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Using the Military Service Pensions Collection to uncover a revolutionary youth and its aftermath

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In the early twentieth century Irish nationalist uniformed youth groups were a nursery for future revolutionary activists. Such groups include the most obvious example, Na Fianna Éireann (also known as the Irish National Boy Scouts), as well as the Clan na Gael Girl Scouts and the Irish Citizen Army Boys Corps/Boy Scouts and Girl Guides. All of these nationalist youth groups served as training and recruitment grounds for future membership in adult organisations such as the Irish Volunteers/Irish Republican Army, the ICA, the Hibernian Rifles and Cumann na mBan. The Military Service Pensions Collection is an invaluable source for researching former members of these youth groups and their contributions to the Irish independence movement as well as their lives after the Irish Revolution. Unlike the Fianna, information relating to lesser-known nationalist youth groups, especially those for girls, is much harder to uncover in extant primary sources, which makes the MSPC all the more valuable to researchers. This essay will demonstrate how the MSPC can be used as a tool to uncover Irish nationalist youth activism and its aftermath.

This Collection of pension applications and supporting documents initially arose as a result of the 1923 Army Pensions Act which was designed 'to recognise and compensate wounded members, and the surviving dependants of deceased members, of various groups that had participated in the events of 1916 to 1923 and were deemed and proven to have had "active service" during this time'.¹ The MSPC includes applications made under this legislation from wounded former members of nationalist youth groups as well as the dependants of those who died while engaged in active service. For instance, parents of Fianna members John (Sean) Healy and Patrick (Percy) Hannafin were granted a partial dependant's

¹ Diarmaid Ferriter, "'Always in danger of finding myself with nothing at all': the military service pensions and the battle for material survival, 1925-55" in Diarmaid Ferriter and Susannah Riordan (eds), *Years of turbulence: the Irish Revolution and its aftermath* (Dublin, 2015), p. 194.

allowance after their sons' deaths.² Healy had just turned fifteen when he was shot by British troops close to his Phibsborough home in north Dublin during the Easter Rising. Garrison commander Thomas MacDonagh had sent the boy home from Jacob's biscuit factory 'because he was too young to fight', but may have asked Healy to deliver a message warning of 'an ambush at the bridge in Phibsborough'.³ Hannafin was shot in the head by the Black and Tans during an encounter on Edward Street in Tralee, County Kerry, in January 1922 and died a week later. His mother's application for a dependant's allowance or gratuity was initially rejected because the fatal incident occurred during the Truce.⁴ These examples demonstrate the risks of youth activism as well as the challenges faced by grieving families in seeking financial compensation for the loss of their children. [p. 228]

The Collection also includes the files of former youth group members who applied under military service pension legislation. Former male members of Na Fianna Éireann who had later served in the National Army, and thus had fought on the pro-Treaty side in the Civil War, were eligible to apply for a service pension under the 1924 Military Service Pensions Act. As Marie Coleman has noted, the Cumann na nGaedheal government introduced this legislation in order to compensate veterans of the Irish Revolution and subsequent Civil War, most of whom were 'young men in their late teens and early twenties who in other circumstances would have been starting careers, settling down in their personal lives, or pursuing studies towards a profession, all of which was interrupted by their involvement in revolutionary activity'. She also asserts that service pensions were a way of placating disgruntled members of the National Army who had been demobilised after the Civil War.⁵ In 1934 under the Fianna Fáil government, the legislation was amended and extended in order to include members of the Hibernian Rifles, Na Fianna Éireann and Cumann na mBan as well as veterans who had only served prior to the 1921 Truce or had supported the anti-Treaty side during the Civil War.⁶ This gesture of reconciliation made service pensions available to a much wider group of former Fianna and ICA Boys Corps members as well as some former members of the Clan na Gael Girl Scouts, either as a result of the organisation's

² See MSPC/1D353 John (Sean) Healy and MSPC/DP4142 Patrick (Percy) John Hannafin.

³ Joe Duffy, *Children of the Rising* (Dublin, 2015), p. 226.

⁴ Marnie Hay, *Na Fianna Éireann and the Irish Revolution, 1909-23: scouting for rebels* (Manchester, 2019 & 2021), p. 211.

⁵ Marie Coleman, 'Military service pensions for veterans of the Irish Revolution, 1916-1923' in *War in History*, xx, no. 2 (2013), pp 205-6.

⁶ Ibid., pp 215-16; Ferriter, 'Always in danger', p. 195.

link with the Hibernian Rifles or their later membership in Cumann na mBan. Although both Na Fianna Éireann and Cumann na mBan were limited under the 1934 legislation ‘to the two lowest possible ranks for pension purposes – D and E’, the ability of Fianna members to later transfer to the ICA, the Irish Volunteers/IRA and the National Army meant that they had the opportunity to serve in ways that could incur greater risks, and thus received greater recognition and financial compensation by the state.⁷ The state also awarded medals to recognise the contribution of activists who had played more limited roles that were not of a pensionable standard. Individuals who applied solely on the basis of service with a nationalist youth group may have found it more difficult to secure a medal or a service pension, however. For instance, Philomena Conroy’s application for a Service (1917-1921) Medal in respect of service with Clan na Gael was unsuccessful.⁸

