

# A Dangerous Man:

## Frank Lawless and the War of Independence in Fingal

### Early Life and Politics

Francis Joseph Lawless was born on 10 October 1870 to Joseph and Mary Anne Lawless at Saucerstown, Swords. The path that Francis' (known throughout his life as Frank) life would follow, both professionally and politically, was one that was laid out by the generations that preceded him. Farming was the family profession: Frank's grandfather, Richard, was a farmer, and his father Joseph was listed on his marriage record as a grazier. Frank's mother Mary Anne came from an agricultural background and her father, Edward Ennis, was also a farmer. Both the Lawless and Ennis families appear in the 1847 Griffith Valuation, and the record shows that the Lawless farm was a sizable enterprise, valued at over £350.



aims was land reform – so it is unsurprising that Frank Lawless was a key figure. In March 1901, he was recorded as seconding a motion in favour of the Irish Parliamentary Party. At the same time, his involvement in the cultural nationalist scene was also growing: in January 1902 he was listed as provisional treasurer of Swords Gaelic League branch, as well as being re-elected president of Fingallians GAA in December. Signing himself Pronsias O'Laoidhleis he was responsible for collecting the Swords contributions to the National Language Fund and was a noted singer at feiseanna and Aeridheacht across the county. In 1905, he became involved in the North County Dublin Farmers Association, and was elected to the committee of that body in January 1906.

However, from 1905 onwards, Lawless' politics appear to have evolved away from the constitutional nationalism of the Irish Parliamentary Party and in a more radical direction. There is some evidence of him getting impatient with the local political establishment: in May 1905 he was part of a heated argument at a Local Government Board meeting about nominations for local elections.

His frustration with the status quo may have been compounded by a petty incident in November 1905 in which his mother Mary Anne was fined under the terms of the 1857 Summary Jurisdiction Act, which directed owners of carts to write their name legibly on the vehicle – the Lawless cart had their details written in Irish. This was one of a series of fines issued in 1905 across the country by the police, all of which were issued to cart owners who had used the Irish language for their signage, details of which appeared in *An Claidheamh Soluis* throughout the year. Mary Anne refused to pay the fine and the Lawless home was subsequently raided by the police, who seized a couch as payment, before reportedly requesting use of the offending cart to transport the furniture back to the barracks. In October 1907 Frank Lawless presided over a meeting in Swords to set up a branch of the National Council, an organisation set up to expand republican membership of local councils. His speech, recorded in the *Irish Peasant* on 26 October, showed the extent to which he had emerged from his father's shadow and was becoming more radical: 'I was a member of the Land League, and later of the United Irish League' he said, 'but since Parnell's death every year that passes strengthens my belief that no good can come to this country through Parliamentarism.' It was via the Irish cultural scene that his path crossed with Kerryman Thomas Ashe, who had moved to Lusk to take up a teaching post in March 1908. Like Lawless, Ashe was deeply interested in Irish language and

However, Frank did not just inherit his farming livelihood from his grandfather and father, he also inherited their involvement in nationalist politics. Like the majority of those who worked the land in 19th century Ireland, the Lawless family did not own their own farm and it is no surprise therefore that they were involved in the



various nationalist movements of the time. Richard Lawless is recorded as having been involved in the anti-tithe movement in the 1830s, which was a campaign against the rates paid by Catholics to maintain the Church of Ireland. As part of this, Richard was a frequent contributor for Rolestown and Oldtown Catholic and nationalist funds throughout the 1840s. He was also a prominent Repealer and appeared at a large rally held in Swords in July 1843. Richard's son, Joseph, was a member of Balrothery Board of Guardians and also appeared regularly in the list of those who donated to nationalist collections such as the Isaac Butt Testimonial. In addition, Joseph was a member of the Dublin County Grand Jury and was also involved in the County Dublin Tenants Defence Association. Therefore, Frank's political education would have been steeped in nationalist politics at both the county and country level.



Frank Lawless was also involved in Irish cultural associations at an early stage. His first recorded involvement in the GAA is from November 1891, when Fingallians were recorded as having beaten Eoin Roe O'Neills by 1-5 to 0-2 and Frank was listed as club president. In January 1892, he was elected as the Fingal representative on the Dublin GAA central committee. He was present at the founding meeting of the Swords branch

of the United Irish League (UIL) in May 1900 and was elected secretary of the branch the following month. The UIL was a nationalist party launched in the aftermath of the Parnellite split in the Irish Parliamentary Party, and one of its

seized a couch as payment, before reportedly requesting use of the offending cart to transport the furniture back to the barracks. In October 1907 Frank Lawless presided over a meeting in Swords to set up a branch of the National Council, an organisation set up to expand republican membership of local councils. His speech, recorded in the *Irish Peasant* on 26 October, showed the extent to which he had emerged from his father's shadow and was becoming more radical: 'I was a member of the Land League, and later of the United Irish League' he said, 'but since Parnell's death every year that passes strengthens my belief that no good can come to this country through Parliamentarism.' It was via the Irish cultural scene that his path crossed with Kerryman Thomas Ashe, who had moved to Lusk to take up a teaching post in March 1908. Like Lawless, Ashe was deeply interested in Irish language and



joined, but is described by his son Joseph as a 'leading light' in the organisation, a fact that was also noted by the authorities in his police file. Ashe probably was a member in Kerry before he moved to Fingal and subsequently became a key figure in Lusk IRB circle. The presence of two such committed and enthusiastic individuals, dedicated to the cause of Irish independence, would be pivotal to Fingal's role in the revolution.

1. Frank Lawless c1921  
Image Courtesy of the Lawless Family
2. Registration of Birth of Frank Lawless 10 October 1870  
[www.irishgenealogy.ie](http://www.irishgenealogy.ie)
3. Main Street, Swords c1909  
Fingal Local Studies & Archives
4. Fingallians Football Team 1909  
Frank Lawless – back row, last right  
Fingal Local Studies & Archives
5. Registration of the Marriage of Frank Lawless and Catherine Howard 14 November 1896  
[www.irishgenealogy.ie](http://www.irishgenealogy.ie)
6. Frank Lawless and his family c1915  
Back line left to right: Barney, Kathleen, Colm, Evelyn, Joe, Ita  
Front line: Nuala, Frank snr., Feilim, Catherine, Kieran, in front Aidan  
Image Courtesy of the Lawless Family



