

1 Beginnings: early life, career, and the Gaelic League

In 1909 Cathal Brugha wrote an article on the significance of the Irish language and the importance of the work of the Gaelic League in consolidating it.¹ Like many cultural revivalists in the early twentieth century, his reference point was Thomas Davis, the profoundly influential Young Irelander, whose writings had highlighted the vital connection between language and nationality. Fr Michael Hickey, a Gaelic League stalwart, expounded on this link in a well-known pamphlet: ‘the Irish language is the mind, the soul, the great bulwark, the most manifest expression of Irish nationality’.² Brugha was inspired by this credo and his deep commitment to the Irish language remained a constant throughout his foreshortened life. When Brugha was born in 1874, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland had existed for almost three-quarters of a century but in many ways the union was only partial. Although Ireland was relatively tranquil, demands for change in the domains of political status, land ownership, and cultural identity intensified in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Five months before Brugha’s birth, sixty Home Rulers were returned at the February 1874 general election with the political goal of restoring an autonomous Irish parliament. Subsequently, the demand for home rule dominated the Irish political landscape until a small band of revolutionaries, Brugha among them, sought a republic by force of arms in 1916. It was a hinge moment for the future of Ireland. As will be shown in this and the next chapter, Brugha’s embrace of the zeitgeist of projecting a distinctive cultural identity was the foundation on which his later republicanism was developed.

Brugha’s ancestors are believed to have originated in Picardy in northern France and may have been Huguenots (French Protestants of the Calvinist tradition). They moved to Cornwall around 1600. Their original name was probably de Burgo which was anglicized to Burgess. In the mid-seventeenth century, the family settled in the Borris area of County Carlow where they purchased land and became fully absorbed in the Irish way of life. The Burgesses were not landlords but craftsmen who retained their Protestantism.³ Three Burgess brothers – Edward, Richard and William – moved to Dublin in the early nineteenth century. Edward and

¹ Cathal Brugha, ‘Connradh na Gaedhilge’, *Leabhar na hÉireann/The Irish yearbook* (Dublin, 1909), 460–9.

² Michael Hickey, *The Irish language movement, its genesis, growth and progress*, Gaelic League pamphlet no. 29 (Dublin, 1902).

³ Ó Dochartaigh, *Cathal Brugha*, p. 14.

Richard became tobacconists with premises at 19 St Mary's Abbey off Capel Street. William (Brugha's grandfather) lived at 1 Salisbury Place off Richmond Road in Drumcondra and in 1846 was listed as a furniture broker on Liffey Street.⁴ He and his wife Roseanne had five children and their eldest son, Thomas, born in 1827, was Brugha's father. Some accounts have erroneously suggested that Brugha was the son of a Yorkshireman, which he patently was not.⁵ On 17 May 1860 Thomas married Marianne⁶ Flynn from 31 Boot Lane.⁷ A Roman Catholic, she was the eldest child of Edward Flynn, a partner in an auctioneering firm in Dublin's fish market. Their fourteen children – ten girls and four boys – were all raised as Roman Catholic (and are named in the accompanying note).⁸ Charles William St John Burgess, their tenth child and our protagonist, was born on 18 July 1874 at 13 Richmond Avenue, Dublin. According to Ó Dochartaigh, after the birth of six girls in a row Thomas Burgess celebrated the boy's arrival with champagne for himself and the attending doctor.⁹ Charlie Burgess, as he was known in his youth, did not become Cathal Brugha until the early years of the twentieth century.

Following somewhat in his father's footsteps, in 1861 Thomas Burgess began to buy and sell furniture at 6 St Mary's Abbey in Dublin before announcing in the press in August of that year that he was moving his business to Great Strand Street.¹⁰ By September 1862 he was trading at 6 Lower Ormond Quay, advertising the sale of household furniture at competitive prices, and also his desire to purchase similar stock from the public.¹¹ Burgess sourced goods from auctions around Ireland and expanded his repertoire to include fine art, bronzes, statuary, carved oak, rosewood and mahogany furniture, and rugs.¹² A press advertisement in October 1864 announced that the pictures offered for sale by Burgess included works from the collections of the late Arthur Guinness (the brewer), Christopher Coppinger (a distinguished Dublin lawyer), and Arthur Cane (a prominent civil servant).¹³ In addition to a substantial

⁴ Joe Mathew's genealogical research on the Burgess family has corrected a widely published inaccuracy that Brugha's grandfather was Richard Burgess rather than William (d. 18 Sept. 1883) (in possession of Cathal MacSwiney Brugha); *Slater's National Commercial Directory of Ireland 1846*, 201.

⁵ Examples include Terence de Vere White, *Kevin O'Higgins* (London, 1948), p. 52; Caufield, *Easter Rebellion*, p. 51; Andrew Boyle, *The riddle of Erskine Childers* (London, 1977), p. 257; Thomas Jones, *Whitehall diary, vol. III: Ireland 1918–1925*, ed. Keith Middlemas (London, 1971), p. 249.

⁶ Given as 'Maryanne' in several accounts but spelled 'Marianne' on the 1901 census and in her husband's probate listing.

⁷ St Michan's parish, Dublin city; Archdiocese of Dublin. Marriages (NLI, Microfilm 08833/03).

⁸ They were in order of birth: Elizabeth (1860), Edward (1862), Thomas (1863), Lucy Agnes (1865), Mary (1866), Frances (1868), Madeline (1869), Caroline, Pauline, Charles (1874), Adelaide (Ada), Eveleen, Alfred (1878) and Angela (1882). Birth certificate information could not be established in all cases.

