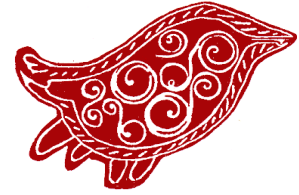


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The Irish Militia—1793-1816.

Raising the Force in Cork City and County.

By SIR HENRY McANALLY.

The Militia Act of 1793, more particularly described as "An act for amending and reducing into one Act of Parliament the laws relating to the Militia in Ireland," received the Royal Assent on 9th April. This was the end of discussion of long duration between Dublin and Whitehall and in the country. The last militia act in Ireland had been that of 1778 (17-8. Geo. ii., chap. 13). The approaching war with France and the defenceless condition of the country at that time caused much uneasiness. The Act, the preamble of which cited strengthening the civil power and protecting the land as the objects in view, had unanimous support. But it was not really acceptable to the Government and it was never brought into force. "Nothing," writes ¹ Lord Westmoreland in 1790 "that I can learn was done in consequence of it." As the result of the Government's inaction, military associations were formed. Thus began the Irish Volunteers, the rapid spreading of which movement has been called ² by Dr. Rogers "one of the most striking phenomena of Irish history."

For a time there was acquiescence in the non-realization of a Militia, but in January, 1785, "the expediency and necessity of putting the armed force of Ireland into a legal form" was urged from London. Certain steps were then taken in Parliament. There were long debates and the services and value of the Volunteers were warmly canvassed. These ended in what the Lord Lieutenant called "our triumph on the militia question," and leave was given to bring in a Bill for establishing a Militia. The Duke of Rutland, then Lord Lieutenant, wrote that he was "hopeful of completing the abolition of the Volunteer Army and the restoration of the sword to the Executive." But no Bill was passed and probably none was ever drafted. The ardour of the Lord Lieutenant for what had been his "favourite project" cooled off. Nor were the ministers in London then prepared to force the situation against the Volunteers. It was thought better to leave "this evil [*i.e.*, of the Volunteers] for the present to remedy itself." They were anyhow considered to be stagnating.³

At the beginning of 1790 the idea of having a Militia was revived from London. Lord Westmoreland, now the Viceroy, at first saw unsurmountable difficulties.⁴ But the Act of 1778, which had expired was revived and was

¹ Hist. MSS. Comm., Dropmore MSS. Vol. I., p. 583.

² *The Irish Volunteers and Catholic Emancipation*, p. 45.

³ Quotations in this paragraph from Hist. MSS. Comm. Rutland MSS. Vol. III., pp. 161, 182, 150 and 279.

⁴ Hist. MSS. Comm. Dropmore MSS. Vol. I., p. 583.

continued in force to 24th June, 1796. Towards the end of 1792, Westmoreland's correspondence is full of the problem of forming a Militia. Pitt wrote¹ of it as being, "if it can be put on a good footing . . . the most likely way to check the spirit of volunteering and to maintain the peace of the country." Before the end of November the confidential servants of the King in Ireland, among points desired, urged the formation of a Protestant Militia.² Westmoreland was still doubtful. But at a meeting of the Irish Cabinet on 1st December, a decision was taken that the volunteering spirit must be put down. On 4th December, Westmoreland thought³ it was "essential to strengthen ourselves without loss of time with a Militia, if we can get one." But nothing could be done until Parliament met. Meanwhile the volunteering spirit was quite unarrested. On the 8th, a Proclamation was issued which referred to persons who "by colour of laudable associations heretofore formed in this kingdom by his Majesty's loyal subjects for repelling foreign invasion" were appearing in arms.

