The Brunswick Clubs: Rise, Contradictions and Abyss

The Brunswick Clubs or Brunswick 'constitutional' Clubs formed the nucleus of an ultimately doomed campaign to deny Catholics the right to enter both houses of the British parliament. Numbering roughly 200 clubs and claiming 150,000 members, the Brunswicks had a short lifespan. Born in September 1828 when the Catholic legislation was proposed, they theoretically continued until December 1829. However, once the bill was passed on a large majority in March 1829, they were in effect dead. The Clubs sought to unite Protestants as a pressure group, were ambiguous towards physical force and hoped to somehow force parliament or King George IV to undertake amendments. The Clubs, though certainly a major feature on the political landscape, never became the populist Protestant movement which they sought to be. However, it is unlikely, even with Protestant unity, that the Brunswicks would have had any real prospects. There was a clear majority in both houses in favour and, with no election until 1830, it is likely that their cause was beyond hope. The 'Brunswick Tree' had many leafy branches; it even made a lot of noise during the storm but ultimately bore no fruit.

Ireland had been relatively tranquil during first decade after the Act of Union. However, stability and Ireland are not natural friends and they inevitably began a slow farewell during the next ten years. Economic conditions began to decline due to a succession of poor harvests. Also, ironically, the actual end of the Napoleonic Wars led to a diminished market for both agricultural and non-agricultural output. Hardship grew and thus also did unrest. Peasant vigilante organisations such as the Rockites began a campaign of intimidation and violence against landowners, causing considerable fear and disruption. The British government was weary of Ireland. The blood of the 1798 rebellion was still fresh in their minds and the war with France from1793 to 1815 had been a long one. Catholics were disproportionately at the lower end of the economic scale and they suffered most. A political and even a military vacuum existed. Catholicism needed a strong political movement which could fight for an improvement of its social and economic

Eligibility depended on, if rules were adhered to, (and in Limerick they were not) holding property to the value of at least 40 shillings. In May 1828 Daniel O'Connell defeated the pro-emancipation, Protestant landlord, Vesey Fitzgerald, in a Clare by-election, but was unable to take his seat due to the oath.

The Duke of Wellington's Tory government was pragmatic regarding the growing distress in Ireland. On a pragmatic level Britain was tired of an eternally troublesome Ireland. British army troops were already stationed in Ireland and further coercion would have been an increased drain of both manpower and money. On a human level the Irish-born Prime Minister realised that the suffering amongst Catholics was real. "There can be no doubt that evils arising from misgovernment do exist in that country, to a degree unparalleled in the history of any civilised country and I know of no remedy but that extremity which I adverted to on a former occasion, or to the measure we are now about to carry." The measure to which the Duke alluded was that which popularly became known as Catholic Emancipation. The Oath of Supremacy was to be repealed and Catholics were to be admitted to both houses. Wellington was optimistic that it could bring "tranquillity." It was essential however that the government respond to this distressing state of affairs; and the remedy could only be to concede Emancipation, since there was now a dangerous agitation in Ireland on its behalf and a majority in the British parliament in its favour. The Emancipation Bill was proposed in autumn 1828 and brought before parliament in March 1829. J.C. Beckett doubts whether Wellington was truly compassionate, believing he was unsympathetic to the Catholic cause, yielding only because the alternative was anarchy. However, the Limerick Evening Post and Clare Sentinel (LEPCS) at the time praised him in divine colour as one who was driven by a genuine empathy with the Catholic plight.

A 'large portion' of Irelands Protestants was now extremely worried. The Protestant cum Anglican Ascendancy governed Ireland, which was then only a province of the United Kingdom. They saw themselves as the Nation, a Protestant nation. There were no Catholic MPs. In fact, Protestant Dissenters were also excluded from parliament until 1829. Few
The Church of England still exists and within parliament and influence, if not there is still no sign of a Catholic revolution or takeover of mainland Britain!

This analysis was correct, though it took a great deal longer to reach fruition than contemporary scare mongering predicted. Ireland, at least the greater part of it, did indeed depart from the Union, but not until more than a century later. However, nearly two hundred years later there is still no sign of a Catholic revolution or takeover of mainland Britain! The Church of England still exists and the monarchy remains an exclusively Anglican entity! It is very important to remember that many Irish Catholics did not wish to politically subordinate their Catholic countrymen. A great many were in fact actively opposed to it, even from within the ranks of the ascendancy.

The line between pragmatism and succumbing to pressure is a blurred one and never more so than in this case. Perhaps Catholic emancipation was conceived out of fear or pressure; there was a great deal of opposition to it. Many feel that Wellington and Robert Peel, his Home Secretary, genuinely believed that emancipation was the correct measure. Wellington’s speeches in the House of Lords suggest this. However, those opposed to the legislation maligned his perceived cowardice. They thought that government had been coerced by Daniel O’Connell’s Catholic Association and its disorderly allies.

As Wellington was perceived as a weak man acting against his conscience for the sake of peace, Protestant opponents felt that he needed their help, help to stand up to Daniel O’Connell. A strong Protestant body was necessary which could unite Irish Protestants and fight for the Prime Minister and King George IV against the Catholic pressure groups. The Prime Minister must be forced by whatever means possible to abandon his proposed constitutional amendment. If the legislation was conceived out of agitation then it too could be aborted through agitation. However, there is a fundamental contradiction in the above objectives. On the one hand, they sought to force the government to abandon its own legislation through force, on the other hand they saw themselves as helping it! The struggle was uphill and very steep. It is likely that they must have realised this. However, in order to have any chance, an organisation was needed that could unite all Irish Protestants. The Orange Order had been cinased in 1825 and lacked respectability. A new association was conceived which could achieve the aforementioned objective. Its name was the Brunswick Constitutional Club. The Brunswick Club of Ireland first met in Morrisson’s rooms in Dublin, on 15 August 1828, with the Earl of Longford as its President.

