

**‘The Irish Reform Act of 1868’**

Colin Barr

From the Act of Union until 1884<sup>45</sup>, the Irish electoral franchise was different to that in England or Scotland. The history of its reform also followed a different calendar: 1829, 1832, 1850, and 1868 were the waypoints on the path to homogenization with the rest of the United Kingdom. But the Irish Reform Act of 1868 has received little attention, and is usually dismissed as a minor technical alteration of minimal political or social importance. When set against the changes in England the year before, this is true. But it is worthy of study, and this article is the first to examine the 1860s campaign for Irish reform, its relationship to events in Britain, the expectations for the Act, its various drafts and its political consequences. It traces the short-lived alliance between the catholic church, the Irish Liberal party and [often secular](#) working class radicals —~~often secular~~—in both Ireland and England, as well as the parallel but quite distinct campaign for reform on the part of working-class northern protestants, many associated with the Orange Order. Although political circumstance resulted in the abandonment of most of the projected reforms, the drafting process and accompanying debates reveal important aspects of Irish political realities and expectations, as well as the limits of parliamentary interest in Ireland. Even in its abbreviated form, the Act had a significant impact on Irish politics, substantially increasing the borough electorate across the island and dramatically so in Ulster.

**Keywords:** Ireland; franchise reform; Irish Reform League; Orange Order; Lord Mayo; Irish Catholic Church; Irish Liberal Party; Irish Conservative Party.

When Anthony Trollope wrote *Phineas Finn, The Irish Member* between May 1866 and June 1867, it was natural that he should assign his hero a small Irish borough. His fictional Loughshane in County Galway had a mere 307 electors. They were, the young Phineas was assured by the worldly Liberal fixer Barrington Earle, ‘so far removed from the world, and were so ignorant of the world’s good things, that they knew nothing about bribery.’ They required of their prospective member only that he be an Irishman and a catholic. Even the local tory landlord – a friend of Finn’s father – was prepared to see a catholic Liberal elected as a way of spiting his brother, the sitting MP. What expenses there were would be ‘defrayed out of a certain fund collected for such purposes.’<sup>1</sup> It was all easily settled and Finn was duly elected.

Trollope’s fiction was perfectly plausible. To take only one example, the English catholic aristocrat Sir John Acton, the future Lord Acton, was returned for Carlow borough in 1859 on a poll of 117 against the Conservative incumbent’s 103. The seat had been found for him by party fixers at the behest of his politically prominent step-father, and his expenses (around £4 per vote) seem to have been paid largely from central funds. Carlow’s electors were at least more open-minded than those of Loughshane, and did not insist that their candidate be Irish, but merely a catholic. Nor did they mind that Acton (like Phineas) did not visit his constituency until after his election.<sup>2</sup> In both fiction and reality, Irish electoral politics in the 1860s remained a world of small boroughs, biddable voters, local power (clerical and landed), confessional identity, absentee candidates, party money, and distant fixers, and its ~~The Irish franchise was distinct from that in Britain and would remain so until 1845,~~ ~~remain so until 1845,~~ when it was homogenized across the United Kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

In the wake of the Union of 1801, the Irish county franchise was fixed at 40 shillings freehold while the boroughs employed a bewildering variety of criteria. Some of these were generous and included 40 shilling freeholders, others were not and granted the franchise only to certain members of the corporation. Most fell somewhere in between.

The first substantive change came with the Irish Parliamentary Act (1829), which was designed to limit catholic political power by eliminating the 40 shilling franchise in the counties and replacing it with a £10 freehold. This reduced the county electorate from some 216,000 to perhaps 37,000, but did nothing to alter the idiosyncratic and variable borough franchises. In 1832, the Representation of the People (Ireland) Act and the Parliamentary Boundaries (Ireland) Act half-heartedly attempted to address this, adding a second seat to four boroughs and to Dublin University (giving Ireland a total of 105), changing some boundaries, and prescribing a uniform franchise across the boroughs. It had a limited impact in the counties beyond enfranchising some categories of leaseholders, although this did see the country electorate grow to some 60,000. In the boroughs, it created a householder franchise set at £10 annual value and abolished the 40 shilling freehold, exempting those who had already qualified on that basis. It also left the 'freeman' vote intact, which was largely poor, biddable and (outside Galway) protestant. The resulting borough electorate was nearly 30,000. With the exception of the Scottish borough franchise, this was narrower than elsewhere in the United Kingdom: K. T. Hoppen calculated that in the Irish counties there was 1 voter per 116 inhabitants, and in the boroughs 1 in every 26. The numbers in England and Wales were 1: 24 and 1: 17, and in Scotland 1: 45 and 1: 27.<sup>4</sup>

The practical problems were legion: rapacious freeman; erratic, arbitrary, and partisan registration procedures; plural, fraudulent, and informally heritable voting; judicial

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disagreements about how to assess value, usually resolved on partisan lines and without consistency; and a steady decline in the granting of leases, partly for economic and partly for political reasons, with the effect of reducing the county electorate. Hoppen estimated that the electorate actually *decreased* between 1832 and 1850, despite the population growing over most of the period.<sup>5</sup> This was widely known or at least suspected, and no fewer than 14 bills were printed between 1835 and 1850 in an attempt to address the problem.<sup>6</sup> But most were absurdly complicated and few were pursued with any great conviction.

The Famine accelerated the previously slow-motion collapse of the electorate, and by 1850 change was unavoidable. In introducing his solution, Lord John Russell drew the attention of the House of Commons to the ‘paucity of electors’, and gave the example of a recent election in County Meath in which only 250 people had voted. John Bright put it more robustly: Ireland’s electorate had been ‘virtually extinguished’.<sup>7</sup> Russell’s plan was comparatively generous: in the counties, the £10 qualification of a freehold or lengthy leasehold was replaced by an occupier franchise for properties with a rateable value of at least £12; in the boroughs, the standard was £8 of rateable value. In both cases, this eliminated the need to value property specifically for electoral purposes, a subjective process that was prone to capricious, partisan and not infrequently perverse outcomes. Using rateable value made the process more predictable, although it did not eliminate all distortions or opportunities for chicanery. Most but not all of those were addressed in 1852 with the creation of a new [national](#) system of valuations, although that took several years to complete. (This proved to be an advantage over England, where the lack of a similarly uniform system of valuation became an issue in debates over reform.)<sup>8</sup> The 1850 Act added 163,546 people to the rolls – 135,245 in the counties and 28,301 in the boroughs – and the proportion of voters in the population rose from 1 in 83 to 1 in 40.<sup>9</sup> [The reform of](#)

1850 was widely seen as a success. As the Irish chief secretary, Edward Cardwell, put it in 1860, it had 'given general satisfaction.'<sup>10</sup>

~~This electorate would remain essentially intact until 1885.~~

As a result, there has been little attention paid to Irish franchise reform between 1850 and the franchise reform and redistribution of seats of 1884-85. The otherwise encyclopaedic Hoppen required only a paragraph to describe the multiple attempts at additional reform in this period 'as shamefaced appendages to English proposals', while dismissing the 1868 Reform Act as 'the suitably mouse-like outcome of all this.'<sup>11</sup> With the exception of Gerald Hall, no scholar gives the 1868 Reform Act or its origins and effects more than passing attention, and the present article is the first to be solely concerned with it. The neglect is explicable: the final Act was significantly less ambitious than originally intended, was lost in the dramatic disestablishment of the Church of Ireland, and then overtaken by events, in particular the collapse of Irish liberalism and the rise of Home Rule. The introduction of the ballot in 1872 made it even harder to judge the political impact of the reform. Only the 1868 election itself was fought under circumstances that can allow an assessment to be made, and then only partially due to the overwhelming force of Gladstone's campaign against the Irish church. Yet, as Hall's study of Ulster Liberalism demonstrated, ~~#~~the Irish Reform Act could and did influence electoral outcomes and political culture.