Having briefly considered how the 1923 Army Pensions Act and 1924 Military Service Pensions Act related to former members of nationalist youth groups, the focus will now shift to a discussion of each organisation. The section on Na Fianna Éireann demonstrates how I used the MSPC when researching a monograph on this youth group. The section on the Clan na Gael Girl Scouts will show how pension files can illuminate the early development of this organisation and the service and experiences of its members. The final section highlights MSPC files relating to the ICA’s youth groups. [p. 229]

Na Fianna Éireann

Na Fianna Éireann is the best known and most documented Irish nationalist uniformed youth group operating during the early twentieth century. Constance Markievicz and Bulmer Hobson established the organisation in 1909 as an Irish nationalist (and increasingly republican) counterblast to Robert Baden-Powell’s Boy Scout movement founded in the previous year.⁹ The MSPC is a rich source of information on the Fianna organisation as well as its former members. The MSPC includes the Fianna Éireann series among its organisation

⁷ Marie Coleman, ‘Compensating Irish female revolutionaries, 1916-1923’ in *Women’s History Review*, xxvi, no. 6 (2017), p. 924.

⁸ Medal application, MSPC/MD7964 Philomena Conroy.

⁹ For studies of this youth group, see Hay, *Na Fianna Éireann*; Damian Lawlor, *Na Fianna Éireann and the Irish Revolution, 1909 to 1923* (Rhode, 2009); J. Anthony Gaughan, *Scouting in Ireland* (Dublin, 2006), pp 33-77; John R. Watts, ‘Na Fianna Éireann: a case study of a political youth organisation’ (Ph.D. thesis, University of Glasgow, 1981).

and membership files, which can be used to research specific Fianna units. The MSPC's pensions and awards files include applications from former Fianna members or the dependants of those who died as a result of their military service. These files provide insight into the individual's service as well as their personal circumstances. I found both types of files invaluable when I was researching my monograph, *Na Fianna Éireann and the Irish Revolution, 1909-23: scouting for rebels*. I used the nominal rolls files from the Fianna Éireann series to ascertain the location and strength of different Fianna units around the country during the final years of the Irish Revolution.¹⁰ I also generated a sample of 155 male former Fianna members from pension application files that I used alongside samples derived from Bureau of Military History witness statements and *Dictionary of Irish Biography* entries in order to develop a general profile of who joined the Fianna during Ireland's revolutionary era.¹¹ The MSPC was particularly useful for tracking the transfer of Fianna members to adult paramilitary organisations, their attitude toward the Anglo-Irish Treaty as demonstrated by service in Pro- or Anti-Treaty forces during the Civil War, and future careers in the Defence Forces or An Garda Síochána. The applications for dependants' allowances and gratuities submitted by veterans' families enabled me to gather information about the circumstances surrounding the deaths and the ages of serving and former Fianna members whose loss of life was (or was perceived to be) attributed to their military service and/or imprisonment during the period 1916-23. For instance, I found that in the vast majority of cases individuals lost their lives in 1922-23 in the context of the Civil War.¹²

Since 2016, pension application files have been released online on a phased basis. This presented a challenge for me because new files were released just as I was trying to finalise my book manuscript for publication. I added these 'new' applicants to my sample; luckily, the information that I derived from their files did not change the thrust of my overall findings at such a late stage in the monograph's development, especially as I was under pressure from my publisher to submit the final manuscript. More pension files have been

¹⁰ Hay, *Na Fianna Éireann*, pp 81, 86. Appendix IV of this book provides a table of the location and strength of Fianna companies in Ireland, c.1921-22, based on records in the MSPC, pp 250-5.

¹¹ See chapter 5 of *ibid.* Appendix III of this book provides a table listing the former Fianna members comprising this sample from the MSPC, which was generated by an online search undertaken on 11 July 2018, pp 235-49. The table also lists each individual's years of birth and death, their MSPC file number, the result of their application and the legislation under which it was made, their pension grade (if applicable), whether or not they had Easter Rising service, and their stance on the Anglo-Irish Treaty (if known).

¹² See *ibid.*, pp 209-14.

released since I generated my sample in July 2018, which opens up [p. 230] opportunities for researchers to work with a wider sample of former members of nationalist youth groups and to utilise the collection in different ways. The nominal rolls and pension applications in the MSPC would be a useful resource for developing county or provincial studies of Na Fianna Éireann; for example, studies of Cork city and county or Munster as a whole could be undertaken. A study comparing and contrasting the profiles of Fianna officers and rank-and-file members is another possibility. Furthermore, studies of the post-revolutionary experiences of young activists would shed light on the longer-term impact of their activism on their later lives as well as social conditions in Ireland north and south from the mid-1920s onwards. For instance, the number of pension applications sent from addresses in the United States and Britain attests to common experiences of emigration and shorter-term migration.

