

## **‘As good a Free State citizen as any they had’? the disbanded members of the Royal Irish Constabulary**

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Sergeant Michael Flynn was officially disbanded from the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) at Gormanston, County Meath on 20 May 1922 and immediately travelled to the home he shared with his wife and young child in Liscannor, County Clare. The second son of Roman Catholic farmers from Stradbally, County Kerry, Flynn was just shy of his twentieth birthday when he joined the RIC in 1908.<sup>1</sup> In doing so he chose a career favoured by many from his socio-economic background; it was secure, respected and pensionable (if underpaid), and the social status inferred on policemen by their communities offered an opportunity to transcend humble origins. Following service in West Cork, Flynn was transferred to County Clare in 1916, where he spent the rest of his policing career. After several years of uneventful and not unduly onerous duty in Cork, his arrival in Clare coincided with the first signs of public contempt for the police there. In 1917, feeling against the police began to intensify and the first acts of social ostracism and violence took place in Clare. Between 1918 and 1920 these acts spread, diversified and became more belligerent: ostracism intensified, policemen were shot and killed and resignations and retirements followed.<sup>2</sup> By December 1921, revolutionary violence had claimed ninety-five lives in the county.<sup>3</sup> Michael Flynn had a good war, receiving a favourable record in March 1921 and a promotion to sergeant the following month.<sup>4</sup> But the termination of his service with the RIC did not end his war. On the night of 25 April 1922, five armed and masked men entered Flynn’s home, ordered him to leave within forty-eight hours and took away,

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<sup>1</sup> Birth Certificate of Michael Flynn (The National Archives, Kew (TNA), HO 184/33); 1901 census return, Timothy Flynn (census.nationalarchives.ie) (17 Apr. 2015); RIC General Personnel Register (TNA, HO 184/33).

<sup>2</sup> David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish life, 1913-1921: provincial experience of war and revolution* (Cork, 1998; 1<sup>st</sup> edn. 1977), pp 5-16.

<sup>3</sup> Eunan O’Halpin, ‘Problematic killing during the war of independence and its aftermath: civilian spies and informers’ in James Kelly and Mary Ann Lyons (eds.), *Death and dying Ireland, Britain and Europe: historical perspectives* (Dublin, 2013), p. 328.

<sup>4</sup> RIC General Personnel Register (TNA, HO 184/33).

he alleged, over eighty pounds worth of property.<sup>5</sup> The family had already packed for a move to Castletownbere, County Cork and so headed there, but soon after arriving received the following letter from the local IRA: ‘You are hereby noticed that you are to leave this Area within TWENTY-FOUR HOURS from receipt of this Order. Failure to comply with above Order will warrant a severe Penalty.’<sup>6</sup> This new threat encouraged Flynn to once again gather his possessions and travel to Dover, England followed by his family a few days later.<sup>7</sup>

Flynn’s experience of threat and forced emigration was harrowing but not necessarily representative.<sup>8</sup> Ex-constable Bryan Donelon, for example, received a letter at his home in New Ross, County Wexford, not dissimilar to Flynn’s: ‘You, Bryan Donelon, (a late member of the R.I.C.) are hereby ordered to leave the South Wexford Brigade area immediately.’ Family history tells that Donelon laughed off the threat, believing that the signatory of the letter was more afraid of Mrs Donelan than his superiors in the IRA. The family remained firmly settled in New Ross, farming and supplying milk and eggs to the local community.<sup>9</sup> These conflicting responses to targeted intimidation emphasise the key point that this chapter will attempt to make: that there was no universal experience in the early Irish Free State for disbanded members of the RIC. Their place in the new independent Irish state was not dictated by any one national, political or military policy but by circumstances that were intrinsically local and often deeply personal. The chapter will first examine the position of policemen in southern Ireland as disbandment approached and in its immediate aftermath. It will then focus on the varying experiences of ex-policemen, and their families, in the nascent Irish Free State, before exploring the motivations of those who stayed and those who left. Finally, it will briefly assess an intriguing discussion on the status of these former servants of the Crown in the British civil service in 1930s to query the position of disbanded policemen after a decade of Irish independence.

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<sup>5</sup> RIC Tribunal, Form 2B, Michael Flynn (TNA, HO 144/22575); Michael Flynn claim (TNA, CO 762/39/17).

<sup>6</sup> Flynn to Secretary, RIC Tribunal, 19 May 1923 (TNA: HO 144/22575); L. Dwyer, Commandant to ‘Flynn Ex-R.I.C. C.T. Bere’, 9 Jul. 1922 (Ibid).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Kent Fedorowich, ‘The problems of disbandment: the Royal Irish Constabulary and imperial migration, 1919-1929’, *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 117 (May, 1996), p. 103.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Lalor, who has also kindly provided a copy of the threatening letter, related the Donelan family story to the author.

## Disbandment

The disbanding of the RIC called for by the Anglo-Irish Treaty took most of the first eight months of 1922. The release was staggered and men were initially transferred from their stations to larger centres around the country to await discharge. It was August before the last members left Dublin Castle.<sup>10</sup> As the disbanded men gradually filtered out of their camps, Ireland was ‘confronted with the problem of the release into civil life of some 13,000 men’, many without suitable qualifications, unable to support themselves or their families indefinitely and with few prospects.<sup>11</sup> A general economic depression and what the RIC Tribunal described as the ‘political situation in Ireland’ only exacerbated the problem.<sup>12</sup> Chief Secretary Sir Hamar Greenwood was ‘most apprehensive’ about the safety of RIC men returning to their homes.<sup>13</sup> He had been told on 5 April by the Chief of Police, Major Henry Hugh Tudor, that of the 13,000 disbanded men, over 1,300 were considered in ‘special danger’ but ‘any man who served in the police force is in danger of murder in Ireland’; later that month RIC Deputy Inspector General C. A. Walsh advised that ‘the vast majority of both officers and men enlisted in Ireland will not be allowed on disbandment to remain in Ireland. They will be compelled to leave the country and it is anticipated that most of them will remove to Great Britain’.<sup>14</sup> The *Church of Ireland Gazette* recognised the immediate plight of the disbanded policeman but was more optimistic about their reception in the longer term:

We know that the majority of the Irish people at present is prejudiced against the police; more is the pity. But that will pass. The Irishman has many faults, but he knows a brave man when he sees one, and there is not an Irishman alive who does not recognise the astonishing valour of the R.I.C. ... Will Ireland refuse to receive them into her fold? We cannot believe that she will be so foolish, for finer Irishmen do not exist than the members of the Royal Irish Constabulary.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Donal J. O’Sullivan, *The Irish constabularies 1822-1922: a century of policing in Ireland* (Kerry, 1990), p. 369.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Brief summary of the work of the Royal Irish Constabulary Tribunal’, Apr. 1928 (TNA, HO 45/13029).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Alfred Cope to Michael Collins, 28 Mar. 1922 (National Archives of Ireland (NAI), FIN 1/506).