## I

~~The reform of 1850 was a success. As the Irish chief secretary, Edward Cardwell, put it in 1860, it had 'given general satisfaction.'~~<sup>12</sup> ~~There~~the scale of the 1850 reforms meant that there was consequently little domestic pressure for further reform changes beyond an effective consensus

that any ~~change~~ concessions in Britain must be matched in Ireland. Irish Conservatives had the most to fear from this prospect. As the *Dublin Evening Mail* put it in 1859, every proposal from whichever party invariably had the same ‘bad feature’: any change to the franchise would necessarily ‘increase the political power of the Romish priesthood in Ireland.’<sup>13</sup> This was true, although as we shall see not universally so, and it was anyway not necessarily appealing to the catholic hierarchy itself. Under the leadership of Archbishop Paul Cullen of Dublin, the bishops feared the consequences of nationalist passions and distrusted those who appealed to them. Franchise reform was consequently not a priority.

Irish Liberals also welcomed in principle the prospect of additional reform. Most assumed that an enlarged franchise would benefit them, although their disastrous result in the otherwise triumphant 1859 general election was a reminder that the primary loyalty of catholic voters was to their church, not to the Liberal party.<sup>14</sup> But Liberals also worried that too wide an extension might open the door to Conservative Orangemen in the north and advanced nationalists in the south. Neither they nor the bishops wanted the former and nobody wanted the latter. ~~As a result,~~ Demands were consequently modest. A meeting held in Dublin in February 1860, for example, urged that if England were to have a new reform bill, Ireland should be granted a £5 occupier franchise in ~~the-its~~ inevitable ~~companion~~ bill. The moderate nationalist *Freeman's Journal* thought this ‘obviously just’, and reassured its readers that it would not be ‘very “democratic”’. Of greater concern was the removal of vexatious barriers to registration, including the requirement that prospective voters prove that they had paid their rates.<sup>15</sup>

Cardwell's 1860 proposal was duly tepid. It would merely, he told the Commons, introduce the same ‘general rules’ as were proposed for England and Wales. The £12 occupier franchise in the counties would be reduced to £8, and in the boroughs it would drop from £8 to £6. He predicted

that this would add 30,000 voters in the counties and 6,655 in the boroughs, giving Ireland a total electorate of some 240,000. The freeman's franchise would be preserved, but made the same as that in England. No one already qualified would lose his vote. Cork county and Dublin city would each get a third seat, to be taken from disenfranchised English boroughs. Cardwell also sought to remove the anomaly under which Irish peers such as Lord Palmerston could sit for English but not Irish constituencies.<sup>16</sup>

Reaction was muted: the *Freeman's Journal* worried that not requiring freemen to register annually would leave Dublin 'a fixed property to the Conservative interest'; the *Dublin Express* mildly regretted the preservation of very small boroughs, suggesting that they had been saved 'as places of refuge for great statesmen who have the misfortune of giving offence to large constituencies'; the Dublin suburb of Kingstown (modern Dún Laoghaire) wanted representation, and sent a delegation to London.<sup>17</sup> In the Commons, some objected to the [continuation of the](#) requirement that prospective voters prove they had paid the relevant taxes before being registered. Even more objected to allowing Irish peers to sit for Irish seats. Lord Robert Cecil, the future Lord Salisbury, complained about Ireland receiving seats that had been 'filched' from England. Yet even the most unbending of Irish Conservatives were broadly supportive. James Whiteside, the member for Dublin University and later a notably bigoted lord chief justice of Ireland, did not particularly object to the bill's provisions but wondered why the government was bothering with reform at all.<sup>18</sup> Unloved and largely unwanted, Cardwell's bill died with Russell's English reform bill.

Demands for Irish reform continued to track events in England. Thus when the Liberals returned to English reform in 1865, they felt obligated to produce an Irish proposal to go with it. This, too, was notably modest. The headline was again a reduction of the borough occupier franchise from

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 – Cardwell first gave the figure of 7557, but suggested that the 'real addition' was 6655.

£8 to £6. With typical complexity, it was further proposed to enfranchise any borough resident who was of age, not a criminal, and had continuously occupied lodgings in a dwelling house that as a whole had a 'clear yearly value, if let unfurnished' of over £10. A handful more might qualify by having lived in the same dwelling for at least six months while having kept £50 in a savings bank for two years. A key Liberal grievance was addressed by rendering it unnecessary for a voter to pay the qualifying rates himself, [but the freemen were left unmolested despite appeals from leading Irish Liberals to 'restrict their power'](#).<sup>19</sup> Dublin city and Cork county would again get an additional seat, and the Queen's University would be enfranchised. These seats would be obtained not from disenfranchised English [seatsboroughs](#), but through the amalgamation of six Irish [boroughs](#): Portarlinton and Athlone; Kinsale and Bandon; Dungannon and Enniskillen. Seven smaller constituencies would see their boundaries expanded (Cashel, Coleraine, Downpatrick, Ennis, Mallow, New Ross, and Youghal), but none would be disenfranchised.<sup>20</sup> It was, of course, moot: the bill fell with Russell's government in June 1866.

## H

The change in administration put Irish reform into the hands of Richard Southwell Bourke, from 1867 the 6<sup>th</sup> earl of Mayo. Now remembered largely for being assassinated while governor-general of India, Mayo had already served two terms as Irish chief secretary (1852-53, 1858-59) under his courtesy title Lord Naas. He was the tolerant and reforming face of Irish [conservatism](#), close to Disraeli and far removed from the sectarianism of many party colleagues.<sup>21</sup> But Naas was also an effective political operator, building an unrivalled knowledge of Irish politics through his control of the Conservative electoral machinery over several general elections. In 1859, he had masterminded the stunning Conservative victory in Ireland despite the Liberal landslide in Britain. This was achieved by a combination of careful

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constituency-level management and an appeal to catholic voters enraged by the Italian policies of Russell and Palmerston. After years of ignorance, half-guesses and relative lack of interest, reform of the Irish electoral system was in the hands of one of the few men who apparently understood it.

## II

The gathering [reform](#) agitation in England inevitably produced an Irish equivalent. This can be seen particularly in the career of the Irish Reform League (IRL), which was founded in Dublin in early November 1866. It has received little attention, with most historians either ignoring it completely or following Hoppen's brusque dismissal of a 'fleeting' organisation notable only for favouring 'cross-channel communication'.<sup>22</sup> The IRL appears to have been organised by Edward Colston Keevil, a Dublin merchant who chaired its inaugural meeting and whose premises served as its temporary council rooms. Among other things, he sold patented matches under the brand 'Daniel O'Connell Lights'.<sup>23</sup> But its inspiration lay in the radical campaign in Britain, fronted by John Bright.<sup>24</sup> [Indeed a representative of the English League, Thomas Connolly, had been in Ireland since late October trying to rally Irish support for franchise reform, and he was one of the eleven men present at the IRL's inaugural meeting. He](#)~~The IRL shared its aim of universal manhood suffrage and emphasis on working class participation in the electoral process, and a delegate from the London Reform League, Thomas Connolly, was one of the eleven men present at the IRL's inaugural meeting. He~~ addressed its second 'in forcible terms on the rights of the working classes to enfranchisement in these countries'.<sup>25</sup> [The London League was so impressed by his 'earnest and successful work in Dublin' that they voted him a £7 gratuity.](#)<sup>26</sup> Another

speaker [at the IRL's second meeting](#), the journeyman printer Michael Richardson, moved thanks to the London League for its exertions on behalf of working men, and urged that its Irish counterpart co-operate with 'Reformers of England and Scotland for the attainment of [representation in parliament for] ourselves and our brethren', 'on the basis of residential manhood suffrage protected by the Ballot.'<sup>27</sup>

The IRL was not intended only for Dublin's small population of [non-republican working class urban radicals](#). Keevil [and Connolly](#) had also managed to recruit three prominent city aldermen: William Lane-Joynt, [Patrick J. James](#) Plunket and Peter Paul McSwiney.<sup>28</sup> All were active Liberals [and members of the national association, the political vehicle of the catholic bishops. \(Although Plunket, a prosperous pawnbroker, was on its nationalist fringe.\)](#)<sup>29</sup> The most significant was McSwiney, the wealthy proprietor of Dublin's famous 'Monster Store' on Sackville Street and a once and future lord mayor of the city. He had built his political career as a creature of the catholic hierarchy, and in late 1864 had co-founded the national association ~~as the political vehicle of the bishops~~. When Archbishop Cullen explained to him the grievances that the association should pursue, he listed 'the condition of the small landholders, the taxation of the country, the exclusion of catholics from offices of trust and emolument, and above all the education question', before agreeing that the overriding parliamentary issue was the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland. He did not mention franchise reform.<sup>30</sup> For Cullen, the point of the national association lay in proving that, 'by sending Petitions to Parliament, and by other peaceful and constitutional means, the best results may be obtained'.<sup>31</sup> ~~By contrast, the fenians and their violence 'must inevitably lead to the establishment of tyranny and despotism.'~~<sup>32</sup>

