

The Spanish Flu in County Tipperary

By Daniel Grace

‘The Great Flu of 1918 – which caused such sadness and grief in many a happy home – cast its deadly spell over many of the parishioners of Newport. This awful epidemic raged through the district with fierceness and cruelty, and many indeed were the unfortunate victims that it caught in its icy grip. The efforts of doctors and of all medical care were found to be useless to rescue those that were affected by the deadly malady. It happened more than once in our parish that two members of the same family were hurled into eternity by the terrible malady within a very short time of each other and had to be buried on the same day. At other times families returned from the burial ground after having laid one of their loved ones to rest forever, only to find that death had claimed another member of the family, even during their short absence’.

(Margaret Ryan, Convent School, Newport, Co. Tipperary, 23 May 1938)¹

Introduction

Young Margaret Ryan’s vivid description of the traumatic effect of influenza on one Co. Tipperary rural parish found echoes on every continent and in every clime. This ‘deadly malady’, as she termed it, was a truly global phenomenon that may have infected upwards of 500 million people worldwide during its short reign of terror. It is estimated to have killed somewhere between 50 and 100 million, making it one of the deadliest natural disasters in human history.² The exact number of flu deaths will never be known because accurate figures are lacking for several parts of the world. The level of mortality was even more dramatic – and traumatic – because most deaths occurred within the short space of just twelve months. As one leading historian of the outbreak has put it, ‘nothing else has ever killed so many in so short a period’.³

The Spanish flu – like other strains of that disease – was a respiratory virus that attacked the throat, nose, bronchial tubes and lungs. The 1918-19 virus was a new and more virulent strain, highly contagious, from which there was little immunity or no effective antidote. The main symptoms were aching muscles, headache, fever, fatigue, coughing, and shortness of breath. The general advice was to go to bed and stay there, but this was not always possible. The centenarian Nenagh veterinary surgeon, the late Jack Powell, recalled that while his whole family was down with flu his farming father still had to get up and carry on. As Jack put it, ‘the farm had to go on, the cows had to be milked’.⁴ Most people recovered after a week or two of rest and care, but some patients deteriorated rapidly and were literally suffocated to death when their lungs filled with blood and mucus. They

sometimes became delirious during this latter stage of the illness and needed physical restraint.

The place of origin of this great flu pandemic is still a subject of debate among historians and scientists. Some argue it originated in war-torn France in 1917, while others claim it was brought to Europe by American troops arriving for service on the Western Front. It has even been speculated that it was introduced to France by Chinese labourers recruited to work behind the fighting lines. But each of those hypotheses has met with strong challenges, so the exact place of origin of this particular strain of influenza is still not conclusively proven.

However, it is clear – notwithstanding the popularity of the name – that the flu did not originate in Spain. This erroneous impression was created by the fact that the outbreak received extensive press coverage in neutral Spain where, unlike in the belligerent nations, there was no wartime censorship. But the press of the time did not universally call it ‘Spanish flu’; it also used terms such as the ‘mysterious malady’, the ‘unknown plague’, the ‘dread disease’, the ‘great scourge’, or more simply, the ‘great flu’. As the *Nenagh Guardian* pithily put it: ‘Some call it Spanish influenza, but more call it worse names altogether’.⁵

The Flu in Ireland

The Spanish flu was an almost constant presence in Ireland from June 1918 to May 1919. It struck the country in three waves, largely corresponding to the international pattern. However, there was a greater overlap between the second and third waves in Ireland than in several other places. The first wave struck during the summer of 1918, but in a mild form that caused few deaths. The second more deadly wave hit the country that autumn. The third and final wave ran from February to April 1919, although isolated cases lingered into the summer.

Upwards of 900,000 people are estimated to have caught the virus in Ireland, approximately 20% of the country’s population. Cities and towns – where many lived in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions – were worst hit, particularly during the second wave. But rural districts also felt its ravages, especially during the spring of 1919. The most notable feature of this new strain of flu was how it disproportionately attacked healthy young adults rather than the old and the young, the usual victims of most strains of influenza.

Influenza was the chief cause of death in Ireland during 1918 and 1919, pushing the consistently leading killer disease – tuberculosis – into second place in both years.⁶ There were 10,651 flu deaths recorded in 1918, and a further 9,406 the following year. Deaths from influenza in 1918 and 1919 were five times greater than they had been during any year of the preceding decade. But the combined total of 20,057 flu deaths is probably an underestimate. The Registrar-General of Marriages, Births and Deaths suggested another 3,231 deaths from pneumonia should be added on the basis that they were most likely brought on by influenza – even if not recorded as such.⁷

'Off History's Map'

Considering its devastating impact, it is rather surprising that the Spanish flu was such a neglected topic in both international and Irish historiography up to comparatively recent years. But excellent studies by Caitriona Foley and Ida Milne have redressed the omission in the case of Ireland.⁸ Several reasons have been proffered for why the topic 'fell off history's map'. The most obvious one in the case of Ireland is that the great political upheavals of the period – the rise of Sinn Féin, the emergence of the First Dáil and the subsequent Independence Struggle – largely dominated historical discourse during the ensuing half-century or so.⁹ But the failure of the great flu to become part of our 'shared past' was by no means peculiar to Ireland; the same occurred in several other countries, including Britain and the United States.¹⁰

Another explanation for the topic's neglect may be that while the outbreak was certainly 'a tale of disaster' – to quote Caitriona Foley's phrase – it was predominantly so for individuals and their families rather than for the community at large. Ida Milne has succinctly explained: 'One cannot help feeling that the major impact of the influenza pandemic was not on politics, medicine, government structures, or public health administration, but on private lives'.¹¹ This sense of flu deaths as essentially family tragedies is reflected in the *Tipperary Star* report on the deaths of Thomas Hogan (44) of Roesboro, Tipperary, and his wife Mary (36) within four days of each other in late October 1918, leaving behind them five orphaned children and two bereft grandparents. The newspaper remarked how crushing a sorrow their deaths were and would continue to be for 'the old folks left to mourn in the evening of their lives', and for the five 'helpless children', now deprived of both father and mother.¹²

Reporting the Outbreak

The Spanish flu first reached epidemic proportions in Ireland in Belfast city in June 1918, apparently introduced there by returning troops.¹³ But there had been isolated cases in parts of the country prior to June, at least some of which seem to have been of the Spanish variety. In Co. Tipperary, for example, nine flu deaths were recorded before that month: two in March, four in April and three in May.¹⁴ Five of those deaths were in Nenagh and one each in Roscrea, Newport, Mullinahone and Tipperary town. Four of the victims were elderly and at least two of them had underlying medical conditions, which might suggest their deaths were due to common rather than Spanish flu.

But two of the nine certainly belonged to the typical cohort of Spanish flu victims – healthy young adults with no prior medical issues. 39-year-old Mary Gubbins of Derby Terrace, Tipperary – wife of the Clerk of Tipperary poor law union and mother of four young children – died on 3 May 1918 after seven days of influenza and a further fifteen of pneumonia. 25-year-old Mary Elizabeth Courtney of Summerhill, Nenagh – daughter of the local dispensary doctor – died on 10 May after a month of influenza and twelve days of meningitis.¹⁵ Both victims were at high-risk of infection due to the occupations of husband and father.