<sup>14</sup> Henry Tudor to Hamar Greenwood, 5 Apr. 1922 (TNA: HO 351/95); Walsh to Assistant Under Secretary and Secretary, RIC Tribunal, 22 April 1922 (TNA: HO 351/98). For more on the concerns of the British administration, see Hamar Greenwood to Financial Secretary to the Treasury, 24 Feb. 1922; ‘Irish Office Memorandum on the Disbandment of the R.I.C.’, Feb. 1922; Proceedings of Interviews of Representative Bodies with the Chief Secretary, Feb. 1922; ‘Memorandum by the Chief of Police’, 5 Feb. 1922 (TNA, CAB 24/134).

<sup>15</sup> *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 24 Feb. 1922.

A letter writer to the final issue of the *Constabulary Gazette* hoped for similarly favourable treatment from the ‘Imperial Parliament’ and ‘the Irish people’ but seemed unconvinced: ‘Things of daily occurrence paint a picture none to pleasant of the future of the old R.I.C. ... There should be no delusions about our future, as all may take it for certain that, however small our pensions be, there will be no chance of other employment in this country for ex-R.I.C. men’.<sup>16</sup>

In April 1922 a ‘large number’ of the disbanded men sent an open petition to Winston Churchill, then secretary of state for the colonies, for the use of empty barracks and military protection until they could board a steamboat out of Ireland.

At present we have to go out disarmed, and we are set upon and searched, our money is taken ... The wanted R.I.C., when found, having been already court-martialled by the I.R.A., are dragged off and murdered at once, and many of them have also suffered unmentionable outrages. ... We have all been warned out of Ireland. Every county in Munster, Leinster and Connaught is placarded that all the R.I.C. are to be shot at sight if they return. Our wives and families, likewise, are being ordered to leave. ... A great deal of luggage has been burned and many of our comrades have already been murdered.’<sup>17</sup>

Between December 1921 and February 1922 alone, there had been eighty-two recorded attacks on the RIC resulting in twelve deaths and twenty-seven serious injuries and at least fifteen ex-RIC men had been killed in southern Ireland by the end of 1922.<sup>18</sup> A pamphlet produced by the Representative Bodies of the RIC in 1922 listed incidents resulting in the deaths of ten serving policeman, a policeman’s wife, a retired policeman and the wounding of six others while also recording seventy-three non-fatal attacks on police and their families and one kidnapping.<sup>19</sup> For men who had been subject to months and years of violence, persecution and ostracism but lasted the course, a warning to leave may well have come with added force in 1922 as any sense of protection afforded by colleagues and barracks had gone. One ex-constable reflected ruefully that ‘there was no protection for the likes of me’ and another who joined the Royal Ulster Constabulary recalled years later that

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<sup>16</sup> *Constabulary Gazette*, 28 Jan. 1922.

<sup>17</sup> *Impartial Reporter*, 27 Apr. 1922.

<sup>18</sup> O’Sullivan, *The Irish constabularies*, p. 368; Richard Abbott, *Police casualties in Ireland, 1919-1922* (Cork, 2000), pp 293-5. Fourteen more were killed while still serving. See pp 275-91.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Outrages committed against the R.I.C. since the Truce, July 1921’, 1922 (TNA: TS 18/237).

in Monaghan ‘the regular RIC was gone, the army was gone and you had no protection.’<sup>20</sup> In this new environment, threatening letters that may have been ignored in the past suddenly became more menacing and were accentuated by a feeling that there would no longer be any consequences; law and order was now in the hands of the rebels.

The files of the Irish Grants Committee (IGC), a Treasury-funded scheme of compensation for southern Irish loyalists, offer some insights into the perceived threat of violence experienced by men after they had been disbanded.<sup>21</sup> Descriptions of fear and flight may have been exaggerated, distorted or simplified for effect, but the testimony provided gives some sense of the mentality of individual policemen after they left the force.<sup>22</sup> Testimony regularly implies an almost immediate flight and that once a threat came, it had to be responded to immediately: ‘I got notice ... to leave the country within 12 hours or forfeit my life. As a consequence I had to leave at once leaving my wife, children, goods, effects etc. at Kilrush’.<sup>23</sup> Such fear was often generated by reports and second hand accounts rather than personal experience. Ex-constable John Beirne told the IGC that he felt that he could not return to his farm as other ex-members were being ‘hurt assaulted and in some cases murdered on returning to their native places owing to increased political trouble’.<sup>24</sup> On leaving Dublin Castle John Egan went straight to London. He had been warned not to return to Roscommon by his father who had been threatened and ‘was afraid for my own safety to allow me home as two or three ex members had been taken out and shot’.<sup>25</sup> James Coogan succinctly articulated a common, if exaggerated, impression that the ill-effects of violence would apply to all former policemen when he explained his decision to head for London, leaving his wife in Waterford: ‘all the disbanded RIC there had left, having received notices to quit the country or put up with the consequences’.<sup>26</sup> The testimony regularly alludes to the added potency of a warning after disbandment. Patrick Durkan admitted that when his home in Killenaule, County Tipperary was raided by armed men he agreed to leave the area the next morning as ‘I well knew they would carry their

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<sup>20</sup> Timothy Murphy claim (TNA, CO 762/7/3); John D. Brewer, *The Royal Irish Constabulary: an oral history* (Belfast, 1990), p. 118.

<sup>21</sup> For the origins and work of the IGC and its predecessors see Niamh Mary Brennan, ‘Compensating southern Irish loyalists after the Anglo-Irish Treaty, 1922-32’, unpublished PhD thesis (UCD, 1994); Niamh Brennan, ‘A political minefield: southern Irish loyalists, the Irish Grants Committee and the British government, 1922-31’, *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 119 (May, 1997), pp 406-19.

<sup>22</sup> David Fitzpatrick, *Descendancy: Irish Protestant histories since 1795* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 160.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Salter claim (TNA, CO 762/126/9).

<sup>24</sup> Patrick Byrne claim (TNA, CO 762/177/3).

<sup>25</sup> John Egan claim (TNA, CO 762/160/9).