The mission of the Brunswicks was to maintain the so-called ‘Protestant’ Constitution of the House of Brunswick, which was upheld by the Oath of Supremacy to have been added to the laws of the country. This was an Anglican state, safeguarded by an Anglican constitution, which would preserve the ascendancy of Anglicans forever. The Brunswick Clubs themselves used the term ‘Protestant’ in order to broaden their appeal, but Anglican is the more correct term. Until 1828, Dissenters too were excluded from parliament by the Corporation and Test Oaths and in Limerick, at least, their presence in local administration was negligible. The Limerick City Brunswick Club was formed on 7 October 1828.

There was an annual subscription and aspiring members were admitted only on the recommendation of its committee.

The mission of the Brunswicks was simple. In order to maintain the so-called ‘Protestant’ Constitution of the House of Brunswick and uphold the Oath of Supremacy to have been added to the laws of the country, they attempted to cloak their method as religious. They were attempting to open the eyes of the public to the word of God and it was thus God’s will that Catholics should remain in perpetual bondage. Hon. James King considered “the Catholic religion inconsistent with the word of God and calculated to prevent the salvation of men’s souls. The religion of Catholics led them into errors and the Constitutional Club to which all the gentlemen in the House of Lords, the “General Petition of the Protestants of Ireland,” which allegedly contained 160,000 signatures, was estimated that over 1000 petitions in total had been received between both houses.”

This paper is chiefly concerned with the Brunswick Clubs in Limerick. Nearly fifty names were presented by the Clare Advertiser, Ennis Chronicle and Rathkeale, which do not appear in the list. Although broadly similar in terms of their aims and activities, there is little evidence of coordination between the various branches. The same newspaper claimed a total membership of 150,000, but the accuracy of this figure is again open to question. Its membership in Limerick, and, it appears, beyond, was predominantly the Anglican upper classes and clergy. Little reference ever appears to lower order Protestants except for the Palatines, who were a major factor in County Limerick. That does not mean that lower rank Protestants were not present, but it is definite that the upper ranks were the leaders. However, many of the Protestant nobility were also firmly against this troublesome sect. (See Appendix 1). The Clubs only tactic appears to have been gathering as many signatures as possible opposing Catholic Emancipation, which a sitting MP or Peer would present to parliament. Wellington hoped the government would be overwhemed by this display of public opinion. The Duke of Cumberland proposed the largest of the Clubs, the “General Petition of the Protestants of Ireland,” which allegedly contained 160,000 signatures.

According to the Ennis Chronicle and Clare Advertiser, by November 1828 there were 147 ‘Local’ Brunswick Clubs, 27 ‘County’ Brunswick Clubs, the Ulster Provincial Club, the University Club and most importantly, the Club to which all others sent delegations the Brunswick Constitutional Club of Ireland. There was also 36 English Brunswick Clubs. The above figures are, however, a definite underestimation. ‘Local’ Clubs existed in Pallaskenry, Killifinnan and Rathkeale, which do not appear in the list. Reports also appeared of meetings in Norwich, England, although Norwich is also not listed. (See Appendix 1)
Protestants was at this time an impossible task. Limerick City was in the middle of a period of prolonged political conflict, which pitched Protestant against Protestant as well as Catholic against Protestant. Protestants themselves were so bitterly divided that many had forged alliances with Catholics against their co-religionists. A pan-Protestant alliance was simply unthinkable. Limerick Corporation, the ‘corrupt Corporation,’ the most powerful organ of local government, was monopolised by the Vereker block, a group of Anglican families related through blood and through marriage, led by Lord Gort, President of the Limerick Brunswick Club. They also had a substantial number of allies with whom they shared privileges, including the Massys, Lloyds, Westroops, Maunsells, Gabbetts, Crokers, Watsons and Crips. Most held property in the George’s Street, now O’Connell Street, area. These families formed the core membership of the Brunswick Clubs. The parish of St. Michaels/Newtown Pery enjoyed autonomy from the Corporation with its own local government authority, namely ‘The Commissioners of the Parish of St. Michaels.’ However, the Corporation alone held the power of determining voting rights for all residents of Limerick City at parliamentary elections. It systematically disenfranchised large numbers of leading Anglican as well as Catholic families, mainly from the Newtown Pery area, the most prominent of whom were the Perys, Barringtons, Bourkes and Roches. Freemanship and the accompanying electoral franchise was granted illegally to many non-residents of Limerick, whose only entitlement was friendship with the Vereker block. (See Appendix 4) These would vote for a Vereker block candidate at parliamentary elections, which were themselves a sham.

John Tuthill and Thomas Spring Rice, (related to the Pery family), were both barristers and were two of the chief opponents of the Corporation at both a parliamentary and judicial level. Eventually the reforming interests did prevail, but not until 1840 when the ‘old’ Corporation was abolished. Normalisation even then was a slow and bitter process.