Finding Fianna files in the MSPC

Under the 1934 legislation, a Referee and a four-member Advisory Committee was constituted to decide whether applicants qualified for a certificate of military service and by extension a service pension. Under the chairmanship of Major General Aodh MacNeill, the Fianna Advisory Committee was formed in 1936.¹³ It liaised with ex-Fianna representatives around Ireland to compile the membership records that make up the forty-one files (FE/1-41) in the Fianna Éireann nominal rolls which were used by the Referee and Advisory Committee to verify information contained in individuals' pension applications. The files cover Armagh, Belfast, Carlow, Cavan, Clare, Cork city and county, Derry city, Dublin city and county, Kerry, Kildare, Limerick, Louth, Mayo, Meath, Offaly, Sligo, Tipperary, Waterford, Westmeath, Wexford and Wicklow. The Fianna Advisory Committee reported in 1938 that it was making 'strenuous efforts' to gather information from different counties in Ireland with varying degrees of success; thus records for some parts of the country are more complete than others.¹⁴ The Fianna Éireann series is organised online by county, though there are no Fianna files for some counties, such as Down, Fermanagh, Galway, Kilkenny, Laois, Leitrim, Longford, Monaghan and Tyrone. I found that a county search for Offaly did not generate results, even though there is a file containing a list of the names of seventeen males who

¹³ Aodh MacNeill to Secretary, Military Service Pensions Board, 12 Dec. 1936, MSPC/FE/1 Dublin and General Headquarters. The committee consisted of former officers of Fianna Éireann Headquarters Staff and representatives of the Fianna old members association.

¹⁴ Aodh MacNeill to Secretary, Military Service Pensions Board, 24 June 1938, *ibid*.

belonged to a Fianna unit in Clara that was attached to the IRA's A Company, 1st Battalion, Offaly, Brigade No. 2 on 11 July 1921.¹⁵ Although the MSPC does not include files for every Irish county, this does not necessarily mean that there was no Fianna unit in these counties during the period c.1916-23. Information about a Fianna unit might be listed under a different county in the MSPC; for instance, the Fianna company in Boyle, County Roscommon, was part of the Sligo Brigade, so a file relating to it can be accessed through a search for Sligo.¹⁶ Furthermore, a nominal roll for a given county may not have been produced, even though existence of a Fianna unit there is evident from other sources, such as other types of files in the MSPC, BMH witness statements, or contemporary [p. 231] newspaper accounts or police reports. An example is Edward Cullen's pension application, which notes his claim that he belonged to a Fianna unit in County Leitrim before joining the Irish Volunteers.¹⁷ Although the Fianna nominal rolls mainly focus on the location and numerical strength of different units and provide lists of officers and members, some include other information, such as the Fianna Éireann Organisation Circular No. 1, which delineates the military structure of the youth organisation in the later years of the Irish Revolution.¹⁸

In relation to individual applications for military service pensions, former members of Na Fianna Éireann are relatively easy to find in the pensions and awards files database because you can do an organisation search for Fianna Éireann specifically. A search undertaken on 12 May 2022 generated 215 files. Most of these files are either applications for military service pensions from former male members or applications for allowances or gratuities made by the dependants of members who had died as a result of their military service. Two of the files – those for Ellen Sarah Bushell and Dorothy Hannafin – pertain to female associates of Fianna *sluaighte* (or troops), rather than members of the youth group. Bushell made kilts for Fianna members and served as a courier for Con Colbert during the Easter Rising.¹⁹ Hannafin, whose brothers belonged to the Fianna, recorded that she was attached to the Fianna unit in Tralee and engaged in such activities as distributing election and IRA propaganda, dispatch carrying and intelligence work.²⁰ Bushell's application under

¹⁵ See MSPC/FE/32 A (Clara) Company, 1st Battalion, 2 Brigade. A handwritten note dated 4 Dec. 1962 indicates that the list of Fianna members was 'found attached to A Coy (Clara) I.R.A.'.

¹⁶ See MSPC/FE/22 Sligo Brigade, Boyle Company and Bundoran Company.

¹⁷ Application form, 18 Dec. 1924, MSPC/24SP3438 Edward Cullen.

¹⁸ Fianna Éireann Organisation Circular No. 1, MSPC/FE/1 Dublin and General Headquarters.

¹⁹ Application form, 31 Dec. 1935, MSPC/MSP34REF22326 Ellen Sarah Bushell.

²⁰ Application form, 1 June 1935, MSPC/MSP34REF16986 Dorothy Hannafin.

the 1949 Military Pensions Act was successful whereas Hannafin's application under the more restrictive 1934 act was unsuccessful because the legislation was deemed not to apply in her case.²¹

A search for the term Fianna Éireann or simply Fianna under 'subject information' in the MSPC catalogue can be used to elicit the names of additional members whose membership in the youth group pre-dated the military service for which they claimed. One example is Thomas Crimmins, who was a member of the Fianna in 1910-15 before joining the Irish Volunteers; he was one of four Fianna members who were presented with gold medals and certificates to recognise their bravery in assisting during a drowning incident near Sandyford in July 1913.²² Another example is Ina Connolly-Heron, a daughter of executed 1916 leader James Connolly; she claimed for service with Cumann na mBan, but had previously belonged to one of only two Fianna troops for girls that existed c.1911-18, the Betsy Gray *shluagh* in Belfast.²³ A search for the term Fianna Éireann under 'subject information' undertaken on 12 May 2022 generated 457 files, but almost half of these names replicated those generated by an organisation search. The search results list shows the name of the individual, counties or countries where they lived, and the organisations for which they claimed service. If Fianna Éireann is not listed [p. 232] under the person's name, you need to read their 'subject information' to ascertain whether previous Fianna membership is mentioned.