With McSwiney's enthusiastic agreement, the national association supported Russell's 1866 reform bill without demanding anything in return. This was not because of the precedent it might

set for Ireland, but because [the Liberals had begun to show a willingness to address other Irish grievances and they thought it was thought](#) likely that a wider franchise would strengthen ~~the~~[the party -Liberals-](#) in England. [The calculation was that disestablishment was unobtainable from the Conservatives, whatever else they might offer.](#) Independent opposition was thus abandoned in favour of keeping the Liberals in and the Tories out. ~~The calculation was that disestablishment was unobtainable from the Conservatives, whatever else they might offer.~~

But Keevil was not content with municipal politicians, however prominent or well-connected. At the League's second meeting on 13 November, it was announced that Daniel O'Donoghue, better known as The O'Donoghue of the Glens, would join McSwiney in taking 'an active part in the movement.'<sup>33</sup> The O'Donoghue had enjoyed a high profile public career after winning a sensational by-election in 1857 at the age of only 24. He quickly established himself as a leader of the rump Independent Irish Party, and was for a time the 'great nationalist hope'.<sup>34</sup> He had a taste for the showy, ~~organising-fronting~~ several events with advanced nationalist overtones, including the massive 1861 funeral procession of the Fenian Terence Bellew MacManus. This was a direct provocation to Archbishop Cullen, who had refused the use of Dublin's churches. The O'Donoghue went even further down that politically dangerous road when he unsuccessfully flirted with forming a common political front with the Fenians, a group that Cullen thought essentially demonic.<sup>35</sup> Four years later, he founded the National League for the Repeal of the Union. It too failed, not least because of episcopal opposition. In 1865, he changed both tack and parliamentary seat and sought to ingratiate himself with the hierarchy by abandoning independent opposition and supporting the Liberals.<sup>36</sup> He eventually opposed the Land League and Home Rule, before changing course again and standing as a Home Ruler in 1880. His decision to accept the presidency of the IRL, in association with the Cullenite McSwiney, was

almost certainly part of The O'Donoghue's ongoing attempts at rehabilitation. He was [perhaps](#) less 'unlikely' as a radical leader than K. T. Hoppen thought.<sup>37</sup>

The Irish Reform League announced its intentions on 27 November 1866. Signed by The O'Donoghue as president and McSwiney as vice president, its demand was simple: 'every man of full age, untainted by criminal conviction, if he has given hostages to his country by the possession of a home beneath its laws, shall have a vote in the election of Parliamentary representatives.' Ireland, 'as well as England and Scotland', had been 'ruled by a class, and not by the free voices of the population.' Under the 'baneful sway' of this oligarchy, the country's industry had withered, its natural resources were not exploited, and 'under this class-rule our agricultural population ... is being steadily destroyed.' The 'selfishness and injustice of a class' should be replaced by 'the wisdom, the justice, and the patriotism of a united, enfranchised people.' 'It is time', they wrote, 'that those upon whom the burdens of the state are thrown, who pay the taxes that others impose, should be admitted to a voice in the administration of their own affairs'.<sup>38</sup>

The IRL's address echoed English rhetoric on reform, including Gladstone's famous [if ambiguous](#) claim for the 'moral right' to the franchise of any man 'not presumably incapacitated by some consideration of personal unfitness or political danger'.<sup>39</sup> Its language was also similar to that employed by Bright in his great reform speech in Glasgow in mid-October 1866 and repeated thereafter.<sup>40</sup> The League's emphasis on the 'oppression' of taxation without representation and its association of the franchise with 'the privileges of free men' also reflected English radical discourse.<sup>41</sup> As Eugenio Biagini noted of the English radicals, 'the franchise was at one and the same time the means of liberty and its substance and symbol: a citizen could not be really free so long as he remained unenfranchised.'<sup>42</sup>

Bright's influence was more than simply rhetorical. He had long cultivated Irish support and urged cross-channel collaboration on a variety of issues, including disestablishment. He noisily opposed the suspension of habeas corpus in Ireland in 1866, ~~and w.~~ When he visited ~~Ireland~~ that autumn he received a rapturous welcome. The O'Donoghue spoke at a banquet in his honour, moderate nationalist newspapers praised him, and Cullen (now a cardinal, Ireland's first) met him. Cullen's public reception of Bright was intended as a green light for catholics to collaborate with him, and it made possible the involvement of the Cullenite McSwiney and the repentant O'Donoghue. But the cardinal's support was wary and conditional. As he confided privately in late October 1866, Cullen thought that Bright's campaign would 'put down the Protestant church.' But, he added in an important caveat, 'I hope he will stop there.'<sup>43</sup> Cullen had no interest in reform, only in disestablishment and, to a significantly lesser extent, land reform. He made his position perfectly clear in a letter to Archbishop Henry Edward Manning of Westminster. Writing in what seems to have been early December, he told Manning that 'Mr. Bright & his party have made considerable progress in this country.' Still, as yet 'no Bishops and scarcely any priests have joined the Reform Association [*i.e.* the Irish Reform League], as they are not quite certain that the agitation may not be turned into a revolutionary movement.' As Manning doubtless understood, by 'they' Cullen meant primarily himself. But, he continued, 'The Reformers promise to aid in pulling down the Protestant Church in Ireland and settling the land question.'<sup>44</sup> Cullen's desire to cultivate and shape English radical support for disestablishment and land reform explains the cardinal's otherwise inexplicable (if still indirect) endorsement of the Irish Reform League.

In a public letter to McSwiney published on 24 December, Cullen noted that he had just seen a letter to the government signed in London by 'A. Alison', an Englishman writing on behalf of

the IRL. Its subject was the Irish church establishment and the League's proposals for its fate. Cullen was unhappy with the letter's unfamiliarity with the 'real state of the question' and ignorance of the 'history and circumstances' of Ireland. He urged McSwiney to exercise a 'real influence' on the English radicals, and 'lay before them a true picture of our grievances, and of the remedies necessary to remove them'.<sup>45</sup> At the IRL's next meeting McSwiney dutifully proposed from the chair that 'steps should be taken to send deputations to represent the League, and point out the wants and wishes of Ireland to the people of the sister countries as he found there was a lamentable lack of true knowledge of Ireland.'<sup>46</sup> But even a tentative alliance of clerical Liberals with Irish and English radicals was unlikely to last. The interests of Cullen, McSwiney or The O'Donoghue were incompatible with those of Keevil\_ (who openly admired Charles Bradlaugh), P. J. Shanley, the League's secretary and a [journeyman printercompositor](#), or James A. Mowatt, a Methodist, temperance campaigner, advocate of secular education and pioneer of Irish vegetarianism. In late January 1867, for example, a delegation from the League called on Jonathan Pim, a Quaker businessman who had been [at school with Cullen and had received the cardinal's vote when he was](#) elected as a Liberal for Dublin city in 1865.<sup>47</sup> Unusually for an Irish Liberal, Pim had opposed Russell's plans for reform, which saw him tarred as an 'Adullamite' in an ill-tempered encounter with Keevil, Shanley, Mowatt, and Michael Richardson.<sup>48</sup> They urged that the IRL [use its influencecampaign](#) against Pim in any future election.<sup>49</sup> McSwiney's reaction is not recorded, but can be easily guessed. Keevil compounded the offence by representing himself at a reform meeting in Manchester in early February as second only to The O'Donoghue amongst Irish reformers. The result was the League's first split.<sup>50</sup>