It was on the first of the two duties—internal order and contra-invasion—of a Militia recited in the preamble to the 1778 Act that principal stress was during this period laid. There is no doubt that the suppression of the Volunteers was at this time the main object the Government had in view. But there was timidity about the possible reactions. When the Lord Lieutenant opened Parliament on 10th January, 1794, he only spoke generally of "measures for the maintenance of tranquility." Further than this no statement of the reasons for the contemplated raising of Militia was made. The preamble of the Act as passed speaks of "a respectable military force [as] essential to the safety and protection of this realm and its constitution." Until after the session of 1793 was well begun, it remained undecided whether the existing Act of 1778 (which, as stated, had lain unused) should be used or whether, on the other hand, there should be an entirely new Act. One step taken was to seek the opinions of leading people in the counties as well as of public bodies. Hobart, the Chief Secretary, on 14th December, 1792, sent out a letter⁴ of enquiry. The replies,⁵ so far as preserved, indicate the tenor of it. They refer to request for "sentiments on the subject of establishing a Militia in this county" (Monaghan); to enquiry as to "the expediency of raising the Militia in this county"; and, in the case of Cork, the reply sent by Richard Longford (afterwards the Lieutenant-Colonel Commandant of the Cork City Militia) describes Hobart's letter as "the offer of a militia in the form and manner directed by the Act of Parliament for that purpose." There seems little doubt that the question that Hobart principally raised was putting into force the existing Act, but he, no doubt, invited comments generally. He

¹ Dublin Castle. Fane Correspondence. 18/11/1792.

² Dublin Castle. Fane Correspondence Westmoreland to Dundas; 18/11/1792.

³ Dublin Castle. Fane Correspondence Westmoreland to Pitt; 4/12/1792.

⁴ Copy of letter to Mayor of Waterford is in Fane papers, Dublin Castle.

⁵ Where not otherwise stated, correspondence is from the now perished Dublin archives. For the extracts given I am indebted to researches made by Mr. Philip Crossle of Dublin.

apparently represented the matter as one of urgency but said it must not be pressed.

The Mayor of Cork also received Hobart's enquiry. He informed Richard Longford that "at the request of the several respectable gentlemen your particular friends [he has] put a note on the coffee-house file for a meeting at the Council Chamber to consider of the expediency of raising the Militia in this County." He had received information that a public meeting had been commenced at Waterford on the same subject. Sir Simon Newport was then the Mayor of Waterford. He reported to Hobart (20th December) that a meeting of the citizens had by 86 votes to 22 accepted a resolution that the embodying of the Militia was not at present expedient.

The meeting at Cork was held on 20th December. There is no report extant from the Mayor to Hobart, but the same day, Richard Longford sent the following interesting letter :—

... I have found much discordance amongst all ranks of people in this City and I am certain no measure of any sort is practicable at all by an application to them for their concurrence.

I would have been more successful in my endeavour, had you not written to the Mayor ; he is not friendly to the measure and the Volunteers here seem to direct and govern his opinions, and they seem to imagine this Militia business is directed against their existence.

The grave and opulent merchant sees the business in its first and proper light, and I have as good a set of officers for the Militia who are ready to embark on the business as any body of men of that description can require, but as it appears not consonant to the general wishes of the City I have literally obeyed your orders and have not pressed the business upon them.

The disposition of men here seems to be to bear a strong proportion to the wildness of the times in other countries . . .

The people of all sorts here complain of the partiality of Government to Dublin and that they get no share of the public money.

The Mayor thought proper to call a meeting of the citizens this day at the Council Chamber to take your letter into consideration. The meeting was fully attended and the Roman Catholics and Lord Shannon's friends were most violent against the measure. Councillor — and others of the same connection proposed that "a Militia was unnecessary and inexpedient"; no one said a syllable in favour of Militia. The resolution was carried that it was unnecessary.

How this report was received and what effect, if any, the various communications to Dublin produced is not clear. The day before that of his circular letter (14th December) Hobart had formally consulted the Attorney General about the Act (17-8 George ii, chapter 13). The position in Dublin throughout that month was somewhat critical. The apparent imminence of a Militia acted as a challenge to the Volunteers. The Government, anxious to "restore the sword to the Executive" but still

undecided about their policy, on 19th December obtained letters patent¹ under the Great Seal for "Commissions for Arraying the Militia for the County of the City of Dublin and for the County and Town of Drogheda." There seems no evidence that any actual arraying ever took place. The creation of Militia which the letters patent contemplated was apparently intended as a warning to the address of the volunteer elements in Dublin and Belfast. The Government in effect, seems to have been bluffing and spinning out time until, with the Meeting of Parliament (10th January, 1793), effective consultation could be had with the country gentlemen.

