

**Papers of the Rev. Adrian C.P. Fisher
concerning the Fethard-on Sea boycott,
1957**

P164



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Introduction

This collection of documents originates from events during the period after the Rev. Adrian C.P. Fisher was instituted in the Fethard union of parishes which included St Mogue's, Fethard-on-Sea, and are Adrian Fisher's own papers relating to what is generally known as the Fethard-on-Sea Boycott.

Adrian Fisher had served as a military chaplain with the British Army and while on a tour of duty in Cyprus in 1957, he was invited to apply for the united parishes of Fethard, Tintern and Killesk. His incumbency began on 9 May 1957, four days before the Roman Catholic community of Fethard-on-Sea began a concerted boycott of the two Protestant-owned shops in the village, the newsagency owned by Miss Betty Cooper, and the hardware and general merchants owned by Leslie Gardner. This action was prompted by that community's view that their Protestant neighbours had colluded in the actions of Mrs Sheila Cloney née Kelly, a local Protestant woman married to a Roman Catholic farmer, Seán Cloney. The Cloneys lived and farmed at Dungulph Castle, outside the village.

Increasingly unhappy at the prospect of her two daughters, Eileen and Mary, being educated at the local Roman Catholic school and in the face of alleged bullying tactics from the local Catholic clergy, Mrs Cloney took her two daughters and left her home on 27 April, travelling to Belfast. Mr Cloney was visited within a matter of days by Desmond Boal, a Belfast barrister and associate of Ian Paisley, with certain demands as preconditional on the return of his wife and children. An attempt by Seán Cloney to obtain a writ of *habeas corpus* in the High Court in Belfast requiring the production of his family, proved futile.

In Fethard, the boycott of the two Protestant business in the village was only one aspect of a series of measures directed against the Protestant community. On 15 May, Anna Walsh, a Catholic teacher, resigned her post at the local Church of Ireland National School, leaving its eleven pupils without a teacher; Mary Stafford, the Catholic sexton of St Mogue's also resigned her post; the Protestant music teacher lost almost all her pupils; Catholics stopped buying milk from Protestant farmers who were also unable to employ Catholic labourers. On a personal level, Catholic farmers refused to conduct business with Mary Cloney's father, Thomas, a well-known cattle dealer.

The boycott campaign attracted increased national and international attention as the summer wore on. Despite the unequivocal condemnation of the actions of the Fethard Catholics by the Taoiseach Eamon de Valera as 'ill-conceived, ill-considered and futile, unjust and cruel', many, particularly in Northern Ireland, were inclined to view events as indicative of a general lack of tolerance in the Republic for the Protestant population. This view was hardly undermined by the statements of several leading Roman Catholic churchmen in support of the boycott, most notably Michael Browne, Bishop of Galway. It should be stated that His Grace's views on this were entirely consistent with his other public utterances, such as his characterisation of Trinity College Dublin as 'a centre for atheist and communist propaganda'.

At any rate, the events leading up to the boycott strengthened generally-held views among the Protestant population as to the inadvisability of inter-church marriages and the injustice of the *Ne temere* decree, the papal decree of 1908 requiring the children of inter-church marriages involving a Roman Catholic to be brought up as Catholics; but some at least of her co-religionists, while condemning subsequent events, felt that having given the undertaking stipulated by the decree, Mrs Cloney should have conformed to its requirements.

In Fethard, a local committee established a relief fund to aid victims of the boycott and during the summer and autumn contributions were received from as far away as the Middle East and South Africa, the major part of the subscribed moneys coming from church collections and individuals, particularly in Northern Ireland. Much of the collection relates to the administration of this fund.

By the autumn the boycott was showing signs of fatigue. The Cloneys were reunited on the Orkney Islands where Sheila had gone from Belfast, on 1 November. She eventually returned to Fethard at New Year but left almost immediately in the face of intrusive press attention. She did not return to stay until Easter 1958. Adrian Fisher remained as rector of Fethard until January 1962 when he left for a second term as an army chaplain. The final curtain on the Fethard boycott was not drawn until May 1998 when Brendan Comiskey, Roman Catholic bishop of Ferns, made a public apology and asked for the forgiveness of the Church of Ireland population for the events of 1957 [see P164/31]

The collection includes notes by Mrs Pan Fisher on, *inter alia*, her husband's conscientiousness in safeguarding these papers during successive relocations of household [see P164/35]. While they are not voluminous, the papers provide valuable insight into events at Fethard, particularly from the point-of-view of the beleaguered Protestant population of the village; and the perceptions of their co-religionists in the country as a whole as to what the Fethard boycott represented.