Thus the corrupt Limerick Corporation formed the core of the Constitutional Club in the City. The movement got off to a bad start. The delegates it sent to the parent body in Dublin (The Brunswick Constitutional Club of Ireland meeting at Rotunda in Dublin) were Alderman Andrew Watson - part owner of the Limerick Chronicle, a powerful propaganda tool - Captain Garnett, G. Hugh Fitzgerald and Michael Bevan. Not surprisingly, I failed to uncover any St. Michaels Parish Commissioners who joined the Brunswick. (See Appendix 5) This is not to say that St. Michaels Parish Commissioners were unanimously pro-Catholic - many definitely were, though some were probably not. However due to the political situation at the time, they could not side with their enemies, regardless of their private opinions.

**Contradiction of term ‘Protestant’**

The glue with which all Brunswick Clubs sought to unite their diverse membership was the Protestant religion. According to Colonel Connoly (Chairman of Kildare Place Society) in Dublin “It would be inconsistent to have Catholics possessed of power in a Protestant state - light and darkness, fire and water, could never co-exist together.” In Limerick, Michael Bevan addressed his flock with the words: “Protestants, Brunswickers and Countrymen - the Star of Brunswick shall not be set.” Catholic doctrine on transubstantiation and the invocation of Saints were their most frequently cited heretical practices. They believed that Protestantism was the only truth and essential for salvation. However, the contradiction here is fundamental. Protestantism is not uniform in doctrine. It is an umbrella term covering a wide variety of sects. The largest in Ireland was Anglicanism, but there were also Methodists and Presbyterians, which themselves contain several branches. All Protestant Churches are in some way different from each other. Thus, how can each be the one true religion when all are so different? In some cases the theological differences between the Protestant Churches is greater than between Anglicanism and Catholicism. Protestantism is not a single entity, as the Brunswicks conveniently assert, and to speak of it as such makes no sense ideologically or theologically. Protestantism was an umbrella term of convenience, a means of broadening their appeal regardless of how little the term actually meant.

**Hatred of Catholic Clergy and Pope**

A further badge of unity worn was a savage hatred of the malign Catholic priesthood and the Pope. The priest was blamed for deliberately keeping his people uncivilised and ignorant. The priest himself allegedly knew better, but for his
Certainly the Brunswicks had no official paramilitary wing. However, many individual members did make direct reference to the use of arms if required. According to Robert Saunders at a Ballinglen Constitutional Club gathering: “The Protestants have got an ascendancy which was purchased by the blood of our ancestors and which if necessary must be preserved by the blood of their descendents.” Henry Westby stated at the same meeting that “the Protestant blood of Ireland is ready to be shed in defence of the laws which they respect and the religion which they reverence.” Certainly militant language, at least, was widespread.

There is also some evidence of actual physical force at meetings of the Limerick Club. Thomas Steele, a native of Derrymore, Co. Clare, was a Protestant, a landlord and a held a Masters degree in Engineering from University College Dublin. Ironically this man was also Vice President of the Catholic Association and President of the Order of the Liberators. Frequently the Catholic Association sent delegates to observe the Brunswicks. One night in October 1828, Mr. Steele was their delegate at the Swinburn Hotel. Once he was spotted, however, the Brunswick response was swift. The Mayor of Limerick “with violent pressure, pushed him from the table among the crowd - where he was seized upon, and by brute force violently thrown down stairs.” He was verbally ostracised, dubbed “a popish agitator” and a “ruffian.” Steele himself alleges he heard “cut the rebels breast out of him” and “murder him.” Also, a politician’s bayonet was supposedly drawn and the Mayor failed in an attempt to arrest him outside. Soon after Mr. Steele was honoured by the “Masters and Wardens of the Congregated Trades of Limerick” by bestowal upon him of “freedom of their several guilds” for his “manly, independent and talented advocacy of the great cause of civil and religious liberty.”

Such episodes did the Brunswicks cause much harm. Rev. O'Grady, a Brunswicker at the aforementioned meeting, expressed his outrage at the incident. It also did much to dissuade potential recruits. The organisation was seemingly lacking respectability, just as the Orange Order had previously. The Limerick Evening Post and Clare Sentinel lists a number of Protestants who felt that they could not co-operate with the Ennis Brunswick Club, Robert Ottway Cave, a landlord, refused to sanction his tenants to attend.

Scaremongering - Fear of Catholic Ascendancy

The lifeblood of many political organisations is fear, the fear of an impending apocalypse. The Ulster Solemn League and Covenant and “Ulster says no!” were political screams of fear by latter day Irish Protestants. The Brunswicks, their ancestors, were born out of sheer terror. The apocalypse in all cases was an eventual Catholic State and Rome Rule. These fears were plausible. No clear minority grouping could hope to monopolise privilege indefinitely. However, realism was disgraced by sensationalism and blatant scaremongering. It was alleged that Catholic MPs would eventually lead to Catholic cabinet ministers - realistic in the long term. The ‘Catholic rent’ would purchase all English boroughs - an absolute fantasy, while the Catholic cabinet ministers would in turn infiltrate the monarchy! Nearly 200 years later, the monarchy remains staunchly Anglican! There has certainly been no Catholic takeover of Britain! However, Catholic Emancipation did apply to British Catholics also and the Brunswicks attempted to spread their movement there. Judging by the number of Clubs and bearing in mind the sheer size of mainland Britain, they appear to have been relatively well spread.

Catholic takeover of what became the Republic of Ireland, though it was nearly one hundred years later when it happened and it was certainly no immediate danger.