The first wave of flu in June, July and August 1918 received only limited coverage in our local press, even though it attacked most Co. Tipperary towns. But its mild nature and few fatalities diminished its newsworthiness, especially at a time when war and political

events were competing for available space. That summer outbreak caused only ten deaths in the county, all of them in the month of July. The deaths were scattered over five different poor law unions, making them even less newsworthy. As Ida Milne has put it, 'the local experience of the influenza drove the amount of coverage in each newspaper'.¹⁶ The *Nenagh Guardian* confirmed that the summer outbreak – unlike the subsequent autumn one – 'did not attract any special attention' because 'it was milder in its effect'.¹⁷

But newspapers may also have wished to avoid accusations of creating unnecessary panic – panic that would invariably disrupt local business and trade, not to mention the many and varied social and recreational activities in their areas of circulation. But since newspapers extensively covered the autumn outbreak, the first explanation seems the more plausible one.¹⁸

Flu strikes Tipperary

The first major flu attack in the county occurred in Tipperary town in late June 1918. The *Cork Examiner* briefly reported: 'During the last few days there has been an epidemic of influenza in Tipperary town, and several hundred of the military and civilians have been among the victims'.¹⁹ Since the town was an important military depot and hospital, the virus had probably been introduced there by returning troops. But the *Examiner* went on to reassure readers that the flu was 'not of a very serious type'. This is supported by the fact that just three flu deaths were recorded in the Co. Tipperary portion of that large poor law union during the summer of 1918. Two of the victims – females 60 years and 9 months respectively – died in the union infirmary, while 48-year-old farmer Thomas Walshe died at home at Stonepark, Bانشا.²⁰

The towns of the South Riding escaped relatively unscathed during the first outbreak – certainly as far as deaths were concerned. No flu death was recorded in Carrick-on-Suir that summer, while Cashel had just one, that of 27-year-old Catherine Stewart, wife of a local hotel proprietor. During the first week of July Clonmel had 'several cases', but the town's medical officer, Dr P.J. O'Brien, informed the Corporation the following month that there had been only one fatality, 'that of a debilitated child of four years'.²¹ James Lonergan, son of a labourer of No. 22 Albert Street, had died on 19 July 1918 after twelve days of influenza and pneumonia. Dr O'Brien reported in early September that 'the epidemic has now practically disappeared' from Clonmel.²² Clogheen union had just one flu death that summer, the victim was 70-year-old single labourer Patrick Noonan from Skeeheenanrinky.²³

The *Nationalist* of 6 July 1918 reported 'several outbreaks of the influenza epidemic in Thurles', but it was happy to confirm that 'the cases were in no way serious'. There was no flu fatality in Thurles poor law union that summer. The *Cork Examiner* of 23 July 1918 noted that 'a great number of people are at present lain up with the new epidemic in Nenagh', and that 'two young persons have succumbed to the malady within a few days'. But the following week the *Tipperary Star* suggested that flu was now waning in Nenagh: 'One does not now hear that every second person seemed to have it, as was the case a fortnight ago'.²⁴ Nenagh poor law union had four flu deaths that summer: two in the town of Nenagh and one each in Portroe and Newport.

There was no mention of flu or flu deaths in Roscrea. However, as Milne has pointed out the absence of deaths may disguise the level of infection in a district.²⁵ Borrisokane suffered a minor outbreak of influenza and whooping cough in July, but without fatalities. The local medical officer, Dr Luke Quigley, caught the virus but was able to resume duty after a short recuperation.²⁶

Most people in Co. Tipperary seem to have viewed that summer's outbreak more as a disruptive irritant than as a real threat to their lives. True, large numbers were forced to take to their beds – some even for weeks – but the majority got on with their usual routines: work, fairs, funerals, dances, religious devotions and a myriad of sporting and cultural activities, notwithstanding advice against congregating in crowds.²⁷ For example, on the last Saturday of June hundreds flocked to Thurles for the Tipperary County Feis and a great hurling contest between Tipperary and Kilkenny. As the *Nenagh Guardian* put it: 'From Carrick's streets to Shannon shore the Gaels wended their way to the Cathedral town by car, bicycle, train and every possible mode of conveyance'.²⁸

Trauma in Thurles

But as summer of 1918 faded into autumn, alarming reports filtered through from various parts of the world of a second and more deadly outbreak of influenza. By late September it had Dublin and several of the towns of Leinster in its grip, with a frightening number of fatalities.²⁹

Thurles was the first town in Co. Tipperary struck by this second wave. It has been suggested – although without offering proof – that the railway was responsible for bringing the disease to the town.³⁰ Fr. Michael Maher – a curate in the parish – recorded in his journal that it first attacked the school children and then the adults. He described the symptoms as 'pains in the head and all over the body, accompanied by high temperature and extreme weakness'. 'At first', he wrote, 'the people did not think much of it, but in the first week of October some deaths occurred and then the alarm spread'.³¹

The first victim in Thurles was Joseph Cleary, a 33-year-old single blacksmith from Pike St. and member of the local Volunteers. He died on Thursday 3 October 1918 after eight days of suffering from influenza and pneumonia. His funeral the following Sunday to Glenkeen, Borrisoleigh, was turned into a political demonstration with over one hundred of his fellow Volunteers cycling and marching in formation behind his coffin.³²

The *Nationalist* newspaper confirmed that Thurles was firmly in the grip of flu by the first week of October: 'The influenza scourge has visited Thurles with fearful malignance, and the epidemic is at present raking the township like a plague. Almost every other household has some of its members down with the sickness and several deaths have already occurred'.³³ Some two weeks later the *Cork Examiner* noted that the epidemic was increasing rather than abating in Thurles. The workhouse infirmary was full and hundreds were sick at home. Some homes of the poor had five or six people stricken, and in one case no fewer than eleven.³⁴

The children in the Presentation and Ursuline convent schools were nearly all attacked and two young boarders – Mary Moloney (6) and Mary Harold (5) – died in the latter institution.³⁵ Fifty clerical students lay prostrate in St Patrick’s College, together with two clerical professors. Many shops were closed, partly due to illness of staff, but also because business was slack or non-existent, as country people were shunning the town, fearful of catching the virus.³⁶ The *Nationalist* of 30 October 1918 commented: ‘On any day of the week, scarcely half a dozen country people are to be seen about the town’.

The Cathedral ‘dead bell’ – tolling its mournful message on a daily basis – was the most dreaded sound in the streets.³⁷ Fr Maher recorded in his journal: ‘We had funerals every day, and some nights we had as many as three coffins in the Cathedral together. One Sunday we prayed for twenty-one adults from the parish, all of whom had died the previous week’.³⁸ There was an almost palpable sense of relief the following Sunday when only thirteen victims were prayed for.³⁹ Rather recklessly one would think, a parish mission for men – organised by Fr Maher and conducted by two Redemporist priests – went ahead in early October. But the curate conceded that ‘attendance was poor as the influenza was raging that week’.⁴⁰

The flu continued to flay Thurles throughout October, but abated quickly in early November. The *Nationalist* of 9 November 1918 explained: ‘The influenza outbreak which ravaged Thurles and district with such violence a few weeks ago has practically disappeared in the town and is rapidly passing away from the rural districts’. The time-frame of flu deaths for Thurles dispensary district confirms that was indeed the case: thirty-two in October, six in November and two in the first week of December. The last victim in Thurles from this second outbreak was 16-year-old blacksmith’s son, Andrew Martley. He died at home at West Gate on 8 December 1918 after eight days of influenza and pneumonia.

Fig. 1: Flu deaths in each DD of Thurles Union, October-December 1918

Thurles Pop. 6,556	Littleton Pop. 3,198	Templemore Pop. 2,722	Moyne Pop. 2,820	Holycross Pop. 2,587	Borrisoleigh Pop. 4,572
40	16	8	4	3	2

There were seventy-three flu deaths in Thurles poor law union during the three months October to December 1918. The outbreak accounted for 20% of all deaths in the union that year. Fig. 1 shows the distribution of the seventy-three deaths over the six dispensary districts of the union. Over half occurred in Thurles DD, while Littleton DD – rather surprisingly considering its rural character – had almost a quarter. Nine of the victims in Littleton DD were from farming families, while the rest were from the labouring class. Templemore – where the *Nationalist* stated ‘very few families have escaped the disease’ – suffered just eight deaths.⁴¹ The dispensary districts of Moyne, Holycross and Borrisoleigh had few fatalities.

The Virus in Nenagh

The virus soon spread its deadly tentacles from Thurles to other parts of Co. Tipperary. It struck Nenagh in mid-October and within a week ‘few families there had escaped its

ravages'.⁴² The medical officer, Dr William Courtney, confirmed that Nenagh dispensary district had in excess of one hundred cases by the close of October.⁴³ There were 150 flu patients in Nenagh workhouse infirmary by the first week of November, with as many more laid up in their own homes.⁴⁴ But the Clerk of the Union informed the Board of Guardians that 'not a single death' had occurred in the infirmary, and that 'people were daily leaving cured'. He also confirmed that there had been no case of influenza in the body of the workhouse.⁴⁵ His contention of no deaths in the infirmary was perhaps premature but essentially true because only five of the forty-four flu deaths in Nenagh poor law union occurred there.