<sup>26</sup> James Coogan quoted in Gemma Clark, *Everyday violence in the Irish Civil War* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 98

threat into effect if I refused'.<sup>27</sup> One former sergeant had been ordered to leave County Cavan pending 'drastic action' and told the RIC Tribunal, 'I have up to the present ignored the notice, but I fear that it will only be a matter of time until I have to comply'.<sup>28</sup> Confessing that one was afraid in 1922 was easier and, perhaps, more acceptable than quitting in 1919 or 1920. Ex-sergeant Lynch claimed that he ignored threats against him during the war as 'I considered no one would resign except a coward' but the receipt of two threatening letters in June 1922 convinced him to leave Tipperary.<sup>29</sup>

### **Returning home, 1922**

The experiences of the men who returned to homes in southern Ireland after disbandment suggest that the extent to which the fear of violence was likely to become reality depended on the locality to which they returned. Over half of the ex-RIC men killed in 1922 were shot in Cork, Clare and Kerry while most counties saw no lethal violence against former policemen.<sup>30</sup> Evidence of non-lethal violence is found across the twenty-six counties but its varied and inconsistent nature suggests community-driven persecution, no official policy and little or no instruction from above. Individuals were targeted through a mixture of written or verbal threats, armed raids and physical violence. Civil servant Alfred 'Andy' Cope informed the provisional government that he had interviewed men who were 'so brutally beaten and maltreated before being driven out that they have had to be treated as in-patients in hospitals'.<sup>31</sup> In King's County, an ex-constable was physically taken from his home and escorted to a nearby train station with 'a promise of drastic steps' if he did not board the train.<sup>32</sup> James McElwaine described how he was dragged from his sickbed in Caltra, County Galway by twelve armed men, marched two miles, blindfolded and tied to the village pump where he was warned to leave the country and had a shot fired over his head.<sup>33</sup> Social ostracism could be more subtle and restrained, but equally as effective. Before he received any explicit threat or injury in Cavan, Benjamin Stafford could 'see from the demeanour of the people in the locality that they wished to avoid him

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<sup>27</sup> Patrick Durkan claim (TNA, CO 762/54/16).

<sup>28</sup> George Ryan to RIC Tribunal (TNA, HO 351/98).

<sup>29</sup> John Lynch claim (TNA, CO 762/6/5).

<sup>30</sup> Abbott, *Police casualties*, pp 293-5.

<sup>31</sup> Cope to Secretary, Provisional Government, 22 Jun. 1922 (NAI, S 1842).

<sup>32</sup> Patrick Healy claim (TNA, CO 762/89/12).

<sup>33</sup> James McElwaine to RIC Tribunal (TNA, HO 351/98). He left that day having been out of the police a fortnight.

and wished to have no conversation with him ... with the exception of a few of his friends'.<sup>34</sup> Former policemen found themselves at the mercy of local suppliers and could be forced to pay over the odds for goods and services. Francis Ronan told the RIC Tribunal, founded to administer allowances and grants to disbanded policeman, that 'We pay the highest price for everything, and pay ready money or starve' while another despairing claimant pointed out that 'the feeling of the people is such that compensation granted is of little avail'.<sup>35</sup> For those who made the decision to leave their community, the experience of having to uproot was traumatic enough but families often found it difficult to secure means of transporting their goods with neighbours either unwilling or afraid to help. Ex-constable Patrick Durkan recalled that 'if it was even suspected that you were an ex-policeman no person would risk his life atal to drive you'.<sup>36</sup> Property could also be stolen or destroyed while in transit and one disbanded policeman went as far as painting over the standard RIC bottle green boxes holding his property in the hope that they would be left alone.<sup>37</sup> Public auctions were boycotted or prevented from taking place at all and land and property often had to be sold at a fraction of its value.<sup>38</sup>

But for every man threatened, beaten or shunned, there were more who experienced little or no hostility in their own communities. Patrick Shea, son of a policeman stationed in Clones on disbandment, for example, was blind to any antagonism against former members: 'The disbanded members of the Royal Irish Constabulary were not made to feel unwanted in the Irish Free State. I think we could have gone to live anywhere in the country without fear of molestation'. His family left Clones for Newry (his mother's birthplace) but only, Shea insisted, as they had no family ties there and limited employment opportunities.<sup>39</sup> Many more simply kept their heads down and carried on with life under the new order. It is the failures to do so that most often survive among the written record, as in Benjamin Stafford's case. His plea that he would 'be as good a Free

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<sup>34</sup> Benjamin Stafford claim (NAI, FIN/COMP/381/153(2)).

<sup>35</sup> Francis Ronan to RIC Tribunal, 20 Jul. 1922 (TNA, HO 351/98); Hugh Carty to RIC Tribunal, 9 Jun. 1922 (Ibid).

<sup>36</sup> Patrick Durkan claim (TNA, CO 762/54/16).

<sup>37</sup> Martin McLaughlin claim (TNA, CO 762/23/2); Martin McLaughlin to Lord Dunedin, 10 Nov. 1925 (TNA, CO 905/17); Martin McLaughlin to Lord Eustace Percy, 1 Dec. 1925 (Ibid).

<sup>38</sup> Memorandum circulated to the Cabinet by Major Alan Reid Jamieson, 1927 (TNA, CO 762/1/16).

<sup>39</sup> Patrick Shea, *Voices and the sound of drums: an Irish autobiography* (Galway, 1981), p. 91.

State citizen as any they had' fell on deaf ears and a threatening notice and damaged property convinced him to leave and not return.<sup>40</sup>

The attitude of the republican hierarchy, who seem to have neither sanctioned nor condoned much of this activity, is likely made clear by comments in a letter from Austin Stack, later a prominent anti-Treatyite, to an ex-policemen seeking permission to return to his wife and family in Tralee, County Kerry:

I cannot see that I have anything to do with matters of the kind referred to. The case is one of thousands on which no general policy, so far as I know, has been settled. The people in various parts of [the] country, very naturally, look upon men who served in the British force up to the last moment as having been our enemies during the war.<sup>41</sup>

The hierarchy remained acutely aware that local conditions would dictate. The Department of Defence was able to arrange that a number of disbanded policemen in Kells, County Meath would not be interfered with but when a Dublin Castle official enquired about two attempting to find new accommodation in Cork, he was informed by the chief liaison officer that 'under the circumstance it would be by no means wise to ask either of these men to remain in Cork. I am sure I would be glad to help you in this respect, but I could not guarantee the safety of the Constables and their families if they choose to remain behind in Cork'.<sup>42</sup> The record of a policeman during the conflict could determine his treatment after disbandment but this was applied somewhat arbitrarily. When Denis Harrington and Florence Donnelly, who had been stationed in Patrickswell, County Limerick, moved into the Kerry No. 2 Brigade area, enquiries were made about their record.<sup>43</sup> The director of intelligence reported:

Harrington was one of the old peelers who were sticking on. Patrickswell was a very quiet area and it is quite possible that he might not be so quiet, if the area were more vigorous ... I would, however, recommend that he be allowed reside in Ireland. ... The same remarks D. Harrington would apply to Florence Donnelly.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Benjamin Stafford claim (NAI, FIN/COMP/381/153(2)).

<sup>41</sup> Michael Daly claim (TNA, CO 762/126/1).

