



Decade of Centenaries grant report

Recipient name:	Thomas Earls Fitzgerald
Amount and year awarded:	€6,269 in 2022
Title of project:	An examination of the impact of a rural and conservative base on the formation of the Irish state from 1922-1926

Summary of project:

The aim of this project is to consider the dynamics of how civil war politics manifested with conservative machinations in rural communities, post 1923. The Irish revolutionary period of 1916-1923 has been considered in a remarkably egalitarian nature by scholars who have examined its unfolding through the prism of gender, class, society and through other scholarly disciplines such as military and religious history. Sadly, this has not been the case for the similarly turbulent years post revolution. Ireland between 1923-1934 saw considerable participation in a political culture which was defined by hostility, tension, sometimes violence and division on civil war lines. However, the histories of this period have focused predominantly on leadership figures and their role in steering the ship of state. This project instead focuses on the periphery rather than the centre by examining how leadership figures, specifically in the anti-Treaty party Fianna Fáil, needed the support of peripheral communities for legitimacy and sense of identity. The project looks at how Fianna Fáil's ethos was shaped by the perpetuation of civil war loyalties and adherence to a nationally minded conservatism in peripheral locations such as Kerry.





Decade of Centenaries grant report

Objectives of the project:

In the crucial 1932 election, which saw Fianna Fáil come to power at an election rally in west Limerick, a Labour Party figure angrily stated that there was no real difference between Fianna Fáil and Cuman naGaedheal (shortly to become Fine Gael), and the two parties needed to move on from the civil war. This sentiment that there is no real difference between the two parties has been a common sentiment in Ireland for nearly a century. Nonetheless, it fails to recognise the loyalties and sense of identity which civil war politics has perpetuated in communities across rural Ireland. Both sides of the divide of the civil war developed a strong sense of identity, purpose and sense of nationalism from the events of 1922-23 which manifested simultaneously to form a deeply conservative political culture.

My first book, *Combatants and Civilians in Revolutionary Ireland* (Routledge, 2021) partly examined how the actions of Irish revolutionaries in County Kerry already echoed the conservative nature of independent Ireland – in terms of cultural uniformity, an exclusivist nationalism misogyny, and being pro-business and farming interests. In this project I sought to examine these conservative and nationalist dynamics in the context of the years in which civil war politics were at their height and crystallised between the end of the civil war in 1923 and the collapse of the violent pro-Treaty Blueshirt movement in 1934.

Initially, the project had hoped to examine these dynamics in two rural peripheral communities, but as the research developed, the County of Kerry, which had been the subject of my research into the 1918-23 period, was selected as the field of study.

Methodology used in conducting the research:

For this project I adopted a similar research structure as for my PhD/book project by firstly familiarising myself with the secondary material followed by a granular examination of events at local level, followed by an assessment of the collected data.

The years between the formation of Fianna Fáil and their coming to power in 1932 were simultaneously divisive and elaborately detailed. It was firstly necessary to go through the significant amount of secondary literature that exists on 1920s and 1930s Ireland, such as biographies of leading figures, the histories of political organisations and movements. This was followed by a more granular examination of rural newspapers to ascertain how rural communities were reacting to events and ascertain whether rural Ireland was following on from the centre or, in fact, shaping the centre's dynamics.

It was also complemented by consultation of government records in the national archives, and material deposited in the archives of University College Dublin and the Kerry County Archive in Tralee Library. The project adopted an entirely qualitative approach trying to understand the development of factors through an examination of public statements, contemporary documents such as letters, political literature and newspaper coverage, rather than a quantitative or theory heavy approach.

Due to full time employment impacting on research time I found that I needed to scale the project back to look at Kerry alone and focus largely on Fianna Fáil rather than both parties as had been my initial intention.



Decade of Centenaries grant report

Findings of research and milestones achieved:

In my initial application form I expressed a desire to uncover the nature of how civil war politics developed and how it managed to perpetuate in tandem with a conservative political culture. Despite setbacks to the scale of my initial aims, I am satisfied with my findings and analysis.