Fig. 2: Flu deaths in each DD of Nenagh Union, October-December 1918

Nenagh Pop. 8,081	Toomevara Pop. 3,946	Portroe Pop. 3,523	Silvermines Pop. 2,770	Newport Pop. 4,712
31	4	3	3	3

During the second outbreak, Nenagh poor law union saw five flu deaths in October, twenty-nine in November and ten in December. The epidemic had eased considerably by mid-November, although it continued to bother the town for a few more weeks. Thirty-one deaths occurred in Nenagh DD, following the usual pattern of having the majority of deaths in urban centres. The *Tipperary Star* remarked on the despondent air pervading Nenagh that November: 'Never has the old Abbey bell been so frequently tolled, and not since its erection did St Mary of the Rosary church contain at the same time so many coffins. With many of the houses closed up, due either to the death of an occupant or in sympathy with relatives, the town presents a mournful appearance'.⁴⁶

The four rural dispensary districts of Nenagh poor law union escaped lightly, confirming a newspaper report that 'the epidemic in all the country districts of North Tipperary is slight'.⁴⁷ Newport was reported free of the outbreak, while Ballina and Killaloe were both 'blessed by the absence of the epidemic from their midst'.⁴⁸ There seems to have been little fear of contagion in the Slieve Felim hill country because on a Sunday night in late October the Grand Catholic Reunion Ball in Upperchurch Parish Hall attracted 'visitors from all over the mountain parishes'. 'The dancing', it was noted, 'was kept up with vigour all night until the small hours'.⁴⁹

Borrisokane and Roscrea

Borrisokane poor law union – which comprised the greater portion of the barony of Lower Ormond – was hit by the outbreak in early November. 'In Borrisokane the epidemic has also made its appearance, and last week thirteen patients suffering from the malady were admitted to the local infirmary', the *Tipperary Star* reported.⁵⁰ Thirteen died of flu in Borrisokane union, six of them in the workhouse infirmary. Two of those victims were James Waters (16) and his brother Patrick (14), a farm labourer's sons from Ballingarry, who died within four days of each other in early November. All but one of the thirteen victims came from rural parts of the union. Unusually, the small towns of Borrisokane and Cloughjordan escaped very lightly.

Roscrea was ‘largely, though so far not so severely, visited with influenza’ in late October 1918. The infirmary there was overflowing with patients and local businesses were badly hit.⁵¹ Seventeen workers were down with flu at the local bacon factory and all killing and curing had ceased. Just one man was left standing in the town’s electric light facility, and ‘only for him’, it was reported, ‘the town would have been in darkness’.⁵² Twenty-seven victims died from flu in the Co. Tipperary portion of Roscrea poor law union during that autumn outbreak. Twenty-three deaths occurred in Roscrea No. 1 dispensary district, which included the town, the union workhouse and its infirmary. Half the victims died in the workhouse infirmary; a portion of these was of course from the parts of the union outside Co. Tipperary. The four remaining flu deaths in the Tipperary portion of Roscrea union occurred in the rural dispensary district of Bourney.

Tipperary and Cashel

The *Tipperary Star* of 19 October 1918 reported that although flu was rampant in North Tipperary, the South Riding had so far escaped its ravages. But the respite was short-lived because by the following week the flu was reported to have reached the foothills of the Galtees and ‘is now pretty general through the barony of Clanwilliam’.⁵³ There had already been several cases and a number of deaths in the rural districts near Tipperary town, particularly in the parishes of Bansha and Lattin.

The first victim in Bansha was James Quinn (28). Described as ‘one of the finest footballers in the South’, he was captain of Galtee Rovers and a member of the Tipperary Senior football team.⁵⁴ Perhaps more poignant were the deaths of Thomas Hogan (44) of Roesboro and his wife Mary (36) within four days of each other, leaving five young children, all ill with flu. Hogan was farm manager at Mooresfort in the parish of Lattin.⁵⁵ He was also vice-president of the Tipperary Sinn Féin club and his funeral was turned into a political demonstration, with Volunteers mounting guard over the bier in St Michael’s church and marching in formation to the graveyard behind his tricolour draped coffin.⁵⁶

The virus had a firm grip on the town of Tipperary by the end of October and the number of deaths there was described as ‘comparatively large’.⁵⁷ The first victim was 22-year-old Private Thomas Churchill of the 3rd Hussar Regiment on 17 October 1918, one of five soldiers in their twenties to die from flu in the town. By the second week of November ninety-eight flu patients had passed through the infirmary and nineteen had died.⁵⁸ Some patients became delirious and had to be closely watched over, particularly at night. The workhouse master experienced great difficulty in finding attendants due to the widespread fear of contagion. ‘Several who promised to come disappointed me’, he informed the Board of Guardians, ‘and I had to secure others, often searching the town for hours, sometimes at midnight’.⁵⁹

Fig. 3: Flu deaths in each DD of Tipperary Union, October-December 1918

Tipperary Pop. 10,166	Bansha Pop. 3,872	Cappagh Pop. 4,054	Emly Pop. 4,126	Golden Pop. 2,450
26	13	13	11	2

Fig. 3 shows the number of flu deaths in each of the five dispensary districts in the Co. Tipperary part of Tipperary poor law union. While twice the number of deaths occurred in Tipperary than in either Bansha or Cappagh DDs, there was however a higher ratio of deaths per head of population in the latter two. The disease was particularly virulent around Pallas, Grantstown and Kilfeacle.⁶⁰ Almost half the thirteen victims in Cappagh DD came from just two families. Three Fleming brothers of Clonganhue townland, Edmond (23), John (26) and William (29), died within a week of each other in late November and early December.⁶¹ Mary Walsh (24) and her brothers Daniel (20) and Denis (14), all of Cappawhite, succumbed during the same period.⁶²

A Cashel correspondent boasted in late October 1918 that over the years his town had always been singularly immune from the epidemics that had plagued the country. 'It seems', he suggested, 'as if Providence is still kind and merciful in not permitting the latest scourge to devastate any of our households'. So far, he pointed out, there had been only a few cases of flu in Cashel poor law union and all of them in the rural districts.⁶³ When flu finally arrived in the town of Cashel, it was neither as virulent nor as devastating as in most other Co. Tipperary towns. Slightly over a hundred cases passed through the union infirmary, but there were only two deaths there. By the end of November fourteen patients only remained in the infirmary and the medical officer expected all to leave cured within the week.⁶⁴

Fig. 4: Flu deaths in each DD of Cashel Union, October-December 1918

Cashel Pop. 5,590	Kilpatrick Pop. 3,766	Killenaule Pop. 3,263	Fethard Pop. 3,802	Tullamaine Pop. 3,076
5	6	5	3	2

During the autumn wave Cashel poor law union had the least number of flu deaths per head of population of all unions of Co. Tipperary. Flu also accounted for a lower percentage of deaths there that year than in any other union of the county. For example, while it caused 17% of all deaths in Nenagh, 19% in Clonmel and 20% in Thurles, it caused just 7% in Cashel. It was unusual too that the towns of Cashel and Fethard escaped so lightly. Flu was prevalent in both for some weeks, yet there were only five deaths in the former and three in the latter.⁶⁵

Flu flays Clonmel

By late October 1918 flu was rampant in Clonmel. The report in the *Clonmel Chronicle* of conditions in the town is worth quoting at length:

In Clonmel whole families are stricken down. A large number of the local police are affected, as well as many of the military. Upwards of eighty employees, mostly girls, of Messrs Cleeve Brothers, Clonmel, have had to quit work. Upwards of forty employees of Messrs Thomas Murphy & Co. Ltd. have also ceased work. Very few business houses in town are left with their complete staffs. Mr Matthew Feehan's premises in O'Connell Street are closed down, all the staff being ill. It was no unusual sight on Sunday evening to see people walking about the streets, their

mouths closely muffled up with scarves and handkerchiefs. Chemist shops were besieged. Long queues waited for considerable lengths of time outside the doors. The local doctors have been literally run off their feet, running hither and thither, always on the one mission – the flu.⁶⁶

By the last week of October there were 400 cases of flu in Clonmel and this quickly jumped to over 1,000 – approximately 10% of the town's populace.⁶⁷ But the *Nationalist* claimed that 'the mortality, though considerable, was not at all high as in other towns ravaged by the disease'.⁶⁸ Yet the virus accounted for thirty deaths in the borough in one week alone, and twenty-six people were prayed for at Masses on Sunday 5 November 1918.⁶⁹

In mid-November the Clerk of Clonmel poor law union reported that 134 flu patients had passed through the infirmary and twelve had died – a mortality rate of 12%.⁷⁰ But the number treated in that institution can hardly have been more than 15% of total cases in the union. Most of those infected – both in town and in countryside – chose to take their chances at home rather than be carted to the infirmary at Clonmel. Relatives sometimes refused to allow loved ones to be brought there – in particular patients from distant rural parts – fearing for their safety on the slow, cold and bumpy journey in the horse-drawn ambulance.