<sup>42</sup> Department of Defence to Officer i/c Evacuation, 6 Jun. 1922 (MAI, LE/4/15); M. Loughnane to Chief Liaison Officer, 1 Apr. 1922; Chief Liaison Officer to Loughnane, 1 Apr. 1922 (LE/11/6).

<sup>43</sup> IO Kerry No. 2 to IO 1<sup>st</sup> Southern Division, 12 May 1922 (National Library of Ireland (NLI), Ms. 31,212).

<sup>44</sup> Director of Intelligence to IO 1<sup>st</sup> Southern Division, 6 Jun. 1922 (Ibid).



For others it seems that simply having been a member of the force and refusing to resign was enough. During a raid on her home, the wife of an RIC sergeant was informed the raiders had come to shoot him simply ‘because he was a servant of the Crown’.<sup>45</sup>

Disbanded policemen made easy targets. In a frustrated letter in March 1922 Andy Cope complained that ‘the R.I.C. are completely demoralised and dispirited and allow themselves to be robbed like sheep’.<sup>46</sup> Todd Andrews remembered the IRA in Mullingar, County Westmeath visiting the local public houses around the same time to deprive RIC men of their weapons.<sup>47</sup> Moses Roche of the Waterford IRA took part in an ‘unofficial’ raid on a group of eighty RIC and ‘Black and Tans’: ‘it was considered that getting from the British such a large quantity of weapons and ammunition with such little trouble was something which should not be missed’.<sup>48</sup> A raid on the home of a policeman in Galway prompted the IRA’s officer in charge of evacuation to lament that:

Attacks upon police and families of police pensioners are very widespread in the County Galway. I feel certain that if those activities were so prevalent during the period of hostilities as they are now much better results would have been obtained. I imagine that the policy in Galway now is that “it is never too late to learn”.<sup>49</sup>

In some localities, returning policemen may have fallen victim to IRA units seeking redemption for previous inactivity. Across Sligo, where there had been a quiet war, Michael Farry has found a ‘campaign of intimidation against ex-members of the RIC. Most of the disbanded RIC appear not to have returned to or settled in the county’.<sup>50</sup> In Cavan, where there were only nine recorded homicides up to December 1921,<sup>51</sup> the county town’s IRA raided the homes of the county inspector, a district inspector and two ex-sergeants over the course of one night in May 1922.<sup>52</sup> Later that month it was reported that five ex-policemen in Belturbet were threatened and fled leaving their families behind awaiting

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<sup>45</sup> M. Loughnane, Dublin Castle to Chief Liaison Officer, 30 Mar. 1922 (MAI, LE/4/15).

<sup>46</sup> Alfred ‘Andy’ Cope, 6 Mar. 1922 (TNA, HO 45/24754).

<sup>47</sup> C. S. Andrews, *Dublin made me: an autobiography* (Dublin, 2001; 1<sup>st</sup> edn. 1979), p. 226. Cope commented that it was only the willingness to be robbed, rather than ‘sell our stuff to the Republicans’ that had ‘saved us from a new war’.

<sup>48</sup> Bureau of Military History (BMH) Witness Statement (WS) 1129 (Moses Roche).

<sup>49</sup> Officer i/c Evacuation to Brennan, 12 Apr. 1922 (MAI, LE/4/10).

<sup>50</sup> Michael Farry, *The aftermath of revolution: Sligo, 1921-23* (Dublin, 2000), p. 165.

<sup>51</sup> O’Halpin, ‘Problematic killing’, p. 328.

<sup>52</sup> M. Loughnane to Officer i/c Evacuation, 18 May 1922 (MAI, LE/4/16); *Anglo-Celt*, 6 May 1922.

suitable accommodation; ex-RIC and ‘Black and Tans’ in Killeshandra and elsewhere were also reported to have been given a few days to clear out.<sup>53</sup>

### Families and Pensioners

The disbandment of the RIC left their families open to victimisation. During a series of meetings in February 1922 with the Representative Bodies of the RIC, the chief secretary was told that police families had been threatened with eviction since the Truce, the children of policemen had been insulted at school, Limerick County Council had passed a resolution making children of RIC men ineligible for scholarships and the wife of a police officer had her school boycotted, forcing its closure.<sup>54</sup> In 1920 it had been suggested that travelling expenses and maintenance should be paid to families who had to leave their residence ‘on account of their homes and lives being in danger by reason of their connection with the Royal Irish Constabulary’ and the terms of disbandment similarly provided for the removal from Ireland of dependents of single men.<sup>55</sup> A separation allowance was also granted for men who had to flee without their families. When a policeman made a hasty and disorganised departure alone, his family bore the brunt of any raids on the family home. It also fell to the wives left behind to sell up property and furniture and settle affairs. Timothy Doona’s wife stayed in Balbriggan, County Dublin while he searched for a home in England but she soon received a threatening letter and felt she had to leave too.<sup>56</sup> The night James Moore left Ireland a group of armed men came to the house looking for him. Finding he was not there, his wife and children were ‘threatened and ill-treated and forced to remain out in a field for several nights’. The experience resulted in a breakdown of his wife’s health from which she was considered unlikely to fully recover.<sup>57</sup>

The trauma of shootings, raids and threats led to complaints of prolonged ill-health and ‘neurasthenia’ from some police wives. In reference to his own wife, John George

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<sup>53</sup> *Anglo-Celt*, 20 May 1922.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Arguments in Support of a Claim for Special Compensation on the ground that no Member of the R.I.C. can be safe in Ireland after Retirement’ in Proceedings of Interviews of Representative Bodies with the Chief Secretary, Feb. 1922 (TNA, CAB 24/134).

<sup>55</sup> ‘Removal Expenses and Maintenance of Police families compelled through intimidation to leave their residences’ (TNA, T 192/2); ‘Note on the work of the R.I.C. Tribunal’, n.d. (TNA, HO 351/97).

<sup>56</sup> Timothy Doona claim (TNA, CO 762/60/20).

<sup>57</sup> James F. Moore claim (TNA, CO 762/65/24).

