Societies Bill	Absent	For
18 Feb. 1824	Catholic Association's Case on Unlawful Societies Bill	Absent	For
21 Feb. 1824	Irish Unlawful Societies Bill	Absent	For
25 Feb. 1824	Irish Unlawful Societies Bill	Absent	For
1 Mar. 1824	Catholic Relief	Absent	Absent
21 Apr. 1824	Catholic Relief	For	For
26 Apr. 1824	Irish Franchise Bill	Absent	Absent
9 May 1825	Irish Franchise Bill	Absent	Absent
10 May 1825	Catholic Relief Bill	For	For
17 May 1825	Repeal of Window Tax	Absent	Against
13 June 1825	Irish Emigration	Absent	Against
13 June 1825	Irish Emigration	Absent	Against
14 June 1825	Irish Church	Absent	Against
9 Mar. 1826	Non-resident Irish Borough Electors	Absent	Absent
20 Mar. 1826	Irish Charter Schools	Absent	Absent
21 Mar. 1826	Irish First Fruit	Absent	Absent
23 Mar. 1826	Irish Charities	Absent	Absent
20 Mar. 1826	Dublin Foundling Hospital	Absent	Absent
Sources: JHC, English chronicle and Whitehall evening post, Hansard, The times, SNL, SRCCC, LS, MH, MC, LES, LC			

Appendix F: Carlow County and Borough Election Results 1831-41					
Year	Polling Dates	Type	Constituency	Candidate	Votes
1831	11 May	General Election	County Carlow	Walter Blackney (Lib) John Milley-Doyle (Lib)	NC
	7 May		Carlow Borough	Lord Tullamore (Cons)	NC
1832	22 December	General Election	Carlow County	Walter Blackney (Lib)	657
				Thomas Wallace (Lib)	657
				Henry Bruen (Cons)	483
				Thomas Kavanagh (Cons)	470
	15 December		Carlow Borough	N.A. Vigors (Lib)	145
				Francis Bruen (Cons)	120
1835	15 January	General Election	Carlow County	Henry Bruen (Cons)	588
				Thomas Kavanagh (Cons)	587
				Maurice O Connell (Lib)	554
				Michael Cahill (Lib)	553
	16 January		Carlow Borough	Francis Bruen (Cons)	150
				N.A. Vigors (Lib)	134
1835	16 June	Byelection	Carlow County	N.A. Vigors (Lib)	627
				Alexander Raphael (Lib)	626
				Thomas Kavanagh (Cons)	572
				Henry Bruen (Cons	571
1835	19 August	Vigors and Raphael unseated		Bruen and Kavanagh declared elected	
1837	18 February	Byelection	Carlow County (death of Thomas Kavanagh)	N.A. Vigors (Lib)	669
				Thomas Bunbury (Cons)	633
1837	11 August	General Election	Carlow County	N.A. Vigors (Lib)	730
				John Ashton Yates (Lib)	730
				Henry Bruen (Cons	643
				Thomas Bunbury (Cons)	643
	8 August		Carlow Borough	W.H. Maule (Lib)	180
				Francis Bruen (Cons)	158
				Philip Bagenal	2

Year	Polling Dates	Type	Constituency	Candidate	Votes
1839	27 February	Byelection (Maule appointed Baron of the Exchequer)	Carlow Borough	Francis Bruen (Cons) Thomas Gisborne (Lib)	167 164
On petition, Bruen unseated and Gisbourne declared elected on 12/07/1839, poll amended Bruen 159, Gisbourne 160					
1840	5 December	Byelection (Death of Vigors)	County Carlow	Col. Henry Bruen (Cons) Frederick Ponsonby	722 556
1841	17 July	General Election	County Carlow	Col. Henry Bruen (Cons) Thomas Bunbury (Cons) John Ashton Yates (Lib) Daniel O Connell Jnr (Re)	705 704 697 696
	5 July		Carlow Borough	Capt. Brownlow Villiers Layard (Lib)	NC
<p>Sources: Compiled from Robert Malcomson, <i>The Carlow parliamentary roll, comprising lists of knights of the shire and members for the borough of Carlow</i> (Dublin, 1872), <i>Return of the names of every member returned to serve in each parliament from the year 1696 up to the present time</i>, HC, 1878 [cd 69-I]; B.M. Walker, <i>Parliamentary elections in Ireland, 1801-1922</i>, (Dublin, 1978); J. Vincent and M. Stenton (eds), <i>McCalmont's Parliamentary Poll Book, 1832-1918</i>, (Brighton, 1971)</p>					

