The city of Limerick was unique in that the National Amalgamated Society of Operative House and Ship Painters (NASOHSPD) never succeeded in establishing a branch there. Such was principally due to a failed legal action that occurred in 1908. The issues involved and the circumstances of the time illustrate aspects of Irish labour history that have hitherto received little attention. The opposing parties to the dispute were the long established Limerick Operative House Painters Society (Limerick OHPS) and a member who had joined the NASOHSPD. The significance of the dispute, the various contemporary issues and developments involved can only be fully appreciated in the context of the times.

Painters’ Organisations in Ireland

By the second half of the nineteenth century most Irish cities and major towns had their own well-established painters and decorators trade unions. These included Belfast (c1842), Coleraine, Cork (c1845), Dublin (c1790s), Limerick (c1820), Dunaskin, Drogheda (c1850s), Newry (c1870), Sligo, Londonderry (c1870), Waterford (c1820s) and Kings-town (c1892). There may have been local unions in Clonmel (c1881) and Kilkenny also. Major towns where no organisation seems to have occurred included Armagh, Wexford, Ennis and Tralee. In the 1890s Galway had a building trade union that catered for a number of trades.

The organisational position in the trade in Ireland prior to the 1890s differed little from that which prevailed throughout the United Kingdom before the establishment of the Amalgamated unions. Some local unions, Belfast and Dublin in particular, were quite large in membership terms. The Belfast union was the only Irish one that had more than one branch.

However, the organisational position in the trade in Ireland differed in one important respect to that of England, Scotland or Wales. There was no real attempt at federation, co-operation or even contact between the Irish unions in the trade. No result of such an initiative in 1893 was recorded. Irish local painters unions were active in and played a crucial role in the establishment of many trades councils and wider trade union bodies, but did not apply the same principles to their own trade.

For a brief few years in the late 1870s, the Dublin, Cork and Newry local unions were affiliates of the Manchester or General Alliance of House Painters. The Belfast union had formally decided to have no part in the Alliance. The Alliance had been a loose federation of local unions formed in Manchester in 1855. It grew in strength and by the late 1870s it had over seventy affiliates with some 7,000 mem-

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**APPRENTICES**

The following Scale of Wages for Apprentices was agreed on between the Limerick Employers’ Federation and the Irish National Painters and Decorators (Limerick Branch) and signed on March 30th, 1922:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st year</th>
<th>2d. per hr.</th>
<th>7 10</th>
<th>per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>4d.</td>
<td>15 8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>6d.</td>
<td>1 8 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>8d.</td>
<td>1 11 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>11d.</td>
<td>2 3 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>2 10 11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>2 18 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And that this scale, applicable to Apprentices, will not be affected by any rise or fall in the Men’s wages. The existing Apprentices to drop 1d. (one penny) per hour as from 1st April, 1922.

Signed,

M. NEALON, Branch Sec.

Apprentice painters’ scale of wages, 1922. (Limerick Museum)
Workers of the Master Painters’ Association in Ireland

LIMERICK BRANCH

March 1st, 1913.

WAGES

1. The Wages to be at the rate per hour.

WORKING HOURS

- The number of hours per week to be 52, divided as follows:
  - From March 1st to September 30th, 42 hours.
  - From October 1st to February 28th, 44 hours.

November 15th to February 1st, the first four days to be 8 hours, and the remainder 8½ hours, till 6 p.m.

The first 3½ to be in the dinner hour. On Saturdays, the men to be in for 8½ hours at 7 a.m., and paid as overtimes, viz. 8½ per hour.

COUNTRY MONEY

4-Money Country Society benefits, paid at the rate of 6 per day outside the usual wages. The men to have the option of working two hours per day extra, and receiving 6p per day for the same, at the discretion of the employer, and to be paid for the same.

BOUNDARY

- Any man working three miles outside the city to be paid 30p per day, at 7 a.m. and 7 p.m.

UNAUTHORISED OVERTIME

- No unauthorised overtime, or part of whose of the dinner hour without consent of the employer.

WORKING

- All workmen in possession of a full set of tools to consist of at least: a trowel, a putty knife, knife, scraper, and if a paper hanger, a scraper, paint-lid, and ruler in addition to lathing.