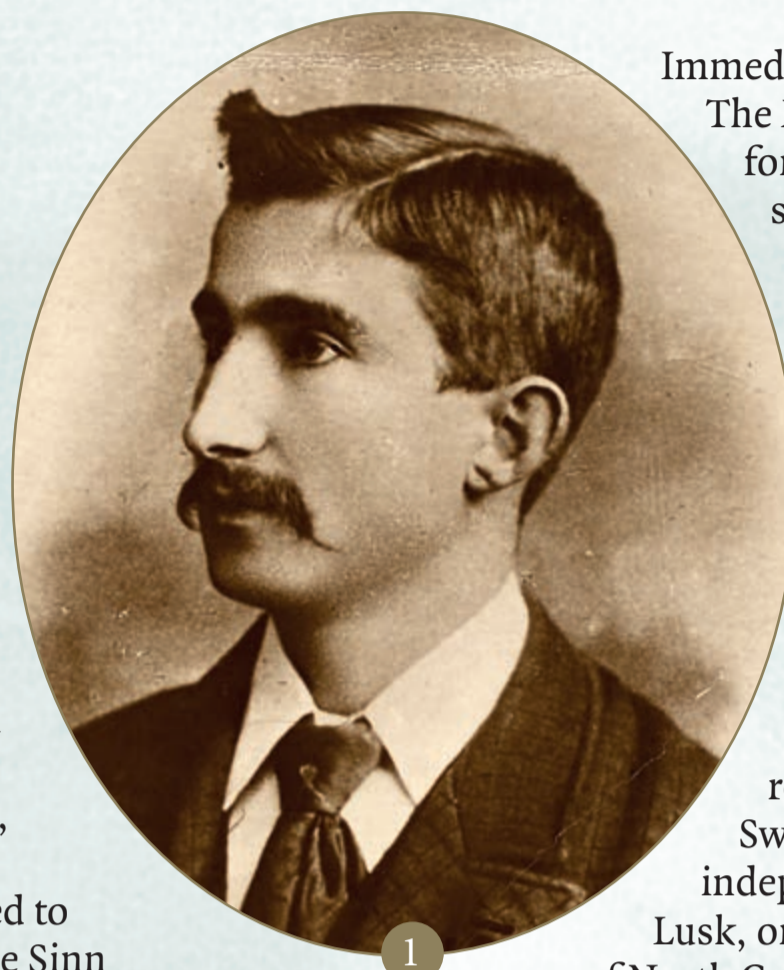


# A Dangerous Man:

## Frank Lawless and the War of Independence in Fingal

### Republican Activity

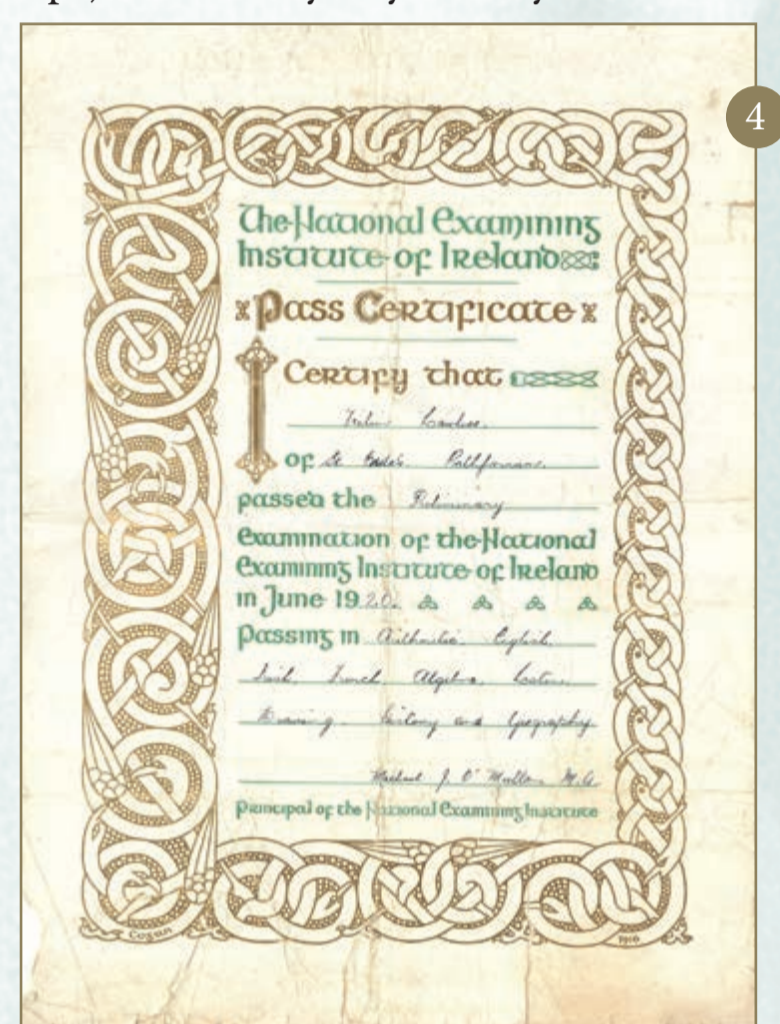
From 1908 onwards, Frank Lawless' involvement in republican politics began to accelerate. In February he attended the North Leirim by-election, which was lost by Sinn Fein's Charles Dolan. In March, he attended a national Sinn Fein meeting at the Mansion House along with Arthur Griffith, Sean T O'Kelly, Jenny Wyse Power, Catherine Lawless, Bulmer Hobson and W.T. Cosgrave; the following month he was elected to the National Executive. In September 1909 he was elected to the Sinn Fein resident council, while also president of Fingal Football and Hurling league, a member of the Gaelic League and holding a seat on Balrothery Board of Guardians. When his mother died in February 1911, his status in Sinn Fein was such that the executive voted a resolution of sympathy.



Immediately, profound divisions appeared in the Fingal Volunteers. The Northern Whig reported that Balbriggan and Swords declared for Redmond; Lusk Volunteer company sent a statement of support to Redmond and paraded 500 men on 4 October. On 11 October Garristown followed Redmond; on 17 October Naul company declared for him, while Skerries split, with two-thirds of the company endorsing Redmond. On 17 October, a notice written by the 'Swords Corps' appeared in the Irish Volunteer; signed by Richard Coleman and FJ Lawless, it declared its support for the original Volunteer constitution and repudiated any declarations to the contrary. By December, the split had become so pronounced in Fingal that there were rival companies in some areas. A letter in the Drogheda Independent lamented the fact that 'Our streets no longer resound with the tramp of marching men...Skerries is reputed to have two corps, but in reality they are only in name.

Swords has also two independent corps. Lusk, once the bright spot of North County Dublin, but now fast becoming notorious for its domestic squabbles, which certainly do not emanate from an excessive love of country, has also two corps which are in the mire of these disputes. In these towns the movement is coming quietly to an inglorious end and all through lack of cooperation and local enthusiasm.'

Frank Lawless was heavily involved in the re-founding of the Volunteer movement from the very start. On 6 December 1914 the General Council of the Irish Volunteers met at 41 Kildare Street to appoint new central administrative officers; Lawless attended as the representative for Dublin County. At the same time, he was extremely vocal in his opposition to the war. At a Guardians meeting in February 1915, he refused to support a motion praising the action of Edwin Landy, a Skerries man who had joined the Royal Navy; in May he threatened to withdraw if the local council followed through with a motion to become the local recruitment committee.