Former members of Na Fianna Éireann can also be found by doing a search for the organisation in the medals database. A search of this database generated 1,703 names along with their county and whether they were awarded a 1916 Medal or a Service (1917-1921) Medal. Although medal application files have not been digitised (at least not yet), you can glean information from the database about the individual's addresses, date of birth, civilian occupation, commanding officer(s), and Fianna company, unit and brigade. Medals were awarded to military service pension recipients as well as to those whose service was not deemed to be of a pensionable standard.

Clan na Gael Girl Scouts

²¹ See MSPC/MSP34REF22326 Ellen Sarah Bushell and MSPC/MS34REF16986 Dorothy Hannafin.

²² See MSPC/MSP34REF16809 Thomas Crimmins; Hay, *Na Fianna Éireann*, pp 139-40.

²³ See MSPC/MSP34REF21565 Ina Connolly-Heron. For a short biography of her, see Sinéad McCoole, *No ordinary women: Irish female activists in the revolutionary years, 1900-1923* (Dublin, 2015), pp 187-9.

In comparison to the Fianna, the Clan na Gael (or Clann na nGaedheal) Girl Scouts have generated less interest from historians, possibly because of their female gender, smaller number of members and relative sparsity of primary sources available.²⁴ The MSPC pension application file for Mary Chadwick (née May Kelly), the founding member and first leader of this youth group, is thus an important source to illuminate the establishment, development and activities of the Clan na Gael Girl Scouts. Her file also serves as an example of what kind of information can be gleaned from an individual's pension application. Further insight can be gained by supplementing her file with documents from other MSPC files, BMH witness statements and contemporary newspaper reports. In her sworn statement to the Advisory Committee, Kelly explained that she established the Clan na Gael Girl Scouts in 1915 as an auxiliary of the Hibernian Rifles. She had initially formed a group called the 'National Girl Scouts' in 1912 with the help of fellow Drumcondra resident Seamus McGowan, who had previously been involved in organising Fianna troops on the north side of Dublin.²⁵ Kelly does not explain what prompted the formation of an Irish nationalist youth group for girls, but it may have been because the Dublin Fianna did not accept female members. Although Fianna troops for girls existed in Belfast c.1911-15 and in Waterford c.1916-18, they were a controversial presence within the organisation.²⁶

²⁴ For discussions of the Clan na Gael (or Clann na nGaedheal) Girl Scouts, see Hay, *Na Fianna Éireann*, pp 7-9, 12, 16-17, 44, 75, 113, 116, 202; McCool, *No ordinary women*, p. 37; Ann Matthews, *Renegades: Irish republican women, 1900-1922* (Cork, 2010), pp 109, 125, 133, 339; Ann Matthews, *Dissidents: Irish republican women, 1923-1941* (Cork, 2012), pp 53, 62, 202, 254; Joseph E.A. Connell, Jr., 'Inghinidhe na hÉireann/Daughters of Ireland, Clan na nGaedheal' in *History Ireland*, xix, no. 5 (Sept./Oct. 1911), p. 66; Francis McKay, 'Clann na nGaedheal Girl Scouts', *Irish Press*, 3 May 1966. Since the publication of the present essay, the following article has been published: Marnie Hay, 'Clan na Gael and other Irish nationalist girl scouts during the era of the Irish Revolution, 1911-23' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xlviii, no. 174 (Nov. 2024), pp 316-37.

²⁵ Sworn statement made before Advisory Committee by Mary Chadwick, 23 Feb. 1937, MSPC/MSP34REF20098 Mary Chadwick (née May Kelly). See also, BMH WS 1670 Seamus Kavanagh; MSPC/MSP34REF4289 Seamus McGowan.

²⁶ For a discussion of the Betsy Gray *sluagh* for girls in Belfast, see Hay, *Na Fianna Éireann*, pp 40, 45-6, 48-9, 112-13, 153, 191. For the girls' troop in Waterford, see *ibid.*, pp 74-5, 113, and Leeann Lane, *Rosamond Jacob: third person singular* (Dublin, 2010), pp 122-4. Since the publication of the present essay, the following article has been published: Marnie Hay, 'Gender inequality and the Irish Revolution: the girls of Na Fianna Éireann, 1911-22' in *Women's History Review*, xxxiii, no. 7 (2024), pp 977-1000.

In July 1915 the Irish National Girl Scouts were among the nationalist organisations which met at the Hibernian Hall located at 28 North Frederick Street in Dublin. The hall belonged to Division 86 (Clan na Gael) of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (Irish American Alliance), but was also used by its Ladies Auxiliary, the Hibernian Rifles, which was the military wing of the AOH (IAA), Na Fianna Éireann [p. 233] and the Irish National Guards, an off-shoot of the Fianna.²⁷ Fianna member Seán Prendergast described the building as ‘a hive of industry, usually of a military nature, drilling, rifle exercises etc., with a number of musical and dance social evenings thrown in to break the monotony’.²⁸ The change in name from Irish National Girl Scouts to Clan na Gael in 1915 may possibly reflect the youth group’s connection to the Clan na Gael division (or local branch) of the IAA. In 1915 the youth group offered girls training in military drill, signalling, first aid and the Irish language as well an opportunity to play camogie and attend Sunday night socials.²⁹ Among the camogie players were May Kelly herself and Eileen (Ellen) Conroy, the latter a future member of the Clann United camogie team that won the 1930 Dublin Championship and League.³⁰