⁹ Ó Dochartaigh, *Cathal Brugha*, p. 16.

¹⁰ *Thom's Directory 1860, 1864; Dublin Evening News*, 22 Aug. 1861.

¹¹ *Dublin Weekly Nation*, 13 Sept. 1862.

¹² *Tuam Herald*, 24 Jan. 1863.

¹³ *Dublin Daily Express*, 13 Oct. 1864.

showroom on Ormond Quay, from where he also operated as an upholsterer and undertaker, Burgess had a shop at 23 Nassau Street. Until 1867, he regularly placed classified advertisements in the press. Some were addressed to the ‘Nobility, Gentry and Parties requiring superior fashionable and antique furniture’ and promised the ‘most select and grandest collection on sale in the city’.¹⁴ They were indicative of a thriving business.

In November 1867 John Littledale & Co. auctioneers were instructed to dispose of Burgess’s stock and his interest in the lease at Ormond Quay on which he had spent £1,100 ‘in substantial and ornamental improvements and rendering it most suitable for carrying on any first class business’.¹⁵ This was in preparation for relocating his family to London where he had taken a stake in a large furniture wholesale business. In 1870 Burgess was listed in *Kelly’s London Directory* as ‘an antique furniture dealer’ at 72 Newman Street, off Oxford Street, where several antique and curiosity businesses were located.¹⁶ A London press advertisement in September 1870 indicated his willingness to buy furniture stock for ready money.¹⁷ The 1871 census of England, Wales and Scotland recorded Burgess, his wife and six children living at 72 Newman Street; they subsequently moved to No. 78.¹⁸ On Marianne’s insistence, all their children were born in Ireland. By 1874 the Burgess family had returned to Dublin and lived at 13 Richmond Avenue until they moved to a more substantial house at 29 North Frederick Street three years later. Burgess maintained both his London business and his premises on Nassau Street and was listed in *Thom’s Directory* as an importer and valuer of works of art and decorative furniture.¹⁹ During the 1880s, however, he appears to have concentrated his business efforts in Britain. Burgess may have experienced financial difficulties in 1881 when there was a hurried disposal of his Dublin premises on Nassau Street, although stores at 4 Great Strand Street were retained until the end of his life.²⁰ The English census in 1881 listed him as a cabinetmaker living in Cheltenham along with his older sons, Edward and Thomas.²¹

In the late 1880s Burgess experienced financial ruin. In August 1887 he sent a shipment of pictures, furniture and statuary worth £6,100 (some accounts suggest £10,000) to Sydney

¹⁴ Classified advertisements by Thomas Burgess in *IT*, 11 May 1863 and 15 July 1864.

¹⁵ *Freeman’s Journal* (hereafter *FJ*), 28 Nov. 1867.

¹⁶ Mark Westgarth, ‘A biographical dictionary of nineteenth century antique and curiosity dealers’, *Regional Furniture*, 23 (2009), 76.

¹⁷ *London Evening Standard*, 10 Sept. 1870.

¹⁸ Census of England, Wales & Scotland, 1871; *Irishman*, 20 Dec. 1873.

¹⁹ *Thom’s Directory 1874, 1877*.

²⁰ *IT*, 21 Apr. 1881; *Thom’s Directory 1881, 1899*.

²¹ Census of England, Wales & Scotland, 1881.

for auction.²² The consignment was accompanied aboard the SS *Austral* by Edward and Thomas junior. In February 1889 Burgess senior told a bankruptcy court in Sydney that Edward, who was given £80 in cash for expenses, was in sole charge and had instructions to sell the goods and to account for the money realized to him. Nothing more was heard from Edward, who, on arrival in Sydney, placed the goods in the hands of James R. Lawson, an auctioneer. Apparently unknown to Burgess senior, a sale took place on 5 December 1887 that realized £2,900; there were two further sales in August and September 1888 that yielded £2,153. None of the proceeds were remitted to Burgess senior. Instead, they were placed in a trust account in Lawson's name on which Edward drew freely for various expenses.²³ Thomas junior took no active part in the business, but while Edward was in Melbourne for a few months he sold a number of articles and spent the money. In consequence, Thomas junior was sent back to England by Edward. Only then did Burgess senior learn of what had transpired. As one Australian headline put it, he had been 'ruined by his sons in Australia'.²⁴ On 16 April 1888 he sequestered his estate in Ireland for the benefit of his creditors and was adjudged bankrupt.²⁵ Burgess told the bankruptcy hearing in Sydney that the shock was so great that his wife became seriously ill.²⁶ It also made a searing impression on 14-year-old Brugha, who as an adult developed an abhorrence, as we will see in chapters 2 and 5, of financial impropriety and was sometimes accused of parsimony in both his business and political life. The cost of the trip to Australia and legal representation there further increased Burgess's debts.²⁷ The blow of having to sell the family home at 29 North Frederick Street and their furniture was softened somewhat by Marianne possessing her own property. She had been bequeathed 12, 13 & 14 Great Charles Street by her father. She had gifted No. 14 to her eldest daughter Elizabeth as a wedding present two years earlier. Marianne moved the family into No. 13.²⁸ Brugha's older brothers never returned to Ireland. Thomas went back to Australia from England and worked variously as a miner, labourer, and station hand. From 1899 until 1940, he lived a pauperized and eccentric existence in a rock shelter on Balmoral Beach in Sydney. Known as 'Dublin Tom', he died in 1943 at the age of seventy-nine.²⁹ Edward (by now known as Éamonn) moved to South Africa and died in Johannesburg in 1952.