There was the added difficulty of how to convey patients to the infirmary. During the height of the crisis the ambulance horse was 'unable to travel any long distance due to lameness'. No substitute horse was to be had in Clonmel and attempts to persuade the military to lend their motor ambulance were unavailing.⁷¹ But after three weeks of flaying the town the flu began to subside and had practically spent itself by late November.⁷² Schools reopened in Clonmel on Monday 25 November 1918.⁷³

Fig. 5: Flu deaths in each DD of Clonmel Union, October-December 1918

Clonmel No. 1 Pop. 10,209	Kilsheelan No. 1 Pop. 1,608	Clonmel No. 2 Pop. 2,286	Kiltinan Pop. 909
58	7	3	1

Sixty-nine flu victims died in the Co. Tipperary portion of Clonmel poor law union during that autumn outbreak. The majority of deaths occurred in Clonmel No. 1 DD, the town and its immediate environs. The deaths took place within the space of just six weeks: thirteen in the last two weeks of October and fifty-six during the month of November. There were no flu deaths in Clonmel in December. On several days during that six-week period there were multiple deaths; on two days in early November there were no fewer than seven each day.

Over half the victims died in two institutions in Clonmel. Thirteen died in the workhouse infirmary, patients brought in already suffering from flu. Fifteen patients died from its effects in the Lunatic Asylum – a high number certainly but still consistent with the level of flu deaths experienced in similar institutions elsewhere in the country.⁷⁴ Remarkably, the

Borstal was kept free of the virus, notwithstanding the fact that the inmates were young men from sixteen to twenty-one, the age group most vulnerable to the virus.⁷⁵ The Borstal Governor William Dobbin was a leading light in relief efforts in the town, particularly in giving the institution's facilities for cooking huge quantities of soup for distribution to the poor.⁷⁶

Carrick-on-Suir and Clogheen

By the end of October 1918 there were eighty cases of flu in Carrick-on-Suir and the number was rising.⁷⁷ All schools were closed and a local millinery establishment had been forced to shut its doors because most of its employees were laid up with flu.⁷⁸ During the period 4 November-6 December 1918 there were thirty-eight flu deaths in the two Co. Tipperary dispensary districts of the poor law union, Carrick-on-Suir and Garrygibbon. All but four took place in the former dispensary district, which comprised the town and environs. Six of the thirty-eight died in the workhouse infirmary; the rest succumbed in their own homes.

The two worst days for flu deaths in Carrick were the 10th and 12th of November when the town saw four fatalities each day. There were three deaths on two other days that month, and two deaths on nine different days. Two particularly sad cases occurred in Carrick that November. William and Bridget Cleary of Cragg Road – described as 'hard-working respectable people' – lost three children aged 13, 14 and 4 years, two of them on the same day.⁷⁹ The previous week Michael McGrath (35), his brother John (37) and their sister Ellen (39) – all unmarried and living together at Newline Road – died from flu within four days of each other, leaving behind their widowed mother.⁸⁰

Newspapers had little to say about the flu in Clogheen poor law union except that it was very prevalent about Newcastle and that the infirmary at Clogheen was practically full. The workhouse master searched in Cork and Dublin but failed to get a qualified nurse – a common problem for most unions during the outbreak.⁸¹ He then employed an Ellen O'Neill as a temporary night attendant but she refused to continue after five days. The workhouse master had to admit 'he was unable to get anyone to take her place'.⁸² The fear of contagion was so strong that only the brave, the zealous, or the foolhardy, would take up a position in a workhouse infirmary.

The danger of infection was vividly demonstrated when several of Clogheen workhouse and infirmary staff fell ill with flu. The victims included the master, the day nurse, four female attendants and the ambulance driver, James Landers. The master was obliged to get a workhouse inmate to drive the horse-drawn vehicle, as 'no man could be got at the time to do it for any money'.⁸³ Twenty-four in total died from flu in Clogheen union during this second outbreak, eleven of them in the infirmary. Sixteen of the deaths were in Clogheen DD, six in Ardfinnan DD and two in Caher DD. The *Clonmel Chronicle* of 2 November 1918 reported that 'in Caher twenty people have been attacked, none, however, seriously'. This was borne out by the fact that Caher DD had fewest flu deaths despite having the largest population of the three dispensary districts of Clogheen poor law union.

The Final Wave

There was not a clear-cut distinction between the second and third waves of flu, at least not in Co. Tipperary. True, the levels of morbidity and mortality fell sharply from the end of November 1918 and did not climb again until the following March. But in the intervening months the disease had subsided rather than disappeared. This will be evident from the chart of the monthly distribution of flu deaths found later in the article. The decline of flu during those winter months made it less newsworthy and it was firmly pushed from the pages of the press. In any case, 'flu fatigue' had probably set in by this time for both newspaper editor and reader.

Newspapers stressed two important differences between the autumn 1918 and the spring 1919 waves. First, the latter was believed to be more contagious but not as virulent as the former.⁸⁴ It certainly killed fewer than half the earlier number, a fact borne out by the death statistics for the county. However, there were dispensary districts in Tipperary that suffered more flu deaths in 1919 than in 1918. Most notable of these were Riverstown, Newport, Borrisoleigh and Kilpatrick.

Second, the spring 1919 outbreak – in contrast to the former – was more prevalent in rural districts than in towns. Newspaper reports and mortality figures both confirm this. For example, there was a combined total of one hundred flu deaths in the four poor law unions of Nenagh, Thurles, Cashel and Clogheen in 1919, but only eighteen of those occurred in the chief towns of the unions; the rest were in their rural hinterlands.

Tipperary newspapers revived interest when flu stepped up its onslaught from late February 1919 onwards. The *Nenagh Guardian* of 1 March 1919 reported that the virus 'has made its appearance in Tipperary town where there are about half a dozen cases'. But it assured readers it was not a virulent type and 'so far has not made much headway'. But the *Guardian* failed to mention that six people had already died from flu in Tipperary union since the beginning of the year – one in January and five during February.