Mary Chadwick (née May Kelly) was among the serving and former members of the Clan na Gael Girl Scouts who participated in the Easter Rising of 1916. After following orders to light bonfires on the Dublin mountains up by the Hell Fire Club, she initially served at the General Post Office before moving on the Tuesday of Easter Week to Jacob’s biscuit factory, engaging in intelligence gathering, delivering ammunition and assisting with first

²⁷ Pádraig Óg Ó Ruairc, ‘A short history of the Hibernian Rifles, 1912–1916’, 31 Mar. 2013, (<https://www.theirishstory.com/2013/03/31/a-short-history-of-the-hibernian-rifles-1912-1916/#.Yo4BtqjMK3A>) (accessed 25 May 2022); ‘Room for all’, *The Hibernian*, 10 July 1915. In this brief notice the Irish National Girl Scouts are referred to as ‘the girl section of the Fianna’. For more on the Irish National Guards, which also met at the same hall, see Hay, *Na Fianna Éireann*, pp 44, 63, 75, 109, 111, 114, 116, 136. The MSPC includes the pension file of a former leader of the National Guards, MSPC/24SP2573 John Kenny. Further information about this group is included in his BMH witness statement, BMH WS 1693.

²⁸ BMH WS 755 Seán Prendergast.

²⁹ ‘Irish National Girl Scouts’, *The Hibernian*, 17 July 1915.

³⁰ Michael McCrea, ‘Remembering the Easter Rising 1916 – Mary O’Kelly and Eileen Conroy’, 10 Apr. [no year] (<https://camogie.ie/news/remembering-the-easter-rising-1916-mary-o-kelly-eileen-conroy/>) (accessed 23 June 2021). Eileen Cronin (née Conroy) applied for a 1916 Medal, but it was not awarded because evidence of service was not established. See MSPC/MD42876 Eileen Cronin (née Conroy).

aid.³¹ Her pension file also outlines her leading role within Clan na Gael, the expansion and activities of the organisation after 1916, and her own ongoing military support service and its consequences. She held the rank of captain within the Clan na Gael Girl Scouts from 1915 until 1919 when she assumed the rank of its commandant general after the demise of the Hibernian Rifles. She also joined the South County Dublin unit of Cumann na mBan in 1919. She claimed that around 1918-19 she formed additional branches of Clan na Gael in Cork (in Douglas and Blackpool) and in Tullamore and Athlone.³² During the War of Independence there were three battalions of Clan na Gael in Dublin city, which provided members with training in intelligence work, drill, first aid and signalling.³³ Kelly reported that Clan na Gael continued to train in their meeting halls during the Truce period: ‘The officers were trained in the use of arms but not the rank and file – they were too young, and besides we had not the arms.’³⁴ She was arrested and imprisoned for about six months during the [p. 234] Civil War, resulting in the loss of her position at Forrest’s in Grafton Street in 1923, which was followed by four years of unemployment.³⁵ She was still unmarried and living with her family at 40 Elizabeth Street in Drumcondra when she first applied for a military service pension in 1935, but married former IRA officer Michael Chadwick while her application was under consideration. The pair had been linked romantically since the revolutionary period and he had assisted her with organising the girl scouts.³⁶ In reading the couple’s MSPC files, one cannot help wondering whether financial constraints due to breaks in employment arising from Kelly’s period of imprisonment and Chadwick’s capture on 29 June 1922 and internment until December 1923 resulted in a lengthy courtship and delayed marriage.³⁷

Their relationship is not the only example that shows the collection’s potential to offer insight into the romantic lives of Irish revolutionaries. Former Clan na Gael and Cumann na mBan member Marcella Crimmins’ second unsuccessful submission of a pension application

³¹ Sworn statement made before the Advisory Committee by Mary Chadwick, 23 Feb. 1937, MSPC/MSP34REF20098 Mary Chadwick (née May Kelly).

³² Ibid.

³³ Note of activities by Mary Chadwick, 22 Feb. 1939, *ibid.*

³⁴ Sworn statement made before the Advisory Committee by Mary Chadwick, 23 Feb. 1937, *ibid.*

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ BMH WS 1768 Andrew McDonnell; Rosamond Jacob diary entry, 23 Aug. 1918, NLI, Rosamond Jacob papers, MS 32,582/34.

³⁷ Sworn statement made before the Advisory Committee by Michael J. Chadwick, 1 May 1936, MSPC/MSP34REF18109 Michael J. Chadwick.

was under her married name Prendergast, which enabled me to link her with former Fianna and IRA member Seán Prendergast, whom she married in 1938. After his death in 1953 she applied for an allowance as the widow of a military service pensioner; a copy of her 1987 death notice is included in his file.³⁸ Perhaps they first met at the Hibernian Hall on North Frederick Street as youth group members. She later served as a dispatch carrier and cook under his command during the anti-Treaty IRA's occupation of Hughes Hotel on Lower Gardiner Street in Dublin from 28 June to 2 July 1922 during the opening days of the Civil War.³⁹ What their files cannot tell us is when their romance blossomed.