They have been arranged in four groups consisting of correspondence; material relating to the administration of the Relief Fund; press cuttings and other publications; and notes and memorabilia. While the second group contains a large amount of routine correspondence, mainly letters enclosing contributions to the Relief Fund, some with comment on events, the first group contains the more individually interesting documents such as the long letter from Eoin O'Mahony [P164/5] relaying the reactions of some eminent contemporaries to the boycott; and from Owen Sheehy Skeffington [P164/7], who had been responsible for raising the question in the Seanad. The volume of correspondence in the second group [P164/13] is extremely valuable in documenting the strength and depth of reaction among the Protestant population in the country, while other documents give a factual indication of the grievous effect of the boycott on the livelihoods of the villagers [P164/15]. The third group contains an extremely comprehensive series of press cuttings reporting the boycott while the final group contains some of Adrian Fisher's own contemporary notes and sermons.

The collection was deposited in UCDA in November 1998 by Adrian Fisher.

Seamus Helferty
January 2001

A. Correspondence, June 1957-February 1958

- 1 11 June-1 July; Correspondence between Liam MacGabhann,
 3 December 1957 5 Weston Park, Churchtown, County Dublin,
 and the Rev. Adrian Fisher, Fethard-on-Sea.
MacGabhann, a newspaperman employed by *The People*, but originally
trained as a national school teacher, offers his services as a teacher in Fethard
Church of Ireland National School 'for a token period'. He states his position
candidly, that 'any of my experiences in life may be the subject of the articles
which I write. That would include the experience of teaching in the town of
Fethard in the strange circumstances which have overtaken it'.
Included are copies of correspondence between MacGabhann and John
Cardinal D'Alton, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All-Ireland, and Dr
James Staunton, Roman Catholic Bishop of Ferns, concerning his proposal. In
the end his newspaper finds this correspondence 'too ambiguous' to proceed
with the proposal.
'Their final attitude was that as a British-based newspaper their motives in
allowing me to teach in Fethard would be misunderstood by the Irish public'.
Includes a further letter from MacGabhann later in the year (3 December
1957, 1p) saying that he has left *The People* and is now working for the
Sunday Review. He enquires in a general way about Fethard.
8 items
- 2 17 June 1957 Letter from Eoin O'Mahony, Castle Hotel,
 Macroom, County Cork, to the Rev. Adrian
Fisher. Due to commitments on the circuit, he is forced to postpone his
proposed visit until the following week.
1p
- 3 26 June 1957 Letter from Edgar M. Deale, Honorary
 Secretary, Irish Association of Civil Liberty, 51
Lower Leeson Street, Dublin, to the Rev. Adrian Fisher, enquiring as to
whether the Association could be of any help and whether Adrian Fisher
would be willing to receive two or three members of the Council of the
Association who would travel from Dublin (26 June 1957, 1p). He encloses a
copy of a letter he has sent to the editors of national and Wexford newspapers
(26 June 1957, 1p), on the instructions of his Council, deploring 'the incident
in Fethard-on-Sea which deprived a school of its teacher and children of their
right to education'.
2 items