The fenians' abortive attempt at a national rising on 5 March made things much worse. Cullen believed that the rebels had 'generally' been 'tailors, shoemakers, and other tradesmen'. At least 16 had actually been employed by McSwiney.<sup>51</sup> This was exactly the class that the IRL hoped to enfranchise and from whom it sought support. Cullen and most other Liberals had never desired ~~manhood~~ [a dramatically enlarged](#) suffrage, but now it appeared to be an actively dangerous demand. The effect was immediate: by the end of March, those newspapers still covering the IRL's affairs were focussed on its internal dissensions.<sup>52</sup> On 9 April, the League's minutes recorded both a 'small attendance of members' and the creation of a deputation to 'wait upon Alderman McSwiney for the purpose of inducing him to preside at the meetings of the league occasionally.'<sup>53</sup> Lane-Joynt and Plunket also appear to have withdrawn, and The O'Donoghue's 'continuous absence' was soon noted, although he [did not resign, remained close to the English League and](#) continued to speak on the subject in parliament.<sup>54</sup> Without Cullen's implicit support, the [League-IRL](#) could be disregarded. Prominent figures such as Isaac Butt and Sir John Gray (the proprietor of the *Freeman's Journal* and an MP) gave the organisation short shrift despite direct approaches, and the catholic and liberal press largely ignored it. In mid-June, the conservative *Dublin Evening Mail* unkindly but not unfairly described the IRL as a 'knot of a half-dozen persons' who 'exchange epistles with the rioters of St. James's Hall, and hold a hole-and-corner meeting occasionally in some obscure retreat in Dublin.'<sup>55</sup>

The IRL rapidly became more working class and more radical. Even before the Cullenites' departure, its original executive committee had been augmented by a grocer's assistant, a carpenter, a hair-dresser and a draughtsman.<sup>56</sup> It also fell more directly under English influence. In June 1867, for example, it was proposed that 24 Englishmen be added as members, six as vice presidents. Lectures by leading English radicals such as Ernest Jones were organised.<sup>57</sup> Their

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audience seems to have been Dublin's working class: the Builders' Labourers Association, for example, requested 460 tickets to a lecture in late August.<sup>58</sup> The reaction of the catholic church was predictable: one member of the executive committee reported in mid-October that he had 'been obliged to retire from a religious society' because his parish priest had anathematized the League.<sup>59</sup> Matters came to a head with the English [Reform League's](#) late 1867 election of Giuseppe Garibaldi as a vice president. Honouring the pope's tormentor was politically toxic in Ireland, even among radicals.<sup>60</sup> [This moved The O'Donoghue to complain directly about the Reform League's 'exhibition of antipapal tendencies', while](#) [Seven members of the IRL's executive committee voted not to 'receive' the notification of ~~Garibaldi's~~ Garibaldi's election and ~~and~~ four ~~to~~ voted to publically denounce it.](#)<sup>61</sup> [London's explanation that its support for the Italian nationalist was not 'religious' and 'not intended as an affront to Ireland, or Irishmen' simply revealed the gulf between the two nations.](#)<sup>62</sup>

The disagreement wrecked the League, which [to London's 'regret'](#) soon suspended operations.<sup>63</sup> Keevil implausibly claimed that the real cause was government persecution, an explanation the English [League](#) appears to have accepted. (Edmond Beales reported that the Irish 'had given up the ghost rather than run the chance of being put down by the police.')<sup>64</sup> Although Keevil [quickly](#) revived the IRL with English support, it ceased to have any importance.<sup>65</sup> As R. V. Comerford put it, 'the catholic ecclesiastical and middle-class people who were the leading Irish allies of Bright and Gladstone, did not wish to have propagated in Ireland the secularist ideas that were the stock in trade of the most active English allies of Bright and Gladstone.'<sup>66</sup>

### III



The IRL's disintegration coincided with the expected introduction of an Irish reform bill in March 1867. ~~The bill~~[This](#) was delayed by the more contentious English reform, although Disraeli promised to bring it forward after Easter.<sup>67</sup> Some thought this a 'fraud', and predicted that whatever did emerge would be insignificant: 'Mr Disraeli', the *Dublin Evening Post* wrote in mid-March, 'is just as likely to establish the Irish Republic' as to grant household suffrage.<sup>68</sup> Conservatives were not so sure: the *Irish Times* had hoped that the government would 'not deem it necessary or expedient' to legislate at all. There had been a 'total absence of any call or desire for Reform on the part of any political section of this country', and the 'existing franchise' already admitted 'every member of the working or other class who possess respectability.' If legislation was necessary, it should be limited to boundary revisions and other technical matters. On no account should the qualification be reduced, as Ireland would be 'plunged in turmoil, trouble, and agitation.'<sup>69</sup> The *Dublin Evening Mail* agreed, claiming that while 'Irishmen differ on a thousand things, and agree about very few', they did agree that lowering the franchise could only produce 'the most unmitigated evil consequences' and introduce 'a Fenian element into electoral warfare.'<sup>70</sup>

Yet no bill appeared. Further postponements were announced in April, again in May and then in early June. The delay only increased tensions. How, the nationalist *Nation* wondered, could Ireland be denied reform? Was the situation there 'so much superior to that of Great Britain, that, while amendment is required in that country, none is required here?'<sup>71</sup> The more moderate nationalist *Freeman's Journal* warned against any variation in the franchise between the two islands as 'an insulting defiance to Ireland'.<sup>72</sup> But agitation was not limited to nationalists or Catholics. In mid-June, some 4000 people ('two-thirds of them being Orangemen') rallied at the Ulster Hall in Belfast to demand household suffrage. This was vastly more than anything

arranged by the Irish Reform League, and was entirely independent of the southern organisation. The primary organiser appears to have been John Rea, a prominent Belfast solicitor who had served prison time for his complicity in the 1848 Young Ireland revolt. The presbyterian Rea had built his reputation as the scourge of the city's tory machine, but by the mid-1850s he had divided Belfast liberalism by his pugnacity, narcissism and aggressively nationalist rhetoric. He then formed an alliance with the city's catholics that endured into the mid-1860s.<sup>73</sup> Although Rea was notoriously erratic, his leadership at the Ulster Hall marked what the *Freeman's Journal* rightly called 'an extraordinary and unexpected turn of events'.<sup>74</sup>

The meeting was chaired by Thomas Hardy, a master printer and the district Orange Secretary. He told the crowd that the 'movement was entirely confined to the working classes' and demanded as a matter of right the same franchise 'which the Government was extending to the people of England.' Rea agreed, urging that 'what an Englishman was entitled to an Irishman ought to have' and that 'what an Englishman got an Irishman would not do without.' But Rea went further, reminding 'the Orangemen of Ulster' that the province's 29 parliamentary seats could hold the balance of power. That made 'Orangemen the most powerful body of politicians in the three kingdoms', more than '100,000 armed men, every man of whom had the blood of Oliver Cromwell in his veins'. Yet only 300 of the 6000 Orangemen in Belfast had the vote. He urged them 'to use their power for their own benefit, irrespective of whether any other class of their fellow countrymen reaped collateral advantages'.<sup>75</sup>

As the *Ulster Observer* noted, such a meeting was remarkable: the sole popular demonstration for an extended Irish franchise came from 'the most Conservative portion of our Conservative population', and was held not in Dublin or Cork, but 'in a town where its very utterance was regarded as an impossibility.' No one could have predicted that Belfast 'would take the initiative

in a movement calculated to enlist the sentiments of the nation on a national question.<sup>76</sup> This was not, in fact, as incongruous as it might seem: northern working class protestants (mostly presbyterian, although not exclusively so) had much to gain from the franchises being mooted in Britain. As the liberal *Banner of Ulster* fretted after the meeting, the power of the Orange Order ‘will be greatly increased when the Reform Bill takes effect.’<sup>77</sup> Moreover, as the member for County Londonderry, R. P. Dawson, pointed out, Scotland’s 3 million people were represented by 53 members, whereas Ulster’s 1.9 million had only 29. On that basis, the province should have about 40 seats, and he reminded the Commons that there were ‘several growing towns ... of some 7,000 to 10,000 inhabitants which were now wholly unrepresented.’<sup>78</sup> The protestant and conservative, but Dublin-based, *Evening Mail* reminded its readers that the result of applying the principles proposed for Scotland and England would be that a ‘transfer of power must be effected from South to North’. Both ‘justice and policy’ would necessitate ‘conceding additional representation to places with increasing population and commercial activity’.<sup>79</sup>

This prospect alarmed many Liberals and almost all catholics, but also many Irish Conservatives. This was especially true of those who were members of the embattled Church of Ireland, which included much of the party’s membership (overwhelmingly so in the south) and most of its leadership, including Lord Mayo.<sup>80</sup> Irish presbyterians and other dissenters rarely harboured tender feelings for the establishment.<sup>81</sup> This was noticed in Belfast: as a speaker at the Ulster Hall pointed out to the hissing crowd, many Irish Conservative MPs actively opposed [their government’s reform bill](#), including at least one of the city’s two members.<sup>82</sup>

The next day, Disraeli announced that nothing would be done until the following parliamentary session. His explanation was that, ‘owing to a foreign and external agency acting upon the sentiments of a morbid character in a portion of the population, there is in Ireland at the present

**Commented [CB5]:** There wasn’t yet an Irish bill, so there wasn’t one to oppose – but it was clear that they would oppose a bill when it appeared, or at least they were thought likely to.

moment a very general feeling of distrust and danger.<sup>83</sup> By this he meant ~~the~~ fenians, not ~~the~~ Orangemen. Irish reaction was predictable: the *Freeman's Journal* decried the chancellor's 'impudent pretence', while the *Dublin Evening Post* expressed its 'absolute amazement' and argued that Irish unrest was in fact the reason reform must go ahead.<sup>84</sup> The *Dublin Evening Mail*, by contrast, felt 'a sense of relief which we are perfectly sure all classes of the Irish public share.' Yet Disraeli did not make a particularly compelling argument: the fenians had been suppressed in early March, tensions were visibly easing and the government had continued until June to promise that a bill was imminent. What had changed?