Former members of youth groups other than the Fianna are more difficult to find in the pensions and awards files database because the specific name of the group is not included in the organisation list. Changes in surname after marriage can also make it challenging to find female veterans in database searches, though there is a space on the search form to include maiden names. One way to identify some former members of the Clan na Gael Girl Scouts is by doing a combined gender and organisation search for female Hibernian Rifles members. A search conducted on 12 May 2022 generated the names of seven women, four of whom were identified in their 'subject information' as former members of the Clan na Gael Girl Scouts: Mary Chadwick (née May Kelly), Margaret Mary MacSherry (née Fagan), Mary McLoughlin and Cecilia O'Neill (née Conroy), all of whom participated in the Easter Rising.⁴⁰ The Clan na Gael membership of a fifth (Annie O'Hagan, née Carey) was confirmed in letters of reference included in her application file.⁴¹ As in this case, the involvement of individuals in nationalist youth organisations [p. 235] sometimes only becomes apparent in supporting letters or statements made before the Advisory Committee. These five Clan na Gael members received a military service pension at the lowest grade E

³⁸ See MSPC/MSP34REF58449 Marcella Prendergast (née Crimmins) and MSPC/MSP34REF1360 Seán Prendergast. Her application for a Service (1917-1921) Medal was also unsuccessful; see MD25976 Marcella Prendergast (née Crimmins). Her maiden name has been incorrectly transcribed as Cummins in the MSPC database.

³⁹ Sworn statement made before the Advisory Committee by Seán Prendergast, 16 May 1935, MSPC/MSP34REF58449 Marcella Prendergast (née Crimmins); BMH WS 802 Seán Prendergast.

⁴⁰ See MSPC/MSP34REF20098 Mary Chadwick (née May Kelly); MSPC/MSP34REF54707 Margaret Mary MacSherry (née Fagan); MSPC/MSP34REF22268 Cecilia O'Neill (née Conroy); MSPC/MSP34REF15389 Mary McLoughlin.

⁴¹ The Clan na Gael membership of Annie O'Hagan (née Carey) was confirmed in letters written by Seán Colbert, 22 Apr. 1938, Mrs M. Chadwick, 18 Dec. 1935, and Sara Kealy, 22 Apr. 1938, MSPC/MSP34REF22054 Annie O'Hagan (née Carey).

on the basis of their active service during Easter week. Three of these women, Chadwick (née Kelly), MacSherry (née Fagan) and McLoughlin, also received credit for later service with Cumann na mBan, demonstrating that Clan na Gael, like the Fianna, served as a training and recruiting ground for adult organisations. For O'Neill (née Conroy), the awarding of a pension in 1939 based on her 1916 service was a long-awaited godsend because her family had been struggling financially due to the ill health of herself and her husband and the inconstancy of his employment. She had applied for a service pension in 1934, but still had not been informed of the result in April 1938 when she and her 'family of seven young children are in a bad way'.⁴²

A 'subject information' search for the terms Clan na Gael and Girl Scouts found other former members of Clan na Gael. Some of these applicants also received military service pensions at grade E, but not necessarily in respect of their involvement with the girls' nationalist youth group. May Murray, who had been a member of the Irish National Girl Scouts and the Clan na Gael Girl Scouts in 1914-15, had already transferred to the Inghinidhe na hÉireann branch of Cumann na mBan when she served during the Easter Rising of 1916.⁴³ Ellen (Nellie) Stynes (née Lambert) was awarded a pension on the basis of her service with the ICA during the Easter Rising and Cumann na mBan during the period 1920-23. After the events of Easter week, she had joined the Clan na Gael Girl Scouts before emigrating to Scotland. When she returned to Ireland in 1919, she joined the Dundrum branch of Cumann na mBan.⁴⁴ Anne (Annie) O'Callaghan (née Duggan) was a Cumann na mBan member who served as commandant of the Clan na Gael Girl Scouts in Cork, Cobh and Douglas. Her application for a military service pension on the basis of her service with Cumann na mBan was initially rejected, but after her case was re-examined she was awarded a pension for her service between 1919 and 1922 during the War of Independence and the Truce.⁴⁵

Four other former Clan na Gael members were unsuccessful in their applications for military service pensions: Marcella Prendergast (née Crimmins), a sister of Thomas Crimmins (both of whom were mentioned above), as well as Mary Jane Slevin (née

⁴² Letter from Cecilia O'Neill (née Conroy), 25 Apr. 1938, MSPC/MSP34REF22268 Cecilia O'Neill (née Conroy). The O'Neill family's distress is also highlighted in her letter dated 15 Aug. 1938 and that of her sister-in-law Tessie Wynne, dated 4 Jan. 1939, *ibid*.

⁴³ Application form, 8 July 1954, MSPC/49SP7805 May Murray.

⁴⁴ Application form, 5 Jan. 1938, MSPC/MSP34REF56696 Ellen (Nellie) Stynes (née Lambert).

⁴⁵ See MSPC/MSP34REF8617 Anne O'Callaghan (née Duggan). Information about the Clan na Gael Girl Scouts in Cork is included in her sister Peg Duggan's witness statement, BMH WS 1576.