²² Ó Dochartaigh suggests that Burgess sought to establish a business in Melbourne, but this is not borne out by the bankruptcy proceedings in Sydney.

²³ *Evening News*, 22 Feb. 1889. This was a Sydney newspaper.

²⁴ *Advocate*, 23 Feb. 1889.

²⁵ *IT*, 23 Apr. 1888; *London Evening Standard*, 7 July 1888.

²⁶ *Evening News*, 22 Feb. 1889.

²⁷ *Cork Constitution*, 11 Sept. 1889.

²⁸ Ó Dochartaigh, *Cathal Brugha*, p. 16.

²⁹ Joan Lawrence, *A pictorial history: Lavender Bay to the spit* (Alexandria, NSW, 1999), p. 106.

The deterioration in the family's financial situation had significant implications for the younger children's education. Brugha first attended the Colmcille Schools on Dominick Street near his North Frederick Street home. In 1888 he and Alfred, his younger brother by four years, were pupils in Belvedere College. Their enrolment lasted only two years due no doubt to the bankruptcy that also ended the boarding school education of Brugha's sisters. Brugha was regarded as a good all-round pupil with a particular interest in Irish history. He provided some home-schooling for his sisters but according to Eveleen taught them nothing but Irish history.³⁰

Although short in stature, Brugha, who was strong and wiry, excelled in a wide variety of sports. An expert swimmer by a young age, he won several prizes as a member of the Pembroke swimming club and the Half Moon Club on Dublin's South Wall (which sponsored a trophy in his honour after his death).³¹ As a 17-year-old, Brugha swam from Howth pier to Ireland's Eye.³² He played rugby at half back for Belvedere, Clontarf and Santry. While at Belvedere he took up cricket and eventually became a bowler for Pembroke Cricket Club, earning the accolade of 'the best fast bowler in Leinster'.³³ Brugha had a particular talent for gymnastics and was a member of the National Club. In the mid-1890s he transferred to Dublin Gymnasium (also known as City of Dublin) and enjoyed considerable success. He was a member of the team that defeated Dawson Street at the Earlsfort Terrace skating rink in April 1897 to win the Irish Shield. The *Freeman's Journal* reported how Brugha's side prevailed by thirteen points in 'a great contest' before a large crowd with Charles Burgess earning the second-highest number of points for his team.³⁴ Two years later and again at Earlsfort Terrace, Brugha was one of an eight-member Gymnasium team that triumphed over a highly rated team from Dundee. He was the second-highest points scorer for his team in the rings event and third in the rope competition.³⁵ In April 1899 an inaugural international gymnastics competition was held in Dublin with an amalgamated England and Wales team competing against teams from Scotland and Ireland. Brugha was on the Irish team that gave 'an indifferent display' to come third on 496 points; the victorious Scots scored 655.³⁶ He was back to winning ways with Dublin Gymnasium who defeated the Birmingham Athletic Institute, one of the foremost clubs in England, in the first round of the Adams Shield in March 1901.³⁷ J.J. O'Kelly described

³⁰ Ó Dochartaigh, *Cathal Brugha*, p. 17.

³¹ Austin Ó Briain to *IT*, 7 Aug. 2020.

³² *Saturday Herald*, 17 Apr. 1897; Frank Bouchier-Hayes, 'An Irishman's Diary', *IT*, 18 Aug. 2008.

³³ *IP*, 26 May 1939.

³⁴ *FJ*, 18 Apr. 1897.

³⁵ *Evening Herald*, 2 Jan. 1899.

³⁶ *Belfast Newsletter*, 4 Apr. 1899; *Evening Herald*, 3 and 4 Apr. 1899.

³⁷ *Belfast Newsletter*, 11 Mar. 1901.

Brugha in gushing terms as ‘amongst the best all round athletes and gymnasts of his weight in Ireland at the close of the last [nineteenth] century’.³⁸ He was also a fine boxer, a keen cyclist, and played Gaelic football and hurling.

After his stint in Belvedere College, Brugha studied medicine for two years.³⁹ However, family circumstances militated against a medical career. His father’s health declined following his bankruptcy and efforts to revive his business failed. Aged seventy-two, Thomas Burgess died of heart failure on 6 April 1899 at 12 Glenarm Avenue, Drumcondra; he was buried in Glasnevin cemetery.⁴⁰ As Alfred Burgess noted, his father was by then a comparatively poor man and his estate, which was left to Marianne, was valued at just £20.⁴¹ Brugha became the family’s chief breadwinner. He initially secured employment in London, but his stay there was short as he disliked his voluntary exile.⁴² On returning to Dublin he secured a position in 1891 as a clerk with Hayes & Finch, a Liverpool company founded in 1882 that manufactured and supplied church candles and other ecclesiastical goods. Its Dublin office was at 3 Eustace Street. Brugha’s abilities were soon recognized and he was promoted to travelling salesman, a position that required travel throughout Ireland.⁴³ His occupation was given as commercial traveller on the 1901 census. At that time, he lived at 1 Ardilaun Terrace, beside Croke Park, with his mother, his aunt Lucy Flynn, his mother’s nephew, a boarder, his brother Alfred, who was a clerk in Dublin Corporation, and four unmarried sisters: Mary, a governess; Pauline and Adelaide described as having no occupation; and Eveleen, a shop assistant.⁴⁴ Sometime after this, Brugha took up residence at 36 Cabra Road and his mother is recorded as dying there after ‘a lingering illness’ on 7 March 1907.⁴⁵ Adelaide and Alfred also lived there as lodgers.⁴⁶ Tomás Ó Dochartaigh, who was Brugha’s nephew, draws attention to the familial support that Brugha provided. At one point when Ó Dochartaigh’s parents and three siblings could find no

³⁸ *Waterford News and Star*, 24 Aug. 1923.