APPLICATIONS

- Any deficiency in place to be reported by Employee at standard price, and payment for same stopped at next day's pay.

KEEPING TIME

- No workman to keep himself in employment who is engaged on any account whatever, without acquainting the Employer and giving his Employer notice. And should a man have 2½ days for abolishing himself from work he was here engaged (before any other work), such manager as is to be admitted to the society in the event of his craft.

Conduct at Work

- Any workman who is dismissed from the line of work during working hours shall cease work for that day, and only be paid his wages of between the hour dies is valued by the Employer.

Signed on behalf of

Master Painters’ Association

Signed on behalf of

Guild of House Painters

ALTERATIONS OF RULES

Adequate to ensure Master Painters (Limerick Branch), and Limerick Operative House Painters Society.

OVERTIME

Extensions of Rules from 11 a.m. to 8 a.m. Wages to be paid at the rate of 7½ per hour.

COUNTRY MONEY

To be paid at the rate of 8½ per day outside usual wages.

PRESSURE OF WORK

To apply for soldiers, under above rules, to have the right to deny him employment under said rules, that enquires be conducted with, and not less than 1 month to be discharged first in the whole city.

Signed on behalf of:

Master Painters’ Association

Signed on behalf of:

House Painters’ Society

Working rules of Limerick Master Painters’ Association, 1913. (Limerick Museum)
the working painter was the standing practice whereby, if a painter had to stay away from home whilst working on a job, a travel and accommodation allowance was paid and a minimum sixty hour working week was guaranteed. Amalgamated practices tended to undermine these established conditions as it insisted only that no less than the local wage rate apply.

The Amalgamated endeavoured to absorb local unions as branches through a variety of blandishments. However, where such overtures failed it was ruthless in its efforts to undermine and destroy local opposition. In pursuing its expansionist policies it was not very principled in the methods it adopted.

A fierce struggle against the presence of the Amalgamated was waged in Belfast and Dublin. The BOHPTU ensured that the Amalgamated's delegates, including its general secretary, George M. Sunley, was excluded from the British Trade Union Congress at Edinburgh in 1897 due to the activities of the union.4 This resulted from a visit by Peter Cassidy, president of the Dublin MHPTU, to the Belfast OHPTU whilst he was attending the TUC conference in Belfast. Such a federation had a potential membership of about 1,200 and the strength to stave off Amalgamated encroachment. Nothing is known to have come of the initiative. In Dublin, after initial resistance from the DMHPTU, a reluctant tolerance of the Amalgamated's presence became the norm.

In 1904 when the two English Amalgamated unions merged, seven other local painters unions (six in England) also became part of the new amalgamation. One of the seven was the Cork House Painters' Society with about 180 members. By the year 1905 there were only four local Irish unions remaining that catered for painters, Belfast, Dublin, Limerick and Waterford.6 In that year the Belfast union was all but destroyed by a lengthy and expensive court action which was taken against it and its officials by the secretary of the NASOHSFDP Belfast branch. The person concerned, Daniel McCrory, claimed £500 in damages against the Belfast union. He won the case and was awarded the lesser, but nevertheless enormous, sum of £150. The Belfast OHSPTU, which had a membership of between 400 and 500 over the decades up to 1905, was reduced to about sixty members in 1906. It was to be 1920 before it recovered its former membership.

The success of McCrory's case arose from the ambiguity in the law that arose from the Welsh Taff Vale Railway Co.-Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants court case, which was finally decided by the House of Lords in 1901. On foot of that judgement trade unions could be held liable for damages arising from trade disputes. McCrory's legal action, with an extensive legal team headed by the solicitor-general, was a potentially expensive venture for a working man and who financed the action was never revealed.

Employers and Industrial Relations

The employers of Belfast were organised from the 1870s, probably in response to the strength of the Belfast union. Twenty years later it was said, undoubtedly expressing the underlying motivation of all the employers groups, that it was compulsory upon them when they were met by a body of men banded together for their own protection that they should, as master painters, join hands so that they might be able to defend themselves against any interference with their rights and liberties.8

No other employers' organisations in the trade have yet been uncovered in other Irish towns if such existed. In 1896, probably prompted by the coming into force of the Conciliation (Industrial Disputes) Act, 1896, the main employers in the capital organised themselves as the Dublin Guild of Master Painters.