Stapleton), Sarah Reardon (née O'Mara), and Theresa Thorpe (née Joyce).⁴⁶ The length of active service and the ability to provide corroborating evidence of [p. 236] duties undertaken seems to have been a factor in whether or not former members of Clan na Gael were awarded pensions and/or medals. Prendergast (née Crimmins), for example, was a member of the Clan na Gael Girl Scouts from July 1916 to March 1918, during which time she was engaged in such activities as collecting funds and removing war-related posters; she then joined Cumann na mBan. She was deemed ineligible for a pension because her active service was not considered continuous.⁴⁷ Slevin, who had signed the 1916 Roll of Honour, claimed for active service with the Clan na Gael Girl Scouts on 23-25 April 1916, but after waiting seven years for a decision on her application, was awarded neither a service pension nor a medal. Her file is stamped 'Act does not appear to apply'. On a form dated 1 September 1942 in a section headed 'observations on service', an assessor wrote 'Doubtful. Too young.'⁴⁸ Perceptions based on age and gender could colour attitudes toward the value of an applicant's service.

ICA Boys Corps/Boy Scouts and Girl Guides

Youth groups were also associated with the Irish Citizen Army, which had been established in November 1913 to protect protesting workers during the Dublin Lockout. It formed its own scout corps for boys in 1914 as part of a broader initiative to improve the efficiency of the army after the Lockout's failure. John R. Watts has suggested that the decision to form a junior section of the ICA was likely influenced by the example of the Fianna; the Scout Corps was viewed as a training ground for future ICA recruits and a way of including boys within the wider trade union family.⁴⁹ Like members of the Fianna and Clan na Gael, the ICA scouts

⁴⁶ MSPC/MSP34REF3762 Marcella Crimmins; MSPC/MSP34REF58449 Marcella Prendergast (née Crimmins); MSPC/MSP34REF21847 Mary Janes Slevin (née Stapleton). Reardon stated she was a member of Clan na Gael from June 1916 to September 1919; she later served with Cumann na mBan and was awarded a service medal. Application form, 3 Jan. 1939, MSPC/MSP34REF57545 Sarah Reardon (née O'Mara). Thorpe claimed for service with Clan na Gael and Cumann na mBan in the period 1917-23. Application form, 30 May 1935, MSPC/MSP34REF9312 Theresa Thorpe (née Joyce).

⁴⁷ Application form, 11 Mar. 1935; Note by Runaí of the Office of the Referee, 23 Oct. 1940, MSPC/MSP34REF3762 Marcella Crimmins.

⁴⁸ Observations on service, 1 Sept. 1942, MSPC/MSP34REF21847 Mary Jane Slevin (née Stapleton). She signed the Roll of Honour of 1916 as M.J. Slevin Nee Stapleton. See (<https://microsites.museum.ie/rollofhonour1916/roleofwomen.aspx>) (accessed 23 May 2022).

⁴⁹ For a discussion of the ICA scout corps, see Appendix III of Watts, 'Na Fianna Éireann', pp 398-404.

accompanied their adult counterparts on marches, manoeuvres and parades. They also received training in scoutcraft, military drill and the use of revolvers.⁵⁰

The MSPC includes pension applications from former members of the ICA scout corps who participated in the Easter Rising of 1916, such as Walter Patrick Carpenter, who served as captain of the 'Boys Corps' during the period 1914-17, and James Connolly's son Roderick, who was also a Fianna member.⁵¹ A number of files refer to younger members of the ICA, both male and female, being sent home from garrisons during Easter week on account of their age.⁵² For instance, one of Carpenter's referees reported that James Connolly ordered boys under the age of eighteen to leave the garrison at the GPO on the evening of Wednesday, 26 April 1916.⁵³ There is no consistency in how membership [p. 237] of the ICA scout corps is described in the MSPC database. Sometimes the Boys Corps or Boy Scouts are listed as a unit or company of the Irish Citizen Army; in other cases, no unit is listed and the individual is simply referred to holding the rank of private within the ICA. Ultimately, the easiest way to find former members of the ICA Boys Corps in the MSPC is to search for names of former members mentioned in secondary sources.⁵⁴ For instance, there are MSPC files for all of the ICA Boy Scouts that Ann Matthews lists as being in action in 1916. The mother of Charles Darcy, who was killed during the rebellion, was awarded a partial dependant's allowance. The other files refer to applications for military service pensions, all but one of which was successful.⁵⁵ In common with members of the Fianna and Clan na Gael,

⁵⁰ Ann Matthews, *The Irish Citizen Army* (Cork, 2014), pp 48, 59, 63, 71.

⁵¹ See MSPC/MSP34REF8789 Walter Patrick Carpenter; MSPC/MSP34REF38900 Roderick Connolly.

⁵² For example, see MSPC/MSP34REF204 Frederick Norgrove, MSPC/MSP34REF210 Christopher Crothers, MSPC/MSP34REF56588 Joseph William Keeley, MSPC/MSP34REF980 Patrick Buttner, MSPC/MSP34REF58426 John McConville, MSPC/MSP34REF1139 Annie Collins (née Flinter), and MSPC/MSP34REF8867 Mary Allen (née Devereux).