Appendix G: Politics of a Catholic landed family: the Finn Family of Carlow

The Finns of county Carlow were a Catholic family involved with politics in the later eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries. William Finn Senior (ca. 1740-1813) was a successful brewer, tanner and currier of Castle Street, Carlow. He managed to accumulate a large property portfolio in Carlow town together with substantial agricultural holdings in counties Carlow, Kilkenny and Queen's County.¹ He was brother to Edward (Edmund) Finn of Kilkenny, who published *Finn's Leinster Journal* until his death in 1777. Edward's widow, Catherine, and later his nephew Patrick, continued to publish the newspaper that, while espousing moderately liberal political opinion, managed to garner the support of both the Protestant gentry and well-to-do Catholics.² This eschewal of extremes was mirrored by William Finn who, while he was politically active, was not extreme and managed to maintain cordial relations with the Protestant gentry and professional class. William was active in the local Volunteer movement in the 1780s and later in Catholic politics, acting of one of the Carlow delegates to the Catholic convention in 1792.³ He persisted in his support for Catholic relief and was, for example, one of the signatories (with his son William Junior) of a requisition for a meeting in Carlow in January 1810 to arrange a parliamentary petition on the matter.⁴ William married twice. His first wife died in in September 1777 and he married his second wife, Lucinda Byrne, in December 1778. It is unclear when his daughters were born, but he had one son by his first wife and a further three by his second. William Senior died in January 1813, his obituary lauding him as one of whom it was 'difficult to speak of him in terms adequate to his merit'.⁵ William Senior bequeathed substantial properties to each of his four sons.

His eldest son Thomas (ca. 1772-1842) although resident in Dublin when William Senior died, inherited substantial property in county Carlow, in Queen's County and in Carlow town including the successful brewery and tannery.⁶ Although unlikely to have been financially dependent on the profession, Thomas worked as a journalist and as assistant editor of Watty Cox's *Irish Magazine* between 1810 and 1814, when he penned graphic accounts of the 1798 rebellion in Carlow.⁷ His writings also led to the prosecution and eventual conviction of Cox in 1811 for seditious libel following the publication of his article *The Painter's Cut: A Vision*.⁸ Thomas

¹ A full listing of his properties is available in his will, see Copy will of William Finn, 1807 (CCA, Burton Papers, P1-359).

² Richard Robert Madden, *The history of Irish periodical literature, from the end of the 17th to the middle of the 19th century*, (2 Vols, London, 1867), pp 236-40.

³ *SNL*, 6 May 1780; Woods, 'Personnel of the Catholic convention', p. 49.

⁴ *DEP*, 18 Jan. 1810.

⁵ *The Irish Magazine*, Feb. 1813.

⁶ Will of William Finn (CCA, Burton Papers), p. 2.

⁷ https://www.victorianperiodicals.com/series3/single_sample.asp?id=128552.