Through an analysis of the stated sources it became clear, and this will be conveyed in my research outputs, that Fianna Fáil, aware of the strong anti-Treaty sentiment in County Kerry, reinforced civil war divisions and anger through the 1920s and early 1930s through constant reference to the civil war, but with different means. Fundamentally, my research will show that Fianna Fáil's constant reference to the civil war experience of Kerry demonstrates how it required peripheral experience and sentiment for legitimacy, purpose and identity. But it also demonstrates that the experience of Kerry as the periphery played a crucial role in shaping both the identity and perpetuation of the culture of civil war politics as it was then reinforced in the 1930s.

My research also demonstrates that together with the reinforcing of civil war legacies, Fianna Fáil in Kerry also reinforced traditional modes of life, stressing a simple non-industrial way of life with the need for full employment whilst decrying Communism and lambasting farmers' interest groups, Labour and Cuman naGaedheal as representing sectional interests alone and therefore not sufficiently national. Fianna Fáil in Kerry acts as an interesting and revealing case study for the self image of their supporters as being the conservative rural heartland of an idealised Ireland, steeped as equally with anti-Treaty credentials. My research shows that as with the anti-Treaty feelings, these more conservative sentiments were as much emanating from the periphery as the centre and played a vital role in shaping how the Fianna Fáil leadership decided to style itself nationally.

Dissemination of the project outcomes:

My findings will be published in two edited collections of essays, details are provided below, and in one magazine article. The paper I gave on my findings at the 'Civil War in Kerry and beyond: a centenary conference' in Tralee in February was covered in an article in *The Irish Examiner*. My lecture was subsequently uploaded to the conference's YouTube page and broadcast on Oireachtas TV, along with the rest of the conference proceedings, on June 7 2023. I was introduced at the conference and in the programme as the recipient of an RIA grant. I have also used my X page, which is used for my history research rather than as a personal account, to promote this project and my findings.

Published work/plans:

I have two forthcoming book chapters in two separate edited collections of essays: 'You will have towns in ruins and famine finishing those who have escaped the bullet': the rhetoric, experience and legacy of the Irish Civil War 1922-23', Fransico Jorge Leira Castineira (ed), *The Logics of Physical and Discursive Violence in the European Civil Wars, 1900-1950* (Routledge, 2004), which examines the legacy of the civil war. This, as the title suggests, looks at the civil war fighting, but the sections on the legacy of the conflict are based on my research for this project.

I also have another chapter dealing exclusively with my findings for this project in a forthcoming edited collection based on the papers given at the 'Civil War in Kerry and beyond: a centenary conference' in



Decade of Centenaries grant report

Tralee in February 2023 edited by Eoin O'Shea, Mary MacAuliffe and Bridget MacAuliffe which is scheduled for a 2024 publication.

Lectures given/outreach activities:

'Civil War in Kerry and beyond: a centenary conference', Tralee, 23-25 February 2023.

Plans for continued communication of the project's results:

Besides the two chapters being published as part of edited collections, a summary of my findings is being published as an article in a forthcoming issue of the magazine of The Kerry Historical and Archaeological Society.

Plans for furthering the project:

I hope ultimately to develop this project into a second monograph, a comprehensive scholarly but accessible volume, moving on from the themes of my first book to look at the development of conservatism and civil war politics in Ireland in the 1920s and 1930s.

How the bursary enhanced professional development:

I am very grateful to the RIA for giving me the opportunity to get my first post PhD book project off the ground and I am satisfied with my outputs which provide an original and research-based analysis of post civil war Ireland.

The bursary has allowed me to explore the links between conservatism and nationalism in the post civil war period, allowing me to explore the after-effects of the dynamics explored in my book.

I have also continued to build on connections with scholars and public historians working on both periods. The grant has helped publicise myself and my work and I continue to be invited to write reviews and contribute to edited collections.