Donaghy wrote that ‘like most of the women who was in Ireland during the trouble she is a nerve shattered creature’.<sup>58</sup> An attempt on the life of an RIC constable in April 1922 rendered his wife, in her own words, ‘a complete invalid suffering continuously from sleeplessness and unable to do housework or engage in any occupation’.<sup>59</sup> James Tarsonney claimed that his wife became ill shortly after he was brought outside by armed men and shots fired over his head; she died in a mental institution in 1927.<sup>60</sup> The IGC believed it would be ‘unjust to exclude from the category of physical injuries the nervous breakdown of a woman who had been compelled to witness her husband’s murder, or insanity supervening on threats to shoot ... or on the terrorism of nightly raids’.<sup>61</sup> The splitting up of families could equally cause anxiety for the separated policeman. An ex-head constable who had travelled to Birmingham, leaving his family behind, complained to the RIC Tribunal that he had ‘got no communication from them for the past three weeks therefore am in an awful plight. I do not know whether they are dead or alive. They have no money nor can I get any sent to them’.<sup>62</sup>

Similarly open to IRA aggression were men who had been pensioned from the RIC before 1922. In April 1922 the RIC Tribunal had decided the allowance granted to disbanded men, their wives and children for railway fares should be extended to any police pensioners and their families who were considered to be in danger.<sup>63</sup> A month later a list was sent from Dublin Castle giving fifteen ‘further cases of old R.I.C. pensioners who have been ordered to leave their homes’.<sup>64</sup> Michael Kennedy had retired from the RIC in 1920 after thirty-five years service and began working as a night watchman on the Great Southern and Western Railway at Mallow, County Cork. On 26 July 1922, he received a notice from the local IRA battalion ordering him to leave within twenty-five (rather than twenty-four) hours. Kennedy testified that he ignored the threat and was on his way to work when he was kidnapped by armed men, tied up and robbed of his valuables. He

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<sup>58</sup> John George Donaghy claim (TNA, CO 762/55/9).

<sup>59</sup> Mary Butler claim (TNA, CO 762/106/11). She claimed she had already suffered a boycott while living alone at Knock, County Mayo as her husband awaited disbandment in Ballyhaunis.

<sup>60</sup> James Tarsonney claim (TNA, CO 762/164/9). Tarsonney claimed he had ignored warnings to leave his home until one night he was brought outside by armed men and shots fired over his head. He was forced to leave without his wife who became ill soon after.

<sup>61</sup> IGC Report, Nov. 1930 (TNA, IGC, CO 762/212).

<sup>62</sup> W. Connolly to RIC Tribunal, 15 Jul. 1922 (TNA, HO 351/98).

<sup>63</sup> Alfred Cope to Cheesman, 28 Apr. 1922 (TNA, HO 351/96).

<sup>64</sup> M. Loughnane to Officer i/c Evacuation, 14 Jun. 1922 (MAI, LE/11/3).

remained in his home but complied with an order not to return to work.<sup>65</sup> Another RIC pensioner, Michael Falvey, left Tipperary town where he had been working as a weigh master following an order from the Tipperary IRA in May 1922. ‘Having good reason to believe that failure to comply with this order would result in my being murdered and that my daughter Bridget Falvey would meet the same fate’, Falvey went to Belfast via Dublin with his daughter, who was due to marry an ex-constable.<sup>66</sup> He returned to Tipperary after fifteen weeks and was able to resume his employment but his daughter did not come back with him.<sup>67</sup> While Kennedy was able to stay at home and Falvey soon able to resume work, another RIC pensioner, James Edward Terrett, left Ireland and his job as steward of a Dublin golf club after receiving a threatening letter from the IRA. Terrett, who retired in 1918, insisted he was particularly active in searches following the 1916 Rising, informed on a local doctor who had been ‘out’ during the rebellion and assisted in the arrest of Éamon de Valera in Greystones in 1918, making him ‘anathema’ to the republicans.<sup>68</sup> For these reasons Terrett was, perhaps, more offensive to the IRA than Kennedy or Falvey. In his own mind at least, his past indiscretions had put him at risk of violence and he felt unable to pass off threats.

### **A ‘wholesale expulsion’ of the RIC?**

In June 1922, Andy Cope described a ‘concerted movement for a wholesale expulsion’ of ex-policemen and their families from the country and pleaded for something to be done.<sup>69</sup> Cope could draw on several examples of the harsh treatment of policemen but victimisation remained localised and, while significant in its own right, did not match any of the more pessimistic predictions. When it finished its work in 1924, the RIC Tribunal had issued 1,263 replacement grants for property lost, stolen or destroyed when forced to move home, and 727 ‘other grants’ for ‘hardship’ which were almost exclusively for widely defined ‘removal expenses’. Any man who ‘owing to fear or molestation was obliged to move his home either to another place in Ireland, or to any place outside Ireland’ was entitled to a disturbance allowance, granted as an advance subject to a liability

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<sup>65</sup> Michael Kennedy claim (TNA, CO 762/186/5). Kennedy’s daughters had worked for the postal service in London during the Great War and one daughter had been kidnapped and briefly detained by the IRA in 1920.

<sup>66</sup> Michael Falvey claim (TNA, CO 762/114/15).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> James Edward Terrett claim (TNA, CO 762/11/6).

<sup>69</sup> Alfred Cope to Secretary, Provisional Government, 22 Jun. 1922 (NAI, S 1842).

to account for it later. The Tribunal dealt with 6,941 such cases but most of the movement was internal. Disturbance allowances covered the cost of migration but men were also entitled to apply to commute a portion of their pension to allow them to purchase a home or set up a business. The Tribunal received 1,686 applications for the purpose of emigration and approved 1,568, suggesting a reasonable estimation for emigration up to 1924 while accounting for substantial (but unrecorded) overlap with the 886 separation allowances awarded to married men who left home, leaving their families in Ireland.<sup>70</sup> Kent Fedorowich has shown that a paucity of records makes it impossible to verify exact numbers but has realistically suggested that the total number of ex-police emigrants may have reached 2,000 by the end of the 1920s, while also acknowledging that the bulk of disbanded men stayed in southern Ireland.<sup>71</sup> Many who initially left also began to return as the political situation stabilised after the end of the Civil War. A 1924 report suggested that ‘the number of men who have returned has been small’ but by 1927 the secretary of the IGC had found that ‘the majority of the force returned to Ireland within a comparatively short period after disbandment.’<sup>72</sup>

L. M. B. Odgers, who had served as secretary of the RIC Tribunal, remarked that ‘it was unfortunately the reverse of exceptional for a disbanded man to leave Ireland’ and while the figures for disruption and emigration are not minor, they remain a relatively small percentage of the (minimum of) 13,502 men who were disbanded.<sup>73</sup> Only a fraction again could be definitively attributed to revolutionary terror. Andy Bielenberg has calculated that only between two and fifteen per cent of Protestant migration from Ireland between 1911 and 1926 could have been the result of violence and intimidation while David Fitzpatrick has similarly concluded that the impact of a campaign of ‘ethnic cleansing’, if one was attempted, on West Cork Methodists was ‘fairly minor’.<sup>74</sup> Similar conclusions must be applied to RIC emigration after 1922. Men who emigrated did not

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<sup>70</sup> Report of the RIC Tribunal to Secretary of State for Home Affairs, 24 Feb. 1924 (TNA, CO 762/1); L. N. B. Odgers to Alan Reid Jamieson, 11 Apr. 1927 (TNA, HO 45/13580); IGC Report, Nov. 1930 (TNA, CO 762/212).