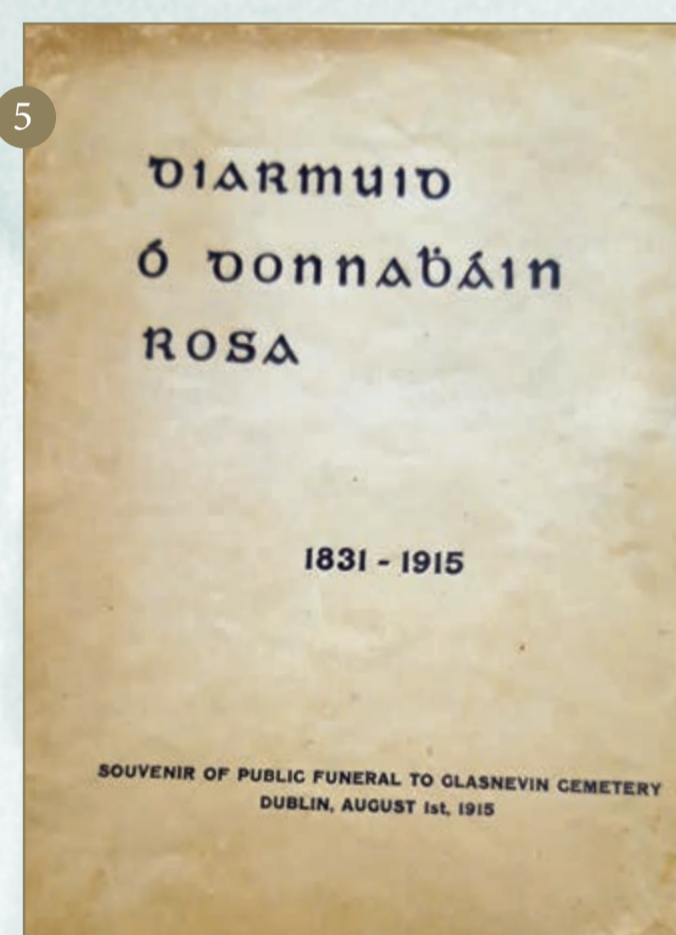
This interesting old picture was taken 25 years ago on the occasion of the first Aonach, on the 11th December, 1908. (Front Row, L. to R.)—Sean Mac Diarmada, Liam Clare, Bulmer Hobson, P. O Caoimh, Kevin J. Kenny, and Diarmuid O'Leary. (Middle Row, L. to R.)—Miss Moloney, Miss Murphy, Mrs. Tuckey, Mrs. Wyse-Power, Frank Lawless, Con Collins, and Tomus Cuffe. (Back Row, L. to R.)—Aindris O Broin (Secretary of Sinn Fein), Seamus Deakin, Hugh Holohan, Tom Kelly, director, Sinn Fein Ba nk (now T.D.), Joe Ryan, Arthur Griffith, and Liam Hickey.

In November 1913, the Irish Volunteers was founded in response to the establishment of the Ulster Volunteers the previous year. A company was established in Swords during April 1914, followed by Lusk and Skerries in May, Donebate in June, as well as St. Margarets, Naul and Howth in July. In August 1914 a company was formed in Malahide and a branch of Cumann na mBan was established in Lusk. Lawless attended the meeting in Donabate and was recorded as saying that the Irish people 'should claim the right as citizens to carry arms. Very soon perhaps they might be called upon to use them; and, on the other hand, the occasion might never arise.' The Irish Independent reported that 'The most important thing, said Mr Frank Lawless, was to be ready and to be qualified to take the field if called upon.' On 5 July 1914 Lawless was on the platform when Douglas Hyde addressed the Fingal Feis at Balbriggan, while on the same day a meeting to set up a Volunteer company in the town was attended by members from Skerries and Swords.

However, the movement as a whole was plagued by a shortage of weapons. Swords company, for example, initially had a single rifle which was shared between members for drill. However, on 26 July 1914 - two days before Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo, sparking the First World War - the yacht Asgard landed 1500 Mauser rifles at Howth: 50 of these went to the Skerries Volunteer company, two were sent to Howth and a further two to Swords. Local Volunteers also bought weapons when they became available. The Weston brothers, for example, bought a rifle each from Lawless for 50 shillings each, while they also purchased pistols and ammunition from Thomas Ashe.

Mr Frank Lawless, Sinn Fein, Swords, said he did not propose to speak in support of any of the resolutions before the meeting except the first one, which was the one that appealed chiefly to him. They should claim the right as citizens to carry arms. Very soon, perhaps, they might be called upon to use them; and, on the other hand, the occasion might never arise. The important thing was to be ready, and to be qualified to take the field if called upon (applause).

At the first public drill of the Swords Volunteer company on 12 April 1914, a total of 12 recruits turned out. By contrast, the first parade in Lusk brought out 80 Volunteers. However, the fledgling movement almost immediately fell apart. Having seized control of the Volunteers in June 1914, Irish Parliamentary Party leader John Redmond delivered a speech at Woodenbridge in Wicklow on 20 September 1914, in which he both declared support for the war and urged the Volunteers to join the British forces. Consequently, the entire Volunteer movement split: the vast majority, around 158,000, sided with Redmond and this group rebranded itself the Irish National Volunteers. The small minority that remained - estimated to be around 10,000 nationwide - retained the original title of Irish Volunteers and were fiercely opposed to any Irish participation in the European war.



On 10 June 1915 Patrick Pearse, in his capacity as Director of Organisation, officially designated the Fingal Volunteers as the Fifth Battalion of the Dublin Brigade, while Lawless was appointed Battalion Quartermaster shortly afterwards. The antagonism between the pro- and anti-Redmond Volunteer factions was suspended briefly after the death of the noted Fenian Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, whose funeral at Glasnevin in August 1915 was turned into a spectacular act of republican publicity; Thomas Ashe and Frank Lawless left a training camp in the Wicklow mountains to attend. Volunteers from both sides of the divide paraded at the funeral in a show of public unity, but there was no actual reconciliation between the two factions. On 15 August, the Volunteers intercepted a shipment of arms at North Wall that were destined for Redmond's National Volunteers; four crates of rifles were subsequently hidden at the Lawless farm in Saucerstown.

While all this was happening, the war in Europe continued to impact on Fingal. On 4 May 1915, it was reported that James Gosson of Skerries had been killed in France while serving with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers; before he joined the British army, he had been drill instructor for the Skerries Volunteer company.

1. Frank Lawless c1916  
Image Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland
2. Frank Lawless with Arthur Griffith 1908  
Irish Independent December 1933  
Courtesy of the Irish Newspaper Archives
3. Frank Lawless addresses Sinn Fein meeting in Swords  
Drogheda Independent 27th June 1914  
Courtesy of the Irish Newspaper Archives
4. School Report from St. Enda's School, Rathfarnham for Feilim Lawless 1920  
Image Courtesy of the Lawless Family
5. Souvenir of O'Donovan Rossa's funeral 1 August 1915  
Frank Lawless attended with Thomas Ashe  
Fingal Local Studies & Archives





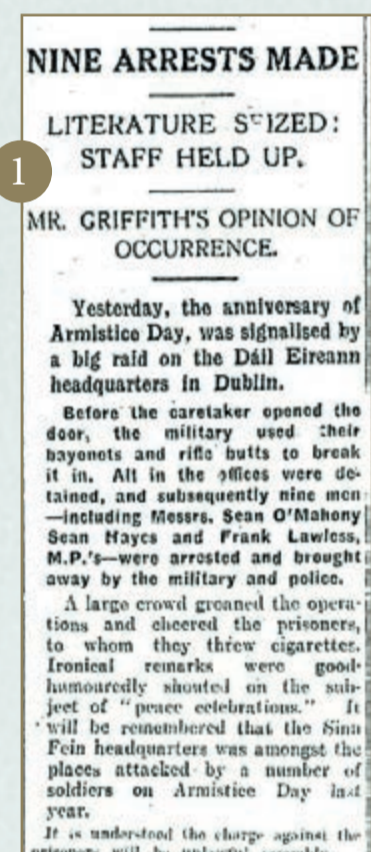
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### From the Rising to the War of Independence

The wider Lawless family played a central role in the revolution in Fingal. Frank's brother Edward was a prominent Volunteer, and had travelled to South Africa to join the struggle against the British during the Boer War of 1899 - 1901, although he arrived too late to fight. Another brother, James, commanded the St Margaret Volunteer company and was president of the Dublin branch of the National Committee. Frank's son Joseph was a member of the First Battalion and co-owned a bicycle shop in Parnell Street, where arms were manufactured in the basement, while Frank's daughter, Eibhlin, was one of Michael Collins' stenographers.