In the same year a lock-out, affecting virtually all the Dublin building trades, commenced on May Day and was only settled by the intervention and arbitration of the Roman Catholic Archbishop, Dr William Walsh, throughout August. The outcome of the lock-out did not achieve the Master Builders Association's (MBA) objectives, which differed from trade to trade.
British firms not to employ Dublin men. Scabs were imported from Britain and there was also a lack of local trade union solidarity. Inexplicably, the Dublin Trades Council & Labour League refused to support the painters, opting instead to call for conciliation.¹

Within a short period the NAMPI¹⁰ had members in all the main cities. The emergence of the NAMPI and the outcome of the Dublin lockout had an impact in Limerick that led to the court action by John O'Ryan. By the early 1900s, although when it dated from exactly is unknown, there was a Master Painters Association in Limerick.

The Limerick Operative House Painters' Society

The painters of Limerick City were organised in their own union probably from the 1790s, but certainly from the 1820s. The exact titles their organisation adopted over the years is unclear and it appears that the union, unlike most of the other Irish unions, was never registered as either a friendly society or a trade union.

The Limerick OHPS was amongst the earliest affiliates of the Irish Trade Union Congress. They were represented at the second annual conference held in Cork in 1895 by J.Hynes. At the following two conferences in Limerick and Waterford in 1896 and 1897 the union was also represented, but the delegate's names were not recorded. Between then and the Dublin conference of 1907 the union was not represented at the ITUC and in that year their delegate at Dublin was Joseph Bruckner.¹¹ Bruckner and a W. Allen represented the union at the ITUC Limerick conference in 1908.¹²

The position of painters and decorators in Limerick City undoubtedly improved over the twenty years 1891-1911 and the Limerick OHPS undoubtedly played a role in achieving these improvements.

The number of painters, decorators, paperhangers and glaziers in Limerick City increased from 109 to 121 and to 150 in the census years 1891, 1901 and 1911 (Table 1). In 1861 the number in the trade, including employers, had been 143.

The working painters of Limerick City were almost all Roman Catholic in religious affiliation. The number of Church of Ireland adherents fell from three in 1891 to one in 1911. The number returned as being illiterate had fallen from six to one over the same period. Those in the trade were well distributed in terms of age groups. Those aged twenty years and under, that roughly equating to apprenticeship, remained at fifteen. At the other end of the age range, those aged sixty-five and older increased from three to nine.¹³

In 1907 the weekly working hours in the trade in the city were fifty-one and the hourly rate was 7¼d., which would have delivered a weekly wage in summer of 3s.10½d. The hourly rate was less than that in Belfast, Cork or Dublin but was more than in any other Irish city or town (Table 2).

Although the hourly rate remained the same the hours worked in winter, for those fortunate enough to be in employment, were much less due to weather and lack of daylight.

The lot of the working painter would have been one of five nine hour days, probably worked from 6.00 am to 6.00 pm with two meal breaks of one hour each. Saturday hours were probably from 6.00 am to 1.00 pm with a one hour meal break. When the time spent in travelling to and from work is included the working day in reality probably amounted to twelve hours. Conditions and equipment were primitive, many of the materials used were toxic and earnings were lost through inclement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Age ranges</th>
<th>Religious affiliation</th>
<th>Illiterate</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-15</td>
<td>-20</td>
<td>-25</td>
<td>-45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2
Painters Trade Unions, Rates, Hours and Wages, 190734

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>1901</th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>Trade Union</th>
<th>From Year</th>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Rate Hour</th>
<th>Weeks Hours</th>
<th>Weekly Wages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Armagh</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Amal</td>
<td>1907</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6d</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belfast</td>
<td>1589</td>
<td>1909</td>
<td>BOHPS</td>
<td>1845</td>
<td>c50</td>
<td>8d</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>36s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coleraine</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>Amal</td>
<td>1899</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6d</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>Amal</td>
<td>1905</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>8d</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>34s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drogheda</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Amal</td>
<td>1894</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6d</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>1865</td>
<td>2033</td>
<td>DMHP</td>
<td>c1790</td>
<td>c400</td>
<td>7½d</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>33s 9d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limerick</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>LOHPS</td>
<td>c1894</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7d</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L/derry</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>Amal</td>
<td>1898</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7d</td>
<td>56½d</td>
<td>32s 11d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lurgan</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Amal</td>
<td>c1907</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newry</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Amal</td>
<td>1894</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sligo</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>Amal</td>
<td>1894</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterford</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>W[HPS]36</td>
<td>c1820</td>
<td>c30</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>30s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Limerick OHPS had mitigated, to an extent that may have been unique, the worst effects of that rule. They had established a local agreement, which provided:

* That no application for men under the above rule be made later than September 1st in any year, and any men employed under said rule their service be dispensed with not later than October 1st in any year.*

Such a provision ensured that work was available in wintertime was to be confined exclusively to the members of the Limerick OHPS as long as any of its members were unemployed. The Limerick OHPS had also instituted a rule, although this was disputed, whereby its members could not belong to any other trade union.

In March 1907, a Limerick painter named John O’Ryan migrated to Dublin in search of work.14 O’Ryan had been a member of the Limerick OHPS for about eight years and earned 7½d. per hour. Whilst in Dublin he joined the Amalgamated union. On his return to Limerick in October 1907, O’Ryan secured a job with one of the city’s leading employers, John MacNamara & Sons, painting contractor, of Catherine Street. In that year 1907-1908, MacNamara was also President of the NAMPI.

Following O’Ryan’s employment, the Limerick OHPS officials, Michael Mayne and Joseph Buckner, president and secretary respectively, visited MacNamara and demanded that O’Ryan be dismissed due to his not being a member of the union. MacNamara sought the union’s demand in writing. This was provided on the 19th October and in the style of the times it read:

I beg to inform you that John O’Ryan, in your employment, has refused to comply with the rules of our society.
O'Ryan was dismissed the same day by MacNamara. O'Ryan commenced proceedings against the Limerick OHPS and its named officials seeking damages of £50 at the Limerick Quarter Sessions in early 1906 before County Court Judge Mr Law-Smith KC. Those joined in the action by O'Ryan were:

Michael Mayne, (president), Little Frederick Street
Joseph Buckner (secretary), Gerald Griffin Street
Michael Anderson, 3 Richmond Street
John Reeves, Garryowen
William Reeves, Garryowen
John Allen, Rutland Street
John Neville, Little Gwentworth Street
Pat McCoy, Church Street, Kings Island
Thomas Murphy, Halpin Lane, off Castle Street, and
William Nealon, 41 Edward Street

The sum sought, then the equivalent of more than eight months wages in the trade, combined with legal costs, would have effectively destroyed the Limerick union had O'Ryan won the case. The claim against the Limerick OHPS was based on an alleged conspiracy by the defendants to procure the dismissal of plaintiff from the employment of John M’Namara & Sons and for the loss of his employment on the 19th October.7

That O'Ryan was aided and abetted in his action by the Amalgamated’s Dublin official appears beyond doubt, although such was never specifically stated or admitted.

A similar case had occurred in Plaistow in London in 1903 when a painter named William McGuire had successfully sued the ASHPD for £25 when he was dismissed in similar circumstances.8 The main difference in the London case was that it was the then London Amalgamated that was acting against a small local union.

As noted above, the officers and others of the Limerick OHPS were joined in the action by O'Ryan for damages. All were described as 'painters of the Limerick Operative House-Painters Society', Joseph Buckner was also president of the Limerick Trades & Labour Council in 1908.9 The John Neville joined in the action may have been the same person who also served as Trades Council president in 1907.10

The case was heard in April 1908. Although the judge expressed the view that the case put forward by O'Ryan was justified, he dismissed the case as being 'unlawful and vexatious'.9 The local men were quite in earnest in trying not to be dominated by the Amalgamated Society. This kind of thing occurred in Limerick some six or seven years ago, when at the order of the English Society the Limerick tailors went on strike, and thousands of pounds went over to England while the tailors were walking about the streets idle. The desire of the employers was to disrupt the Society; the plaintiff [O'Ryan] was their agent, and the defendants were within their rights in trying to defend themselves from being swamped by the English Society. The father and brothers of the plaintiff were and remained members of the [Limerick] Society, and that helped to show the surrounding (sic) of the defence.11

O'Ryan's counsel countered Kelly's claims by stating that he denied there was any grounds for Mr Kelly's contention...the plaintiff was not backed-up by anyone and he came into court to get justice. The case rested on malice and the object of the defendants was to punish plaintiff and disqualifying him from membership preventing him from getting work in Limerick and forcing him out of the city.12

The case was appealed and heard before 'The Lord Chief Baron' in early July 1908.13 During the hearing valuable information was revealed by several witnesses that illustrate some of the issues and conditions of the time. O'Ryan was again represented by Phelps and the Limerick OHPS by Kelly, O'Ryan, MacNamara, Mayne, and Buckner gave evidence, but only the first two were cross-examined.