Stalking the Land

As spring rolled onwards there were disconcerting reports of outbreaks and deaths from several parts of South Tipperary. A dozen cases were under treatment at Carrick-on-Suir in early March; although described as 'of a rather light nature', the flu still accounted for upwards of a dozen deaths there before it ran its course.⁸⁵ The virus had also made its appearance in Caher, but seemingly 'only in a mild form'.⁸⁶ In late March flu was raging in the Glen of Aherlow and in the district of Golden. Many families were stricken in the latter and 'in some households scarce anyone is left to attend to the wants of the sufferers'.⁸⁷ In early April William Vaughan (24) and his sister Maggie (26) died from flu and pneumonia within two hours of each other at Shronell. Across country in Drangan a young farming couple named Cunningham – parents of one child – died within three days of each other.⁸⁸

The situation was equally perturbing in North Tipperary, where in the words of the *Nenagh Guardian*, 'it seems to sweep through districts successively'.⁸⁹ By early March the virus was rampant in the Newport district and claimed several lives, including Kate Rainsford (67) and her daughter Maggie (29) within the space of five days.⁹⁰ It was also reported

to be 'stalking over the land around Kilcommon and leaving a murky trail'. The victims there included Rody Moloney (58) and son Jeremiah (18), farmers at Loughisle.⁹¹ By mid-March it had broken out in Currabaha, Templederry, Gortnagoona and the village of Ballina. It was particularly virulent across the Shannon in neighbouring Killaloe, where it claimed several lives.⁹²

During March and April the epidemic rifled through large swathes of the North Tipperary countryside from Borrisoleigh up north as far as Lorrha. In the Borrisoleigh dispensary district there were upwards of a dozen deaths that spring. Borrisokane poor law union was also badly hit, and had in fact more flu deaths in the spring of 1919 than during the previous autumn. In late March 'a very severe epidemic of influenza of a virulent type' was raging in Toomevara dispensary district.⁹³ Among those laid low (but survived) were the local medical officer, Dr Thomas Williams, and the famed Toomevara and Tipperary goalkeeper, Jack 'Skinny' O'Meara.⁹⁴

The epidemic had spent itself in all districts of Co. Tipperary by mid-May, although isolated cases still lingered here and there. Life returned to normal – or at least as normal as was possible in an atmosphere of growing political and military tension. People looked forward to brighter days, eager now to put dark memories of racking sickness and devastating death behind them. But for some that would not be easy, as they faced into sad and lonely years bereft of loved ones mercilessly swept away by the raging torrent of Spanish influenza.

The Victims

How many people died? What exactly did they die of? Where and when did they die? These questions invariably arise during a discussion of the Spanish flu, whether at national or local level. The available statistics – particularly those in the 55th and 56th Registrar-General reports – help to provide at least partial answers. But as Milne has correctly pointed out, all flu statistics must be treated with caution because doctors sometimes misdiagnosed cases, particularly during the early stages of the outbreak.⁹⁵ Flu mortality figures are invariably skewed – whatever their source – and should never be claimed as one hundred per cent reliable.

The statistics throughout this article have been compiled from a hitherto largely untapped source – the civil records of deaths, now published and freely available online to researchers. (For more information on this source see Appendix 1). While the death certificates are certainly informative, their sheer number is so time-consuming to work through that they are really only suitable for use in a local study. I have done a methodical trawl of all death certificates for Co. Tipperary for the two years 1918 and 1919 and have identified a total of 595 where influenza is recorded as a cause of death.⁹⁶ 53% of the 595 Co. Tipperary victims were male, a figure that corresponds exactly with the national percentage.⁹⁷ The figure of 595 flu deaths is the statistical base for the calculations in the article.

The death certificates also throw light on the knotty problem of defining exactly what flu victims died of. We find that in the majority of cases it is more accurate to speak

of influenza as *a* cause rather than *the* cause of death. The reason is that a second complication is also frequently recorded on the certificate. In point of fact, influenza is recorded as the *sole* cause of death in only 20% of the 595 fatalities. In 56% of cases the patient died from a combination of influenza and pneumonia. The remaining 24% of deaths also had an additional cause, the most common being bronchitis, meningitis or heart failure. These figures demonstrate the difficulty of defining what exactly constituted a flu death. But perhaps it is best not to be too pedantic because whether the victim ultimately died from pneumonia or some other complication, he or she would hardly have fallen sick in the first place had it not been for a bad bout of influenza.

Fig. 6: Influenza deaths in Co. Tipperary 1918-19 by Poor Law Union

Poor law union	Number of influenza deaths 1918	Influenza deaths as percentage of total deaths in union	Number of influenza deaths 1919	Influenza deaths as percentage of total deaths in union
Birr (part)	1	6%	5	20%
Borrisokane	13	14%	15	15%
Callan (part)	10	13%	4	6.5%
Carrick-on-Suir (part)	39	23%	15	9%
Cashel	23	7%	20	6%
Clogheen	25	11%	12	6%
Clonmel (part)	71	19%	7	3%
Nenagh	54	17%	35	11%
Roscrea (part)	27	16%	6	5%
Thurles	73	20%	34	10%
Tipperary (part)	68	16%	27	8%
Urlingford (part)	10	26%	1	3%
Totals	414	16%	181	8%

Fig. 6 shows the spread of flu deaths over the twelve poor law unions of Co. Tipperary. (For details of the unions see Appendix 2). It also shows flu deaths as a percentage of total deaths in each union for the years 1918 and 1919. While the figure of 595 is probably accurate enough as the number who died from flu *in* the county, it may however either underestimate or overestimate the number who died *from* the county.

Just to explain. Birr, Callan and Urlingford unions had their infirmaries outside Co. Tipperary and some victims from our county died in these. This would of course deflate the number of flu deaths recorded for Tipperary. But alternately, victims brought from outside the county to the infirmaries at Carrick-on-Suir, Clonmel and Tipperary town would inflate the number of Tipperary flu deaths. So for the sake of accuracy, it is probably best to speak of 595 victims who died from flu *in* rather than *from* Co. Tipperary.

The study of the death certificates shows that 70% of the 595 flu fatalities in Co. Tipperary occurred in 1918, with the remaining 30% in 1919. These figures differ significantly from the county and the national breakdown of 53% and 47% respectively found in the Registrar-General reports.⁹⁸ The most obvious reason for the discrepancy is that several of the 1918 deaths were not registered until early in 1919 – certainly the case in Co. Tipperary – and this skews the Registrar-General figures and severely diminishes the true number of flu deaths for 1918. If my Co. Tipperary figures were replicated elsewhere in Ireland, they would certainly call into question the accuracy of the generally accepted figures.

Fig. 7: Monthly analysis of influenza deaths in Co. Tipperary, 1918-19

Number of influenza deaths	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1918	0	0	3	3	3	0	10	0	0	92	264	39
1919	23	27	73	46	6	2	1	1	0	1	1	0

Fig. 7 gives the monthly breakdown of flu deaths for 1918 and 1919. November 1918 was the deadliest month, accounting for 44% of flu deaths in Co. Tipperary. Deaths peaked again in March 1919 but never reached the same height as during the previous November. Flu mortality tailed off in late April and the epidemic had spent itself by the beginning of May, leaving a few isolated cases during the remainder of the year. The chart also confirms that there was no clear break between the second and third waves in Co. Tipperary. There were peaks and troughs between October 1918 and May 1919, but flu was always lurking in the background.

Age and Social Class

Two further questions suggest themselves in regard to victims of the epidemic. First, were they from a certain age-cohort? Second, did they belong to a particular occupational and social class? The evidence gleaned from the death certificates helps to provide answers to both.

Fig. 8: Number and percentage of influenza deaths by age-group in Co. Tipperary and Ireland, 1918-19

	Under 5 yrs	5-9 yrs	10-14 yrs	15-19 yrs	20-24 yrs	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-54 yrs	55-64 yrs	65-74 yrs	Over 74 yrs
Tipperary	82 14%	24 4%	18 3%	36 6%	56 9.5%	114 19%	91 15%	58 9.5%	47 8%	49 8.5%	20 3.5%
Ireland	2,523 12.5%	905 4.5%	766 3.5%	1,725 8.5%	2,170 11%	4,205 21%	2,430 12%	1,767 9%	1,380 7%	1,489 7.5%	697 3.5%

It has been already noted that healthy young men and women were the prime target of the Spanish flu. Fig. 8 confirms that the largest cohort of deaths in Co. Tipperary, at 19%, came from the 25-34 years age-group. This was followed by the 34-44 years group at 15%. The three age-groups ranging from 20 to 44 years accounted for almost half of all flu deaths in the county. Another very susceptible group was children under

5 years. This youngest group accounted for twice as many deaths as the combined total of the next two groups ranging from 5 to 14 years. It is noticeable that there was no significant difference between the Co. Tipperary and the national figures in any of the eleven age-groups.