⁸ 'The Painter's Cut: A Vision', in *The Irish Magazine*, July 1810, pp 293-5; *SNL*, 19 Feb. 1811, 27 May 1811, Pilot, 22 Feb. 1822.

featured frequently in Catholic meetings in Carlow, earning some notoriety for his colourful and sometimes tempestuous contributions. His description in August 1812 of Lord Castlereagh as ‘the man who rose to power like the filth of a deleterious liquid in a state of fermentation’ illustrates his abrasive oratorical style. Thomas began as a supporter of Catholic claims and of Daniel O’Connell, forcefully defending him during the Magee controversy in 1813. He described him as one whose ‘great fault is too much candour, but it is the fault of a noble mind’.⁹ He was also active in other local matters such as the committee formed to abolish corporation tolls and customs, the Carlow Society for bettering the Condition of the Poor and a committee formed to attempt to introduce linen manufacturing to the county.¹⁰ He continued to hold a preeminent position in Catholic politics in Carlow until the introduction of the Catholic rent in the mid-1820s, a measure he disapproved of, characterising the rent as ‘a beggar’s tax’ in an open letter published in the press.¹¹ This served to begin to open a schism with O’Connell and did little to reduce the tension between him and Bishop James Doyle.¹² ¹³ His relationship with Bishop James Doyle of Kildare and Leighlin was stormy. Finn accused Doyle in 1818 of interfering financial arrangements between him and his sister and, although he later apologised, the relationship between the two remained strained.¹⁴ Public invective like this was to become a feature of Thomas’s disagreements with others.

Thomas gave credit grudgingly to O’Connell following the concession of emancipation in 1829 and he went on to lend his support to the repeal campaign.¹⁵ He assumed the editorship of the *Waterford Chronicle* in 1830 and used this platform to criticise Henry Bruen and Thomas Kavanagh’s past parliamentary performances during the 1830 and 1831 elections.¹⁶ While never again enthusiastic about O’Connell, he was willing to accord him some credit. Speaking at the county Kilkenny byelection in February 1831, he grudgingly praised O’Connell observing that ‘he has rendered greater service to his country than any Irishman who has laboured for that country for the last three hundred years’.¹⁷

William’s second son Patrick (ca. 1783 – 1847) attended Carlow College as a lay student between January 1794 and February 1804, also inherited several properties in Carlow.¹⁸ The income from these enabled him to live from his private means allowing him ample opportunity

⁹ *MC*, 3 Nov. 1813.

¹⁰ *CMP*, 19 Feb 1818; Rochfort to peel, 24 May 1818 (BL, Peel Papers, Add Ms 40277, f. 204; *CMP*, 1 June 1818.

¹¹ *DEP*, 2 Sept. 1824.

¹² *DMR*, 5 Aug 1825.

¹³ *FJ*, 29 Aug. 1812.

¹⁴ Doyle to Finn, 24 Sept 1818; Finn to Doyle 24 Sept. 1818 (Delany Archive, Doyle Papers, IE-DA/KL/00018-1, 2).

¹⁵ *CMP, Pilot*, 27 Apr. 1829, *Pilot*, 5 Nov. 1830; *Pilot*, 5 Nov. 1830.

¹⁶ *WWC*, 14 Aug. 1830; 7 May 1831.

¹⁷ *WWC*, 5 Mar. 1831.

¹⁸ *Student roll of Carlow college, 1793-1811*, (Carlow, 1948), p. 26.

to engage in Catholic politics.¹⁹ Although not as combative as his brother Thomas, he was prominent, acting as secretary or chairing almost every Catholic meeting between 1811 and 1829. This was acknowledged by Catholics in Carlow at the ‘conciliation dinner’ staged following emancipation on 23 April 1829.²⁰ Patrick served as secretary to various Liberal causes including the local O’Connell tribute committee the Carlow Independent Club and repeal meetings in Carlow.²¹ He took an active part in electoral politics, acting as seconder for John Milley-Doyle in the 1831 general election and he joined the National Political Union on 27 December 1831.²² Patrick supported parliamentary reform and attended a reform meeting on 24 May 1832.²³ This was to be his last action as a political liberal.