<sup>71</sup> Report of the RIC Tribunal to Secretary of State for Home Affairs, 24 Feb. 1924 (TNA, CO 762/1); Fedorowich, ‘The problems of disbandment’, pp 88-108. See also Kent Fedorowich, ‘Reconstruction and resettlement: the politicization of Irish migration to Australia and Canada, 1919-1929’, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 114, No. 459 (Nov., 1999), pp 1143-78.

<sup>72</sup> Memorandum circulated to the Cabinet by Major Alan Reid Jamieson, 1927 (TNA, CO 762/1/16).

<sup>73</sup> Abbott, *Police casualties*, p. 295.

<sup>74</sup> Andy Bielenberg, ‘Exodus: the emigration of southern Irish protestants during the Irish war of independence and the civil war’, *Past and Present*, 218 (2013), pp 199-233; Fitzpatrick, *Descendancy*, pp 159-80. See also Enda Delaney, *Demography, state and society: Irish migration to Britain, 1921-1971* (Liverpool, 2000), pp 69-83.

have to account for their disturbance allowance, making it impossible to accurately assess motivations for emigration, and additional allowances to emigrants were only categorised as resulting from ‘danger’ in the five exceptional cases where it was believed the life of the recipients were still under threat in Britain.<sup>75</sup> Over 600 men were required to refund their disturbance allowances as they had ‘remained in Ireland and not removed their homes’ but a generous interpretation of the rules allowed a further ‘large proportion’ who did not move to keep theirs.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, the decision to move was rarely the result of a single impetus, as Odgers could attest: ‘many of the men advanced such a large number of reasons for their applications that it was impossible to say that so many applications were in respect of this and so many in respect of that.’<sup>77</sup> Demand for employment certainly informed patterns of migration. While it offered a refuge from potential republican vengeance, the prospect of work fitting their experience also surely enticed many of the 1,347 RIC veterans who joined the Royal Ulster Constabulary and over 250 Irish-born ex-RIC who joined the Palestinian gendarmerie; the Irish contingent of the gendarmerie was made up of young men, more than half of whom had no work experience beyond police or military service.<sup>78</sup> One ex-RIC constable who went on to serve in Palestine had been in Belfast looking for work when visitors came to his family home in Limerick looking for him. Years later, he was unsure ‘Whether I’d have been in any trouble if I had been there ... Some of these young fellows, you know, [I] think it was bravado. I would have liked to have stayed [at home], but I knew I wouldn’t get work there’.<sup>79</sup>

Twelve of the fifteen disbanded RIC men interviewed by John Brewer in the 1990s joined the RUC after disbandment.<sup>80</sup> Five of the interviewees directly mentioned violence against disbanded policemen and feelings of being unable to return to their homes in

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<sup>75</sup> L. N. B. Odgers to Alan Reid Jamieson, 11 Apr. 1927 (TNA, HO 45/13580). The five cases were that of the infamous ex-Head Constable Eugene Igoe and four ‘minor Igoes’ (the specific references were crossed off and not intended to be included in the final draft of the letter).

<sup>76</sup> Report of the RIC Tribunal to Secretary of State for Home Affairs, 24 Feb. 1924 (TNA, CO 762/1). G. C. Upcott, a member of the RIC Tribunal, later complained that the Tribunal was ‘unduly lenient’ in not requesting more refunds but accepted that it was a ‘question of getting the butter out of the dog’s mouth’: Upcott to L. N. B. Odgers, 8 Apr. 1927 (TNA, HO 45/13580).

<sup>77</sup> L. N. B. Odgers to Alan Reid Jamieson, 11 Apr. 1927 (TNA, HO 45/13580).

<sup>78</sup> Fedorowich, ‘The problems of disbandment’, p. 97; Seán William Gannon, ‘“Sure it’s only a holiday ...”: the Irish contingent of the British (Palestine) Gendarmerie, 1922-1926’, *Australasian Journal of Irish Studies*, 13 (2013), pp 66-9.

<sup>79</sup> Brewer, *The Royal Irish Constabulary*, p. 122. Having been disbanded from the Palestinian police, John Fails and his family left for America before returning to Belfast in the late 1920s. My thanks to Dr Seán William Gannon for this information.

<sup>80</sup> Brewer, *The Royal Irish Constabulary*, pp 20-2.

southern Ireland.<sup>81</sup> But more policing had a limited appeal. One who stayed out of the profession after he left the RIC later asserted that it was many of the younger disbanded men who had joined the RUC as they were unmarried and ‘had their small pension, a pound a week was money to them at that time’. He was, perhaps, representative of most of his colleagues in declaring that he did not wish to get involved in the ‘shooting’ again; the Representative Bodies of the RIC told the chief secretary in February 1922 that ‘Further police employment is generally distasteful to the majority of the members of the Force, even if it were available’.<sup>82</sup> A head constable with 30 years service refused employment with the Ulster Special Constabulary ‘owing to strain of R.I.C. service’; he had changed his name to avoid danger.<sup>83</sup> Brewer’s sample was, then, unrepresentative of their colleagues in this regard.<sup>84</sup> Where policing did attract, money mattered. William Dunne admitted that he ‘did not fancy going back to civilian life. I didn’t think that I’d settle in any other job and, of course, being married at the time you were glad of a job. I though this was all I could get’; although he noticed a vaguely hostile attitude among neighbours at the family farm, he felt he would not have experienced intimidation had he gone home.<sup>85</sup> Edward Sullivan thought the RUC was ‘better and they were better paid than the Civic Guards were.’<sup>86</sup>

Economics remain a key determinant in the experience of a disbanded policeman after 1922 – whether he left southern Ireland or not. If only a relatively small proportion left owing to intimidation, there were also those who were threatened or feared violence but decided against emigration. Martin McLoughlin insisted that ‘The R.I.C. Officers who had a good pension, being afraid left the country. It was not my case, as I had no means to take me anywhere’.<sup>87</sup> The terms of disbandment had offered McLoughlin the financial means to secure passage abroad but his comment may more intimately reflect a perceived inability to settle in a foreign country and forge a lasting career away from home. Family bonds and, as Fedorowich has put it, ‘faith in their fellow-countrymen to make amends

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, pp 117-27.

<sup>82</sup> ‘Arguments in Support of a Plea for Special Compensation on the ground that no Member of the R.I.C. can secure Employment after Disbandment in Ireland (and elsewhere)’ in Proceedings of Interviews of Representative Bodies with the Chief Secretary, Feb. 1922 (TNA, CAB 24/134).

<sup>83</sup> Note on Head Constable Peter Shannon, 1922 (TNA, 351/96).

<sup>84</sup> Brewer acknowledges that Protestants made up an unrepresentative proportion of his interviewees, as it was only younger men who joined towards the end of the force’s life, when the majority intake was Protestant, who were still alive. Generally, it was the younger men with less pensionable service who went on to join the RUC.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p. 121.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p. 126.