- 4 9 July 1957 Letter from Canon John B.S. McGinley, The Rector, Athy, County Kildare, to the Rev. Adrian Fisher, regretting that his first incumbency in Ireland should be attended by so much difficulty and wondering whether monetary contributions were the best means of expressing support. 'It is so easy to be enthusiastic without being at the same time sensible and I would be very grateful if you could let me have an idea about what sort of help would be constructive ... I presume the shopkeepers are the most likely persons to suffer from this shameful boycott, ill-conceived, ill-considered and futile as the Prime Minister of this part of Ireland [Eamon de Valera] has so well expressed the situation'. 4pp
- 5 11 July 1957 Letter from Eoin O'Mahony, on Jury's Hotel notepaper but from Trinity College Dublin, to the Rev. Adrian Fisher, marked private. He thanks him for his recent kindness in Duncannon and Fethard. 'I lunched with Christopher Gore Grimes early in the week and agreed with him that a small deputation from the Council of Civil Liberty [Irish Association of Civil Liberty] could go to Fethard with profit ... the deputation proposed was Seán Ó Faoláin, Ernest Wood Senior Counsel, and himself ... Judge my horror when I saw that they had cut their own throats by interviewing Dr Ryan [Minister for Finance] to ask his permission to go to Fethard. They were of course fobbed off. In my opinion it was unwise to go near him until they had been at Fethard and seen for themselves ... I had a long and interesting interview with Terry de Valera and I offered to help him in any way I could. He said that he would always be glad to see me but that of course he could not discuss the matter in detail as it was now at a critical stage, legal and otherwise. However there was plenty of fight in him ... I was in the [Dublin] Institute for Advanced Studies in the middle of the week and Professor Myles Dillon sent for me having heard I was in the house. The rector of Raheny my old friend Tommy Johnston had told him that I had told him that I was going down to see for myself and Dillon kept me for over an hour talking about the affair ... He said that he and the Earl of Wicklow had started an indemnity fund to be subscribed to only by our own co-religionists and that they had drafted a letter to the *Irish Press* and *Independent* condemning the boycott. When I returned to see him last Friday morning he was so delighted with Mr de Valera's excellent statement that he said that the whole thing was now over and done with ... It was after this interview that I again met Terry de Valera who told me that in his opinion the thing had not blown over at all ... Very private. The most sinister rumour in Dublin is that Miss Walsh the School Mistress was put up to pretending that she was being intimidated by friends of her fiancé, William Kelly, that it was never intended that she should give up school and that the whole idea of her giving up

- 5 contd. teaching in your school came from those who wanted to make trouble by giving grounds for making the boycott appear a much bigger affair in the press than it really was ... I dread the Twelfth of July speeches tomorrow'.
13pp
- 6 2 August 1957 Typescript copy letter from the Rev. Adrian Fisher, The Rectory, Fethard-on-Sea, to the Right Rev. John Phair, Bishop of Ossory, Ferns and Leighlin, informing him of sums disbursed from the Fethard Relief Fund to victims of the boycott, and arrangements for regular statements of account.
'There seems to be no sign of a relaxation in the boycott'.
1p
- 7 10 August 1957 Letter from Owen Sheehy Skeffington, on Seanad Éireann notepaper but from La Michonette, Route de Berck, Fort-Mahon, France to Miss [Shelagh] Auld [Secretary to the Fethard Relief Fund], enclosing a small cheque for the relief fund and sending, under separate cover, a copy of Seanad Éireann Parliamentary Debates, 5 June 1957.
'Some people think publicity is "unwise". I believe it is the only thing the boycotters fear. Furthermore, the more public protest that is made now about the Fethard boycott, the less likely will some other parish pundit be to start similar pressure techniques elsewhere' (2pp).
Copy of Seanad Éireann Parliamentary Debates, 5 June 1957, containing a report on the Adjournment Debate concerning the absence of a teacher from Fethard Church of Ireland National School following the withdrawal of the previous teacher, a Roman Catholic, allegedly after advice from a number of women in the village. The question on the Adjournment, tabled by Senator Sheehy Skeffington for [Jack Lynch] the Minister for Education, concerns the lack of teaching for the eleven children on the school roll.
'I am not concerned with the commercial boycott, although I regard it in this case as equivalent to conviction and sentence without trial. What concerns me is the matter I have asked leave to raise here; and I hope, even though he is absent, that it concerns the Minister also. It is the simple fact that eleven small children are being deprived – I think I might use the word victimised – in relation to the educational facilities and the opportunities for education afforded to them at a most critical time of the year'.
Cover annotated 'With sympathy and good wishes to the victims of the boycott at Fethard. Owen Sheehy Skeffington'. (5pp)
2 items