Displaying some instability of character, Thomas Finn renewed his public feud with Bishop Doyle in January 1832 through another abusive open letter questioning the prelate’s honesty and principles.²⁴ A second even more abusive missal followed in February, questioning the Bishop’s fitness to lead.²⁵ This antipathy was deepened by Doyle’s opposition to the candidacy in Carlow borough of William Francis Finn in the general election of December 1832, occasioning yet another public letter from Thomas Finn questioning the bishop’s judgement and motives.²⁶ Doyle was the dominant influence in Liberal politics in Carlow at that time causing both Thomas and his brother Patrick to gravitate towards the Conservative Bruen faction.²⁷ Thomas and Patrick copper-fastened their defection at the borough election itself when the latter proposed and the former spoke in support of Francis Bruen in the borough election in December 1832.²⁸ Days later, both supported Henry Bruen in the county election, an action that confirmed their move to the Conservative side, attracting strident criticism from their co-religionists.²⁹

Thomas and Patrick espoused Conservative politics thereafter. Both voted for Bruen and Kavanagh in the general election in January 1835 much to the delight of Conservative observers.³⁰ They were publicly named by O’Connell himself as two of the thirty-five Catholics who voted for the Conservatives in Carlow.³¹ This provoked an epistolary assault by Patrick on O’Connell

¹⁹ *Report from the select committee of the House of Lords appointed to enquire into the state of Ireland in respect of crime, part I*, HL. 1839 [cd. 486-I], p. 813.

²⁰ *Pilot*, 27 Apr. 1829.

²¹ *Pilot*, 4 May 1829, *CMP*, 4 May 1829, *WWC*, 30 Oct. 1830, *DEP*, 4 Nov. 1830, *CMP*, 13 Jan. 1831, *CMP*, 24 Feb. 1831, *CMP*, 17 Mar. 1831

²² *CMP*, 12 May 1831, *DMR*, 28 Dec. 1831.

²³ *CS*, 26 May 1832.

²⁴ *Pilot*, 18 Jan. 1832.

²⁵ *CST*, 9 Feb. 1832.

²⁶ *CS*, 24 Nov. 1832.

²⁷ *CMP*, 1 Nov. 1832, 22 Nov. 1832.

²⁸ *CS*, 15 Dec 1832.

²⁹ *CMP*, 20 Dec. 1832, 24 Dec. 1832, *CS*, 22 Dec. 1832.

³⁰ *CWH*, 4 Feb. 1825.

³¹ *The Times*, 6 Feb. 1835.

which served to further alienate him from Liberals in Carlow.³² Patrick did little to appease his Catholic neighbours. He served as the sole Catholic juror in what was thought to have been a ‘packed’ jury in the retrial at the Spring Assizes 1836 of Archbald Slye for the supposedly sectarian murder of Fr. John Walsh.³³ He continued to publicly endorse and support Conservative candidates in both borough and county.³⁴ He acted as secretary to a Conservative meeting in May 1835, he spoke at a dinner given in honour of Henry Bruen and Thomas Kavanagh on 17 Jan 1837, and spoke at a celebratory dinner given to Francis Bruen after his victory in the 1839 byelection.³⁵ All of this contributed to his pariah status in Carlow and led to the sundering of relations with the local Catholic clergy. His property was also subject to regular vandalism in response to his ‘apostate’ political opinions.³⁶ Following the 1841 general election, Finn gradually withdrew from public life. Patrick Finn was unmarried and died in Carlow in October 1847.³⁷