County Limerick

Brunswick Clubs were also formed in County Limerick, in Rathkeale, Pallas-kenny and Killilane. The bulk of the membership in all three was provided by the Palatine community. The surnames of those who attended (if the LEPCS is accurate) clearly illustrates this: James Cornellie, John Switzer, Peter Hyphel, Valentine Brithair and Moses Spailling. The Palatines were in effect the most recent planters. Over 3000 arrived in Ireland in 1709 from the Palatine area of Germany. They were Protestants fleeing persecution and were imported to strengthen the Protestant interest in County Limerick. The majority of the 3000 settled in Rathkeale and the surrounding area. In 1712 Sir Thomas Southwell granted land to 130 Palatine families at half the normal rent. Their coming was almost within living memory and must have intensified the already maligned feeling towards any ‘foreign occupier.’ Gradually they adopted the Methodist faith, as their own church was not represented in Ireland. They were to suffer greatly at the hands of the Rockite movement during the depression of 1793 - 1795. The Palatines were always the scapegoats when harvest was poor and it was poor again in 1823.

This group were the subject of particularly savage newspaper coverage and appear to have been hated even more than the Protestant Ascendancy. A Rathkeale priest dubbed them “a low set.” The LEPCS further reinforced this view, dubbing them “swines” (akin to the German word ‘Schwein,’ meaning pig) whom their landlord would chase to the ballot box like cattle to vote according to his will. “A set of men who merely breathe on the will of every Lording, trading their votes and driving to the hustling like Swine to his self fattening trough, would he call them a high set?” Perhaps it was this
The Brunswicks failed to unite Irish Protestants; perhaps they were coerced by their landlords as the LEPSCS alleges. However, it is ironic that as Methodists, Palatines suffered under much the same political disabilities as Catholics until 1828 and were excluded in practice for many years afterwards. A group which, in the surface, should have had empathy with the Catholic cause now actively sought their subordination. Colonel Rochfort of Westmeath presented the anti-Emancipation petition of the Palatines of Pallaskeenry to the House of Lords. Those in Kilfinane also sent their own anti-Catholic petition. In February of 1829, the LEPSCS also published sparse details of a 'Grand Petition' of the Protestants of the City and County combined. Lord Gort was to be 'postman' to the House of Commons and “sing their illalaby”! The forementioned publication attempted to downplay its significance by claiming that “the Protestants of rank and property of this county are Emancipators.” This is a highly dubious assertion.

**Disunity & Contraction**

The Brunswicks failed to unite Irish Protestants. In fact they were even divided amongst themselves, sabotaging their cause even further. Lord Gort, President of the Limerick City Brunswick Club, stated that he did not oppose concessions to Catholics, as they too were loyal to the House of Brunswick and the constitution. He felt that “concession would strengthen, not weaken, the Protestant interest.” He even insisted, before accepting the position of President, that he maintained the right to support the legislation in the House of Lords if required by the government to do so! Colleagues (Hon William Massy and Rev Josiah Crampton) even reluctantly supported his right to “freedom of opinion” and “political conduct.” He later wrote of his dismay at being named a vice-president of the Brunswick Club of Ireland without his assent. Perhaps he was embarrassed by them. Lord Gort was evidently chosen only for his name, although he did co-operate as their postman, delivering their petitions. A group which, on the surface, should have had empathy with the Catholic cause now actively sought their subordination.

**Liberal Protestants**

Many Protestants were actively in favour of the proposed constitutional reform and the Brunswicks by no means represented the entire spectrum of Protestant opinion. Though a minority, 'Liberal Protestants' were significant both on a national and local level. Pivotal in illustrating Liberal Protestant support for a removal of Catholic political disabilities on pan-Christian grounds. Catholics and Protestants are both Christian and both sons of Adam, both followers of the common truth of the compassionate saviour, Jesus Christ. Emancipation would actually strengthen the empire, stabilising its institutions and promoting “National tranquillity.” Catholics too supported the House of Brunswick and the constitution and were capable of virtue.

According to Samuel Ward, the chief architect of the declaration, "liberty is the birth-right of every man" and Catholic bondage was "reducing the great maxim of justice, every principle of humanity," altogether an embarrassment. "Romans" were responsible for "trial by jury, for Magna Carta and very many of the best principles of our civil institutions." He concludes the Brunswicks of perverting the Protestant religion for their own selfish ends. If the franchise depended on virtue, they were generally distrusted as the Papists. "If therefore these be referred to Protestants at large we shall find the principle body even of them intellectually and morally unfitted, and consequently, although eligible by law, virtually excluded from their benefit, fully as much as any Roman Catholic." The true follower of Christ, he went on, "stands not distrusted as his house, but he who lives according to his word. The Brunswicks were an absolute distortion of Christianity, bordering on Fascism. "The Protestant religion is abhorrent, altogether abhorrent, from anything illiberal or cruel, influenced by the Holy Spirit." "Observance of outward ceremonial is insufficient; the affections of the heart must display themselves in the sincerity of accordance with the Brunswicks’ "attribute senseless fanatical and wicked acts" to "religious doctrine." They are mere "anti-Catholic societies, the true designation of either orange or black Brunswicks."