³⁹ Account by John McCann in *IP*, 21 Jan. 1952; Fidelma Brugha to Professor Éamon de Valera, 9 May 1971 (University College Dublin Archives (hereafter UCDA), Éamon de Valera papers, P150/3618) (Professor de Valera was Éamon de Valera’s third child. He became professor of obstetrics and gynaecology at UCD in 1960); R.F. Foster, *Vivid faces: the revolutionary generation in Ireland 1890–1923* (London, 2014), pp 67–8.

⁴⁰ Thomas Burgess death certificate, 11 Apr. 1899; *FJ*, 8 Apr. 1899.

⁴¹ Alfred Burgess (BMH WS 1,634, p. 1); Will of Thomas Burgess 1899, Ireland Calendar of Wills and Administrations, 1858–1920 (www.FamilySearch.org).

⁴² *IP*, 21 Jan. 1952.

⁴³ Ó Dochartaigh, *Cathal Brugha*, p. 18; Ó Cillín, ‘Cathal Brugha’, 141.

⁴⁴ Census of Ireland 1901:

http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Dublin/Rotunda/Ardilaun_Terrace/1330115/

⁴⁵ *Irish Independent* (hereafter *II*), 9 Mar. 1907.

⁴⁶ Dublin City Public Libraries and Archive, Electoral Rolls, 1908–1915.

suitable accommodation, Brugha took them all to live with him. Before Brugha got married he bought a small shop and a house for his sisters, Madeline and Adelaide.⁴⁷

Brugha's pursuits were not confined to the sporting realm. He had a keen interest in literature, was a good linguist, and 'a pleasing singer' who was fond of music, particularly classical.⁴⁸ Known for his dapper and well-groomed appearance (see plate 1), russet hair, sallow skin, a broad forehead, penetrating blue eyes and tight lips dominated his features. Brugha's reticent and generally aloof disposition often obscured a more genial inclination. At times characterized as intense and austere, some of his closer acquaintances noted a charm of manner. He did not smoke, drink or swear. He was devout and attended Mass and prayed the rosary daily.⁴⁹ A revealing portrait was sketched by Robert Barton who suggested that Brugha's taut mouth and long upper lip created the impression of 'a hard and stubborn character, unyielding to persuasion or force. His smile however revealed an inner self that made an instant appeal'.⁵⁰ Brugha developed a reputation as a pugnacious opponent when opinions were divided. For Barton, he 'made up in willpower ... for what he lacked in argumentative acumen'.⁵¹

A pivotal moment of awakening in Brugha's life occurred in 1899 when he was introduced to the Gaelic League by John Carrig, a friend of his brother Alfred.⁵² Founded in July 1893 by Eoin MacNeill and Douglas Hyde 'for the sole purpose of keeping the Irish language spoken in Ireland', the League was the most influential of the various organizations devoted to the preservation or revival of the Irish language in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Through the language it was hoped to appeal to people of all political and religious persuasions. The League sought to revive Irish as a spoken and literary language by organizing language classes, publishing existing Irish literature, and promoting new literary output. Hyde, the organization's most important public figure, was the first president and retained that position until 1915. He was the Sligo-born son of a Church of Ireland rector who grew up in Roscommon and was educated in Trinity College. MacNeill was born in County Antrim and served as first vice-president of the League. He was also the inaugural editor of *An Claidheamh Soluis*, the League's newspaper, which provided an outlet for new verse and prose.

⁴⁷ Ó Dochartaigh, *Cathal Brugha*, p. 19.

⁴⁸ *Waterford News and Star*, 24 Aug. 1923.

⁴⁹ *United Irishman*, 17 Sept. 1932; Quinn, 'Brugha, Cathal', *DIB*; Brian Dillon Branch Sinn Féin, *Cathal Brugha*, (Cork, 1955), p. 4.

⁵⁰ Robert Barton to Ruairí Brugha, 6 May 1965 (in possession of Cathal MacSwiney Brugha).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Alfred Burgess (BMH WS 1,634, p. 2).

The Gaelic League sought mass membership and was enthusiastically received. By 1908, according to the League's own figures, there were an estimated 671 branches in Ireland.⁵³ They were affiliated to the governing council or central executive of the League known as the *coiste gnótha*. The League was involved in a number of high-profile campaigns. It lobbied for the rights of Irish speakers to give testimony in court in 1897; the Dublin branches secured Irish as a requirement for employment in Dublin Corporation; in 1899 the League opposed attempts to have Irish removed from the school syllabus for the intermediate examination; and in 1908–9, following the establishment of the National University of Ireland (NUI), it campaigned to have Irish made a compulsory matriculation subject. Fittingly, Hyde became the first professor of modern Irish at University College Dublin from 1908 until 1932, and MacNeill became the first professor of Early and Medieval Irish History there. In addition to cultural revival, the League served social needs for the urban lower middle classes of English-speaking Ireland. Dunleavy and Dunleavy argue that it had 'a faddish attraction for hundreds of young men and women drawn to it more for its collateral social activities than for its language classes'.⁵⁴

Brugha's interest in the Irish language and in Gaelic culture generally became intense. He increased his fluency by regularly attending classes in Parnell Square, where he also participated in *céilí*-dancing, singing, lectures and debate. Brugha took part in the Fleming Companionship, inaugurated in 1901 in Cork to continue the work of John Fleming (*Seán Pléimeann*) to systematize the study of the language. He passed examinations in 1902 with honours and won second prize in the 'Hall of Readers' category, a feat repeated in 1903.⁵⁵ Brugha was one of several Irish-speakers and people interested in Irish-Ireland ideas who met informally in *An Stad* on North Frederick Street, a shop and guesthouse owned by Charles McGarvey. Patrons included Arthur Griffith, The O'Rahilly, John MacBride, Oliver St John Gogarty and James Joyce.⁵⁶ In 1906 Brugha entered six competitions in *Oireachtas na Gaeilge*, winning five first places in the language competition.⁵⁷ When his work as a salesman brought him to various parts of the country, he sought out and attended local Gaelic League classes and functions. In this way, Brugha became well known in League circles across Ireland. Peadar Ó

⁵³ Timothy G. McMahon, *Grand opportunity: the Gaelic revival and Irish society, 1893–1910* (New York, 2008), p. 88.