⁵³ James O'Neill, late O/C, ICA, to Military Service Pensions Board, 14 Feb. 1936, MSPC/MSP34REF8789 Walter Patrick Carpenter.

⁵⁴ For instance, see Matthews, *The Irish Citizen Army*, p. 212; Jeffrey Leddin, *The Labour Hercules: the Irish Citizen Army and Irish republicanism, 1913-23* (Newbridge, 2019), pp 151-2, 168.

⁵⁵ In addition to Carpenter and Connolly, Matthews lists the following ICA Boy Scouts: MSPC/MSP34REF980 Patrick Buttner; MSPC/MSP34REF2068 Louis Byrne Jr; MSPC/MSP34REF32621 Patrick Carroll; MSPC/MSP34REF210 Christopher Crothers; MSPC/MSP34REF1390 Laurence Corbally; MSPC/1D204 Charles Darcy; MSPC/MSP34REF56588 Joseph William Keeley; MSPC/MSP34REF204 Frederick Norgrove; MSPC/MSP34REF46307 Patrick Joseph O'Neill; MSPC/MSP34REF31689 Patrick Seery;

like those from the Crimmins and Hannafin families, several members of the ICA Boys Corps had fathers and siblings who also engaged in revolutionary activism.⁵⁶

In Cork the formation of groups of ICA Boy Scouts and Girl Guides c.1918 caused a split in the Fianna and Clan na Gael in that city, according to one former Fianna member.⁵⁷ The MSPC includes pension applications from three women, sisters Nora and Sheila Wallace and Mary Monica Clifford (née Vaughan), who were involved in organising these Cork-based ICA youth groups, which disbanded in 1920, with many of their members then joining the Fianna or Cumann na mBan. Youth group organisation was only one example of the women's activism. The Wallaces' newsagent shop on St Augustine Street served as a dispatch centre for Cork No. 1 Brigade of the Irish Volunteers/IRA.⁵⁸ Unlike the Wallace sisters, Clifford was a Cumann na mBan member. She reported that she was one of the founders of the ICA Girl Guides in Cork in 1918 and was elected their commandant, and that her drapery shop on Douglas Street was utilised by the Volunteers for various purposes.⁵⁹ These three women's pension applications and supporting documentation offer insight into the military support services they rendered, but provide little detail about the ICA Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, aside from their short-lived existence in Cork.

Irish nationalist uniformed youth groups played an important role in the socialisation and mobilisation of future revolutionaries. As this essay has shown, the MSPC is a valuable tool for uncovering information about these young nationalist activists and their families both during and after the Irish Revolution. Files from the MSPC can be used to develop a general profile of nationalist youth group membership and leadership, undertake city, county or provincial studies, reveal the types of military service [p. 238] undertaken by youth group members, determine their attitudes toward the Anglo-Irish Treaty, chart aspects of their future lives, and examine the array of challenges faced by former members and/or their dependants

MSPC/MSP34REF37 William Edward Oman Jr. Of these, only Seery's application was unsuccessful; there was not enough evidence to corroborate his claim for service in 1916 when he was aged seventeen.

⁵⁶ Examples include Walter Carpenter, Roderick Connolly, Frederick Norgrove, William Oman and Patrick Seery.

⁵⁷ BMH WS 1628 James A. Busby. Also see Hay, *Na Fianna Éireann*, p. 76.

⁵⁸ Application form, 31 Dec. 1935; letters of reference from Cathal O'Shannon, 20 May 1940, and S. Hegarty and F. O'Donoghue, 20 May 1940, MSPC/MSP34REF29323 Nora Wallace. See also, MSPC/MSP34REF29324 Sheila Wallace.

⁵⁹ Petition to the Minister for Defence, 10 Sept. 1953, MSPC/MSP34REF30473 Mary Monica Clifford (née Vaughan).

after the Revolution. These challenges included financial insecurity and poverty, health issues, bereavement, emigration and migration. Even gaining recognition of their contributions to the Irish Revolution could be a challenge, especially for female members. Moreover, applications and supporting documents in the MSPC, like BMH witness statements, could be used as a source for considering how people later in life reflect on and write about experiences of their past youth. Hopefully, this essay will inspire you to join me in using the MSPC to explore revolutionary youth activism and its aftermath in twentieth-century Ireland.

Further Reading:

Marnie Hay, *Na Fianna Éireann and the Irish Revolution, 1909-23: scouting for rebels* (Manchester, 2019 & 2021).

Ann Matthews, *Renegades: Irish republican women, 1900-1922* (Cork, 2010).

Ann Matthews, *Dissidents: Irish republican women, 1923-1941* (Cork, 2012).

Ann Matthews, *The Irish Citizen Army* (Cork, 2014). [p. 239]

The following two journal articles have appeared since the publication of this essay in 2023:

Marnie Hay, 'Gender inequality and the Irish Revolution: the girls of Na Fianna Éireann, 1911-22' in *Women's History Review*, xxxiii, no. 7 (2024), pp 977-1000.

Marnie Hay, 'Clan na Gael and other Irish nationalist girl scouts during the era of the Irish Revolution, 1911-23' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xlviii, no. 174 (Nov. 2024), pp 316-337.