The reason was obvious: backbench unrest was serious enough without adding an Irish rebellion. As The O'Donoghue put it in the Commons debate on the delay, Irish Tories were prepared to follow 'silently and obsequiously' so long as the subject was English or Scottish reform, 'but when they felt their own time coming ... they could no longer be kept within bounds.' Ireland could not be dealt with until English (and Scottish) reform had been settled. Until then, Irish Conservatives might plausibly threaten the government; after, Disraeli could brandish the prospect of reform being carried under a Liberal administration. The point was made when Gladstone declared that not only was an Irish bill necessary, it would necessarily be on the same terms as those offered to England.<sup>85</sup>

In the meantime, Mayo began to draw up a comprehensive reform. Liberals inevitably feared that his goal was 'the extinction so far as possible of the Liberal representation of Ireland.'<sup>86</sup> This was paranoia, but Mayo naturally drew on his detailed knowledge to craft a bill that was as helpful as possible to the Conservatives. His focus was consequently on the mechanics of registration, constituency boundaries and the distribution of seats. The franchise threshold was an issue, but a

secondary one; despite the hopes of many Irish Conservatives (particularly in the south), there was little doubt that the qualification would be reduced, at least in the boroughs.

The redistribution of seats was more contentious. There was widespread but not universal agreement that the only alternative to disenfranchising a number of very small boroughs was either to merge them, to expand their boundaries, to create entirely new groupings of adjacent towns, or to attempt some combination of these options. Each approach would free up seats for underrepresented areas. The Liberals had proposed limited amalgamations and boundary expansions in 1866, and the Dublin Liberal MP Jonathan Pim had given Mayo a similar but more extensive plan in late 1867.<sup>87</sup>

Grouping and reallocation gave the chief secretary some hope of Liberal support (necessary to navigating the Commons) while retaining control of the details. Mayo's papers contain extensive notes for several such schemes, which though undated were almost certainly created in late 1867 or early 1868. He agreed with Pim and many others about increasing the representation of Dublin, Cork and Belfast, and dividing County Cork into two ridings – the argument for the last was 'perfectly irresistible'.<sup>88</sup> But Mayo also contemplated allocating a third seat to counties Down, Tyrone and Tipperary. He noted that the four counties had on average one representative per 5625 electors (and 156,243 people) as against one per 2302 electors (and 66,970 people) in the other 28, and one member per £360,379 of rateable value compared to one per £150,799. Such a change seemed likely to ensure two or even three Conservative seats in already tory Down and Tyrone, and perhaps add a Conservative in previously Liberal or independent Tipperary. Depending where the six seats were found, Conservative representation might be preserved or even see a net gain.<sup>89</sup>

This would have set an important precedent: if a county could gain a seat based on population and wealth, without being divided into ridings, smaller or poorer counties could also lose seats. On what basis should Longford, with 2767 electors, have the same representation as Antrim, with 10,921?<sup>90</sup> This logic might appeal to some Irish Conservatives, especially in the north, as Longford returned two Liberals and Antrim two Conservatives, but the precedent was unlikely to entice British Tories. Problems also bedevilled the grouping of boroughs. Although commonplace in Scotland, this was described by the Irish Conservative James Whiteside as adding ‘one melancholy little town to another melancholy little town, and their union makes a still more melancholy state of things than did their separate existence’.<sup>91</sup> Pim had envisaged grouping a handful, but Mayo considered going much further. In one draft, Leinster would have 34 seats, with the 12 counties accounting for 24, Dublin city three, Drogheda, Dundalk, Kilkenny, and Wexford one each, and then three groups of towns each with one member. A number of smaller boroughs, such as Carlow and New Ross, would be subsumed into the larger groups. Ulster would see no addition to its 29 members, but Belfast would get its third seat, Londonderry, Newry, and Armagh would have one each, and there would be five groups, also with one each. Munster (27 seats) and Connaught (13) would have similar arrangements, except that Waterford and Limerick cities would continue to return two members while Cork city would get a third and the county would be divided into two ridings returning two members each. Galway city lost its second member (another Pim recommendation), which was allocated to a new grouping consisting of the towns of Ballina, Castlebar and Westport.<sup>92</sup> Grouping was logical, avoided disenfranchisement and opened an alluring vista for gerrymandering, but was also open to almost endless local and parliamentary complaints.

Mayo's plan finally appeared on 19 March 1868, [just a few days after Gladstone announced his intention to bring forward a motion to disestablish the Church of Ireland.](#)<sup>93</sup> [Although the scheme had first been presented to Cabinet in early February, it had proved contentious and the government decided to 'wait events a little before further considering the subject'.](#)<sup>94</sup> [Now there was no point in waiting.](#) Grouping was abandoned entirely as politically unworkable, but there would be two new members for County Cork and one each for Tyrone, Down and Tipperary. Dublin city would get an additional seat, but with the stipulation that [the third seat](#) would be reserved for the minority [thus guaranteeing Conservative representation in the capitol](#). Neither Belfast nor Cork city received an additional seat, but the Queen's University was enfranchised. Downpatrick, Dungannon, Bandon, Kinsale, Cashel and Portarlington were to be disenfranchised, costing the parties three seats each. A commission would be created to determine the boundaries of the boroughs, with the expectation that there would be substantial augmentations at the expense of the counties. The borough franchise was extended to those who occupied property above £4 in rateable value, and there would be a lodger franchise on the English model [of occupation for a year of premises worth at least £10.](#)<sup>95</sup> The county franchise was unchanged. The existing procedures and requirements for registration were also retained.

Irish reaction was [again](#) predictable. The *Freeman's Journal* grumbled that the lodger franchise mattered only in Dublin, worried about the expansion of the borough boundaries, was annoyed that Ireland did not receive more seats, and thought £4 'a trifle, for it adds less than ten thousand to the borough constituencies'.<sup>96</sup> The *Dublin Evening Post* was furious that the county franchise did not match that in England.<sup>97</sup> On the other hand, the establishment *Irish Times* accepted that the very small boroughs needed to go, worried that Mayo had effectively introduced household suffrage, but was consoled by his estimate of a mere 9,313 additional borough voters. On

balance, it thought, the bill was as good as could be expected.<sup>98</sup> Others were less sanguine: the liberal *Banner of Ulster*, for example, decried the £4 franchise as a gift to Orangemen who lacked ‘the intelligence and morality’ to be entrusted with the vote.<sup>99</sup> On the Conservative side, one of Mayo’s regular correspondents predicted that a £4 franchise would cost the party the Ulster seats of Armagh, Dungannon, Enniskillen, Lisburn, Londonderry, Newry and one seat in Belfast, as well as Bandon, Sligo and one seat in Dublin. If the county qualification was then reduced on amendment, he predicted that ‘Cardinal Cullen would carry all in Connaught – Munster – Leinster except Dublin & a good many in Ulster.’ He hoped that protestant radicals might hesitate to make the cardinal ‘a pocket owner of so many boroughs and counties.’ This would guarantee the return of numerous ‘repeal members’ and thus be ‘the great lever to separate the two countries’.<sup>100</sup>