There is no further evidence of action taken or influence exercised by Cork during the incubation of the Bill which was not presented until 1st March. The discussion on it (very imperfectly recorded according to modern standards) concentrated mainly on matters of detail. There was no second reading debate on the general policy of the measure. But there was one full dress discussion—in the House of Lords—on the admission of Catholics to the Militia. In this the Bishop of Cork intervened energetically in favour of liberal courses. "Was this," he asked, "a time for procrastination [*i.e.*, sending the Bill back to the Commons on the admission-of-Catholics question] when a French fleet of twelve sail of the line hovered in the chops of our channel; when a British ship of war, which was sent to Cork for the convoy of our outward bound trade to the West Indies, was ordered back to England with all expedition, in order to act for the more pressing emergency of home defence? He was not afraid of the fidelity or gallantry of the Roman Catholics which had been proved in every quarter of the globe. Finally, he was persuaded that in many counties it would be difficult to officer the Militia regiments with Protestants."²

Something should perhaps be added at this point as to the reactions of the Volunteers to the measure. Richard Longford's remark about the attitude of the Volunteers in Cork has been quoted earlier but beyond this I have no other evidence of their views. In the north, the third Dungannon convention in February condemned the proposed bill as "only having ministerial influence for its object" and as being "burdensome and totally unnecessary." Individual volunteer bodies staged similar demonstrations. Many meetings, which also strongly advocated Parliamentary reform, passed adverse resolutions. Co. Monaghan,³ and possibly other counties, instructed the parliamentary representatives to oppose the Bill. But no parliamentary opposition or demonstration, if any occurred, has left any trace on the records which remain. It gradually became recognized that a Militia was coming. On 11th March the Lord Lieutenant issued a proclamation⁴ against "certain seditious and ill-affected persons in several parts of the north of this Kingdom and particularly in the town of Belfast." The Belfast Volunteers remonstrated

¹ *Dublin Gazette*; 24/12/1792.

² British Museum; Cuttings from newspapers relating to the affairs of Ireland, 1736-1811.

³ *Dublin Evening Post*; Jan., 1793.

⁴ *The Irish Volunteers and Catholic Emancipation*, p. 310.

to the Government, but "the proclamation remained in force, and the Belfast Volunteers obeyed it."¹ Nothing is more surprising than the unspectacular disappearance of the Volunteers from the Irish scene. For the most part these organizations faded out of sight. Only to a small extent do they seem to have demonstrated against the Militia, once the Act was in force. At the end of May, 1793, there is the following :²

"The awkward squads of Sunday soldiers calling themselves Volunteers, who were some time since legally disbanded, occupy themselves at present as orators against the Militia. Every barber's shop, fourpenny ordinary, and petty alehouse rings with murmurs of those crestfallen heroes against a Militia law which compels them to risk becoming constitutional soldiers."

This presumably refers to Dublin. There is a report from Sligo³ of the Volunteers having assembled on a beat to arms caused by some apprehended trouble ; and in a riot at Ballinaford, five miles from Boyle, in early June, they also gave help. The same thing, no doubt, happened, as it was natural it should, elsewhere. In the north there was some assembling of the ex-Volunteers but Lord Hillsborough, at the end of July, informed⁴ Dublin Castle that it had been exaggerated. In September⁵ there was an attempted Volunteer review at a village ten miles from Belfast. In the west the Ennis Volunteers, which had had a grand field day on 16th April, passed a resolution on 5th May, that it was useless to meet further, but that they would continue associated. On 20th June the officers of the Clare Militia were elegantly entertained at dinner by the Ennis Volunteers.⁶