"It is assumed to be in the name of Religion - yes, of the Christian religion, which enjoins us to love our enemies, "do good unto all men" "Are they to dictate what their narrow views, guided alone by headstrong passions, reckless of any interest but their own?" "Ultra loyalty is nothing more than conditional loyalty and selfishness in the extreme." If the Clubs succeeded they were only "yet further division - further animosities, further and more deadly reactions." Catholics support the House of Brunswick, as do Protestants who signed the Declaration. He also quoted examples of inter-Christian harmony in Prussia, France, the U.S.A. and Saxony, although with the benefit of history, these examples are unfortunately questionable. These views typify those of the 'Liberal Protestant' and there were regular meetings, especially in Dublin. The man who deserves particular praise is the Duke of Leinster. Whenever reports appear regarding Liberal Protestants, his name is almost always mentioned. The Star of Brunswick questioned the motivation of those who signed this Protestant Declaration, accusing its signatories of selfishness or bowing to intimidation. "This thing so called - a fabrication - to which signatures have been voluntarily affixed for the worst and most selfish motives or have been superinduced by threats the most unworthy and intimidation the most basefaced." It could not accept that fellow Protestants could simply have an unselfishly different view to their own. There had to be something more sinister. It alleges that a ten shilling subscription was required from signatories to defray expenses and it vowed to dismiss the occupations of those who signed.

**Limerick's Liberal Protestants**

The creature called the Liberal Protestant inhabited Limerick also. Thomas Spring Rice MP was their leading figure. Others included Richard Fitzgibbon, The Earl of Limerick and the Barrington family. Some, such as Mr Spring Rice, had Catholic branches in their family tree. However, this does not appear to be their primary motivation.

There were two important factors. Firstly, there appears to have been a genuine belief that in order for the Protestant elite to survive, it needed to open its doors to new members. If political or social advancement could be achieved on the basis of merit, rather than merely on Protestant birth, then the nation could find peace. Secondly, a large section of Limerick Protestants, namely those outside the Corporation, were dependent on Catholic political support in their quest..."
for reform. This movement became popularly known as 'The Independence Movement.' Thomas Spring Rice petitioned parliament demanding that the proposed removal of Catholic disabilities must become law. He also supported proposed interdenominational education, and was one of the so-called 'Christian Party.' Regardless of the clergy's anti-Irish and xenophobic sentiment, the Protestant Church was underdeveloped and incapable of thinking for themselves on broader issues. The priest was one of the few educated persons in the community. Also, he had clear majority support. He had an interest in tranquility; they will therefore aid in preserving it and set an example to the lower and poorer order of the people. The higher and richer order of the people will side with the Clubs. They do not wish to change, to broaden their terms of reference, for survival. Henceforth they suffered from the stigma of abject failure and the will did not exist to save them. The Clubs died depressed and few attended their funeral. Henceforth the Brunswick were destined, at best, to be a tiny and insignificant footnote of history.

One interesting report which appeared in Star of Brunswick in October 1829 was that the Brunswick Clubs achieved their aims. "The primary newspapers used for the research of this article were The Star of the Protestant 'self-interest movement' in Ireland. The Star of Brunswick continued publication until December 1829. Dissolution was vehemently denied as late as 12 December. "Much it is true has been lost, but much still remains worth contending for. Look to the efforts made to subvert the Protestant Church in these islands."

The Clubs had a duty to help their fellow Protestants, though I'm not sure what might be done by a Popish sovereign and a Popish successor. It is thus safe to assume that they ceased operation long before their newspaper. Catholic emancipation was law and most unlikely to be repealed. The Brunswick Clubs would have needed to change, to broaden their terms of reference, for survival. Henceforth they suffered from the stigma of abject failure and the will did not exist to save them. The Clubs died depressed and few attended their funeral. Henceforth the Brunswick were destined, at best, to be a tiny and insignificant footnote of history.

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LIMERICK INDEPENDENT CLUB.

At a Meeting of the Club, held this Day, at the Canal Hotel, pursuant to adjournment.

Thomas Steele, Esq. in the Chair.

The following Resolutions were entered into, as forming the fundamental Rules of the Club:—

1st.—That the object of the Club be to promote mutual kindness and reciprocal benevolence amongst all classes and denominations of His Majesty's Subjects.

2nd.—That the object of the Club be also to assist in superintending the Education of the Poor, in this City and Liberties.

3rd.—That the Club be also bound to discourage and prevent the existence, in this district, of all Seditious and Illegal Societies whatever.

4th.—That the next object be to put an end to Feuds and Factions amongst the People, and to prevent Riots or breaches of the Peace.

5th.—Next, to ascertain the number of Persons possessed of Freeholds in this City and Liberties, and to take care that all Freeholders be duly registered, and the owners ready to exercise their Elective Franchises, and to insist every Claimant to Freedom in obtaining the enjoyment of their Charterd Rights.

6th.—That it be the object of this Club to promote public and private charities, of every description, sanctioned by law.

7th.—That all the proceedings of the Club be public, and open to the inspection of all the members, and of all Public Officers, Magistrates, and any other person having any kind of authority whatsoever from or under Government.

8th.—That there be no oath whatsoever required or admissible from any Member, and that secrecy be utterly banished from any of the Rules, Regulations, Proceedings or Meetings of the Club, or any portion thereof; but that it be a fundamental rule of the Institution, that every Gentleman seeking to be admitted a Member, do make a distinct and positive pledge, to act upon every important political crisis according to the decision of the majority, without regard to any private or personal interests or feelings whatsoever.

9th.—That any person wishing to become a Member, shall be proposed by one Member and seconded by another, a week's notice of same being given to the Secretary, and that One black bean to every five white ones, excludes the person so proposed, and that no less than Twenty Members form a Ballot.

10th.—That the terms of admission be One Pound Yearly.

11th.—That the following Gentlemen be appointed Officers of the Club for the next Three Months:—Edmond Ryan, Esq. President; William Hackett, Esq. Vice-President; William Ryan, Esq. Treasurer; and Thomas Molony, Esq. Secretary.