The death certificates list the occupations of victims – or in the case of females, of their husband or father – so it is possible to classify them by occupational and social class.⁹⁹ 43% of the 595 flu victims belonged to the labourer class and a further 12% to the slightly better-off tradesman class. 6% of victims were associated with either the military or the police. Moving higher up the social ladder, 27% of victims were farmers, 7% were merchants, while 2% held clerical positions, probably often poorly paid but giving their occupants at least a veneer of middle-class respectability. The remaining 3% were members of the professional and propertied classes, although only one victim in the county was a member of the landed gentry. She was 36-year-old Alice Margery Biggs-Atkinson of Ashley Park, Nenagh, who died from influenza and pneumonia on 11 May 1919. Her husband, Major Thomas B. Biggs-Atkinson, was on active service in Egypt at the time.¹⁰⁰



Alice Margery Biggs-Atkinson

It was hardly surprising that the biggest cohort of victims came from the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder. The working class often lived in unsanitary and overcrowded conditions and had less ready access to medical and nursing care. The *Nationalist* newspaper was highly critical of the fact that in most Co. Tipperary towns 'a great many working-class families are obliged to live in dwellings that are a disgrace to civilisation'.¹⁰¹ A Clonmel doctor went on to explain how these cramped conditions contributed to flu mortality: 'Big families living in small houses are in the most critical condition, for if a member of such family is stricken down the whole family is bound to be prostrated. People better off have less difficulties to combat as they can remove the patient to an isolated portion of the house'.¹⁰²

Many of the poor were in dire straits due to fuel and food shortages and steeply rising prices. Coal was scarce and had trebled in price since pre-war days, putting it beyond the reach of the poor.¹⁰³ There were 'milk famines' in Clonmel and Nenagh, in the latter farmers preferred to send it to the creamery because they got back the skim milk for livestock feed.¹⁰⁴ The *Tipperary Star* reported that 'Clonmel people are at their wits' end to procure a sufficient quantity of milk for themselves'.¹⁰⁵

The *Nationalist* neatly characterised the terrible deprivation present in most towns during that autumn of 1918: 'High prices and scarcity put nourishing foods beyond the reach of many needing them, while the bad inclement weather rendered the condition of the poor harder and more uncomfortable still. Little wonder, then, that death entered so many poor homes'.¹⁰⁶

Fighting the Flu

Most flu victims remained at home and were tended as best as possible by family members. The wealthier sometimes hired private nurses, but this often proved difficult due to a widespread demand for their services. A minority of patients were removed to infirmaries, especially where all the family was down with the virus. Flu victims died at home mostly, as was common for all deaths at the time.¹⁰⁷ The death certificates confirm that 80% of the 595 flu deaths in Co. Tipperary took place in the victim's home, while the remaining 20% occurred in infirmaries and other institutions. The source also shows that 90% of the 595 victims had received some level of 'medical attention'.

That percentage probably helps to explain why doctors were – to use a phrase beloved of contemporary newspapers – 'run off their feet' during the outbreak. Dr Foley of Cashel summed it up well when he said, 'the door is knocked down with people coming to me'.¹⁰⁸ Dr O'Brien of Clonmel revealed that he had seen no fewer than 150 patients in one day.¹⁰⁹ Dr Mitchell – who acted as locum tenens during the worst of the outbreak in Borrisoleigh DD – told Thurles Board of Guardians that 'he had to work night and day in very bad weather', and 'had to treat patients in most difficult places, where he had to ride to on horseback'. The local poor law guardian jocosely commented that Dr Mitchell was 'a second Shackleton'; but added on a more serious note that 'he met the doctor one evening, and he was after tiring two horses in his visits'.¹¹⁰

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NOSTROLINE

Nostroline

Allied to the long hours and tiring travel was the ever-present danger of the doctor himself catching flu. I have identified from newspaper reports and boards of guardians' minute books twenty-three doctors in Co. Tipperary who fell foul of the virus. But remarkably only one died from its effects, 52-year-old Dr Stephen Keogh, the long-time medical officer at Dundrum. He succumbed on 7 November 1918 after only three days' illness.¹¹¹

Even the most caring and skilled physician often found his best endeavours thwarted.

For example, 28-year-old Teresa Purthill of Mayfield, Cashel, died of flu and pneumonia 'despite the constant attention of Drs Foley and Cusack, assisted by the ungrudging services of Nurse Hayes from a Dublin hospital'.¹¹² Likewise, 42-year-old Clonmel businessman Philip Brennan – described as a man of magnificent physique – fell victim, notwithstanding the fact that he had 'the best medical aid, including that of a Dublin specialist, and skilled and loving nursing'.¹¹³

The problem for doctors was that there was no effective vaccine or antibiotic to combat or cure either influenza or pneumonia. As Ida Milne has put it, the best that physicians could do was 'to throw the entire contents of their doctor's bag at the illness in the hope that something would work'.¹¹⁴ Aspirin, quinine, cinnamon, eucalyptus oil, linseed poultices, hot whiskey – even small doses of strychnine – were all recommended and tried; these may have brought some relief to the patient but they were never going to cure him or her. Strong doses of whiskey, one doctor wryly observed, at least had the merit of ensuring 'the patient had a merry spin to Paradise'.¹¹⁵

Good nursing was probably more beneficial than the ministrations of doctors.¹¹⁶ Infirmary nurses worked tirelessly to relieve the stricken, often at great personal risk. But while several of them fell ill with the virus, I have found only two who died from its effects in Co. Tipperary. Nurse Smith of Barrington's hospital, Limerick, was singularly unfortunate. She was hired as temporary nurse in Roscrea infirmary on 28 October 1918 but was dead from flu within a fortnight.¹¹⁷ The second victim, Sr Mary Monica O'Donnell of the Mercy order, caught the virus while nursing flu patients in the Tipperary town hospital. The *Cork Examiner* described her as 'a martyr to duty'.¹¹⁸

The Jubilee nurses – who worked among the poor in several towns – won unstinting praise for their devotion to duty during the epidemic. Miss Ryan, the nurse in Nenagh, was reported to have been 'tireless in her attention and services to the scores of people who were stricken down'.¹¹⁹ Likewise, it was said of her counterpart in Clonmel: 'There is many a home in Clonmel bright and happy today, and many a person in perfect health who might be otherwise, only for the marvellous amount of energy that Nurse McKillen put into her work last October and November'.¹²⁰

Relieving Distress

The flu epidemic exacerbated the already straitened circumstances of the poor, especially of families in the towns. A Clonmel correspondent pointed to the appalling conditions that prevailed there during the outbreak: 'In many cases there is no one in the house able to cook food, light



Flu Victims – Tom Hogan and Wife Mary, Roesborough c. 1907 (Photo Dan Hogan)

fires, or procure medicine, and in others there is no money available to procure the simplest necessities of life'.¹²¹

Similar stories emanated from most towns in the county. For example, the *Tipperary People* of 15 November 1918 cited a case from Old Road in Tipperary town where 'a mother and her five children and her aged father were laid up with nothing to lie on but a few heaps of straw, and with no food or fuel in the house'. Neighbours helped as best they could, but often could do little because 'in many instances they themselves are only a little better off than the sufferers'.¹²² The only official recourse was to the relieving officer for either outdoor relief or admission to the workhouse. But most poor people found this a step too far because it would irremediably stigmatise them as paupers.

Private charity stepped into the breach in most towns. Help came from individuals, charitable organisations, and in some places from specially constituted relief committees. Most individual acts of charity went unheralded, but the occasional one found its way into the columns of the local press. Major de La Poer daily delivered free milk and rabbits to the poor of Kilsheelan, while Lady Wyndham Quinn provided soup and other necessities to poor families in Carrick-on-Suir.¹²³ The Sisters of Mercy actively looked after a number of poor families in Carrick, and also in Nenagh and other towns where they had convents.¹²⁴

A group of Red Cross ladies was the first to organise relief in Clonmel. During the first week of November they drove around in their pony traps, morning and afternoon, 'with baskets of bottles filled with steaming hot Bovril and beef-tea'. When the Relief Committee took over, the ladies were able to provide the names of one hundred families in the town requiring urgent assistance.¹²⁵ The St Vincent de Paul Society – with branches in several major towns – played an important but inconspicuous role in relieving distress during the epidemic. It seems to have been the main conduit for relief in both Nenagh and Thurles where no separate relief committees were set up. The *Nationalist* noted that the Thurles branch 'at the present time is doing most valuable and necessary work in relieving to a considerable extent the sufferings and privations of the poor of the town and neighbourhood'.¹²⁶

Relief committees were set up in Templemore, Carrick-on-Suir and Clonmel to combat the crisis. We know little of the activities of the first two except that £147 was collected for relief in Templemore and that Carrick was somewhat tardy in getting operations under way.¹²⁷ The Clonmel Committee was established at a meeting at Hearn's Hotel on Monday 4 November 1918 and immediately swung into action. The sum of £153 was collected at the meeting and this soon swelled to £800.¹²⁸ During the following six weeks the committee distributed 20,752 pints of milk, 900 loaves, 240 lbs of beef, 271 lbs of butter, 116 lbs of tea, together with 155 tins of condensed milk, 303 bottles of Bovril and a small quantity of eggs. They also sent turf and coal, sheets and blankets, shirts and footwear, to impoverished households. They paid for seven coffins and the hearses and funeral carriages in a dozen cases.¹²⁹

The Last Word?