- 8 12 August 1957 Anonymous letter, possibly incomplete, to Mr Fisher, Rector, Fethard-on-Sea.
 ‘You may have to be removed from Fethard. Granted yours is a responsible position but you seem a most unreasonable person ...If Miss Cooper’s business is not doing well down there she ought to join the rest of her tribe elsewhere’.
 2pp
- 9 13 August 1957 Letter from His Excellency the Most Rev. Alberto Levame, Apostolic Nuncio, to Lieut. Col. D.E.C. Price, Campile, County Wexford, concerning a letter of Price’s to the Secretariate of State of His Holiness the Pope, suggesting that the Nuncio should inform the Secretariate of the events in Fethard.
 ‘On my return to Dublin after a long period of complete rest, on doctor’s orders, I hereby wish to inform you that I did not fail to submit the necessary details about the case to the Secretariate of State and that I shall continue to do so, starting from the sad fact which gave rise to the whole dispute’.
 Draft reply by Lieut. Col. Price. ‘That the boycott ever started is sad, but that it still continues is distressing, to think that responsible Christian leaders in the parish will not save face and call off all signs of intolerance against religious minorities’.
 2pp
- 10 15 August 1957 Letter from Patrick Bentley, 106 Quarry Road, Cabra, Dublin, to the Rev. Adrian Fisher, enclosing a copy of the *Ulster Protestant* in which the Fethard boycott is mentioned.
 ‘I saw a letter in the *Irish Times*, which I do not get, from your Treasurer [of the Relief Fund]. No doubt a great many readers of that paper helped, but you will agree that most of the help came from Orange quarters’. He suggests a similar letter to newspapers in Northern Ireland.
 ‘We have, of course, heard from Bro. Norman Porter M.P. and Bro. the Rev. J.R. Horan concerning their visit to Fethard. You have been let down badly by your bishops. The only two who spoke were Messrs Percy Phair and Tindall, and their utterances were painful to read ... Regarding the *Irish Times*, it may be useful sometimes, but it is Anti-Partitionist and Jesuitical in policy ... This reminds me that the *Church of Ireland Gazette* has recently referred to the 12th of July speeches of the “unscrupulous” politicians of Northern Ireland! It has also praised two Sunday newspapers. The boycott has been a blessing in disguise if it has stopped Miss Cooper selling them’.
 4pp

- 11 28 October 1957 Letter from John Irwin, Associated TeleVision Ltd, Television House, Kingsway, London, to the Rev. Adrian Fisher.
‘I was very glad to have your letter of the 22nd of October, and to discover that I had been able to do a little good and apparently no harm. If the thing should come to an end as I hope it will very soon, I will be greatly obliged if you will let me know how and when it happens’.
- 1p
- 12 12 February 1958 Letter from E.L. Ledwich, Honorary Secretary, Meath Clerical Union, Kilskyre Rectory, Kells, County Meath, to the Rev. Adrian Fisher.
The boycott has been discussed at a meeting of the Meath Clerical Union and one of its members, the Rev. W.T. McDowell, Presbyterian minister in Kells, travelled to Fethard to gain first-hand information. As Adrian Fisher was away, Mr McDowell talked to some parishioners. Mr Ledwich is writing now to get additional and up-to-date information.
‘I am sure you will understand that this request is not prompted by mere curiosity, but by the desire to have the right focus on a matter which is of gravest concern to the whole Church of Ireland’.
- 3pp