⁵⁴ J.E. Dunleavy & G. W. Dunleavy, *Douglas Hyde: a maker of modern Ireland* (Berkeley, 1991), p. 202.

⁵⁵ *FJ*, 10 June 1902, 20 Sept. 1902; *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 20 Sept. 1902, 4 Oct. 1902; *Kerry Sentinel*, 28 Oct. 1903.

⁵⁶ Brian P. Murphy, *The Catholic Bulletin and republican Ireland with special reference to J.J. O'Kelly (Sceilg)* (Belfast, 2005), p. 47; <https://comeheretome.com/2015/03/26/an-stad-north-frederick-street/>.

⁵⁷ Joseph Doolan, 'Cathal Brugha', lecture given in O'Donovan Rossa hall, Rathmines, 24 Feb. 1953.

hAnnracháin, a Gaelic League organizer in Munster, recalled meeting Brughha one day in his hometown of Skibbereen when Brughha emerged from the local post office indignant that the Irish form of his name was not accepted on a postal order.⁵⁸ Brughha developed a preference for Munster Irish, especially the dialect of Gaeltacht na nDéise in west Waterford, a place with which he developed a personal and enduring bond. When on business in Waterford city, he regularly stayed at the Metropole Hotel on Bridge Street. He used these occasions to visit Martin Coleman, a native of Kill parish then in his eighties who was regarded as ‘the finest Irish speaker and the greatest repository of Gaelic lore in prose, verse, proverb, prayer and every class of folklore’ in the area.⁵⁹ Brughha often stayed with him until late into the night conversing in Irish and taking notes on Irish sayings and local history. When business took him to Dungarvan, he cycled to Ring and immersed himself in the company of local Irish-speakers of all ages. Brughha quickly acquired both fluency and a perfect blas (accent) such that he could pass as a native speaker.⁶⁰ By 1910, Brughha, along with Piaras Béaslaí, the journalist, member of the Gaelic League and later revolutionary, regularly attended the League’s summer college, Coláiste na Mumhan at Ballingearry in the Muskerry Gaeltacht of west Cork, as both a student and a teacher of Irish.⁶¹

Alfred Burgess located the origins of Brughha’s republican or separatist outlook as springing from the family’s nationalist political background, which was further developed through his involvement in the Gaelic League.⁶² Politically, Thomas Burgess senior was an ardent supporter of Charles Parnell, the Irish Party leader. There are some suggestions that he may have been a Fenian.⁶³ In 1873 the *Irishman* recorded that he contributed £1 to a national testimonial for John Mitchel, the militant journalist, Irish nationalist and defender of slavery in the US, who had fallen into poverty and poor health.⁶⁴ Through his association with the Gaelic League, Charlie Burgess gaelicized his name to Cathal Brughha. Reports in *An Claidheamh Soluis* and elsewhere indicate that this was a gradual process. The English version of Brughha’s name appeared in the early years of the twentieth century, then for a time he was Cathal Burgess, then variously Cathal Mac Burgéasaigh, Buirghéis and Buirréas before settling on Brughha. Whereas he recorded his name in English in the 1901 census, he was the only male ‘Brughha’ in Ireland in the 1911 census and for good measure he entered the surnames of his

⁵⁸ Peadar Ó hAnnracháin, *Fé bhrat an Chonnartha* (Dublin, 1944), pp 99–100.

⁵⁹ *Waterford News and Star*, 8 Jan. 1943.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1 Feb. 1924.

⁶¹ Foster, *Vivid faces*, p. 51.

⁶² Alfred Burgess (BMH WS 1,634, p. 1).

⁶³ Ó Cillín, ‘Cathal Brughha’, 141.

⁶⁴ *Irishman*, 20 Dec. 1873.

sisters Ada (Adelaide) and Madeline as Brugha also.⁶⁵ In addition, he concentrated more intently on native games such as handball, hurling and Gaelic football rather than ‘Saxon’ sports.⁶⁶ Piaras Béaslaí suggested that the League exerted a ‘considerable influence’ on the outlook of Brugha and others.⁶⁷ This was also the subject of reflection by fellow revolutionary and future president of Ireland Seán T. O’Kelly:

When he knew Cathal Brugha first, almost a quarter of a century ago, he was just a typical Dublin youth, a little more serious minded than the average, full of the joys of living ... Suddenly he, like Padraic Pearse, Eamon Ceannt, Joseph Plunkett, Tom MacDonagh, and thousands of others were touched by the fire of Gaelic enthusiasm enkindled through the foundation of the Gaelic League.⁶⁸

Roy Foster points out that radical nationalism seemed to thrive among medical students. As well as Brugha, other advanced nationalist medical students included Ernie O’Malley, James Ryan, Patrick McCartan, Daniel T. Sheehan, Eimar O’Duffy, Kathleen Lynn, Dorothy Stopford and Brigid Lyons Thornton.⁶⁹