The story of 'the deadliest pandemic in history' has been comprehensively covered at national level in the excellent accounts by Caitriona Foley and Ida Milne. But the topic is still somewhat neglected in regional studies, rather surprisingly one would think considering its devastating impact on so many households. The subject rarely gets mention in local histories, even in those specifically dealing with the period in question. Yet most parishes and towns suffered more casualties from this 'great scourge' than from the Great War and the Independence Struggle combined. This article has attempted to redress the omission in the case of Co. Tipperary, no easy task considering the sheer size of the county and the number of sizeable towns within it. Since those towns were the main target for the virus – particularly during the deadlier second outbreak – each one probably deserves more individual attention than has been possible within the confines of this article. So this study makes no claim to be the last word on the subject; there is still plenty of valuable work to be done at the micro-level of parish and town.

APPENDIX 1

The source of the statistics of flu deaths in this article needs explanation. They are compiled – unless otherwise stated – from a methodical study of the civil records of deaths (death certificates) for all of Co. Tipperary for the two years 1918 and 1919. These death records are readily accessible online at <https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie>. They are organised by Superintendent Registrar District (SRD) and are subdivided into Registrar District (RD). The SRD equates exactly to the Poor Law Union, while the RDs are the Dispensary Districts (DDs) found within each union.

As far as I am aware the death certificates have not previously been systematically tapped as a source for compiling statistics and other information on the Spanish flu. Most studies rely on the figures published in the 55th and 56th Register-General Annual Reports. While the death records are certainly time-consuming to trawl through – probably only possible for a local study – they are very rewarding in the amount of information they reveal about victims: their names, ages, occupations, marital status, date, cause and place of death, number of days ill and whether they had medical attention or not. I have drawn up comprehensive lists of flu deaths – with the above details attached for each individual – for each of the twelve poor law unions found wholly or partially in Co. Tipperary. (See Appendix 2 for details on unions). I have included in those calculations only flu deaths that occurred within the Co. Tipperary portion of each union.

While it might be desirable to individually footnote each set of statistics in the article, this is not technically possible. Readers should note that details of individual flu deaths mentioned in the text – ages, addresses, number of days ill, etc. – are also gleaned from the online death certificates unless otherwise stated.

APPENDIX 2

The census of 1911 – the last published census before the outbreak of Spanish flu – showed that Co. Tipperary had a population of 152,433. At the time there were twelve poor law unions lying wholly or partially within the bounds of the county. Five were totally within Co. Tipperary, while the remaining seven extended into neighbouring counties to a greater or lesser extent. For example, the greater portions of Clonmel and Tipperary unions were in Co. Tipperary, while Parsonstown and Urlingford unions lay predominantly in counties Offaly and Kilkenny respectively. The chart below shows the name of each union, its Co. Tipperary 1911 population, also that population as a percentage of the total union population. Each union was subdivided into dispensary districts (DDs) and these are listed for the Co. Tipperary portion of each of the twelve unions.

Poor Law Union	Population of Co. Tipperary part of union	Percentage of union population in Co. Tipperary	Dispensary Districts (DDs) in Co. Tipperary portion of each union
Parsonstown (pt.)	1,883	8%	Riverstown
Borrisokane	7,853	100%	Borrisokane; Cloughjordan; Terryglass
Nenagh	23,038	100%	Nenagh; Newport; Portroe; Silvermines; Toomevara
Roscrea (pt.)	7,653	45%	Roscrea No. 1; Bourney
Thurles	22,455	100%	Borrisoleigh; Holycross; Littleton; Moyne; Templemore; Thurles
Urlingford (pt.)	2,738	32%	Kilcooley
Cashel	19,501	100%	Cashel; Fethard; Killenaule; Kilpatrick; Tullamaine
Tipperary (pt.)	24,668	79%	Bansha; Cappagh; Emly; Golden; Tipperary
Clonmel (pt.)	15,012	82%	Clonmel No. 1; Clonmel No. 2 (Marlfield); Kilsheelan No. 1; Kiltinan
Clogheen	14,737	100%	Ardfinnan; Caher; Clogheen
Carrick-on-Suir (pt.)	7,655	46%	Carrick-on-Suir; Garrangibbon
Callan (pt.)	5,241	40%	Ballingarry; Mullinahone

My thanks to Donal A Murphy, Nenagh, for reading a draft of this article and for his helpful suggestions.

References

- 1 IFC, Schools' Collection, vol. 0539, pp. 228-10. Margaret Ryan's account – from information supplied by 90-year-old William Bourke of Ballyard, Birdhill – was evidently based on fact because there were a number of cases in her parish where two family members died from flu within days of each other.
- 2 Johnson and Mueller, 'Updating the accounts: Global mortality of the 1918-1920 Spanish influenza pandemic', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, lxxvi (2002), pp. 105-15. There has been an enormous number of publications on the Spanish flu internationally in recent years.

- Among the most accessible are Laura Spinney, *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How it Changed the World* (New York, 2017) and John M. Barry, *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History* (New York, revised ed. 2018).
- 3 Alfred Crosby, *America's Forgotten Pandemic* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 203.
 - 4 Turtle Bunbury and James Fennell, *Vanishing Ireland* (Dublin, 2011), p. 91.
 - 5 *Nenagh Guardian* 19 Oct. 1918.
 - 6 *55th annual report of registrar-general for Ireland for 1918* (1919), x, cmd 450, records that during the decade 1908-17 deaths from TB were five times greater each year than deaths from influenza.
 - 7 *55th annual report of registrar-general*, p. xxv.
 - 8 Caitriona Foley, *The Last Irish Plague: The Great Flu Epidemic in Ireland 1918-19* (Dublin, 2011); Ida Milne, *Stacking the Coffins: Influenza, War and Revolution in Ireland, 1918-19* (Manchester, 2018).
 - 9 Caitriona Foley has an interesting discussion on the topic's previous neglect in Chapter 8 of *The Last Irish Plague*.
 - 10 Laura Spinney explains the amnesia as follows in *Pale Rider*, p. 292: 'Memory is an active process. Details have to be rehearsed to be relived, but who wants to rehearse the details of a pandemic?'
 - 11 Milne, *Stacking the Coffins*, p. 237.
 - 12 *Tipperary Star* 26 Oct. 1918. One of the strengths of Milne's *Stacking the Coffins* is her chapter of interviews with elderly child survivors of the pandemic and the effects it had on their families.
 - 13 Foley, *The Last Irish Plague*, pp. 14-15.
 - 14 The source of the statistics of flu deaths found here and throughout the article is explained fully in Appendix 1. It is not possible to reference each entry individually, but all statistical details are based on these civil records unless otherwise stated. This source has also been helpful for Information on individual deaths.
 - 15 *Tipperary People* 3 May 1918; *Nenagh Guardian* 11, 18 May 1918.
 - 16 Milne, *Stacking the Coffins*, p. 51.
 - 17 *Nenagh Guardian* 2 Nov. 1918.
 - 18 Dr George Peacocke, President of the Royal Academy of Medicine in Ireland, accused the press of causing undue alarm over the outbreak. But this was probably unfair because the press – either national or local – could hardly ignore the stark reality of sickness and death happening all around it.
 - 19 *Cork Examiner* 24 June 1918.
 - 20 *Tipperary People* 26 July 1918.
 - 21 *Clonmel Chronicle* 6 July 1918.
 - 22 *Nationalist* 7 Sept. 1918.
 - 23 Information based on death certificate.
 - 24 *Tipperary Star* 27 July 1918.
 - 25 Milne, *Stacking the Coffins*, p. 60.
 - 26 *Nenagh Guardian* 27 July 1918.
 - 27 A perusal of the Tipperary newspapers of those summer months, particularly the advertisements, obituaries and sporting and social reports, shows this to have been the case.
 - 28 *Nenagh Guardian* 6 July 1918.
 - 29 *Tipperary People* 18 Oct. 1918; Milne, *Stacking the Coffins*, pp. 25-47.
 - 30 Foley, *The Last Irish Plague*, p. 16.
 - 31 Local Studies, Thurles: Maher Papers (typescript), vol. 8 (Journal 1918), p. 128, (hereafter Maher Journal).
 - 32 *Nationalist* 9 Oct. 1918.
 - 33 *Cork Examiner* 9 Oct. 1918.
 - 34 *Cork Examiner* 19 Oct. 1918.