But Mayo had been clever. His bill ~~stipulated that~~preserved the principle that the borough franchise ~~continue to be~~was tied directly to the proven payment of rates. In Ireland these became payable above £4 of rated value in most of the country and above £8 in the five largest cities, including Dublin and Belfast. Between £4 and £8 the rates were by custom usually split or paid entirely by the landlord.<sup>101</sup> There were two distinct stings: because Mayo ~~insisted~~maintained the requirement of~~a~~ *personal* payment, in most boroughs many newly enfranchised voters would have to choose between paying additional taxes and voting. In the five larger cities, by making occupiers or owners of property valued between £4 and £8 liable for the first time, Mayo could anticipate a substantial increase either in non-payment or non-registration. The national impact was unclear, but likely to favour the Conservatives. According to the head of the Irish poor law commission, in 1865 only 1061 borough voters (876 of them in Dublin) and 1293 county voters had been excluded on the grounds of non-payment.<sup>102</sup> Presumably the lower borough franchise

**Commented [RS6]:** Is this the same as “compound householding” in England? If so, this was a very important issue in the English debate, and would be a really interesting point of connection between the two. It was adopted in the English bill with the explicit intention of reducing the electorate. IT SEEMS TO BE A COUSIN, BUT NOT QUITE THE SAME THING. AS FAR AS I CAN TELL, IN ENGLAND COMPOUNDING MEANT THAT THE TENANT PAID THE RATES TO THE LANDLORD, WHO THEN FORWARDED THEM TO THE PARISH. IN IRELAND, THERE DOES NOT APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN A FORMAL ARRANGEMENT, BUT RATHER AN INFORMAL ONE: THE LANDLORD WAS LIABLE FOR THE RATES BUT WOULD PRESUMABLY FACTOR THAT INTO THE RENT HE CHARGED.



would increase that number. The Conservative election agent in small and competitive Carlow, for example, calculated that an above £4 franchise would add 83 voters, but ‘I know I can disqualify from 20 to 30 out of that, if personal payment of rates is imperative as I am quite aware that in the majority of cases those Houses are let for a week but less Taxes.’ With the Liberal advantage expected to be around 30 after the first registration, ‘we could still fight’.<sup>103</sup>

Mayo sought to further limit the impact of a widened franchise through two key clauses in the companion Registration Bill. The 32<sup>nd</sup> clause made it a misdemeanour to claim to be a lodger when already rated as an occupier, in order ‘to prevent occupiers who have not paid their rates from claiming as lodgers in the same house’.<sup>104</sup> The 33<sup>rd</sup> required that those registering as a lodger provide the revising barrister with positive evidence of their qualification. As the law stood, it was necessary to make a formal objection to each suspect claim, no matter how absurd. This placed an intolerable burden on the local Conservative apparatus in constituencies such as Dublin, where there were ‘seldom less than 3 claims preferred by each claimant’.<sup>105</sup> As Mayo wrote privately, without the two clauses ‘the expense of Revision in large cities will become so enormous, that no one will venture to undertake the responsibility.’<sup>106</sup> The creation of a new misdemeanour was rejected in Committee on the grounds that no such offence existed in England, but the Commons accepted that no one ‘duly’ rated as an occupier could register as a lodger. Liberal wariness of a too extensive franchise overcame a natural reluctance to aid Conservative election agents, and the 33<sup>rd</sup> clause passed with Irish support. Sir John Gray, for example, regaled the House with the story of a man who ‘claimed the vote in twenty counties’, got on the register in 18, ‘and voted in five’.<sup>107</sup> The cumulative effect of these restrictions is difficult to quantify, although Brian M. Walker has estimated that in 1874 some 21,000 people in the boroughs and 28,600 in the counties were qualified to vote but had not registered to do so.<sup>108</sup>

**IV**

Although the bill had finally appeared, it had taken too long. The passage of the English Reform Act and Gladstone's declaration for Irish disestablishment had made an early dissolution inevitable. Irish reform was widely agreed to be one of the issues that should be resolved ~~first~~ before the election, but there was little appetite for an extended debate. As the *Dublin Evening Post* noted in late May 1868, the Liberals did not want to do anything to delay parliament finishing its business.<sup>109</sup> The Conservatives on the other hand did not want to push too far, for fear that the Liberals would prefer entirely fresh legislation under Gladstone. This prospect terrified those Irish members already looking into the abyss of disestablishment.

The government consequently decided privately on 13 June to abandon the entire idea of redistribution.<sup>110</sup> Ireland's constituencies would remain ~~exactly~~ as they were. The necessity of this decision was revealed in the first substantive parliamentary debate two days later. Not knowing that redistribution had been abandoned, various speakers pointed out inconsistencies, including the apparently arbitrary (but in fact politically balanced) selection of the six boroughs marked for disenfranchisement. Some wanted only tiny Portarlington (106 electors) abolished and its seat handed to Kingstown. Pim wanted to augment the boroughs at the expense of the counties, while the Conservative General Francis Dunne of the Queen's County wanted to augment the counties at the expense of the boroughs. Sir Frederick Heygate of County Londonderry wanted more seats for Ulster. In all, more than 100 amendments were proposed.<sup>111</sup> Almost certainly prompted by the government, Joseph Warner Henley of Oxfordshire suggested that redistribution be left to a future parliament, because he saw 'no hope' of passage 'in a

reasonable period.’ The former Liberal chief secretary Chichester Fortescue agreed. He thought the proposed redistribution ‘objectionable’ and ‘utterly impossible to assent to’, and so better postponed. Mayo then made it official.<sup>112</sup>

Commented [RS7]: Footnote?

On other matters Mayo chose to fight, in particular over whether the borough threshold should be £4 or ‘above’ £4. He had specified the latter. The Liberal lawyer James Anthony Lawson of Portarlinton proposed that it should be £4 exactly. He pointed out that valuations were made in 10s increments, which meant the franchise would actually require a rating of at least £4 10s. He implied that this might tempt ‘Government valuers’ to consider the franchise in arriving at their valuations. Mayo responded that giving the vote to those occupying exactly £4 properties meant that they would have to pay rates for the first time. And because Lawson’s proposal would require a revision of how rates were collected nationally, and not just in parliamentary boroughs, some 39,000 people would become taxpayers but only 1931 of them voters, and then mostly in Dublin.<sup>113</sup> The amendment was narrowly defeated, by 188 votes to 177.<sup>114</sup> The government also saw off attempts to enfranchise the Queen’s University (183-173), abolish the freeman franchise entirely (155-109), lower the county franchise to £8 (241-205) and introduce the ballot (225-126).<sup>115</sup> Although the boundary commission was abandoned, Mayo secured approval to extend parliamentary boundaries to meet municipal ones in the five boroughs (Dublin, Belfast, Londonderry, Dundalk, and Athlone) where the latter had come to exceed the former. He also managed to preserve the requirement that rates be paid before a voter could be registered.

Although Disraeli delighted in having avoided ‘many difficulties & defeats’ to pass the bill ‘by a decided majority’, nobody was impressed by the final result.<sup>116</sup> Mayo had secured much less than he wanted, although he had at least maintained control. The Liberals obtained nothing, but had prevented much they considered mischievous. They also did not now have to do the job

themselves. Irish observers were less forgiving. The *Dublin Evening Mail*, for example, believed that the government could have counterbalanced the £4 ‘engine of Radicalism’ with redistribution, if only it had had the courage of its convictions.<sup>117</sup> By contrast, the *Dublin Evening Post* thought the ‘popular interest in Ireland suffered grave and unexpected loss during the progress of the mockery called the Irish Reform Bill’, and complained that the Liberals had not rallied to reduce the county franchise.<sup>118</sup> The reality was that franchise reform was never high on the Irish agenda outwith Belfast, and the imminent prospect of disestablishment crowded it out entirely.

But everybody was wrong: Mayo had significantly underestimated the impact on the borough electorate. In the 1865 general election, there had been 30,673 borough electors in Ireland. In 1868, there were 45,625, an increase of nearly 50%. Mayo had expected only 9,313 new electors but got 14,952. (Belfast alone accounted for 8753.) Some could be attributed to natural increase, but most were the direct result of the Reform Act.<sup>119</sup> The impact was even more significant at constituency level, where the increase was almost everywhere substantial and in some places exceptionally so. Belfast grew by an astonishing 256%, and several others by more than 50%. Only Limerick (1%) and Downpatrick (5%) saw less than double digit increases. Although growth was largest in Ulster (which more than doubled its borough electorate), it was not concentrated there.