It was claimed that O'Ryan, in joining the Amalgamated, had foregone his membership of the Limerick OHPS in that the Amalgamated rules provided that members could not belong to any other society. O'Ryan claimed that he knew nothing of such a rule. He countered by claiming that no such rule existed in the Limerick OHPS and that he was still a member of the local union, albeit in arrears to the extent of 24s. As the Limerick OHPS weekly contribution was 6d., he was forty-eight weeks in arrears.

O'Ryan claimed he had paid £2.9s.4d. fees to the Dublin Amalgamated branch and was not able to pay the Limerick society.

O'Ryan denied, under questioning, that he had been 'the means of leading to a lockout' at MacNamara's in 1906 but admitted he was 'an active opponent' of MacNamara. The records of the Limerick union were then quoted.

Proposed by John O'Ryan, and seconded by John Reeves, that 'we give George Burrows until Saturday to conform to our rules, and should he not comply, all men to cease work with him'.

O'Ryan admitted that such was the case and that it was 'in accordance with the rules and constitution of the society'. He was then asked 'are they doing anything to you under their rules that you did not propose to do to Burrows?' When it was put to him that 'This amalgamated society is of English origin, and these people are trying to dominate the trade societies of this country?', O'Ryan replied 'I don't know anything about that'.

MacNamara, the employer, when examined by O'Ryan's counsel, stated that he remembered Buckner and Mayne calling on him demanding O'Ryan's dismissal as he did not comply with their rules and went on to state he...

Knew the cloak of the thing, and said he thought they were making a mistake. Two of their men had left to go to Dublin where they expected to get work as a matter of course. John O'Ryan had joined the Amalgamated Society in Dublin, numbering 1,900 men, and he was a blackleg when he came back according to their action. Another member went up to Dublin and worked as a non-union man, though he was a member of the Limerick Society, and he came back to Limerick and resumed work there without any objection to him. He quoted for the delegation the case of McCrocy against the Belfast Painters Society, being an action for damages caused by loss of one and a half years'...
work. The venue was changed to Dublin, and the case was tried before Judge Kenney and a special jury. The trial lasted five days and there was an eminent Bar...the result was that McCrory was awarded £150 damages and costs. The case had the effect of breaking up the Belfast local society, and they all then joined the Amalgamated Society.

Although McNamara admitted that the rule regarding the employment of Limerick OHPS members had been agreed he went on to state under cross examination that

| His object was not to flood the town with amalgamated men so as to give employers larger selection of men and reduce wages, because amalgamated men could come down and work side by side with the local branch. They did it in Dublin – amalgamated and local men and non-union men worked side by side in Dublin [but he] did not want non-union men.  

McNamara also stated that when the rule regarding the employment of Limerick OHPS members was proposed, although they had agreed to it, the employers objected saying that ‘if at any time the Amalgamated Society wished to contest their rights we disassociated ourselves from any costs or liabilities in the matter’. McNamara was incorrect in at least three respects in his views. Firstly, the Amalgamated union had 941 members in fifteen branches in Ireland at that time, not 1,900. Secondly, the Belfast union was not broken-up by the legal action, although its membership fell drastically from about 500 to sixty. Thirdly, the virtual collapse of its membership did not lead to its members joining the Amalgamated union. The result of the damage done to the Belfast union created a situation whereby most Belfast painters became non-union men. Despite the establishment of a second Amalgamated branch in Belfast following the action its total membership increased from ninety in 1907 to 195 in 1908, leaving about 1,750 painters outside any union in the city.30

The position adopted by the union was that O’Ryan was not a member of the Limerick OHPS, was a member of another union and that they were simply enforcing an agreement with the employers. They were prepared to admit O’Ryan to the local union provided he ceased to be a member of the Amalgamated union. Although the decision of the court went against O’Ryan, the judge did not conceal his own views in the matter. He stated that the action of the defendants was malicious in the way they attempted to get rid of the plaintiff, but on the construction of the 3rd section of the Act he had to dismiss the case.