As a resident of Dublin, Thomas did not have the same opportunity to engage with Conservatives in Carlow, but he continued his defiant support of them coupled with his antipathy towards the Catholic clergy and Daniel O’Connell. Following his declaration of support for Conservative principles, he gained some prestige among them. He acted as editor of the little-known *Hibernian Constitutional Magazine*, a publication welcomed by Conservatives that sought to sustain ‘the rights of the Irish Aristocracy’ by combatting ‘A Union of Spiritual and Temporal power in the hands of the Roman Catholic Clergy’.³⁸ Although no copies have been located, advertisements and contemporary commentary suggest that the magazine was critical of Bishop Doyle and often questioned his *bona fides*.³⁹ Like Patrick, Thomas launched a public attack on O’Connell in February 1835. His original letter of 18 February 1835 to the Dublin newspaper *Stewart’s Despatch*, in which he questioned O’Connell’s honesty, was widely reproduced in the press and then circulated in pamphlet form.⁴⁰ These published attacks continued with Finn describing O’Connell variously as ‘the Kerry Robespierre’, as one who was skilled in ‘left-hand dexterity’ and as ‘the most immoral and impious monster in Europe’.⁴¹ These strident public pronouncements bestowed a certain celebrity on Thomas who was often invoked by the Conservative press in the following years as an example of a Catholic who shared their perception

³² *DEP*, 14 Feb. 1835; *BN*, 17 Feb. 1835.

³³ Cronin, *Fr. John Walsh*, p. 24.

³⁴ *CS*, 17 Jan. 1835, Poll Book 1835 Elections, (NLI, Bruen Papers, MS 29,778-1), *Pilot*, 4 Aug. 1837.

³⁵ *LE*, 21 Jan. 1837, *CS*, 31 May 1835, 21 Jan. 1837, 9 Mar. 1839

³⁶ *State of Ireland in respect of crime*, p. 816.

³⁷ *LC*, 4 Nov. 1847.

³⁸ *Warder*, 15 May 1833, *LE*, 1 June 1833.

³⁹ It is unclear how many issues were published, but articles from the first few issues were widely reprinted including the satirical ‘Bishop Doyle and Peter Doyle’ which portrayed the bishop as unconcerned by the plight of freeholders who voted against their landlords, see *CS*, 18 May 1833.

⁴⁰ *CS*, 14 Feb. 1835, *CC*, 17 Feb. 1835, *KM*, 18 Feb. 1835, *Warder*, 18 Feb. 1835, *LC*, 21 Feb. 1835, *BCC*, 21 Feb. 1835, *WM*, 21 Feb. 1835, Notice taken from “Stewart’s Despatch”, 18 February 1835 (NLI, Ephemera Collection, EPH E571a).

⁴¹ *CS*, 23 Jan. 1836, 7 May 1836, *MP*, 22 Feb. 1837

of the hypocrisy and dishonesty of Bishop Doyle and Daniel O’Connell.⁴² Finn died in Dublin on 11 March 1842 after a painful illness.⁴³ Thomas Finn married a Miss Wade from Raheny, Co. Dublin on and had at least two sons by her, one of whom, Charles Francis died aged twenty-five in Naples in March 1826.⁴⁴

William Francis Finn (1784-1862) was a barrister and a steady follower of Daniel O’Connell. He entered Trinity College, Dublin in 1802, graduating in 1805, and later he attended King’s Inns completing studies there in 1808.⁴⁵ He excelled as a student and obtained a medal for oratory in 1805.⁴⁶ In common with his siblings, he took an active part in Catholic politics in Carlow often requisitioning, attending, chairing and speaking at meetings both in Carlow and Dublin.⁴⁷ As a Catholic activist and a barrister, he came into contact with Daniel O’Connell who, at that time, was actively seeking a suitable husband for his sister Alicia.⁴⁸ O’Connell had already discounted one of his sister’s suitors, the attorney Kit Moriarty, as being incapable of supporting her when he began discussions with Finn.⁴⁹ Finn was aware that he was set to inherit extensive lands in the Tullaroan, Co, Kilkenny from his father.⁵⁰ He assured O’Connell that these lands were set well under value and would be worth £1,000 per year when the current leases expired.⁵¹ O’Connell was reassured. Archbishop Murray officiated at William and Alicia’s wedding in O’Connell’s residence in Merrion Square on 23 Jan 1812.⁵²