Brugha was born at a time of national reawakening. As with many others, membership of the Gaelic League, and of the Keating branch in particular, changed the whole pattern of his life. This branch was founded in 1901 by four Munster men: J.J. O’Kelly (‘Sceilg’), a writer, teacher and journalist from Valentia Island; Shan Ó Cuív, a journalist and writer from Macroom; Tadhg Ó Donnchadha (‘Torna’), future professor of Irish at University College Cork; and Risteard Ó Foghludha (‘Fiachra Éilgeach’), a teacher and journalist from east Cork. The branch was notable for the number of female members and its vigorous promotion of the Munster rather than the Connacht dialect. Its meeting room was first in Parnell Square and later at 2 North Frederick Street. Brugha was a member of the Keating branch from its inception.⁷⁰ Keatingites were regular patrons of An Stad (discussed above). Over time, the Keating branch

⁶⁵ Census of Ireland, 1911.

⁶⁶ Quinn, ‘Brugha, Cathal’, *DIB*; Senia Pašeta, *Before the revolution* (Cork, 1999), p. 44.

⁶⁷ Piaras Béaslaí, ‘Giants of the Gaelic revival movement – a veteran remembers’, *II*, 17 May 1957. On this see Regina Uí Chollatáin, ‘Ó Chéitinn go Conradh: the revivalists and the 1916 Rising’, *Studies in Arts and Humanities*, 2:1 (2016), 52–66.

⁶⁸ *II*, 7 July 1924.

⁶⁹ Foster, *Vivid faces*, pp 67–8.

⁷⁰ Brian P. Murphy’s entry on Brugha in the *Oxford dictionary of national biography* states that he joined in 1906 but several other sources, including reports in *An Claidheamh Soluis* suggest an earlier admission to the Keating branch.

developed a more advanced nationalist position than the coiste gnótha (central executive of the Gaelic League) and became identified with separatism.⁷¹

The Keating branch was regularly at loggerheads with the coiste gnótha. Relations became strained in 1903 when Patrick Pearse rather than J.J. O’Kelly was selected as editor of *An Claidheamh Soluis*. They were soured further when members of the coiste gnótha, including Hyde, were involved in the dismissal of O’Kelly from the *Freeman’s Journal*. A third controversy arose in 1908 around the payment of special fees for the teaching of Irish. This played out in bitter differences of opinion between Pearse and others in the pages of *An Claidheamh Soluis*. He accused the Keating branch of being ‘moral thugs’, ‘cranks’, ‘traitors’, and the ‘wrecker party’.⁷² Pearse maintained that if the teaching of the national language was the first duty of the teacher, a special payment was unnecessary. Béaslaí, a member of the coiste gnótha and the Keating branch, accused Pearse of acting without sanction. Brugha wrote an angry letter in which he argued that teachers needed to be induced not compelled. This was published by Pearse with a comment that the ‘views of Gaels who disagree with us are just as sure of a place in our columns’.⁷³ Pearse was regularly needled by Fr Patrick Dinneen, the Irish language lexicographer and president of the Keating branch since 1904, who referred to him as ‘Pee Haitch’ and criticized his literary outputs and editorship of *An Claidheamh Soluis*.⁷⁴ The controversy around the payment of special fees was not the first sharp difference of opinion between Brugha and Pearse. In 1907 the Liberal government introduced the Irish Council bill which proposed to devolve to a 107-member council some administrative powers in areas such as education, agriculture and local government. Famously, it was described by the prime minister as ‘a little, modest, shy humble effort to give administrative powers to the Irish people’. Nationalist Ireland condemned it as an inadequate substitute for home rule. J.J. O’Kelly recalled that when Pearse wrote an article strongly supporting the Irish Council bill Brugha ‘felt very sore, and took him severely to task for it’.⁷⁵ When Dinneen resigned the presidency of the Keating branch in 1908, he was succeeded by Brugha who retained the

⁷¹ Brian P. Murphy, ‘O’Kelly, John Joseph (‘Sceilg’; Ua Ceallaigh, Seán)’, *DIB*; Patrick, Maume, *The long gestation: Irish nationalist life, 1891–1918* (Dublin, 1999), p. 27.

⁷² Murphy, ‘O’Kelly, John Joseph (‘Sceilg’; Ua Ceallaigh, Seán)’, *DIB*; Brian P. Murphy, *Patrick Pearse and the lost republican ideal* (Dublin, 1991), p. 34.

⁷³ On this controversy see Joost Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse: the making of a revolutionary* (Basingstoke, 2010), p. 127.

⁷⁴ Eoin Mac Cárthaigh, ‘Dinneen, Patrick Stephen’, *DIB*.

⁷⁵ J.J. (Sceilg) O’Kelly (BMH, WS 384, p. 16).

position until his death in 1922.⁷⁶ As the next chapter will discuss, in 1908 Brugha also joined the IRB with which the Keating branch became synonymous.