<sup>87</sup> Martin McLoughlin claim (TNA, CO 762/23/2).

with them' influenced others to stay.<sup>88</sup> The inability to secure a job in the Irish Free State may be seen as a form of enforced exile, but one driven largely by perception and prejudice rather than by violence and persecution. The full extent of local discrimination in Free State communities is difficult to discern but incidents of hostility occasionally surface. As late as 1936 a Fianna Fáil member of Ballybay Town Council 'strongly objected to, and protested against' the position of town clerk being given to 'a man who served in the R.I.C. during the troubles'; opposition to the appointment of a teacher in County Limerick the same year, resulting in the burning of the school, was put down to her father's service as a sergeant in the RIC.<sup>89</sup> Michael Flynn, referred to at the opening of this chapter, felt safe enough to return to Castletownbere in West Cork in 1924, but by 1930 reported that he was unemployed and in acute financial difficulty, complaining to the RIC Pensions committee that 'Ex R.I.C. men wont get any employment on account of remaining in the force until disbandment'.<sup>90</sup> This may have been an exaggeration for the benefit of the RIC Tribunal, or reflect a mentality as much as a reality, but the effect of a weakened economy on prospects for both urban and agricultural employment should not be underestimated. The RIC Tribunal found that disbanded policemen struggled with careers in both Ireland and Britain, evidence that prejudice in the Free State was not a lone cause of hardship. The Tribunal rejected over 1,000 applications for 'home commutation' as the applicant was considered unsuitable to the proposed business.<sup>91</sup> Irresponsibility, lack of business acumen and inability to turn sufficient profits hindered men who opened small retail shops or bought motor cars while farming ('a popular proposal since the conditions in the Free State settled') 'suffered through the severe agricultural depression in Ireland and the consequent fall in land values'.<sup>92</sup> Past service in the RIC may have been just one of a number of factors keeping a man out of work. In 1924 retired sergeant William Kennedy complained that his sons were unable to find employment as there was 'nothing to be got for anyone at present in this country especially if you weren't known to be a good Sinn Féiner'.<sup>93</sup>

For those who left for Great Britain, there was solace and camaraderie to be found in numbers. Ex-RIC interest groups held social events, reunion dinners and dances and the

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<sup>88</sup> Fedorowich, 'The problems of disbandment', p. 108.

<sup>89</sup> *Irish Times*, 13 Jun. 1936; *Irish Times*, 11 Jul. 1936.

<sup>90</sup> Michael Flynn to RIC Pensions, 1 Aug. 1930 (TNA, HO 144/22575).

<sup>91</sup> Report of the RIC Tribunal to Secretary of State for Home Affairs, 24 Feb. 1924 (TNA, CO 762/1).

<sup>92</sup> Brief summary of the work of the RIC Tribunal, Mar. 1928 (TNA, HO 45/13029). See also, Gannon, 'Irish contingent', p. 70.

<sup>93</sup> William Kennedy quoted in Gannon, 'Irish contingent', p. 71.



Association of Ex-Officers and Men of the RIC was still appealing to potential members in Britain and elsewhere in 1928.<sup>94</sup> The Irish Office set up a body to assist arriving ex-policemen to find suitable accommodation, with headquarters in Cardiff and a branch in London; around fifty ex-constables and their families formed a ‘little colony’ in Hertfordshire.<sup>95</sup> But there was no guarantee of prosperity or even financial security outside of the Free State; the Southern Irish Loyalist Relief Association believed it was ‘still necessary to help the widows and children of men who had served in the Royal Irish Constabulary’ in 1935.<sup>96</sup> Association with a paramilitary force and the perceived violence and ill discipline of ‘Black and Tans’ occasioned some discrimination outside of Ireland.<sup>97</sup> The RIC Tribunal reported that emigrants to the dominions and colonies had generally been more successful than ‘Home Cases’ in Britain and Ireland but none were immune to hardship.<sup>98</sup> An ex-constable wrote to the *Weekly Irish Independent* that he and some colleagues, unable to find any work in Perth, Western Australia, were ‘thinking of going back to Ireland, as we might as well be shot there as die here’, while Patrick Larkin described his situation in England to the Irish Grants Committee: ‘It is also very terrible to be walking around looking for work, nobody knows me to assist me, the result is that I get so fed-up, it is enough to make a man commit suicide. I find I am not able to get on here, not wanted in my own country, what am I to do?’<sup>99</sup>

Fears for the safety of disbanded policemen meant the British government was still refusing to disclose personal details in 1925.<sup>100</sup> In 1931 the subject prompted a revealing discussion on government policy surrounding the freedom of information on pensioned and disbanded members of the RIC. An April memorandum from the Home Office suggested that ‘the position has greatly changed since 1922’ and the time had come to review the policy on acceding to requests for personal information. Previously, details had only been given to police in Great Britain and Northern Ireland (but not the Irish Free State) for use in judicial cases, to solicitors requesting amounts due to deceased police

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<sup>94</sup> See, for example, events reported and advertised in London in the *Irish Times*, 26 Apr. 1924, 3 Jun. 1925 and in Sheffield in the *Weekly Irish Times*, 26 Nov. 1938; Mo Moulton, *Ireland and the Irish in interwar England* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 209.

<sup>95</sup> G. G. Whiskard to G. R. Buckland, 8 May 1922 (TNA, MEPO 2/1814); Clark, *Everyday violence*, p. 98.

<sup>96</sup> *The Times*, 17 Jul. 1935.

<sup>97</sup> Fedorowich, ‘The problems of disbandment’, pp 98-104; Fedorowich, ‘Reconstruction and resettlement’, p. 1150.

<sup>98</sup> ‘Brief summary of the work of the Royal Irish Constabulary Tribunal’, Apr. 1928 (TNA, HO 45/13029).

<sup>99</sup> Patrick Kennedy quoted in Fedorowich, ‘Reconstruction and resettlement’, p. 1143; Patrick Larkin claim (TNA, IGC, CO 762/102/12). See also the report of the suicide of an ‘unemployed and depressed’ ex-RIC member in London: *Irish Times*, 15 Nov. 1922.