William persisted in his political activism which saw him speak in support of Walter Bagenal and David Latouche in the 1812 general election in Carlow.⁵³ While his political focus shifted to Dublin and O’Connell, and he was prominent in aggregate Catholic meetings there, his oratory proved a welcome addition to meetings in Carlow. He spoke in favour of the Catholic Rent at a meeting in Carlow on 4 September 1824 delivering ‘one of the best speeches we have ever heard in a public assembly’; he spoke again in Carlow on 15 April 1825 and acted as secretary to an aggregate meeting of Catholics in Carlow on 28 November 1825.⁵⁴ Finn proved particularly useful to O’Connell when he acted as secretary and main organiser of the Leinster Provincial

⁴² *WM*, 28 Feb. 1835; *CJEA*, 18 Sept. 1837, *LSCA*, 13 Mar. 1840; *WXC*, 14 Nov. 1840, 16 Jan. 1841, 13 Mar. 1841; *KM*, 15 Dec. 1841.

⁴³ *DEPKT*, 17 Mar. 1842; *CS*, 19 Mar. 1842.

⁴⁴ *BCC*, 15 May 1826; *CC*, 16 May 1825; *LKC*, 17 May 1826.

⁴⁵ James H. Dodd (ed.), *A catalogue of graduates who have proceeded to degrees in the University of Dublin* (Dublin, 1869), p. 191; Edward Keane, P. Beryl Phair and Thomas U. Sadlier (eds), *King’s Inns admission papers 1607 - 1867* (Dublin, 1982), p. 163.

⁴⁶ George Dames Burtchaell, *Genealogical memoirs of the members of parliament for the county and city of Kilkenny from the earliest record to the present time* (Dublin, 1888), p. 212.

⁴⁷ See for example *DEP*, 18 Jan. 1810, *FJ*, 7 Oct. 1811, 26 Dec. 1811

⁴⁸ O’Connell (ed.), *Correspondence*, i, p. 154.

⁴⁹ O’Connell (ed.), *Correspondence*, vii, p. 180; *I*, p. 242.

⁵⁰ Copy will of William Finn, 1807 (CCA, Burton Papers, P1-359).

⁵¹ O’Connell (ed.), *Correspondence*, i, p. 262.

⁵² *FJ*, 25 Jan. 1812, *CMI*, 28 Jan. 1812.

⁵³ *FJ*, 28 Oct. 1812.

⁵⁴ *FJ*, 7 Sept. 1824, *DEP* 21 Apr. 1825, *DEP*, 29 Nov. 1825.

Catholic meeting held in Carlow on 15 December 1825.⁵⁵ As described in the text on page 102, O'Connell expected a hostile reception following the 'wings' controversy, but was pleasantly surprised by the enthusiastically warm welcome he received. It was later suggested that Finn had 'packed' the meeting by introducing an admission charge in order to exclude 40-shilling freeholders that faced disenfranchisement.⁵⁶

Finn remained active in Catholic politics in association with O'Connell; he chaired the first meeting of the Catholic Association in Dublin after the election in Clare in July 1828 and attended O'Connell's second election for Clare in July 1829.⁵⁷ As discussed above (pp 163-4), he first put himself forward as a parliamentary candidate for Carlow borough in 1831. In this he encountered opposition from Bishop Doyle as he opposed the institution of a poor law. Eventually Finn opted to accept an offer to stand free of expense in county Kilkenny.⁵⁸ Afterwards disagreement persisted as to whether or not O'Connell had supported Finn's candidacy in Carlow borough in the face of opposition from Doyle.⁵⁹ Finn was returned unopposed for county Kilkenny as a Repealer in December 1832.⁶⁰ He was returned unopposed again in January 1835. In parliament, Finn generally followed O'Connell's lead. Perhaps the highpoint of his parliamentary career was securing the appointment of a committee to investigate the nature of Orange Lodges in Ireland.⁶¹ When the reports were published, they appeared to suggest the existence of an 'Orange' conspiracy to subvert the British state, which eventually led to the dissolution of the order in February 1836.⁶² This was reflected in the resolution of thanks to Finn passed at a meeting of freeholders held in Kilkenny on 31 July 1837 to select a candidate to replace him in the approaching general election.⁶³ Following this, Finn retired to his lands in Kilkenny where he lived unostentatiously with his wife in Tullaroan Cottage, a modest building boasting just two bedrooms.⁶⁴ He died on 9 December 1862 within hours of his wife. They had no children.⁶⁵