THOMAS STEELE, Chairman.
THOMAS MOLONY, Secretary.

August 18, 1828.

Printed at CANTER'S Commission Paper and Alphabet Warehouse, 15, Francis-street, Limerick.

Leaflet of Limerick Independent Club, August 1828, printed by R.P. Canter, 12 Francis Street (Limerick Museum)

Limerick Chronicle for most of the years 1828/29 is missing from all local collections. Thus a valuable perspective is lost, apart from occasional extracts which were reprinted in other papers. However, what was most striking was the extent of the hostility to the Constitutional Clubs by the LEPCS.

The LEPCS did its utmost to ridicule and dehumanise the Clubs through poetry and probably blatant slander. "Bloodhounds" it dubbed them, a phrase later used by Daniel O'Connell, and it made frequent reference to their "Kennels." In another issue they were "Cannibals" and on another day still, a Brunswick Protestant minister fathered a bastard child and deserted its mother. Members are also referred to as "the Council of War" who talk to horses, being "Parsons and tithe pig eaters," "Tax eaters and Grinders" who don't pay full taxes on their property. It also stated that the Limerick Brunswick Clubs stamped £1000 to help defray the costs of former Mayor Thomas Jervis's legal action against the paper.

In conclusion the Brunswick 'Fundamentalist' Clubs were a short lived and abysmally unsuccessful phenomenon. They closely resembled the Orange Order which rose and became a populist movement in opposition to Home Rule half a century later. The Orange Order, in conjunction with other Protestant pressure groups, did achieve a modicum of success, forcing the creation of a separate Northern Ireland and Protestant state. However, its power was derived from the fact that it did represent popular Protestant opinion. The Clubs never did so and this was their Achilles heel. They were not helped by the person so object to put an end to Feuds and Factions of the Clubs never did so and this was their.

Catholic, priest-dominated nation. However, this did take a great deal longer than they anticipated and there was certainly no Catholic takeover of mainland Britain. The Brunswicks were eventually succeeded by the Orange Order as the leader of patriotic Protestantism in Ireland. However, their place in history is deserved despite their short life span. They were a force for only one year, but it was one critical year in the evolution of the future Irish nation. The Brunswicks played a prominent role in the screenplay of 1828/29, although ultimately their role wasn't to finish with glory. However, as an ancestor of the living Orange movement they do hold historical interest and contemporary relevance. Love them or loathe them, I believe that the Brunswick should not be forgotten.

Appendix 1

1. The following is the complete list of Brunswick Clubs formed throughout Ireland and England, from the Ennis Chronicle and Clare Advertiser, 29 November 1828:

Brunswick Club of Ireland
Ulster Provincial Club
University Club

The following counties established County Clubs:

Antrim
Carrickfergus

Armagh
Clongow

Cavan
Clare

Cork
Donegal

Down
Dublin

Fermanagh
Galway

Kilkenny
Leitrim

Limerick
Londonderry

Longford
Louth

Meath
Monaghan

Queen's County
Roscommon

Sligo
Tyrone

Tipperary
Westmeath

Wexford
Wicklow

The following established local clubs:

Armagh city
Aughrim

Ardfinnan
Athlone

Agher
Arva

Arklow
Aughnavoghy

Aghlish
Ballinaheo

Borris-in-Ossory
Ballyhobey

Ballymacarrett
Ballymahan

Boyle
Ballyshannon

Bandon
Ballygawley

Ballycumber
Bangor

Ballybode
Ballymena

Ballintr
Buttevant

Beltrum
Brookeborough

Ballybay
Ballinmont

Ballinamore
Belleek

Bennburch
Ballyshank

Cork City
Cavan Town

Clones
Carnew

Collon
Cooterhill

Conroy
Connoloe, Upper

Cournell, Lower
Carlingford

Castletown
Carrickfergus

Carrick-on-Shannon
Clogher

Carlingford
Charlemont

Clogheenfield
Carrickfergus

Clonfeacle
Cookstown

Charleville
Derry City
No record exists of any Orange Societies in Limerick City either before or after this period. Outside of Ulster, the Orange Order was strongest in Dublin and Cork.

2. Population of Limerick City - 1821: 59,045 (28,117 Male, 30,928 Female) - 1831: 66,554

In 1871, the first year in which religious denominations were included in the census, the population of Limerick City was said to be 81.5% Catholic.


(County of Limerick, 1821-1831; Judith Hill, The Building of Limerick, Mercier Press, 1991, p.149)

3. General Elections in Limerick City 1810-1830 (1 M.P. elected)

Lord Glentworth (Henry Hartstone Pery): 27
1817 By-election: Hon. John Prendergast Vereker: 412
Lord Tuthill: 288
1818 General Election: Hon. John Prendergast Vereker: 601
Thomas Spring Rice: 506
1820 General Election: Hon. John Prendergast Vereker: 796
Thomas Spring Rice: 560
On petition Vereker unseated and Spring Rice was later declared elected
1826 General Election: Thomas Spring Rice: elected unopposed.
1830 General Election Thomas Spring Rice: 796
Samuel Dickson: 485
(Walker, B.M. (ed): Parliamentary Election Results in Ireland 1801-1922, Royal Irish Academy, 1978)

It is important to note that, according to the Constitution, Catholics were allowed to vote and theoretically allowed to participate fully in most areas of local and national politics, even to sit as MPs. However, a combination of the corrupt nature of the Corporation and the Oath of Supremacy kept them out. The Oath of Supremacy, which had to be taken before entry to Parliament, required one to acknowledge the Monarch as head of the Church. In a pious world, where religion occupied such a pre-eminent position, no Catholic could in his conscience take this Oath. It also affected Protestant dissenters until 1828, when it was modified for their benefit. Also, at this stage and for some years after, MPs received no salaries. This combined with the enormous costs of commuting to London meant that few Catholics were likely to be in a position to sit as MPs.