It was inevitable that the politically neutral stance of the Gaelic League, championed by Hyde, would become unsustainable during the 1910s as the prospect of Irish home rule appeared to be within the grasp of the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) at Westminster. Sections of the League regarded the organization as part of a broader preparation for a home rule state.⁷⁷ By contrast, other factions such as the Keating branch had become increasingly separatist. Diarmuid Lynch, who represented New York on the coiste gnótha and was a member of the IRB, described the League's executive as divided into a left wing deemed separatist and a Redmondite right wing led by Hyde.⁷⁸ Attempts to commit the League to a political programme were initially repelled.⁷⁹ In November 1914 the Keating branch⁸⁰ passed a resolution, strongly favoured by Brugha, calling on the coiste gnótha to adopt a 'political' structure.⁸⁰ In August 1915 an ard fheis in Dundalk, heavily influenced by the IRB, voted to make the League a specifically nationalist body committed to freeing Ireland from foreign rule.⁸¹ Hyde resigned the presidency. In retrospect, MacNeill, who supported the change, believed that the 'Gaelic League had been severely damaged by linking its fortunes to a political movement' and that Hyde's stance was the correct one.⁸² In their biography of Hyde, Janet and Gareth Dunleavy provide a tantalizing snippet on Brugha's position when the third home rule bill had been suspended for the duration of the First World War. Whereas Hyde counselled patience for the promise of home rule at the end of the conflict, Brugha maintained that 'only a fool or a dreamer' would believe in such promises 'which had no more substance behind them than those in Hyde's own Fairy talking to his Tinker' – a reference to Hyde's 1902 play, *An Tincéar agus an tSídheóg* ('The Tinker and the Fairy').⁸³

The influence of the Gaelic League on Brugha was not only far-reaching in terms of his political outlook but it also shaped his career and personal life. In 1909 he resigned from his employment with Hayes & Finch, due, apparently, to a growing unease at working for an

⁷⁶ Ua Ceallaigh, *Cathal Brugha*, p. 11.

⁷⁷ On this see Alvin Jackson, *Home rule: an Irish history* (London, 2003), pp 101–2.

⁷⁸ 'The IRB: some recollections and comments by Diarmuid Lynch', p. 5 (NLI, Diarmuid Lynch papers, MS 11,128).

⁷⁹ Timothy G. McMahon, 'Douglas Hyde and the politics of the Gaelic League in 1914', *Éire-Ireland*, 53:1 & 2 (2018), 29–47.

⁸⁰ *II*, 9 Nov. 1914.

⁸¹ Ua Ceallaigh, *Cathal Brugha*, pp 41–2; P. J. Matthews, *Revival: the Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, the Gaelic League and the Co-operative movement* (Cork, 2003), p. 25.

⁸² Patrick Maume, 'Hyde, Douglas (de hÍde, Dubhghlas)', *DIB*.

⁸³ Dunleavy & Dunleavy, *Douglas Hyde*, p. 331.

English firm. He formed a partnership with brothers Anthony and Vincent Lalor, who had also worked with Hayes & Finch. Messrs Lalor Ltd was incorporated on 14 June 1909; the capital for the venture was provided by J.J. Lalor, father of Anthony and Vincent, who had a well-established business as a printer of memorial cards.⁸⁴ With premises at 14 Lower Ormond Quay, close to where Brugha's father had traded, and a branch office in Cork, the company specialized in the manufacture of church candles and the supply of allied products such as sanctuary oils, incense tapers, night lights and so forth. In 1911 *The Belvederian* (an annual Belvedere College magazine) praised the new company established by its alumni, Brugha and Vincent Lalor: 'In this age of Irish industrial revival, it is satisfactory to record that our old Belvederians are not wanting.'⁸⁵ Brugha worked as a director of Lalor Ltd until his death in 1922. As minister for defence in the underground Dáil Éireann from 1919, he managed his ministerial portfolio from Ormond Quay and the premises was regularly used from 1914 onward for receiving and dispatching arms and ammunition. The Derry city-born Joseph O'Doherty, a member of the IRB, the Irish Volunteers and a future Sinn Féin TD, worked as a travelling salesman for Lalor Ltd. Like Brugha, he used his employment as a cover for smuggling arms.⁸⁶ Robert Barton recalled the rather spartan conditions in Ormond Quay and suggested that Brugha must have been 'both economical and conservative for his business premises appeared to me to lack any modernising influence' (see plate 2).⁸⁷ In addition to his role as director, Brugha continued to travel, as he had done with Hayes & Finch, to various parts of the country to maintain and develop business contacts for the new company. As a businessman, he became a member of the council of the Dublin Industrial Development Association and shared the concerns of many Dublin businesses about the 'dislocation of trade in the city' caused by 'repeated strikes and lockouts which [had] inflicted serious injury' on industry.⁸⁸ In September 1911 Brugha, along with other businessmen, demanded new methods for settling trade disputes, including the establishment of courts of arbitration.⁸⁹

The Gaelic League brought Brugha into contact with many like-minded individuals. One of the most significant was Éamonn Ceannt (see plate 3), with whom he shared the same passion for the language, cultural nationalism, sport and music. Like Brugha, Ceannt was also

⁸⁴ *IT*, 2 July 1910; 'Obituary – Mr. V.J. Lalor', *IP*, 27 Sept. 1955; Ó Cillín, 'Cathal Brugha', 142.

⁸⁵ Oliver Murphy, *The cruel clouds of war: a book of the sixty-eight former pupils and teachers of Belvedere College S.J. who lost their lives in the military conflicts of the 20th century* (Dublin, 2003), p. 89.

⁸⁶ Joseph O'Doherty (Irish Military Archives (hereafter IMA), Military Service Pensions Collection (hereafter MSPC), MSP34REF16536); *IP*, 29 June 1967; Marie Coleman, 'O'Doherty, Joseph', *DIB*.

⁸⁷ Robert Barton to Ruairí Brugha, 6 May 1965 (in possession of Cathal MacSwiney Brugha).