The story of the Fingal Battalion during Easter Week 1916 was one of the few success stories of the Rising. The rebellion had originally been scheduled for Easter Sunday, 23 April but was countermanded by the Volunteer Chief-of-Staff Eoin MacNeill. In the confusion, the Fingal Volunteers mobilised with around 120 men on April 23. However, in the words of Christopher Moran of Swords, 'it was quite apparent that something had gone wrong with the plans for the day'. Having been fed at the Lawless farm, and an impromptu dance in the barn, the rebels were dispersed but told to be ready to remobilise at a moment's notice.



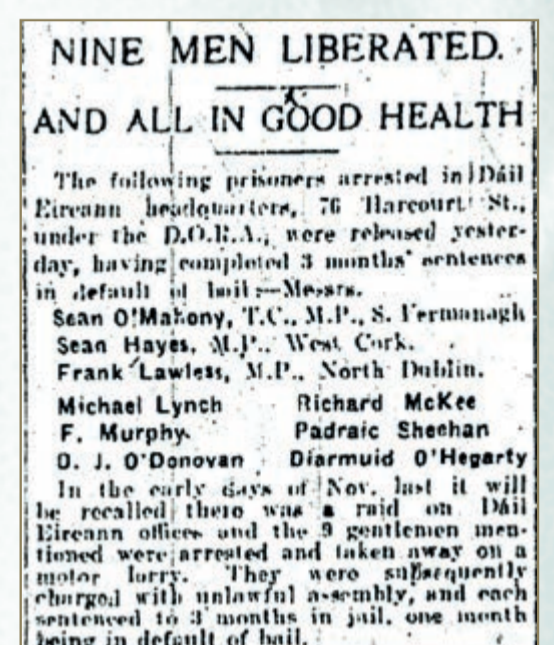
The next day, 24 April, a message arrived at the farm that Pearse had ordered the rebellion to proceed at 1pm. Frank Lawless delivered the news to his son Joseph, 'his eyes alight with the excitement of joyful news, and with the announcement 'the day has come at last'. Fifth Battalion mobilised again on the morning of 24 April at Knocksedan, but only 80 came out this time. The Battalion was extremely active during the week and, instead of occupying static positions as the rebels did in the city centre, it divided into fast-moving columns. On the first day it bombed the railway bridge at Rogerstown and marched to camp in Finglas. The following day, 25 April, after receiving a request directly from James Connolly, Ashe sent 20 men, including Richard Coleman, Thomas Peppard, Peter Wilson and Edward Lawless, into the city as reinforcements. On 26 April Fifth Battalion captured Swords, Donabate and Garristown RIC barracks and camped in Baldwinstown; the next day, 27 April, it moved to Borranstown.

On the morning of 28 April the Volunteers attacked the RIC station at Ashbourne and then ambushed a column of cars filled with RIC reinforcements close to Rath Cross. A fierce five-hour firefight developed with eight RIC, three civilians and two Volunteers being killed. During the battle, Volunteer Jack Crenigan, who had been in school with Joseph Lawless and employed on the Lawless farm, was shot dead by RIC District Inspector Harry Smith. Joseph Lawless later recounted that Smyth had fired at his father, but hit Crenigan instead: at the same moment, Frank Lawless shot Smyth in the head from close range. Following the police surrender, Dr Richard Hayes and Molly Adrien distributed first aid to the police as they were stripped of their arms. The Battalion subsequently camped at Borranstown and Newbarn, where they received the stunning news that Pearse had ordered their surrender. Frank Lawless was court-martialled at Richmond Barracks on 9 May; he was sentenced to death which was immediately commuted to ten years imprisonment and he was moved to Mountjoy prison the next day, before being sent to Lewes. One immediate consequence of his absence was that the burden of farm work fell onto family: on 14 June 1916 Catherine Lawless advertised multiple animals and assorted farming implements for sale, as well as advertising 102 acres for rent.



Frank Lawless was released on 16 June 1917 as part of the general amnesty for republican prisoners and immediately returned to republican activism. In September 1917 he presided over the creation of the North County Sinn Fein clubs executive, and the following month he attended the establishment of Rush Sinn Fein branch. The same month, Eamon de Valera addressed the North County Sinn Fein clubs at a large public meeting in Balbriggan, which Lawless attended. In November, he spoke alongside Count Plunkett at a republican meeting in Skerries; in December he was appointed the Director of Sinn Fein's Agriculture Department.

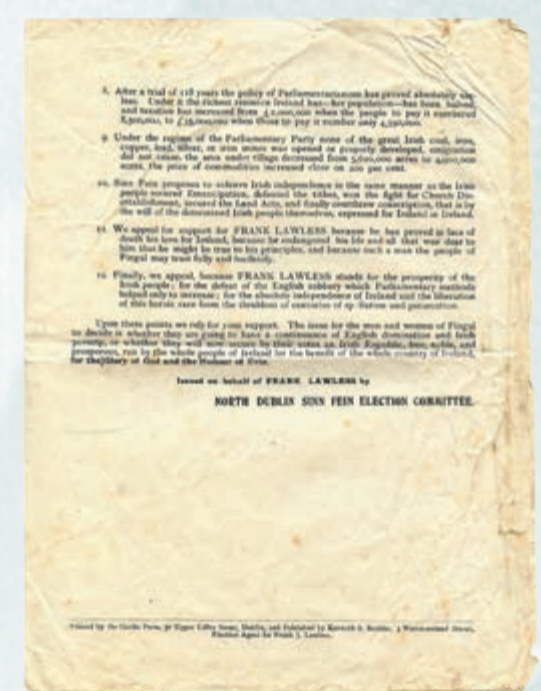
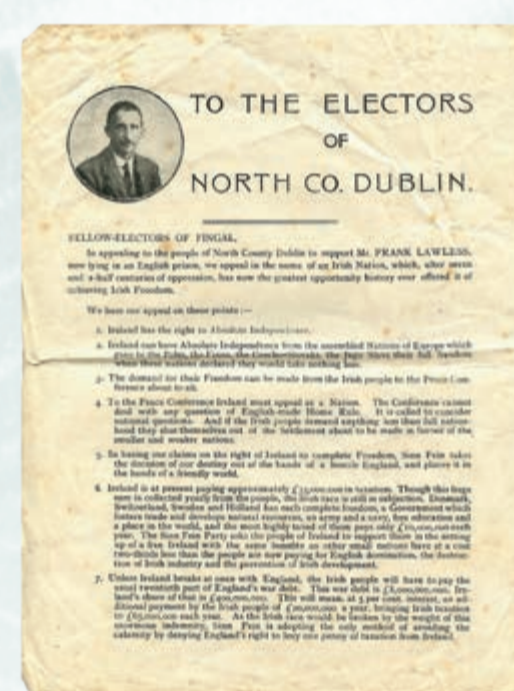
On 18 May 1918 he was rearrested during the so-called 'German Plot': 30 police arrived at 2am to take him into custody. Richard Coleman, O/C of Swords company, was also arrested. Both were deported via Dun Laoghaire to Usk prison, where Coleman died of influenza in December 1918. Lawless was granted parole to accompany his friend's body home and, while still in prison, was selected as the Sinn Fein candidate for County Dublin. In the run-up to the December 1918 general election, meetings were held across Fingal to support Lawless' candidacy in Donabate, Rush, Skerries, St Margarets, Baldoyle and Malahide. On 9 December a torchlight parade was held in Balbriggan with 2000 in attendance. His address to the voters of North Dublin, written from prison, ended with the declaration that 'The question of freedom overshadows all other questions, and its attainment alone can definitively solve them.'