- 35 Maher Journal, p. 128; *Nationalist* 30 Oct. 1918.
- 36 Maher Journal, p. 128.
- 37 *Cork Examiner* 19 Oct. 1918.
- 38 Maher Journal, p. 128.
- 39 *Nenagh News* 2 Nov. 1918.
- 40 *Nationalist* 9 Oct. 1918; Maher Journal, p. 129.
- 41 *Nationalist* 2 Nov. 1918.
- 42 *Nenagh Guardian* 26 Oct. 1918.
- 43 *Freeman's Journal* 28 Oct. 1918.
- 44 *Cork Examiner* 9 Nov. 1918.
- 45 *Irish Independent* 9 Nov. 1918.
- 46 *Tipperary Star* 23 Nov. 1918.
- 47 *Nenagh Guardian* 2 Nov. 1918.
- 48 *Nenagh Guardian* 2, 30 Nov. 1918.
- 49 *Nenagh News* 2 Nov. 1918.
- 50 *Tipperary Star* 16 Nov. 1918.
- 51 *Tipperary Star* 26 Oct. 1918.
- 52 *Nenagh News* 9 Nov. 1918.
- 53 *Tipperary Star* 26 Oct. 1918.
- 54 *Tipperary People* 25 Oct. 1918.
- 55 *ibid.*
- 56 *ibid.*
- 57 *Nenagh News* 2 Nov. 1918.
- 58 *Nationalist* 16 Nov. 1918.
- 59 Local Studies, Thurles: Tipperary Union, BG 152/A/86, p. 898.
- 60 *Nationalist* 6 Nov. 1918.
- 61 *Nationalist* 30 Dec. 1918.
- 62 *ibid.*
- 63 *Nationalist* 30 Oct. 1918.
- 64 Local Studies, Thurles: Cashel Union, BG 54/A/127, pp. 549-52.
- 65 *Nationalist* 26 Oct., 13 Nov. 1918.
- 66 *Clonmel Chronicle* 30 Oct. 1918.
- 67 *Tipperary Star* 26 Oct. 1918, *Irish Independent* 1 Nov. 1918.
- 68 *Nationalist* 6 Nov. 1918.
- 69 *Nationalist* 6 Nov. 1918; *Tipperary Star* 9 Nov. 1918.
- 70 Local Studies, Thurles: Clonmel Union, BG 67/A/143, pp. 104, 124.
- 71 *ibid.*, pp. 99-104.
- 72 *Nationalist* 23 Nov. 1918.
- 73 *Nationalist* 30 Nov. 1918.
- 74 Milne, *Stacking the Coffins*, p. 148.
- 75 Conor Reidy, 'The 1918 Influenza Outbreak in Clonmel', *THJ* (2011), p. 81.
- 76 Milne, *Stacking the Coffins*, p. 155.
- 77 *Nenagh News* 2 Nov. 1918.
- 78 *Nationalist* 2 Nov. 1918.
- 79 *Cork Examiner* 20 Nov. 1918.
- 80 *Nationalist* 13 Nov. 1918.
- 81 *Nationalist* 26 Oct. 1918.
- 82 Local Studies, Thurles: Clogheen Union, BG 64/A/135, p. 342.
- 83 *ibid.*, p. 445.
- 84 *Nenagh Guardian* 1 Mar. 1919; *Tipperary Star* 15 Mar. 1919.
- 85 *Clonmel Chronicle* 1 Mar. 1919.
- 86 *Nationalist* 5 Mar. 1919.
- 87 *Nationalist* 29 Mar., 2 April 1919.

- 88 *Nationalist* 5 April 1919.
- 89 *Nenagh Guardian* 5 April 1919.
- 90 *Nenagh Guardian* 8 Mar. 1919.
- 91 *ibid.*
- 92 *ibid.*
- 93 Local Studies, Thurles: Nenagh Union, BG 129/A/96, p. 338.
- 94 Local Studies, Thurles: Nenagh Union, BG 129/A/96, p. 338; *Nenagh Guardian* 17 May 1919.
- 95 Milne, *Stacking the Coffins*, p. 57.
- 96 This figure of 595 flu deaths differs slightly from the figure of 606 calculated from the *55th and 56th registrar-general reports*.
- 97 Milne, *Stacking the Coffins*, p. 64.
- 98 Percentages based on *55th and 56th annual reports of registrar-general*, p. 864 and p. 641 respectively.
- 99 In a small number of cases the classification is vague, e.g 'housekeeper', but these are easily checked for occupation and social status in the 1911 census returns.
- 100 *Irish Independent* 14 May 1919.
- 101 *Nationalist* 23 Nov. 1918.
- 102 *Clonmel Chronicle* 26 Oct. 1918.
- 103 *Nationalist* 3 Aug. 1918.
- 104 *Nationalist* 6 Nov. 1918; *Nenagh Guardian* 16 Nov. 1918.
- 105 *Tipperary Star* 2 Nov. 1918.
- 106 *Nationalist* 6 Nov. 1918.
- 107 *55th annual report of registrar-general for Ireland for 1918*, p. 859, shows that 78% of the 78, 695 deaths in Ireland that year took place in the home.
- 108 *Nationalist* 9 Nov. 1918.
- 109 *Nationalist* 6 Nov. 1918. Dispensary doctors were obliged to attend for free every sick person issued with a ticket by the relieving officer or a poor law guardian. A black ticket entitled the holder or his dependents to attend at the local dispensary, while a red ticket obliged the doctor to attend at the patient's home. Since the majority of flu patients remained at home, rural dispensary doctors were constantly on the move throughout their often far-flung districts.
- 110 *Nenagh News* 13 Sept. 1919.
- 111 *Clonmel Chronicle* 9 Nov. 1918.
- 112 *Nationalist* 30 Oct. 1918.
- 113 *Nationalist* 20 Nov. 1918.
- 114 Milne, *Stacking the Coffins*, p. 129.
- 115 *ibid.*, p. 131.
- 116 Foley, *The Last Irish Plague*, p. 101.
- 117 Local Studies, Thurles: Roscrea Union, BG 141/A/85, p. 346.
- 118 *Clonmel Chronicle* 20 Nov. 1918; *Cork Examiner* 18 Nov. 1918.
- 119 *Nenagh Guardian* 2 Nov. 1918.
- 120 *Clonmel Chronicle* 12 April 1919.
- 121 *Nationalist* 6 Nov. 1918.
- 122 *ibid.*
- 123 *Nationalist* 9, 20 Nov. 1918.
- 124 *Nationalist* 20 Nov. 1918.
- 125 *Clonmel Chronicle* 9 Nov. 1918.
- 126 *Nationalist* 26 Oct. 1918.
- 127 *Nationalist* 20 Nov. 1918; *Nenagh Guardian* 14 Dec. 1918.
- 128 *Nationalist* 2, 13 Nov. 1918.
- 129 *Nationalist* 21 Dec. 1918.