⁸⁸ *FJ*, 28 Sept. 1911.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

a devout Catholic and did not drink or smoke.⁹⁰ A close friendship soon developed, and this was reinforced by their involvement in the Irish Volunteers, discussed in the next chapter. By far the most important connection made through the League occurred in 1909 while on a visit to Birr, County Offaly. As was his wont, Brughá attended a local language class where he met Kathleen Kingston, his future wife. Several other future revolutionaries met their wives through the League, including Ceannt and de Valera. Born on 9 December 1879, Catherine (Kathleen) Mary was the youngest of six children of William Kingston and Catherine Roche, who owned a successful general provisions business on Main Street, Birr. Kathleen had a comfortable upbringing. She was educated at the Sacred Heart Convent, Roscrea, and one of her sisters joined that order.⁹¹ For many years, her father had been a member of Birr Town Commissioners. On his death in 1904, he was described as belonging to one of the oldest and most respected families in the midlands.⁹² Kathleen's mother continued to manage the family business with the assistance of her children, an example that Kathleen would follow in the 1920s.⁹³ As a local Gaelic League organizer, Kathleen, like many women of her generation, enjoyed the access to leadership roles and public life that it provided. Her enthusiasm for the Irish language and culture, her interest in public and political life, and her religious devotion ensured that a relationship with Brughá blossomed.⁹⁴ This was facilitated by Kathleen's relocation to Dublin in 1910. She lived at 5 Fitzwilliam Terrace, Upper Rathmines, with her mother and sister, Máire. Her older brother, John, was a member of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritans) and on the staff in nearby St Mary's College, Rathmines (he was later bursar of Rockwell College).⁹⁵

Kathleen and Cathal were married in the Church of the Three Patrons, Rathgar, on 8 February 1912. Friends and members of the Keating branch arranged a celebratory function in Wynn's Hotel, Lower Abbey Street, on 5 June 1912. The chairman of the event remarked that they had chosen the occasion of Brughá's marriage 'to mark in some slight way the esteem and respect in which they held him ... [and] ... his work for Ireland'.⁹⁶ Another claimed that

⁹⁰ James Quinn, 'Ceannt, Éamonn', *DIB*.

⁹¹ Census of Ireland 1901; Senia Pašeta, 'Brughá, Caitlin [née Catherine Mary Kingston]', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [<https://doi-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/92989>].

⁹² *Leinster Leader*, 21 May 1904.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 6 Aug. 1904.

⁹⁴ Fidelma Brughá to Professor Éamon de Valera, 9 May 1971 (UCDA, de Valera papers, P150/3619); Mary McAuliffe, 'Remembering Caitlín Brughá, TD for Waterford, 1923–27' paper to 'Remembering Cathal Brughá Conference', Dungarvan, 4 Dec. 2018 [<https://marymauliffe.blog/2018/12/04/remembering-caitlin-brughá-td-for-waterford-1923-1927/>].

⁹⁵ *II*, 30 Dec. 1939.

⁹⁶ *FJ*, 17 June 1912.

Brugha's 'labours were an inspiration to every one of them'.⁹⁷ After her marriage, Kathleen became known as Caitlín Brugha and continued her own Gaelic League activities in Dublin.⁹⁸ Following the death of Caitlín's mother in January 1914, 5 Fitzwilliam Terrace became the Brugha home; it was shared with Caitlín's eldest sister Máire who helped rear Caitlín's young family after Brugha's death.⁹⁹ Between 1912 and 1922, the Brughas welcomed six children: Nollaig (1912), Nóinín (1913), Brenda (1916), Ruairí (1917), Fidelma (1919) and Nessa (1922) (see plate 4).¹⁰⁰ Brugha's nephew Liam Ó Dochartaigh (and older brother of Tomás) recalled that his uncle was full of fun among children, never visited them without bringing sweets, and was generally quiet among adults. Brugha's sister emphasized his charitableness and love of children.¹⁰¹ As will be shown, family life was greatly disrupted by Brugha's revolutionary career. While the word 'indomitable' is used in the subtitle of this study, the term can be applied with equal facility to Caitlín who shared her husband's ardent republicanism and supported his activities.

There were four significant constants in Brugha's life: his family, his religion, the Irish language and republicanism. As this chapter has shown, Burgess the sportsman became Brugha the Gaelic Leaguer. Writing in 1957, Piaras Béaslaí described the League as 'one of the greatest forces ... in the national resurgence that led to the events of 1916 and 1921' and stated that many of those prominent in the 1916 Rising and War of Independence 'made their first appearance as public men in the Irish language movement'.¹⁰² While that portrayal is true of Brugha and other members of the revolutionary elite, it is too simplistic to suggest a direct correlation between the Gaelic League and militant separatism. For Brugha the language movement became an essential underpinning and he later claimed that there would have been no 1916 Rising without it.¹⁰³ But the path towards the 1916 insurrection was less the product of the Gaelic League than of the IRB as the custodian of advanced republicanism with the Irish Volunteers as its instrument. To these we now turn.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ó Cillín, 'Cathal Brugha, 142; O'Kelly, *A trinity of martyrs*, p. 39.

⁹⁹ *FJ*, 15 Jan. 1914; *Thom's Directory 1912, 1913, 1914*; Fidelma Brugha to Professor Éamon de Valera, 9 May 1971 (UCDA, de Valera papers, P150/3618).

¹⁰⁰ Information from Cathal MacSwiney Brugha.

¹⁰¹ Ó Dochartaigh, *Cathal Brugha*, p. 20.

¹⁰² Piaras Béaslaí, 'Giants of the Gaelic revival movement – a veteran remembers', *II* 17 May 1957.

¹⁰³ Ua Ceallaigh, *Cathal Brugha*, p. 116.