The results of the 1918 election were a seismic shock: Lawless was elected as part of a Sinn Fein landslide, while the Irish Parliamentary Party, which had dominated Irish politics for decades, was decimated and won only 6 seats. Lawless defeated the Irish Parliamentary Party incumbent JJ Clancy - who had held the seat since November 1885 - by 9,138 votes to 4,428. However, John Gaynor of Balbriggan noted that the Volunteers 'did a huge amount of personation on behalf of Sinn Fein.'

Lawless spent most of the war of independence between 1919 and 1921 in prison. He missed the meeting of the First Dáil in the Mansion House on 21 January 1919 and was released only on 8 March. On 17 June he was appointed to the Dáil Housing Committee as part of the Department of Local Government. On 10 September 1919 Dáil Éireann was declared illegal by the authorities; on 16 October all Sinn Fein clubs, the Volunteers, Cumann na mBan and Gaelic League branches were suppressed in Dublin city and county. On 11 November, Lawless was arrested when the police raided the Dáil Éireann offices at 6 Harcourt Street, and imprisoned in Mountjoy until 11 February 1920. In the interim, his brother James was arrested and deported to Wormwood Scrubs prison in London, where he joined other republicans on hunger strike.

On 13 July, the Lawless farm at Saucerstown was raided by the military; it was searched again on 6 August. Frank was arrested, along with his son Colm, at Smithfield market on 13 December 1920 by Auxiliaries and Special Branch. On 30 December, he was interned at Ballykinlar camp in County Down, with his sons Colm and Brendan, and registered as internee no. 1504. Ironically, the camp commander was Colonel Hely-Hutchinson, a native of Swords. Lawless remained at Ballykinlar for the next eight months and was re-elected as TD for Dublin County in May 1921 while still incarcerated.



1. Arrest at Dáil Éireann Headquarters, 11 November 1919  
Irish Independent 12 November 1919  
*Courtesy of the Irish Newspaper Archives*
2. Raid on Lawless & Heron's Bicycle Shop in Parnell St, Dublin, 1920.  
The shop, part owned by Joseph Lawless, Frank's son, housed a munitions factory, making grenades & experimental weapons.  
*Image Courtesy of the National Museum of Ireland*
3. Jail Release of Frank Lawless after 3 months in Mountjoy  
Irish Independent 12 February 1920  
*Courtesy of the Irish Newspaper Archives*
4. Frank Lawless Election Pamphlet 1918  
*Image Courtesy of the Lawless Family*



# A Dangerous Man: Frank Lawless and the War of Independence in Fingal

## The Treaty

1

LIST OF MEMBERS OF DAIL, or PARLIAMENT INTERNED IN BALLYKINLAR, Camp 2.				
NAME	SERIAL NO.	REGT.	COY.	REMARKS.
Dorhan, Michael James	1581	10	F	
Doyle, Seamus (James)	1449	15	F	
Hayes, Michael	932	35	H	
Lawless, Frank	1241	26	G	
Milroy, Sean	1513	12	F	
McGuinness, Joseph	1512	12	F	
O'Doherty, Joseph	1204	35	H	
Sears, William	1530	12	F	

When Frank Lawless was released from Ballykinlar on 8 August 1921, a ceasefire had been in place between the IRA and the British forces for almost two months. The Truce came into operation on 11 July and, while it did not mean that all fighting had ceased – for instance, violence in Ulster peaked after July 1921 – it did mean that some semblance of peace returned to large parts of the island. The war of independence in Fingal may

not have been as intensive as it was in other parts of the country, yet north county Dublin saw some of the most notable incidents of the conflict. In March 1919 an IRA raid on a British military post at Collinstown netted 70+ rifles and thousands of rounds of ammunition, which would supply the IRA across Dublin for most of the war. In February 1920, the county was declared to be ‘in disturbance’ by the police, joining Louth, Longford, Sligo, Westmeath and Wicklow. In September 1920, RIC Head Constable Peter Burke was shot dead in an altercation in Balbriggan. Shortly afterwards, Auxiliaries from Gormanstown camp raided the town, burning fifty buildings and killing two men – James Lawless and John Gibbons. The ‘Sack of Balbriggan’ as it became known, created worldwide headlines and the town was visited by the American Committee for Relief in Ireland, ensuring that British rule in Ireland came under international scrutiny, and provided many parallels with German actions during the First World War: the *Manchester Guardian* referred to the event as ‘Ireland’s Louvain’, referring to the German destruction of the Belgian city in 1914. The attack on Balbriggan became one of the most notorious events of the war of independence, along with the burning of Cork in December. Further houses were burned in Swords in November 1920 while Thomas Hand, secretary of the local branch of the ITGWU was shot dead at his home in Skerries. What all this means is that when the Truce was announced in July 1921, it most likely came as a relief to the inhabitants of North County Dublin.

Frank Lawless’ frequent stints in prison between 1918 and 1921 meant that he was not closely involved with the IRA in Fingal during the war of independence. However, the Truce offered republicans the chance to solidify their claims to be the legitimate government of the country. During the war of independence, the RIC withdrew from its more exposed barracks, which were generally then burned by the IRA. The ensuing vacuum was filled by republican police, who undertook investigations into petty crime, robbery and lesser offences. For example, on 14 October 1921, Volunteer police cleared the pubs at closing time in Skerries and evicted lodgers from rented property in Athlone. At the same time, the pause in fighting allowed the Dáil and republican courts to entrench and solidify their authority, and Frank Lawless returned to these activities as soon as he was released. On 9 August 1921, a single day after he left Ballykinlar internment camp, he attended an informal meeting of the Dáil in the Mansion House; on 9 September he was recorded as being present at a republican meeting



in Swords; and on 8 October he was listed as an officer of the republican court held in the Carnegie Hall. In December 1921 the Irish Product League, which Lawless had helped to establish in Ballykinlar and which promoted Irish manufactured-products, asked the Balbriggan IRA to support them by smoking Irish tobacco and cigarettes made in Ireland.

These local events occurred against the backdrop of negotiations between the republican movement and the British Government, which had started in earnest in September 1921. The Lawless family had a direct connection to the talks: Frank’s daughter Eithne had been one of Michael Collins’ stenographers and left to become a nun, leaving a vacancy in the administrative team. Frank recommended his nieces Alice and Ellie Lyons as replacements, and both were part of the secretarial team during the Treaty negotiations in London. After two months of difficult and complex negotiations, the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed on 6 December 1921, establishing the Irish Free State as a British dominion, while the six counties of Northern Ireland remained inside the UK, as had been envisaged by the 1920 Government of Ireland Act. This was far less than what some republicans wanted and caused an immediate split in the movement. The Dáil itself debated the terms of the Treaty for a full nine days, from 19 December 1921 to 7 January 1922, with passionate arguments being offered both for and against. Frank Lawless was listed as being present at the debates but is not recorded as having spoken; on 7 January the Treaty was ratified by the Dáil by 64 votes to 57, with Lawless voting in favour of it. The vote led to dramatic scenes in the chamber. On 10 January, amidst rancorous arguments, De Valera walked out in protest, followed by his supporters, while Michael Collins shouted ‘Deserters all!’ as they left. Frank Lawless was one of those who was listed as remaining in his seat and Arthur Griffith was elected as President to replace de Valera. Lawless left behind no record of his thoughts on the Treaty but the split over the Treaty began the slide towards civil war, which eventually broke out in June 1922.