**Table 1: Borough Voter Increase, 1865-1868**<sup>120</sup>

	Electors 1865	Electors 1868	% Increase
<b>Armagh</b>	409	603	47
<b>Athlone</b>	246	318	29
<b>Bandon</b>	231	295	28
<b>Belfast</b>	3415	12168	256
<b>Carlow</b>	255	352	38
<b>Carrickfergus</b>	1125	1290	15

Cashel	146	203	39
Clonmel	350	436	25
Coleraine	259	346	34
Cork	3143	3536	13
Downpatrick	230	241	5
Drogheda	581	726	25
Dublin	10666	12899	21
Dundalk	287	447	56
Dungannon	174	245	41
Dungarvan	257	311	21
Ennis	189	231	22
Enniskillen	264	341	29
Galway	1182	1381	17
Kilkenny	574	739	29
Kinsale	145	172	19
Limerick	2005	2032	1
Lisburn	313	469	50
Londonderry	876	1483	69
Mallow	171	208	22
New Ross	191	259	36
Newry	539	796	48
Portarlington	106	134	26
Sligo	379	520	37
Tralee	238	263	11
Waterford	1156	1383	20
Wexford	334	520	56
Youghal	237	278	17

## V

It is difficult to assess the immediate impact of the Reform Act, largely because the promise of disestablishment hardened partisan divisions. There was no chance of a reprise of the 1859 alliance of Catholics and Conservatives in the south, [despite the hopes of Mayo and Disraeli](#). Irish Anglicans were largely confirmed in their alliance with the Conservatives, despite the support for disestablishment offered by Irish Liberals such as Sir John Gray. It is unlikely to be coincidental that the Conservatives' sole gain (excepting corrupt Sligo) was James Anthony Lawson's tiny Portarlington. Although a ~~Liberal~~ and former [Liberal](#) office-holder, Lawson was a committed member of the Church of Ireland and unwilling to countenance disestablishment. Portarlington was competitive, Lawson having taken it from the ~~Tories~~ [Tories](#) in 1865 on a vote

of 46-35. In 1868, he lost 69-51. Whether Liberals punished him by abstaining (14 voters did) or by siding with his opponent is unclear but seems likely. Certainly if the bulk of the 28 souls enfranchised by the Act were protestant, it would make the borough (located in the Queen's County) unique outside Ulster. In most places, the additional voters simply augmented existing majorities. There were exceptions, particularly Dublin, where the large protestant population had regularly returned at least one Conservative. McSwiney, Cullen, and ~~Sir John~~ Gray consequently established the Central Franchise Association to ensure newly eligible catholics were registered to vote.<sup>121</sup> Yet outside of Ulster and a handful of southern seats, the £4 franchise gave little scope for inter-party advantage. A significant increase of humbler voters, however, could give an edge in *intra* party conflict, ~~or in the~~ It could also change the sort of candidates preferred by catholic and nationalist voters in the south and Conservative and protestant voters in the north. This is worth bearing in mind when considering the astonishing success of home rulers at the 1874 general election.

Ulster's politics were certainly ~~could be~~ disrupted by the advent of new voters. This was particularly true of Belfast, where an unholy alliance of opportunistic catholics and newly enfranchised protestants combined to return William Johnston, a notorious Orangeman who had been briefly imprisoned for leading a prohibited march. Johnston ran as a Conservative, but based his cross-community appeal on his enthusiasm for disestablishment.<sup>122</sup> Even with catholic support, he defeated the incumbent Conservative only because many of the newly enfranchised were ~~drawn from a~~ working-class presbyterian ~~sism that was out of~~ unsympathetic to sympathy ~~with~~ a Conservative elite with whom ~~it~~ they had little in common. But the changes did not simply aid Orange candidates. In Londonderry, Lord Claud Hamilton, a son of the newly created duke of Abercorn, lost his seat to the Liberal Richard Dowse. Dowse benefited from the £4

franchise raising the catholic proportion of the electorate from 24% to 38%—of the whole. Catholic voters were joined by a substantial number of liberal presbyterians who either voted for Dowse or did not vote at all.<sup>123</sup> In Newry, the Liberal William Kirk secured the support of 9 members of the Church of Ireland, 36 presbyterians and other protestants and 341 catholics, nearly one-third of whom (102) had been newly enfranchised. His incumbent opponent, the Anglican viscount Newry, received the support of only 83 new voters, 45 of whom were members of the Church of Ireland, 31 presbyterian or other protestant, and 7 catholic. Kirk's majority was seven.<sup>124</sup> Ulster's politics continued to evolve as its sectarian divisions hardened, but the Reform Act clearly had an influence there as elsewhere in Ireland. The reform of 1868 was not on the order of 1829, 1832, 1850, or 1884-85<sup>5</sup>, but it was rather more important than its reputation would suggest.

<sup>1</sup> Anthony Trollope, *Phineas Finn, The Irish Member*, edited by Jacques Berthoud (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999 [1992]), 6.

<sup>2</sup> See Colin Barr, 'Lord Acton's Irish Elections', *Historical Journal*, 51, 1 (2008), 87-114.

<sup>3</sup> The franchise was revised in 1884, and a substantial redistribution of seats followed in 1885.

<sup>4</sup> K. Theodore Hoppen, *Elections, Politics, and Society in Ireland, 1832-1885* (Oxford, 1984), 2; Stephen Farrell, 'Ireland', in David Fisher (ed.), *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1820-1832*, ed. David Fisher (8 vols, Cambridge, 2009), i, 147-216.

<sup>5</sup> Hoppen, *Elections*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Hoppen, *Elections*, 15.

<sup>7</sup> Hansard, *Commons Debates*, cxiii, cols 534, 552: 30 July 1850.

<sup>8</sup> See Robert Saunders, *Democracy and the vote in British politics* (Farnham, 2011), 219-20.

<sup>9</sup> Hoppen, *Elections*, 18.

<sup>10</sup> Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clvi, col. 2074: 1 March 1860.

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<sup>11</sup> Hoppen, *Elections*, 31.

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<sup>12</sup> Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clvi, col. 2074: 1 March 1860.

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<sup>13</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 28 December 1859.

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<sup>14</sup> See Jennifer O'Brien, 'Irish Public Opinion and the Risorgimento, 1859-60', *Irish Historical Studies*, 34 (2005),

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289-305.

<sup>15</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 1 March 1860.

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<sup>16</sup> Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clvi, col. 2074: 1 March 1860.

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<sup>17</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 29 March 1860; *Express*, 2 March 1860; *Express*, 11 March 1860.

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<sup>18</sup> Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clvi, cols. 2073-85: 1 March 1860. For a particularly egregious example of Whiteside's judicial bigotry, see Colin Barr, *The European Culture Wars in Ireland: The Callan Schools Affair, 1868-1881* (Dublin, 2010).

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<sup>19</sup> William Monsell to Lord Wodehouse, 28 March 1866, Bodleian Library, Kimberly papers, MSS. Eng. C. 4044 f.

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<sup>20</sup> A copy of the bill can be found in the Mayo papers at the National Library of Ireland, MS 43,866/8.

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<sup>21</sup> See Disraeli to Montagu Corry, 16 October 1866, *Benjamin Disraeli Letters* (currently 10 volumes, Toronto,

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<sup>22</sup> Hoppen, *Elections*, 274. For a direct echo of Hoppen, see James Loughlin, *The British Monarchy and Ireland, 1800 to the present* (Cambridge, 2007), 129.

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<sup>23</sup> The National Library of Ireland preserves the matchbook cover.

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<sup>24</sup> For the reform campaign in Britain, see the essay by Malcolm Chase in this volume.

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<sup>25</sup> Irish Reform League Minute Book [IRLMB], 7 and 13 November 1866, Trinity College Dublin [TCD], MS

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<sup>26</sup> George Howell to Connolly, 17 November 1866, Bishopsgate Institute [BI], Howell papers [HP],

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<sup>27</sup> Irish Reform League Minute Book [IRLMB], 7 and 13 November 1866, Trinity College Dublin [TCD], MS

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10,384.