No costs were awarded. Under the provisions of the Trades Dispute Act, 1906, where losses were sustained as the result of an industrial dispute the parties involved could not be held liable for damages. The Trades Disputes Act, 1906, which negated the impact of the Taff Vale Railway v ASRS judgement of 1901, had been passed by the Liberal government at the urging of the then new parliamentary Labour Party.

Aftermath

The outcome of the court case lead to a reconciliation between O’Ryan and the Limerick OHPS, in that he resigned from the Amalgamated and rejoined. What subsequently became of O’Ryan is unknown. However, from the few scant references there are to the affair in trade union sources, the hard-nosed cynicism of the Amalgamated is clear.

Around 1907 the secretary of the NASOHSID Dublin No 2 branch, John Graydon, was appointed on a full-time basis. He seems to have operated as their organiser throughout Ireland. Graydon was also a member of the Amalgamated’s National, UK wide, Executive Council. In 1910, two years after the court case, Graydon raised the matter at the Executive Council. The general discussion on the issue revealed some of the attitudes held by its leading officials.31 Graydon claimed that the Limerick OHPS had gone on strike against O’Ryan’s employment. Graydon had visited O’Ryan in Limerick at the time and claimed that O’Ryan had taken the court action himself. The Amalgamated’s General Office had refused to take any action in the matter although Graydon had submitted a report to it. As a member of the Dublin No 2 branch, O’Ryan had been paid victimisation benefit of 10s. per week plus unemployment benefit. After O’Ryan’s unemployment benefit was exhausted, his victimisation benefit was increased to 20s. per week. It appears that O’Ryan was supported over the winter 1907-1908 and benefit was then stopped. The position adopted by the General Council was that he should leave Limerick to seek employment. Graydon’s appeal that he was a Limerick man who supported his parents did not evoke a sympathetic response. Graydon further pointed out that removal expenses available under the rules in the case of victimised members had been refused. What rankled with many who spoke was that the local union had succeeded. As one stated

The point, to his mind, was that the Limerick Society had more power than their own society, and that they as an amalgamated society, allowed some local society to dictate to them what their members should do.

Graydon expressed the view that

if they had fought the this particular case the employers would have been with them hand in hand, because they would have been very glad to have men of our society to work in Limerick.

What precisely Graydon meant by his statement is less than clear. However, it more than suggests that amalgamated members would have been prepared to work under conditions that were less than the established local norms and undermine the Limerick LOHPS itself. The chairman offered the view that

if the man had been supported he might have been the means of establishing a branch there which might
have been a rallying ground. That was often the way in which branches were made in amalgamations.

The general consensus of the meeting was that the union had failed O’Ryan, that workers were bitter for O’Ryan and that ‘if they had removed him to Dublin he would have got a job and the society’s money would have been saved’. No consideration was given as to O’Ryan’s desire to stay in his home town, no regret was expressed regarding the undoubtedly difficult position O’Ryan had put himself into and no concern for his wellbeing or future was recorded.

By 1908 the Amalgamated had fifteen branches in thirteen Irish cities and towns with a total of 866 members. Four local Irish unions in Dublin, Belfast, Limerick and Waterford had about 550 members between them.

The Limerick OHPTS was unique in that it is the only Irish city or major town in which the NASOHSHPD did not succeed in establishing a branch.

In the years before the First World War the NASOHSHPD went on to establish branches, some short lived, in Downpatrick (1909), Galway, Queenstown (1911), Bray, Clonmel, Newtownards, Waterford (1912) and Banbridge (1913).

The Amalgamated union went through several name changes over the decades. In the 1940s it became known as the National Society of Painters, although it had been known as that since around 1920. In 1963 it amalgamated with the Scottish amalgamated painters union and two years later it absorbed the last remaining local painters trade union in Britain, the Birkenhead society. In 1968 it amalgamated with the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers. Following a further amalgamation it became part of UCATT when it was established in the early 1970s.