2

Caucerstown  
Saturday

My dear Mrs. Pearse  
When in town on Thur.  
I quite forgot. to get the bill  
stamp. So I am sending you  
cheque for £10. 0. 0. I don't  
think the Bank will refuse  
to honour it. I don't like drawing  
too heavy on them. & the outlook  
is very dark. I fear we have  
some very bad times ahead for  
farmers. However I must close  
hoping Miss Pearse & family  
are keeping well.  
Sincerely yours  
Frank J. Lawless

4

**CLEARANCE SALE AND LETTING OF  
LANDS AT SAUCERSTOWN, SWORDS,  
COUNTY DUBLIN.**

WE have been instructed by Mrs.  
Catherine Lawless to sell BY  
AUCTION on MONDAY, 15th JUNE, 12  
Horses, 20 Cattle, 120 Sheep, and a large  
quantity of Farming Implements. Also  
25 Barrels Oats, etc. etc. Also TO LET  
ABOUT 100 ACRES for Grazing, Meadows,  
and in Wheat and Oat Crops.

Sale to commence at 11.30 a.m.

Particulars on application to  
**GAVIN LOW, Ltd.,**  
12 PRUSSIA STREET, DUBLIN. 567

1. List of Dáil Members interned at Ballykinlar Camp 2 1921  
*Image Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland*
2. Letter from Frank Lawless to Mrs. Pearse regarding late payment of school fees at St. Enda’s  
*Image Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland*
3. Frank Lawless and his wife Catherine leaving the Dáil 17 August 1921  
*Image Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland*
4. Lawless Farm Land to Rent Advertisement  
*Freeman’s Journal 14 June 1916  
Courtesy of the Irish Newspaper Archives*





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## Death and Funeral

On the morning of 17 April 1922, Joseph Lawless was woken by his uncle James with the solemn words 'The Boss is dead'. The previous evening, a pony and trap in which Frank and his son Colm were travelling was involved in an accident in which the horse took fright and the vehicle overturned. Colm escaped without being seriously hurt; Frank suffered catastrophic head injuries. He was treated locally by Doctor R.J. May in Swords before being transferred to the Pembroke Private Hospital at 4 Upper Pembroke Street, where he died without ever regaining consciousness. Officially he was recorded as having died of a fractured skull. He was the third TD elected to the first Dáil to die prematurely and in tragic circumstances, following Pierce McCann's death from influenza in March 1919 and Terence MsSwiney's death on hunger strike in October 1920. 'The sense of his loss was quite overwhelming' wrote his son Joseph in his BMH Witness Statement, 'and I had not recovered from the shock when the funeral was over'.



Frank Lawless' funeral was a remarkable event for its scope, timing and attendees. The funeral mass was held at the Pro-Cathedral at 11 am on 18 April and was attended by a veritable who's-who of nationalist Ireland. Among the prominent government and public figures at the service were Richard Mulcahy, W.T. Cosgrave, Dr Richard Hayes, Peadar O'Keefe, Art O'Connor, Dublin Lord Mayor Laurence O'Neill, Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins, Joe McGrath, George Gavan Duffy, Ernest Blythe, Eamon De Valera, Cathal Brugha, Margaret Pearse, Harry Boland, Sean T O'Kelly, Joe McDonagh, Desmond FitzGerald, Con Collins, Sean Etchingham, Michael Staines, Darrell Figgis, Diarmaid O'Hegarty, and Jenny Wyse Power. The tricolour-draped coffin was accompanied by a 12-strong firing party, a large body of National Army troops, members of the Dublin IRA battalions, and a parade of 100 Civic Guards – the first time the new police force had publicly paraded on any occasion in Ireland. Lawless' body was brought to the graveyard at Rolestown and buried in the family plot, where three volleys were fired over the grave and a photographer captured an image of Arthur Griffith standing beside the headstone.



Members of Dail Eireann marching four deep in the funeral procession.

The long list of notable personalities at the funeral is even more remarkable when viewed in the political and military context at the time. The republican movement had fractured over the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which had been ratified by the Dáil on 7 January 1922, triggering de Valera's resignation as president. On 17 March, de Valera gave his notorious speech at Thurles, in which he stated that the IRA might have to 'wade through Irish blood' to achieve freedom. On 26 March, the IRA convention rejected the Treaty and repudiated civilian control, while in the same month violence was very narrowly averted in Limerick between the pro- and anti-Treaty IRA factions. On 14 April – two days before the accident while ultimately led



170	Frank Lawless	18 April 1922	Pro-Cathedral
171	Frank Lawless	18 April 1922	Pro-Cathedral
172	Frank Lawless	18 April 1922	Pro-Cathedral
173	Frank Lawless	18 April 1922	Pro-Cathedral
174	Frank Lawless	18 April 1922	Pro-Cathedral
175	Frank Lawless	18 April 1922	Pro-Cathedral
176	Frank Lawless	18 April 1922	Pro-Cathedral
177	Frank Lawless	18 April 1922	Pro-Cathedral
178	Frank Lawless	18 April 1922	Pro-Cathedral
179	Frank Lawless	18 April 1922	Pro-Cathedral
180	Frank Lawless	18 April 1922	Pro-Cathedral

**SOLEMN SCENES**  
**Funeral of the Late Mr. Frank J. Lawless, T.D.**  
**FULL MILITARY HONOURS**

The funeral and interment of Mr. Frank J. Lawless, T.D., which took place today with full military honours, was a solemn and impressive sight.

The coffin containing the remains lay overnight in the Pro-Cathedral, and Solemn Requiem Mass was celebrated at 11 o'clock this morning by the Rev. J. Harley, C.C. Pro-Cathedral.

The church was crowded with mourners, including Ministers and members of Dail Eireann and the Provisional Government.

The chief mourners included Mrs. Lawless (wife), Joe, Colm, Brendan, Kieran, Patsy, and Aidan (sons), Nuala and Kathleen (daughters), James and Peter Lawless (brothers), Mrs. J. Lawless and Miss M. Howard (sisters-in-law), Kevin (nephew), and Moses Lawless (niece).

The funeral procession was headed by a strong party of 12 soldiers from Beggar Bush Barracks. The coffin was draped in a tricolour flag, and immediately after the horse came the carriage with the chief mourners. The O'Connell File and Drum band and another uniformed party of soldiers from Beggar's Bush followed.