Appendix 2

Irish Protestant nobility or nobility with Irish connections who supported Catholic Emancipation:

- Duke of Leinster
- Duke of Devonshire
- Earl of Glengall
- Earl of Granard
- Earl of Damley
- Earl of Fitzwilliam
- Earl of Blessington
- Earl of Bective
- Earl of Portarlington
- Earl of Gosford
- Lord Plunkett
- Lord Bangham
- Lord Dunalty
- Lord Riversdale
- Lord A.M.W. Hill, MP (Down County)
- Lord W.C. Fitzgerald, MP (Kildare County)
- Marquess of Lansdowne
- Marquess of Downshire
- Marquess of Hastings
- Marquess of Clancaride
- Rt. Hon. Maurice Fitzgerald, Knight of Kerry
- Hon. Agar Ellis
- Hon. R. Fitzgibbon, MP

The above figures met at Rotunda Dublin and the Union Hotel, Cockspur St., London, among other locations. They planned to raise money for a statue in honour of the Duke of Wellington.

Appendix 3

List of persons who are reported as having attended Limerick City Brunswick Constitutional Club meetings. Undoubtedly other figures did attend, but these were the leaders.

- Lord Gort: President, who stated that he may vote for Catholic Emancipation Bill in House of Lords!
- Charles Fitzgerald, Treasurer, resident in 5 Upper George's St.
- Captain Garrett Hugh Fitzgerald, Secretary
- Alderman Andrew Watson, part owner of Limerick Chronicle, Delegate at Brunswick Club of Ireland in Dublin
- Captain Garnett, not listed as a Freeman of Limerick, Delegate at Brunswick Club of Ireland meeting in Dublin
- G. Hugh Fitzgerald, noted not listed as a Delegate, Brunswick Club of Ireland meeting, Dublin
- Michael Bevan, Limerick Delegate at Brunswick Club of Ireland Meeting, Dublin
- Edward Croker, Freeman since 1795, resident in Ballylagan
- John B. Langford, not listed as a Freeman
- Major Croker
- Right Hon. Lord Massy, resident in Ballycough, Freeman since 1817
- Rev. O'Grady, not listed as a Freeman
- Lord Clare
- Lord Dunraven
- Sir Aubrey de Vere Hunt
Mr. Waller, Castletown resident
Hon. William Massy
Vere D. Hunt: Mayor
Hon. George Massy, resident in Ballyclough, Freeman since 1792
Hon John Massy, Freeman since 1816
Hon William Massy, resident in Belmon, Cork
Henry A. O'Donnell
C.A. Rev. William Waller
Colonel Mondsell
Robert Maunsell Esq.
Godfrey Massy, resident in Ballycahane, Freeman since 1793.
Alderman Wilson
Alderman Gabbett
Alderman D. V. O'Mahony
Alderman N. Mahon
George Tuthill, resident in Faha, Freeman since 1801.
Thomas M. Wilson
Rev. Josiah Crompton, resident in Mulcair, Freeman since 1817
Joseph Gubbins Esq.
Capt. Thomas Ross
John Waller O'Grady esq.
John Hunt Esq., Surgeon & Freeman since 1813
John Blennerhasset, resident in Riddleston, Freeman since 1817
Thomas Jervis, late Mayor

List of persons who opposed the Act of Union in 1800 who were themselves or their descendants later to join the Brunswick Constitutional Clubs, an organisation whose cornerstone was Bunswickers' constitutional clubs, an organisation whose cornerstone was loyalty to the Union. Published in The Limerick Chronicle, 11 January 1800.

Andrew Watson
Edward Croker
Godfrey Massy
Robert Maunsell
George Tuthill
Hon. John Massy
Vere Hunt
Thomas Vereker
John Prendergast Smyth

Appendix 4

Four official criteria for receipt of Freedom of Limerick:

One could:
1. Be the eldest son of a Freeman and resident in the city.
2. Be married to the daughter of a Freeman and resident in the city.
3. Have served an apprenticeship of at least seven years to a tradesman or merchant who was himself a Freeman.
4. Or, most controversially, one could simply be a 'distinguished non-citizen.'

This was a loose ambiguous term and it was under this heading that the greatest abuses occurred. Under the Verekers the only criterion was that one be a political ally of theirs.

Appendix 5

Commissioners for the Parish of St. Michael, 1831

For Life:
Lord Glentworth
John Kelly

John Tuthill, barrister, Catherine St. John Mark
William Roche
William Howley
Rev. John Pinkerton, Glentworth St.
William White
Francis Philip Russell
George William Russell
Michael Gavin
James Anglin
Hewey Watson

For two years:
Michael Quin
Thomas Quillavan
Hewy O'Sullivan
Cornelius O'Brien
Joseph Jones
Ralph Wilson
Daniel Barrington

I found no evidence of any involvement by this body with the Brunswick movement.