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<sup>28</sup> The identification of 'Alderman Plunket' (as he is only ever described) as Patrick J. Plunket is conjectural, but

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seems secure. I am grateful to Prof. R. V. Comerford for suggesting the identification. [helping to identify Plunket.](#)

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<sup>29</sup> [The identification of 'Alderman Plunket' \(as he is only ever described\) as James Plunket is conjectural, but seems secure. I am grateful to Prof. R. V. Comerford for suggesting the identification.](#)

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<sup>30</sup> Cullen to McSwiney, 11 October 1864, Dublin Diocesan Archives [DDA], Cullen papers [CP], Letter Book [LB] 2, 177.

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<sup>31</sup> [Cullen to McSwiney, 24 December 1866, DDA/CP/40/3/46.](#)

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<sup>32</sup> [Cullen to McSwiney, 24 December 1866, DDA/CP/40/3/46.](#)

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<sup>33</sup> IRLMB, 13 November 1866, TCD/MS 10,384.

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<sup>34</sup> Bridget Hourican, 'O'Donoghue, Daniel', *The Dictionary of Irish Biography*, <http://dib.cambridge.org/home.do> accessed 13 January 2016.

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<sup>35</sup> For more on Cullen's fear of Irish nationalism, see Colin Barr, 'Paul Cullen, Italy, and the Irish Catholic Imagination', in *Nation/Nazione: Irish Nationalism and the Italian Risorgimento*, ed. Colin Barr, Michele Finelli and Anne O'Connor (Dublin, 2014).

<sup>36</sup> See R. V. Comerford, *The Fenians in Context: Irish Politics and Society, 1848-1882*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Dublin, 1998), 141.

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<sup>37</sup> Hoppen, *Elections*, 274.

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<sup>38</sup> 'Address of the executive council of the Irish Reform League to the people of Ireland' ['Address'], 27 November 1866, IRLMB, TCD/MS 10,384.

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<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Eugenio F. Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860-1880* (Cambridge, 1992), 258.

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<sup>40</sup> See Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, 259.

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<sup>41</sup> 'Address'.

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<sup>42</sup> Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment, and Reform*, 258.

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<sup>43</sup> Cullen to Tobias Kirby, 30 October 1866, Pontifical Irish College Rome Archives [PICRA], Kirby papers [KP], K-66-296.

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<sup>44</sup> Cullen to Manning, [December?] 1866, DDA/CP/LB 4, 313.

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<sup>45</sup> Cullen to McSwiney, 24 December 1866, DDA/CP/40/3/46.

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<sup>46</sup> IRLMB, 9 January 1867, TCD/MS 10,384.

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<sup>47</sup> [See Cullen to Kirby, 16 July 1865, PICRA/KP/K/65/157. Cullen had been sent to a Quaker school as a boy and always retained a certain affection for the Friends.](#)

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<sup>48</sup> The encounter was described in *The Tablet*, of 2 February 1867, quoting from the *Daily News*. ‘The Adullamites’ or ‘the Cave of Adullam’ was the derogatory name given by John Bright to the Liberal opponents of Russell’s reform bill in 1866. It was a reference to 1 Samuel 22:1-2: ‘David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave of Adullam ... And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him’.

<sup>49</sup> IRLMB, 29 January 1867, TCD/MS 10,384.

<sup>50</sup> IRLMB, 5 February 1867, TCD/MS 10,384.

<sup>51</sup> Cullen to Kirby, 12 March 1867, PICRA, KP/K/67/86.

<sup>52</sup> For example, *Dublin Evening Post*, 27 March 1867.

<sup>53</sup> IRLMB, 9 April 1867, TCD/MS 10,384.

<sup>54</sup> IRLMB, 7 October 1867, TCD/MS 10,384.

<sup>55</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 18 June 1867.

<sup>56</sup> IRLMB, 23 November 1866, TCD/MS 10,384.

<sup>57</sup> IRLMB, 6 June 1867, TCD/MS 10,384.

<sup>58</sup> IRLMB, 26 August 1867, TCD/MS 10,384.

<sup>59</sup> IRLMB, 14 October 1867, TCD/MS 10,384.

<sup>60</sup> See Barr, ‘Paul Cullen, Italy’.

<sup>61</sup> [The O’Donoghue to Howell, 28 October 1867, BI/HP/HOWELL/1/4/58](#); IRLMB, 4 November 1867, TCD MS 10,384.

<sup>62</sup> [Howell to Keevil, 10 October 1867, BI/HP/HOWELL/2/4/18](#).

<sup>63</sup> [Howell to Keevil, 19 December 1867, BI/HP/HOWELL/2/4/200](#).

<sup>64</sup> *The Tablet*, 11 January 1868.

<sup>65</sup> See ‘Irish Reform League/Redistribution of Seats’, [Bishopsgate Institute, Howell papers BI/HP/-HOWELL/11/2d/71](#).

<sup>66</sup> Comerford, *Fenians in Context*, 145.

<sup>67</sup> Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxvi, col. 818: 29 March 1867.

<sup>68</sup> *Dublin Evening Post*, 13 March 1867.

<sup>69</sup> *Irish Times*, 14 March 1867.

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<sup>70</sup> [Dublin Mail](#), 18 May 1867.

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<sup>71</sup> [The Nation](#), 8 June 1867.

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<sup>72</sup> [Freeman's Journal](#), 17 June 1867.

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<sup>73</sup> Gerald Hall, *Ulster Liberalism, 1778-1876* (Dublin, 2011), 200-4.

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<sup>74</sup> [Freeman's Journal](#), 17 June 1867.

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<sup>75</sup> [Freeman's Journal](#), 17 June 1867.

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<sup>76</sup> Reproduced in *The Freeman's Journal*, 24 June 1867.

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<sup>77</sup> [Banner of Ulster](#), 18 June 1867, quoted in Hall, *Ulster Liberalism*, 212.

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<sup>78</sup> Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxviii, col. 716: 28 June 1867.

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<sup>79</sup> [Dublin Evening Mail](#), 18 June 1867.

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<sup>80</sup> For the definitive account of Irish conservatism in the period, see Andrew Shields, *The Irish Conservative Party, 1852-1868: Land, Politics and Religion* (Dublin, 2007).

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<sup>81</sup> Hall, *Ulster Liberalism*, 220.

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<sup>82</sup> [Freeman's Journal](#), 17 June 1867.

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<sup>83</sup> See *The Times*, 18 June 1867.

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<sup>84</sup> [Freeman's Journal](#), 19 June 1867; [Dublin Evening Post](#), 18 June 1867.

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<sup>85</sup> For the entire debate, see Hansard, *Commons Debates*, clxxxviii, cols. 703-28: 28 June 1867.

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<sup>86</sup> [Dublin Evening Post](#), 13 March 1867.

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<sup>87</sup> See Pim to Mayo, 20 September 1867, NLI/MP/MS 43,866/1.

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<sup>88</sup> 'Cork', MS note in Mayo's hand, NLI/MP/MS 43,866/4.

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<sup>89</sup> 'Facts and Figures Electoral Statistics Ireland', MS notes, NLI/MP/MS 43,866/4.

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<sup>90</sup> At the 1865 general election.

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<sup>91</sup> Quoted by Sir Frederick Heygate, Hansard, *Commons Debates*, cxcii, col. 1575: 15 June 1868.

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<sup>92</sup> 'Proposed Plans Distribution of Seats Ireland', MS draft in Mayo's hand, NLI/MP/MS 43,866/4.

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<sup>93</sup> See Disraeli to Victoria, 17 March 1868, *Benjamin Disraeli Letters*, x. #4821.

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<sup>94</sup> Disraeli to Victoria, 11 February 1868, *Benjamin Disraeli Letters*, x. #4720.

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<sup>95</sup> The details were published in the *Irish Times* of 20 March 1868.

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<sup>96</sup> [Freeman's Journal](#), 20 March 1868.

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<sup>120</sup> Derived from Brian M. Walker (ed.), *Parliamentary Election Results in Ireland, 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978).

Belfast, Cork, Dublin, Galway, Limerick, and Waterford returned two members each.

<sup>121</sup> Sean Boylan and James Quinn, 'McSwiney, Peter Paul', *The Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

<sup>122</sup> Hall, *Ulster Liberalism*, 220-1.

<sup>123</sup> Hall, *Ulster Liberalism*, 225.

<sup>124</sup> Hall, *Ulster Liberalism*, 222-3.

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