<sup>100</sup> Gannon, ‘Irish contingent’, p. 77.

pensioners and customs and exiles authorities in Britain and Ireland, while requests from wives of former RIC policemen accused of abandoning their families were, in most cases, refused to avoid interference in the ‘private affairs of a pensioner’. It was pointed out that there were ‘165 disbanded members who for some reason or another were graded as needing special precautions to be taken’ but ‘Many men who alleged that their lives would be endangered if they ever returned to Ireland have now taken the risk and no grievous harm has come to them.’<sup>101</sup> A Home Office official, responding to the memorandum, was sceptical about fears for the current safety of former members of the Irish police. He cited ‘numerous instances’ of men who had been compelled to leave and ‘could never safely return, going back within a year or two and quietly settling down.’ In other cases, complaints were made that their former service in the RIC was precluding men from work but, ‘these serve to show that, if they are unpopular, they are at any rate taking no steps to hide their identity.’ Such cases, it was argued, seemed to hint ‘that the stories of “persecution” are largely mythical, and indeed, it is not surprising if, after a lapse of nearly 10 years, old enmities should be dying down. I have, in fact, heard it suggested that many of the “threats” delivered anonymously to ex-R.I.C. men were in the nature of ill-conceived practical jokes.’ While suggesting that men who had evaded responsibility towards their families may have forfeited any right to protection, the official favoured a continuation of the established policy with a ‘universal practice of giving addresses where they are required by the police for use in Court proceedings’, excepting the 165 men considered to be in particular danger.<sup>102</sup> Sir Henry Arthur Wynne, chief Crown solicitor of Ireland until 1923 and then exiled in England, counselled that even after ten years ‘it must not be forgotten that Irishmen have very long memories in matters of this kind’ and considered that no change should be made to the policy for ‘some further period of any rate’. Wynne based his conclusion on ‘my own knowledge and from replies to enquiries that I make when I meet people from Ireland here’ and saw the renewal of Free State legislation aimed at protecting jurors from intimidation as evidence that it would be ‘rash’ to assume all ex-RIC men were safe. ‘It is quite true that in many instances they may be quite safe and there are a number living in the Irish Free State now apparently without molestation, but one can never be sure of the “wild men”’.<sup>103</sup> Agreement was reached not

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<sup>101</sup> Memorandum on ‘Question of question of furnishing addresses and supplying information concerning former members of the Royal Irish Constabulary ...’, 17 Apr. 1931 (TNA, HO 144/22600). I am grateful to Dr Seán William Gannon for alerting me to this file.

<sup>102</sup> Minute, ‘H. S. M.’, 22 May 1931 (Ibid).

<sup>103</sup> Minute, Henry Arthur Wynne, 11 Jun. 1931 (Ibid).

to relax the previous policy for the present and any requests for information for legal use would be granted only after the Home Office had established the individuals concerned were not among the 165 men 'liable to risks by reason of their police service in Ireland'. When the Ex-Royal Irish Constabulary Officers' Association put forward a request for addresses in 1934, the Paymaster General's Office was still following the same 'rigid rules'.<sup>104</sup>

The Home Office discussion, and the decision to bring up the issue at all, highlights the difficulty in defining a single experience for disbanded policemen after southern Irish independence. In the absence of the 1931 list of 165 men needing 'special precautions' (all of whom would have been residing outside the Free State), it is not possible to verify the criteria for inclusion. It is a tiny proportion of the total number, but the list and surrounding concerns about policy are evidence that, for the British administration, the danger of violence against disbanded policeman lingered on for over a decade. There was, for instance, an obvious reluctance to accept that former policemen were all immune from danger – Sir Henry Wynne asserted that he 'certainly would not like to take the responsibility for so assuming – and unwillingness to 'risk' their safety unnecessarily. Wynne particularly feared that ex-RIC men would fall victim to the Free State CID and be 'treated as some of their victims have been treated'.<sup>105</sup> The input of officials emphasises a lack of firm knowledge on the position of disbanded policeman after ten years of southern Irish independence, an imperfect understanding of conditions in Irish communities and no universal agreement on the extent of any potential threat to their safety. Given the intrinsically local experiences on the ground in southern Ireland, it would perhaps be unfair to expect anything different.

## Conclusion

In November 1926 ex-Constable Patrick Meara applied to the IGC for compensation but insisted that 'If this claim is to go to anything belonging to the Free

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<sup>104</sup> See correspondence between C. Moriarty of the Ex-Royal Irish Constabulary Officers' Association, C. M. Martin-Jones of the Home Office and officials in the Paymaster General's Office, Jun. to Aug. 1934 (Ibid).

<sup>105</sup> Minute, Henry Arthur Wynne, 11 Jun. 1931 (Ibid).

State, I will forego it at once, as I do not want any wrangling or business of any sort with the Free State'.<sup>106</sup> If sincere, desires to avoid any contact with the independent Irish state represent sense of anger, resentment, loyalty or betrayal personal to Meara. The experiences of the men disbanded from the Royal Irish Constabulary in the early years of the Irish Free State were varied and often uniquely personal. All had been placed in an initially uncertain and unstable position on the termination of their employment, but the variety comes in studying how they coped, how they were treated, their successes and their failures. Some were the targets of hardened IRA veterans with a vendetta either against the individual or the service in which they had earned their living. Others were the unlucky victims of quiet IRA units seeking to make amends for an unproductive war. While a relatively small number elected to leave Ireland, the majority stayed and that was a decision potentially dictated by a range of factors ranging from personal bravery to financial security. Many suffered the ill effects of prejudice and hostility for several years, while others fell victim to an economic downturn and weak job market (which in turn could potentially inform animosity). Migration was costly and the very availability of financial support from British government schemes may have influenced some movement as much as any fear of violence or persecution. Compensation for lost or damaged property (far easier to account for than social ostracism and terror) eased financial distress and offered a sense that justice had been done but, equally, the failure to receive what it was felt was due could provoke feelings of bitterness, treachery and isolation.<sup>107</sup> John George Donaghy disparagingly compared his own treatment, and that of his colleagues, to other 'civil officers of the State' who 'lived in peace and quietness', continued working for the Irish Free State and received full pensions.<sup>108</sup> Pensions, allowances and compensation provided tangible opportunities to right the wrongs of the past and continued to motivate mobilisation well into the 1930s.<sup>109</sup> Away from all that were the men who silently and effectively integrated (or reintegrated) into communities in Ireland and abroad. Stories of the ex-policemen victimised, aggrieved and suffering as 'outsiders' are relatively easy to uncover. Those who did not suffer, did not complain, did not label themselves as a 'victim', those who lived quiet or ordinary lives, remain harder to account for.

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<sup>106</sup> Patrick Meara claim (TNA, CO 762/42/9).

<sup>107</sup> See, for example, John George Donaghy claim (TNA, CO 762/55/9); Jeremiah O'Donovan claim (TNA, CO 762/82/10); William Donovan claim (TNA, 762/63/2).

<sup>108</sup> John George Donaghy claim (TNA, CO 762/55/9).

<sup>109</sup> In 1928 an ultimately unsuccessful writ was taken against the British attorney general on behalf of disbanded members of the RIC over the rate of compensation paid. The claim was initially rejected and judgment reserved in 1930 after an appeal: *Irish Times*, 28 Jun. 1928, 30 Oct. 1929, 4 Nov. 1930.