From this digression about the reactions of the Volunteers I return to the situation in Cork. The views there held about the Militia had not prevailed. Creation of a Militia received Parliamentary sanction. This was not the old force as provided for in the Act of 1778, but a new one based upon a new estimation of the needs of the country. The Act of 1778 contemplated that the whole number of Militia in a county should not be less than 100 nor more than 500. Exception to this was that "the county of the City of Dublin" might be 1,000 and of the County of the City of Cork 600 ; for Limerick also there was an exceptional provision. The Act of 1793 fixed 488 as the number for the City of Cork (if not made part of the County) and 976 as the number for the County (if organized separately from the City). This is a total of 1,464, *i.e.*, a regiment or 8 companies for the City and two similar regiments for the County. These numbers are exclusive of the officers. The cities of Ireland in the case of which a contingent separate from that for the County was allowed by the Act were :—Cork, Limerick, Waterford, Dublin and Drogheda. In the case of Kilkenny, Galway, Antrim and Londonderry, the Act definitely provided that the

¹ *The Rise of the United Irishmen*. Rosamund Jacob, p. 166.

² *Freeman's Journal*, 25/5.

³ *Sligo Morning Herald*, 24/5.

⁴ P.Ro. H.O. 100/40.

⁵ *Freeman's Journal*, 17/9.

⁶ *Ennis Chronicle*.

contingent should include respectively the City of Kilkenny, the town of Galway, the town of Carrickfergus and the City of Londonderry.¹ Waterford did not take advantage of the power to raise a separate contingent for the city; Drogheda did.

The provision of 1,464 men was thus the task left with the City and the County of Cork. Within a month of the Royal Assent to the Bill (9th April) thirty-three of the thirty-eight Militias for which the Act provided had been started. These thirty-three did not include any of the Cork units (City; south Cork; north Cork); these were not available for service until late in the year.

What set in motion the raising of a Militia was the issue of a proclamation by the Lord Lieutenant requiring the unit to be embodied. For most of the counties these proclamations appeared soon after the Royal Assent. In the case of Cork they did not appear until 30th September. The course of events in Cork during the five months, May to September, is not altogether clear. Opinion, as has been seen, had been adverse. Possibly at Dublin Castle it was regarded as necessary to let enlightenment spread before these Militias were formally and officially instituted. The general attitude in the City, if not in the County, was that Militias were not, in Cork, necessary. Those responsible for public order, *e.g.*, the Mayor, appear to have argued that the City of Cork supported "a large police establishment who, should they do their duty, are adequate to preserve the peace thereof," and further, that "the City is well supplied with constables and peace officers besides a strong garrison." Others argued: "let the men of fortune be embodied and those engaged in trade support their families."²

The common people in Cork seem to have shared the alarms which prevailed in other parts of Ireland and there were some disorders. Riots in the eighteenth century, in England, just as much as in other parts of the British islands, followed more often than not any innovation, whether it was turnpikes or anything else. When the Militia was set up in Scotland in 1797 there was opposition as strong as any that showed itself in Ireland in 1793; and many instances are recorded of Militia riots in England.

The selection and appointments of the officers rested with those designated to be colonels; so far as concerned the provision of the men, the working and administration of the Act rested with the governor of the county and more particularly with deputy governors, of whom there were normally twenty in every county. The appointment of these essential officials was the first step after the issue of the proclamation. Then followed, at statutorily prescribed intervals, general and subdivision meetings. The former were county; the latter regional. The former settled the partition of the county into subdivisions, appointed the days and places for the first meetings of the subdivisions and issued orders to constables to prepare for those meetings "lists in writing of the names of all men usually and at that time dwelling within their respective parishes and places between the age of eighteen and forty-five."³ The sub-division

¹ 33 George iii., chap. 22.

² *Cork Gazette*, 22 and 29/5/1793.

³ 33 George iii., chap. 22.

meeting scrutinised and amended these lists, using their local knowledge. The lists as amended and approved were affixed on church doors and at other customary notice-places and the date of a further subdivision meeting was, with the lists, announced. At this persons who thought themselves aggrieved could appeal. Further amendment of the lists would then take place and the numbers for each place and parish within the subdivision were appointed. At the next meeting the actual balloting took place, after which the constables issued notices to every man chosen citing him to appear at a further (fourth) meeting of the subdivision. At this the men had to attend and take the oath and be enrolled, and at this meeting, it would seem, substitutes were produced and, if approved by the deputy governors, enrolled.