The youngest brother, Michael Finn (c. 1790-1855) attended Carlow College between 1800 and 1809.⁶⁶ He inherited several houses in Carlow town, lands in Tomard, county Carlow and lands in Tullaroan, Co. Kilkenny.⁶⁷ His father considered him immature, stipulating in his

⁵⁵ *DMR*, 16 Dec. 1825.

⁵⁶ *DMR*, 9 Jan. 1826.

⁵⁷ *SNL*, 21 July 1828, *DEP*, 1 Aug. 1829..

⁵⁸ *KKJ*, 17 Oct. 1832.

⁵⁹ *BCC*, 24 Oct. 1832, *WM*, 24 Oct. 1832, *CMP*, 25 Oct. 1832.

⁶⁰ Walker, *Parliamentary results*, p. 52.

⁶¹ *Hansard (Commons)*, 23 Mar. 1835, cols 136-154.

⁶² Senior, *Orangeism in Ireland*, p. 273.

⁶³ *KKJ*, 2 Aug. 1837.

⁶⁴ *KKJ*, 20 Dec 1862

⁶⁵ *KKJ*, 13 Dec. 1862.

⁶⁶ *Student Roll Carlow College*, p. 33.

⁶⁷ Wm. Finn Will, p. 6.

will that his twenty-five years was to be considered as his age of majority.⁶⁸ This did not prevent him from playing an active part in Catholic and commercial affairs in Carlow. For example, despite his youth, he acted as secretary to a Catholic meeting in Carlow on 25 October 1810; later he urged unity at a Catholic meeting in Carlow on 21 September 1815 and was a signatory to the resolutions subsequently issued.⁶⁹ He featured in Catholic meetings in Carlow including one in Carlow on 4 September 1824 and 15 April 1825, and one in Killeshin on 13 January 1828.⁷⁰ Michael was active in other spheres. He was a member of the committee formed to seek the abolition of corporation tolls, the building of a new Catholic chapel in Killeshin, the establishment of Carlow Savings Bank and the raising of petitions against the corn laws.⁷¹ He also spoke forcefully and at length in defending Catholicism at a Reformation meeting in Carlow on 18 October 1827.⁷² His public activities came to an abrupt end in April 1829. Showing his enduring commitment to the Catholic cause, he signed the requisition for a national aggregate meeting to be held in Dublin on 25 March 1829 to discuss the payment of a tribute to O'Connell as the passage of the Catholic relief bill approached.⁷³ This was his last public act. Even though he was toasted at the 'Conciliation Dinner' held in Carlow on 23 April, he was not present and his brothers Patrick and Thomas, who both spoke at the dinner, made no allusion to him or 'returned thanks' as convention demanded.⁷⁴ By then Michael had become mentally ill and, following the intervention of William Francis, he was 'adjudged a lunatic' in 1832.⁷⁵ Michael died on 7 July 1855.⁷⁶

⁶⁸ Wm. Finn Will, p. 10.

⁶⁹ *DEP*, 1 Feb. 1810, 28 Sept. 1815,

⁷⁰ *DEP*, 11 Sept. 1824, *DMR*, 20 Apr. 1825

⁷¹ *CMP*, 19 Mar. 1818; 6 July 1818; 10 July 1818; *DMR*, 20 May 1820.

⁷² *DEM*, 22 October 1827.

⁷³ *DMR*, 23 Mar. 1829.

⁷⁴ *CMP*, 27 Apr. 1829.

⁷⁵ *FJ*, 8 June 1857.

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