

‘...the Kilorglin town crowd were no good’: The Characterisation of Civilians, during the Revolutionary Period, in IRA Testimony: A Kerry Case Study

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Abstract: Using testimony collected by the Irish Government from IRA veterans, of the revolutionary period, this article examines the ways in which civilians were characterised by these veterans in the 1919-21 Anglo-Irish conflict and 1922-23 Irish civil war. Looking beyond the traditional more glossy narrative that maintained the IRA had universal support, this article shows that, through looking at this testimony, civilians were routinely characterised in negative ways. This article examines who in Irish society the IRA believed they had the support of, but also and more importantly, who they believed did not. The article shows that the IRA tended to associate civilians who they felt were opposed to their revolution with certain towns, but also, that their civilian opponents were characterised as either being upwardly mobile in urban environments but also as the poverty stricken in rural environments. The article explores the connotations around definitions of respectability that these characterisations create. The article concludes by examining how these issues played out in the civil war, and how from the revolutionary period through to the Northern Irish troubles militant Irish republicans have consistently characterised their civilian supporters as part of a small but dedicated nucleus. County Kerry is used as a case study.

Keywords: Irish revolution, civilians, IRA, local history, irregular conflict