This was a just but long drawn out procedure and it is obvious that working of it called for considerable goodwill and afforded plentiful opportunity for wilful delay and opposition as well as for those miscarriages which are no one's fault. Colonel Longford complains, in a letter of November, 1794, that "the City of Cork was very backward in assisting (his) endeavours." Men drawn were entitled to fourteen days before presenting themselves for enrolment. This, he says, was unnecessary in a city where a man knew of his being drawn the day it happened. His men "when they found they were drawn, absconded or went into the navy, army or marine service—and never joined me." He complains of the delay by the Lord Lieutenant in raising his regiment. The result was, he says, that all his men who were engaged (*i.e.*, who came forward and undertook to join) "were picked up by independent corps at an exorbitant expense." He proceeds: "I cannot omit the greatest nuisance I ever met with in my exertions to complete the regiment—I mean the lottery offices of Mr. Harley and others at Cork." He speaks of these offices as "seminaries for opposition and sedition." Incidentally it may be remarked that the insurers, as they were called, flourished in other places; in Dublin and elsewhere they had countenance from deputy governors.

No sooner was the act passed than these "insurers" became busy. Colonel Longford says: "they represented the measure as a delusive one to entrap the people, and made it as black as possible . . . to induce every one to ensure at their offices." On 6th May, Harley by public advertisement¹ respectfully informs the public that for a premium of half a guinea "he will engage to keep harmless any person in city or county who should be drawn to serve in the Militia." He makes the point that his office is "founded on similar principles with those in different parts of Great Britain." He refers to the confidence with which the public had hitherto honoured him and thinks this should "entitle him to a decided preference." His establishments, it appears, had handled "numerous past lotteries in London, Dublin and Cork" and were "of too long standing and too well known to require any such puffing." Others were seeking the same kind of business. There was the group of Lawrence O'Brien, Stephen Coppinger and some other

¹ The quotations in this paragraph and the next two are from the *New Cork Evening Post*.

gentlemen whose office was in "Castle Street, opposite the Tontine coffee house." There was also a third office for certain, opened in St. Patrick Street by 'A. Shenkwin.'

Harley's calculations were that he would have to provide, in round numbers, 1,500 men and that he would have to give them £10 each. His original premium of 10s. 6d. was also quoted by the other two. Harley very quickly reduced his premium to 8s. At this figure he would need 37,000 subscribers to produce the sum of £15,000 (for which he considered he must be solvent) and he points out what a large saving accrued to the public, *i.e.*, the difference between £15,000 and 37,000 subscribers at the higher rate quoted by his rivals. Later he said he would do it for less than 8s. and return the difference. All three undertook to return the money paid (less a deduction for expenses) "should government not think it necessary to embody the said Militia" *i.e.*, for the City and County of Cork. Harley seems to have employed agents "in the principal towns all over the county who will require no money until the proclamation be issued" to take down the names of persons wanting to insure. Simultaneously he is advertising for "able-bodied men to serve as substitutes in the City and County of Cork Militias."

In early October, after the proclamation had appeared, Harley is still insuring for 8s. ; his agents "will call to the different towns to receive subscriptions and give vouchers agreeable to the original plan." At the end of October, O'Brien and Coppinger ask for able-bodied young men to serve as substitutes and also offer insurance, still at 10s. 6d. Harley, on 28th October, advertises as follows: "Five guineas bounty. All able-bodied Volunteers. To serve as substitutes in the Militia, from 5ft. 7 in. to 5ft. 10in. Will on application to Harley's office receive a bounty of from 2 guineas to 5 guineas, proportioned to their size and figure." He will continue to insure at 8s. until the day of ballot.

Meanwhile other people were tackling the situation. Definite efforts were made to enlighten the people as to what the Militia meant. It is recorded¹ that in some cases "the consternation on account of the Militia Act was so great that . . . [people] mostly slept in the fields lest they should be taken in their beds and compelled to serve." They were reassured that the force could not quit the Kingdom.