The Limerick Operative House Painters Trade Union continued in existence. In 1912 it made tentative move to become linked with the Dublin MHPPTU for the purposes of the administration of the National Insurance Act of that year but nothing materialised.

In January 1919, following the call from the ITUC to trade unions to re-organise and consolidate themselves, the DMHPTU transformed itself into the Irish National Painters & Decorators & Allied Trades Union (INPDATU). The transformation of the union happened in the same month as the establishment of Dail Eireann, although whether such was by coincidence or otherwise is unknown. The INPDATU introduced the existing glaziers and the whiteners unions into its ranks. The Sligo, Kilkenny and Waterford branches of the Amalgamated union also joined the new Irish national union. The Limerick OHPS also became a branch between 1921-1924. The early 1920s, with rising unemployment, a series of reductions in wages and severe employer and state retrenchment, did not lend itself to new organisational endeavour. In 1924 the Limerick OHPTU re-established itself as an independent trade union.

In 1942, in the wake of the Trade Union Act, 1941, it became a constituent branch of the Building Workers Trade Union (BTUW). The constituent unions that operated under the umbrella of the BTUW for the previous decades continued to function as independent organisations. Following the building strike of 1964 (which won the forty-hour, five-day week) the INPDATU left the BTUW and acquired its own negotiating license. In 1966 the Limerick OHPTU and the Cork House Painters Trade Union merged with and became branches of the INPDATU. In 1991 the union became a trade group within SIPTU.

NOTES & SOURCES
1 Sarah Ward-Perkins, Select Guide to Trade Union Records in Dublin, Dublin, 1996 For registration and other details on many of these unions, passim.
4 J.D Clarkson, Labour and Nationalism in Ireland, New York, 1925, pp65-96.
6 National Archives (NA), Mss. 1017/1/2, Dublin Metropolitan House Painters Trade Union (DMHPTU) Minutes Sep. 1893.
7 Evidence of others may yet be uncovered.
9 Labour History Museum & Archives, Dublin (LHMA), Dublin Trades Council & Labour League Minutes, June 1899.
11 Also spelled ‘Bruckner’ in some sources.
12 Irish Trade Union Congress Annual Reports 1895, 1896, 1897, 1907, 1909.
13 Dublin Evening Telegraph, 1 Oct. 1908. A stark reminder of improvements in life expectancy since then. Although figures for Limerick were not cited it was estimated that 187,314 ‘ septuagenarians’ (c/4% of Ireland’s population) would be eligible for the new Old Age Pension, when inaugurated in 1909.
14 Journal of Decorative Art & British Decorator (JDBD), Vol. 29, 1908, pp183, 270. Gives 1906 as the year of O’Ryan’s sojourn in Dublin. The Limerick Leader of 8 July 1908 gives 1907 as the year of O’Ryan’s sojourn in Dublin.
15 Variously Macnamara, MacNamara, McNamara and M’Namara.
16 Many of the surnames listed occur over the subsequent decades in the trade, and in the union, in Limerick.
17 Limerick Leader, 8 July 1908.
18 JDA, Vol. 25, 1904, p141.
19 Limerick Leader, 27 April 1908.
20 Limerick Leader, 29 April 1907. The John Neville who was president of (or at least presided at the April 1907 meeting) the Limerick Trades & Labour League in 1907 may have been the same person.
21 Limerick Leader, 6 April 1908.
22 P. Kelly BL, instructed by P.J. O’Sullivan, solicitor.
23 JDABD, Vol. 29, 1908, May, p163.
24 Limerick Leader, 6 April 1908.
25 Mr’Phelps BL, instructed by J.S.Gaffney OS.
26 Limerick Leader, 6 April 1908.
30 The NASOHSHPD changed its title to the National Amalgamated Society of Painters.
31 NA. Registry of Friendly Society files INPDATU (290T) Annual Return, 1921. The military seized the DMHPTU/INPDATU records in November 1920 during the war of independence.
32 The BTUW constituent unions included: Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick & Stonemasons Trade Union of Ireland; Irish National Union of Woodworkers; Irish National Painters & Decorator Trade Union; Stonecutters Union of Ireland; Limerick Operative House Painters Trade Union.
35 The Coleraine branch ceased to exist sometime between 1899-1907 and was re-established in 1910.
36 The local Waterford union became an Amalgamated branch in 1912.