Appendix 6

A Brunswick Song by a Supporter

Brunswickers
A Song by a Clare Man
Air—"Protestant Boys"

The Protestant spirit of Erin is rous'd,
That long had lain dormant; when
needless, unknown,
While all who love freedom it's cause have
espous'd,
Resolv'd to support Constitution and
Throne.
Rebellion that lurk'd, and underhand
work'd,
(The Wolf in Sheep's clothing, of late
plainly shewn,)
Disheart'n'd, doth tremble, since
Brunswicks assemble!

Sing Billy bo lero, we'll keep the bone
They who the war whoop of party have
rais'd,
Appear quite astonish'd to find it is up to.
They hop'd that their masters would take,
and be pleased,
Whatever they choose to pour into their
cup.
Theirs masters are men! They'll show them
again,
Disaining the yelp of each priest-ridden
gulp
With bluster or blarney, from Clare or
Killarney,
Sing Billy bo lero, this let them sup.

These who the Blood-bounds by Blood-
bounds sty'd
Too long look'd for peace where no peace
could be found.
But, now they resolv'd they'll no more be
beguill'd
To security's sleep, by a mere empty
sound.
Delusion is done; it's tell race is run;
It's victim's fist ready for slaughter were
bound,
Till the war wisdom of treason; just
sounded in season,
And Billy bo lero sinking hope crown'd!

Contempt on George Dawson, though he
opd men's eyes

By Craven! - deserted the Protestant
cause!
He said the Great Captain should give up
the prize,
And Rome's rebel minions to Britons give
laws,
But now, one and all, on Britons we call,
To rescue their rights from Dragoon's fell
jaws.
As loyal they'd blazon, the black depths of
treason
Singing Billy bo lero with their appluase,

Those renegade Protestants whose
breasts, disgrac'd,
Rebellion and Faction's foul badges
display,
Contempt hath from social life's
sanctuaries chas'd,
Since Protestant principles walked into
play;
Those madmen or fools, those blind Cat's-
paw-tools,
Devoid of discretion, or judgment to away,
Like rats shall run routed, from social life
scouted -
Sing Billy bo lero, - since Brunswick's day!

The mob, priests and demagogues, tag,
rag, and bols,
Have called forth the Lion of Liberty's
mighty:
And, now that those blockheads have
done their own job,
They may fling, with their schemes, all
their hopes out of sight
No longer thick scull'd, no more to be
guld.
The Protestants see how things stand by
truth's light,
And conciliation, their own ruination,
Sing Billy bo lero, - hence scare to flight!

Rejoic'd would the Protestants grant all
their claims,
And place them, as friends, with
themselves on par,
Ere they found their pretensions mere
coats to their schemes,
To rule, and or fam'd Constitution to mar,
Even then too inert, their rights to assert,
Till destruction they saw from threshold
not far;
When the act that concession, provok'd
aggression,
(Sing Billy bo lero) rais'd Brunswicks star!

And now that the fiend's cloven foot has
been shown,
While faction's foul ferment works up in
the land,
Beth' gauntlet of loyalty fearlessly thrown
Through all wind and weather, united
together,
(Sing Billy bo lero) our ship is mann'd!
(Ennis Chronicle and Clare Advertiser, 29
October 1828)

Appendix 7:

Anti-Brunswick Poem

Brunswick Echoes
Hue eocamus, alt; nullique libertinis
uniquam
sponsurs sono, Cocamus, retulit Echo.
There are echoes, we know of all sorts, From the Echo, that “dies in the dale,” To the “airy-tongued babbler,” that sports Up the tide of the torrent her “tale.”

There are echoes that bore us, like Blues, With the latest smart met they have heard; There are echoes, extremely like shrews, Letting nobody have the last word.

In the bags of old Fadd-land, too, Certain “talented,” Echoes there dwell Who, on being ask’d, “How do you do?” Politely reply, “Pretty well.”

But why should I talk any more Of such old-fashioned echoes as these, When Britain has new ones in store, That transcend them by many degrees?

For, of all repercussions of sound, Concernings what bards make a poiler. There’s none like a happy rebound, When one blockhead echoes another.

When K_ nyon commences the bray, And the Borough Duke follows his track; While loudly, from Dublins sweet hay R_thd ne brays, with interest back!

And while of most echoes the sound On our ear by reflection doth fall. These Brunswickners pass the bray round Without any reflection at all.

Oh Scott, were I gifted like you, Who can name all the echoes there are, From Ben-voi-loch to bold Ben-venue, From Ben-ledi to wild Uam-var;

I might track, through each hard Irish name, The rebounds of his axinine strain, Till, from Neddy to Neddy, it came To the chief Eddy, K_ nyon, again;

Might tell how it roard in R_thd ne, How from D_wss it died off gently, How hollow it rung from the crown, Of the fat pated Marquis of E_y;

How, on hearing my Lord of Cl_nd ne, Thistle-eaters, the stoutest gave way, Outdone, in their own special line, By the forty-assy power of his bray.

But no - for so humble a bard Tis a subject too trying to touch on; Such a nobleman’s names are too hard, And there needles too soft to dull much on

Oh Echo, sweet nymph of the hill, Of the dell, and the deep-sounding shelves, If in spite of Narcissus, you still Take to folks who are charmed with themselves.

Who knows but, some morning, retiring To the bank the Trent’s wooded side, You may meet with N-w. wiste admiring His own length’d ears in the tide!

Or on into Cambria straying, Find K_ nyon, that double-tongued elf, In his love of ass-endency, braying A Brunswick duet with himself!

Written by a person named only as S (Limerick Evening Post, 24 October 1828)