**DAIL MEMBERS.**

After three, marching four deep, came the Dail Ministers and members and officials of the Provisional Government. Those included: President A. Griffith, Mr. E. Collins, Mr. E. Bulfinch, Mr. Joe McGrath, Mr. M. Hayes, Mr. E. Lynch, Mr. W. T. Cosgrave, Mr. Gavan Duffy, Mr. J. J. Walsh, Mr. Ernest Blythe, Mr. E. J. Duggan, Mr. De Valera, Mr. Cathal Brugha, Mrs. Pearse, Mr. H. Boland, Mr. J. M. Conboy, Mr. Sean T. O'Kelly, Mr. Joe McDonagh, Mr. B. Fitzgerald, Mr. Sean Etchingham, Mr. Sean Etchingham, Mr. Peter Hughes, Mr. M. Staines, Mr. Darrell Figgis, Mr. Diarmaid O'Hegarty.

Other representative people included: Mr. L. O'Shea, Lord Mayor; Mr. H. Price, Chairman Co. Dublin; Councillors Miss. Was Power, Joe Mooney, Geo. Lyons, J. Farrell, T. J. Loughlin, J. J. Murphy, Mr. Moore, J. Murphy, Town Clerk; Sean J. Mairchillo, Phil Ryan, G.C.C.; Fred J. Allan, Joe Murray (St. Club), E. P. Bowen and Bridget M. Conboy, Dublin County Airia Council; Mr. O. Enright, Chairman Dublin Guards; J. J. Early, Secy.; Dr. Coffey, W. J. Murphy, Chief Clerk, Geo. Leahy, Clerk of Works, Grangegorman Mental Hospital, etc.

**CLERGY PRESENT.**

Amongst the clergy present were Rev. Fr. Dominic, O.S.A., who was at one time a prisoner with deceased in Kilmainham jail; Rev. Fr. Aloysius, Rev. M. Tobin, Rev. J. Ryan, Rev. H. Burke, Rev. E. McNeill, Very Rev. J. O'Connell, Rev. J. O'Leary, Rev. M. Ryan, Rev. M. Martin, Rev. P. O'Riordan, Rev. Fr. Devine.

Officers from Beggar's Bush present were: Major J. Stacey, who had charge of the funeral arrangements; Col. Austin, F. Thurston, representing 2nd Dragoon Division; Commandant James, Commandant Boland, Commandant Shill, and Captain, Melbury.

Parties of officers and men representing the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 6th Batts of the Dublin Brigade, and detachments of I.R.A. from Marlborough Hall, and about 100 men of the Civic Guard at Ballsbridge also marched. The latter body of men, in over six feet, attracted considerable attention.

The funeral proceeded to Kilsnoo Cemetery, where the Last Prayers were recited. Three volleys were fired over the grave and the "Last Post" sounded.

A large number of beautiful wreaths, including some from Dail members and the deceased's comrades, officers and men of the Fingal Brigade, I.R.A., were laid on the coffin.

to Frank Lawless' death – a group of anti-Treaty IRA led by Rory O'Connor and Liam Mellows occupied the Four Courts in central Dublin, in a direct and provocative challenge to the authority of the Provisional Government, and civil war seemed likely. By the time of the funeral, the lines of the Treaty split were very firmly drawn, and it is entirely possible that the funeral was one of the last times that the pre-split leadership gathered in one place. Joseph Lawless recalled in his Witness Statement that Eamon de Valera and Arthur Griffith stood facing each other over his father's grave. Both Griffith and Michael Collins were dead a mere four months later; Griffith died suddenly on 12 August 1922, while Collins was killed in an ambush at Bealnablath in Cork ten days later. Just as O'Donovan Rossa's funeral in 1915 saw both sides of the original Volunteer split temporarily put aside their differences to mourn a fallen leader, Frank Lawless' funeral saw both sides of the Treaty divide united in grief.

Despite the gravity of these events, the practical results of Frank's death still had to be attended to. His death left his family with the considerable task of managing the farm and handling a formidable list of creditors. The Provisional Government undertook to pay the cost of the funeral, which totalled £100, and subsequent documents show that Michael Collins was involved in a decision to grant the family £1000 from the Dáil special fund. The Government also arranged to pay the outstanding balance of Frank's special allowance as a TD from September 1920 to the date of his death, a total of £395, 16s 8d. In June 1922, Michael Derham was elected to Frank's Dáil seat, while Matthew Coul was co-opted to replace him on the county council. Negotiations to resolve the debts associated with the Lawless farm continued for several years and took quite a while to resolve.

1. Civic Guards march for the first time at Frank Lawless Funeral  
Image Courtesy of An Garda Síochána
2. Dáil Members marching at Lawless Funeral  
Irish Independent 19 April 1922  
Courtesy of the Irish Newspaper Archives
3. Arthur Griffith at the Graveside of Frank Lawless  
Image Courtesy of RTE Archives
4. Registration of the Death of Frank Lawless on 16 April 1922  
[www.irishgenealogy.ie](http://www.irishgenealogy.ie)
5. Description of Frank Lawless Funeral  
Evening Herald 18 April 1922  
Courtesy of Irish Newspaper Archives

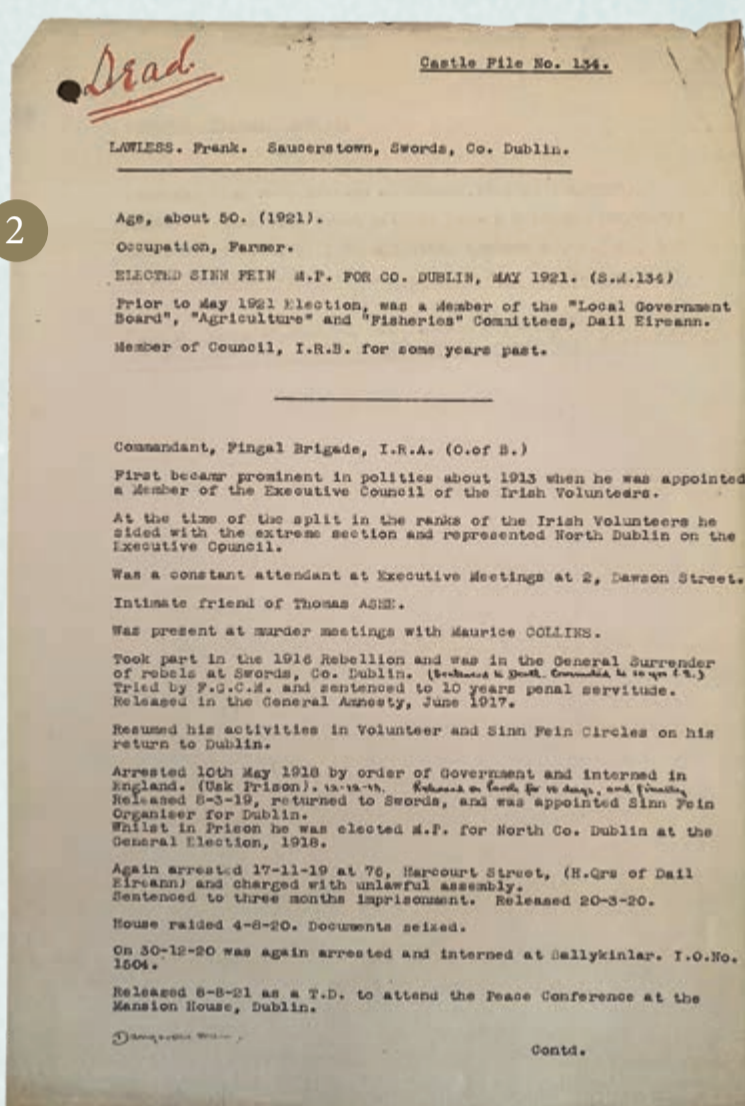




# A Dangerous Man: Frank Lawless and the War of Independence in Fingal

## Legacy

Frank Lawless' death was felt keenly both nationally and locally. On 26 April 1922, President Arthur Griffith provided a moving tribute in the Dáil, stating that Lawless was



‘...the first man who pioneered Sinn Fein and the Gaelic League in Fingal. He was a man who stuck by his country all through. He feared nothing – neither physical fear nor the fear of obloquy – and his death has left a gap amongst us all that will not easily be filled. I am sure this Dáil will extend to his relatives our deepest sympathy and place on record our appreciation of a noble man, a fine patriotic Irishman.’