Another step² taken, *e.g.*, in the parish of Carrigaline was to form a mutual insurance fund out of which would be provided substitutes for those who had contributed to the fund but not, of course, for others. The contributions to the fund were as follows:—

Gentlemen and prominent farmers	....	....	6/- each
Farmers paying rent of £50 and under £100 yearly	....	....	4/- each
Journeymen, tradesmen and principal servants	....	....	3/- each
Labourers and common servants	....	....	1/- each

Any addition to the aggregate sum subscribed which might be necessary to ensure provision of substitutes for the subscribers was to be paid by the

¹ *New Cork Evening Post*, 24/6/1793.

² *New Cork Evening Post*, 28/10/1793.

“gentlemen”; on the other hand any redundancy in the amount subscribed was to be laid out for the benefit of the poor of the parish. A committee was formed; they invited applications from persons desiring to become substitutes (“none need apply but bachelors”) and undertook to “engage them and pay them their bounty on being approached by the commanding officer of the South County of Cork Militia.”

Lord Kingsborough, the Colonel of the North Cork Militia, had another method.¹ He offered to not more than 244 Protestants descended from Protestant parents who enlisted in his regiment before 1st January, 1794, “a small farm in Munster, at a reasonable rent, during his (*i.e.*, the soldier’s) life on condition that he will engage to reside and occupy the same.” Those volunteering in response to this offer were to come into enjoyment of the farms on the expiration of four years service. There is a good deal of criticism of this action in the Cork newspapers and elsewhere.

The ballots were held at different dates in different places during November, December and January (1794). No official figures are available showing the aggregate number liable, the number after applications for exemption had been dealt with and, finally, the number actually balloted for. But Harley affords us some light. On 23rd December, he announces that “from returns made for (this City) he finds it necessary to raise the premium from 8s. to 13s. He says “the total return for the city and liberties [is] but 6610 out of which 488 are to be drawn.”² He had apparently not obtained nearly as many subscribers as he had hoped for.

A report³ from the clerk of one of the Cork subdivisions shows some of the difficulties. “Many against whose goods warrants were issued and on which constables returned “no goods, but personally fit to serve” have been regularly enrolled and, as the time limit for their joining the regiment, without their having done so, has elapsed, I will at the next meetings . . . proceed to ballot for others in their stead and trust that every drawing hereafter will be productive . . . No doubt the balloting for the parishes in the suburbs . . . has been and must continue to be tedious for many reasons, chiefly the long notice requisite to be given to those drawn, the time the constables must have to serve such notice, the very bad attendance of the deputy governors, but above all the shamefully defective lists originally returned, for certain it is that eighteen out of every twenty yet drawn have come under some of the incapacities contained in the Act.” This clerk also states that “no man has had more trouble or has been at greater expense than you [*i.e.*, Colonel Longford], nor is this very surprising when we consider the particular men who ought to be staunch friends indeed, but who have pointedly set their faces against the measure and, as for loyalty, sorry I am to say that the name is nearly obsolete here, democracy being the order of the day.” Colonel Longford himself says that “the expenses to my private fortune have been very heavy, as the City of Cork were very

¹ *New Cork Evening Post*, 10/10/1793.

² *New Cork Evening Post*, 10/10/1793.

³ Where not otherwise stated, correspondence is from the now perished Dublin archives. For the extracts given, I am indebted to researches made by Mr. Philip Crossle of Dublin.

backward in assisting my endeavours"; and he adds, "there is no man in the city a friend to the measure."

At the end of 1794 the Lord Lieutenant seems to have sent out "interrogations" (*i.e.*, a questionnaire) about the ballot and the raising of the Militia; this was probably with reference to an already projected Militia Amendment Bill to be introduced in the session of 1795. The reports furnished to Dublin Castle are no longer available; if they were, it would be possible to generalize on a more firm basis about the militia events of 1793 in Ireland. Many of the circumstances of the raising of the Militia in the City and County of Cork reproduced themselves elsewhere, but there are considerable differences. In a book, *Ireland's native troops; 1793-1816; the Militia*, which I am hoping shortly to publish, I have reviewed the raising of the Militia generally and brought together the evidence to be had. In this article it has principally been my object to put on record the special information I have collected about the reactions of the City and County of Cork to the new social problems then obtruded into the life of the country.