In the days following his remarkable funeral, tributes poured in from across the country. Recounting the battle of Ashbourne in the Irish Independent on 19 April 1922, Richard Mulcahy wrote that ‘The Last Post has sounded over Frank Lawless too. Never has it sounded over a more faithful or more unobtrusive Irish soldier.’ A poem in the Fermanagh Herald on 6 May 1922 declared

In every work for Ireland's weal  
Frank Lawless was still there  
With worth and word and silent deed  
To do the good man's share;  
He held the faith of men who died  
For loving Ireland well,  
Of this the men who still survive,  
A lively truth can tell.

The paper also stressed his pro-Treaty stance, noting that ‘He was one of those sensible, keen thinkers who recognised in the Treaty and Free State Government a golden opportunity for enabling Ireland to become a free Gaelic nation.’ His police file listed his membership of the various republican organisations in Fingal, with the handwritten addition ‘Dangerous Man’.

Locally, Balbriggan Town Commissioners stated on 19 April 1922 that Lawless was ‘the beacon light in this area of everything that stood for Irish independence for the ultimate freedom of this country...In this work he was actuated by one motive only, honesty of purpose.’ On 22 April a special meeting of Dublin Corporation passed a vote of sympathy and Lord Mayor Laurence O'Neill said that he ‘saw around him so many of the leaders of the people he felt a joyful hope that over the grave of Frank Lawless they would once more unite for the welfare of Ireland.’ Much later, in 1937, his contribution to Fingal GAA was recognised when Swords GAA was named Frank Lawless Memorial Park.

On a more practical level, his death placed his family in great difficulty. His wife Catherine was left to care for nine children and to run a substantial farm and victualling business. A detailed accounting carried out after his death showed that he had left behind a formidable list of debts, from payments for the purchase of the farm under the 1903 Land Act to school fees owed to Margaret Pearse and overdrafts secured against his land. While the government paid the funeral costs in full, and granted Catherine Lawless £1000 from a special fund, this was still not enough to cover the debts that had accrued. In the months and years following his death, local newspapers often carried notices regarding the letting out of large portions of the Lawless farm – one in December 1923 advertised 70 acres of the farm for rent. Even a decade after her husband died, Catherine was noting the difficulty she was having in managing the farm's substantial operations.



While his importance to the republican movement in Fingal is unquestioned, there are two other aspects to Frank Lawless that are less well-known. As a member of the County Dublin Farmer's Association, he arguably took a stand against organised labour. During the Lockout of 1913, which lasted from August to January 1914, when James Larkin's Irish Transport and General Worker's Union (ITGWU) was engaged in a tense and sometimes violent standoff with Dublin employers, the County Dublin Farmer's Association publicly condemned Larkin. Swords was badly affected by strikes and unrest; in October 1913 there were clashes in the town between the United Irish League and striking workers. In May 1914, Larkin's newspaper The Irish Worker called on the people of north county Dublin not to vote for Frank Lawless in the local elections, declaring ‘What short memories these fellows think the workers have. Will you be sold again, boys?’

Even more remarkable was Lawless' stance as an opponent of vaccination. Swords became the centre of anti-vaccination activity in north county Dublin, leading the Irish Independent to report in 1915 that ‘In Swords, for some reason, Sinn Feiners and anti-vaccinators are regarded as identical in opinions.’ Lawless refused to vaccinate his children against smallpox, arguing that it was ineffective, that it was cruel to subject children to the procedure and that he objected to the formulation of the vaccination laws in Ireland, which differed from them in the rest of the UK. As he stated at one meeting of Balrothery Guardians, ‘As long as we are under British law, then let us have the best as well as the worse of it.’ Lawless was prosecuted on 24 April 1915 for his stance and eventually served 14 days in Mountjoy prison upon refusing to pay the resulting fine. A crowd of 500 people turned out to welcome Lawless home from his sentence and the crowd was addressed by Ernest Bannister, secretary of the Irish Anti-Vaccination League.



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**3 VIOLENT SCENES IN SWORDS.**  
In Swords, for some reason, Sinn Feiners and anti-vaccinators are regarded as identical in opinions. This lent a political hue to a public welcome given on Sunday night to Mr. F. J. Lawless, P.L.C., on his release from jail, where he had been for refusing to have his children vaccinated. Many police went on duty, as trouble was feared. While Mr. E. Bannister, secretary Irish Anti-Vaccination League, was speaking there were interruptions, and a woman tried to push her way towards the speaker, who, she said, “ought to be out fighting the Germans.” Mr. Thirtle, an Englishman, said England legislated very badly for Ireland, and a voice said: “They didn't put that in the appeals for recruits.” On Mr. Lawless rising to speak the interruptions were many. One interrupter was roughly handled, and Mr. Lawless said: “Don't mind people who can be bought with port.” Amid an angry scene space was made for a fight between the interrupter and a small man who challenged him. The latter ducked under his adversary, flung him into the air, the man falling with a thud on his head and shoulders. The scenes continued. A voice was heard to say that it was well for the Balrothery Guardians they were not present. “They're too busy acting as recruiting agents,” came the reply.

In many ways, the Irish revolution rested on the efforts of people such as Frank Lawless: organisers who provided the crucial energy in building up a local network to drive forward the cause of Irish independence. He was at the centre of every cultural, sporting and revolutionary association in Fingal, and the remarkable list of attendees at his funeral shows the esteem he was held in by his colleagues. Writing at the end of April 1922, Dr Richard Hayes, who had been the Volunteers Medical Officer in Fingal, summed Lawless up thusly:



‘He was very loveable, very chivalrous, very true. And in the tragic divisions of these latter months while he took the side he thought best for Ireland he never showed a trace of bitterness – always attributing to those on the other side the highest and purest motives. Little wonder that all his old comrades, forgetful of passing differences, gathered around his open grave in Killossory, where he sleeps his last sleep...President Griffith speaks a few fitting words of praise of this dead Irish soldier, whose whole life was a valiant battle for Irish ideals, and so we leave him here in the heart of old Fingal, where he worked and fought for Ireland.’

1. Lawless Family Grave, Rolestown Cemetery 2021  
Image Courtesy of Bernard Kelly  
With permission of the Lawless Family
2. Frank Lawless's Dublin Castle Intelligence File – in the bottom left corner is written “Dangerous Man”  
Courtesy of the Fingal Old IRA Commemorative Society
3. Violent Scenes at Swords  
Irish Independent 8 June 1915  
Courtesy of the Irish Newspaper Archives
4. Catherine Lawless and her Adult Children 1933  
Image Courtesy of the Lawless Family
5. Lawless Family on the Lawn at Saucerstown c1935  
Image Courtesy of the Lawless Family

## Acknowledgements

Fingal County Council would like to thank the following for their assistance with and contributions to this exhibition:

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