B. The Fethard-on-Sea Relief Fund, June 1957-May 1958

- 13 5 June 1957-5 May 1958 259 letters enclosing contributions towards the Fethard-on-Sea Relief Fund. A significant proportion are from individuals from both parts of Ireland. While many restrict themselves to referring to the enclosed contribution, others express sympathy and solidarity with the boycotted Fethard Protestants. A number of contributors identify themselves as Roman Catholic, some, such as 'Catholic father of five', wishing to remain anonymous, others, such as Pamela Hinkson, happy to have their names published as supporters.
- Many of the contributions, particularly the larger ones, are the product of collections specifically made in support of the fund at church services, mainly in Northern Ireland, in the workplace, and at meetings of community and social groups such as the loyal orders. Examples are Short Bros & Harland, £154-0-0; Cable Street residents, Newtownards Road, Belfast, £56-0-0; Banbridge District Loyal Orange Lodge No.7, £202-18-4. Other contributing organisations include Apprentice Boys' clubs, Unionist associations and the Evangelical Protestant Society through Norman Porter M.P., a Baptist lay preacher active in support of the fund. Contributions are received from as far away as Aden and South Africa and many are sent direct to the Royal Bank of Ireland, Grafton Street, Dublin, where the fund's account is held, or through the *Belfast Telegraph* or *Church of Ireland Gazette*. While the fund is most active in July and August, there is a noticeable increase in contributions from England and Scotland after the boycott was highlighted in the *New Statesman* on 28 September.
- Includes:** letter from Serjeant A.M. O'Sullivan Q.C., 26 Greenmount Road, Terenure, Dublin (31 July 1957, 1p) enclosing a contribution and commenting on the boycott.
- 'Three men bearing the titles of Catholic Bishops are involved. One has denounced boycotting as sinful. One has encouraged it and the third, the bishop of the Diocese, has no opinion one way or the other. These three men cannot belong to the same creed. If one is Catholic, the other two are not'.
- Includes:** letter from Hubert Butler, Maidenhall, Bennettsbridge, County Kilkenny (14 November 1957, 1p) enclosing a cheque from Mrs Terence MacSwiney, to be spent on the children of the village.
- 'Mrs MacSwiney, whom I don't know at all well – I've met her once – has sympathy for the boycotted as she herself has been badly treated. She left the Catholic Church some years ago and is strongly opposed to the £10,000 Memorial Fund which is being collected at present to build a Memorial Chapel for her husband in the Cathedral at Southwark'.

- 14 July-December 1957 Notebook entitled 'Relief Fund, July 1957' containing minutes of three meetings of the Fethard-on-Sea Relief Fund Committee, held at Tintern Abbey. The meetings are concerned exclusively with donations to and disbursements from the Fund; and with the disposal of the residue after the closure of the Fund.
5pp
- 15 2 August-14 September 1957 Handwritten list by Betty Cooper [proprietor of the Fethard newsagency] entitled 'List of people who did not come back for daily papers, Sunday papers, magazines etc.'. Receipt from W.L. Gardiner [proprietor of the Fethard hardware business] for money received from the Fund, together with statements from some victims of the boycott as to the financial losses they had or were likely to incur. Includes a statement from William Cruise, a local farmer unable to harvest his corn because his Roman Catholic employees had left.
7 items
- 16 4 October 1957 Letter from Shelagh Auld, Rose Cottage, Grange, to the Rev. Adrian Fisher, expressing thanks to the Finance Committee 'for the monetary recognition of my humble services on behalf of the Relief Fund. My help was given voluntarily and most willingly to this worthy cause, and I am very glad that at last we are coming out into the light again'.
1p
- 17 11 October 1957 Letter from Norman Trevor Ruddock, Tullow Street, Carlow, to the Fethard Relief Fund Committee, thanking them for their generous grant which he will use to purchase a cassock, a surplice and a clerical suit. He recalls with pleasure the nine months he spent teaching at Fethard and serving the union of parishes during the boycott [He had been appointed a temporary substitute teacher on 24 June 1957].
2pp

C. Press cuttings and publications, 1957-58 [-98]

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|----|---------------------------------|--|
| 18 | 28 May 1957-
19 January 1958 | 152 press cuttings mainly from Irish daily and Sunday newspapers, including Northern Ireland newspapers, but also from secular and religious periodicals and from overseas publications. The cuttings report the origin and development of the boycott; Seán Cloney's attempt to obtain a writ of <i>habeas corpus</i> in the High Court in Belfast; statements by religious and secular leaders; the opening of the Fethard Relief Fund; the debate on events in Seanad Éireann; and the eventual decline of the boycott; together with editorial comment. The single largest category of cutting consists of letters to the editor of the <i>Irish Times</i> . |
| | | Issues of the <i>Standard</i> containing reports and editorial comment on events in Fethard, largely subversive of the idea of an organised boycott.
'Our Protestant Brethern have expressed themselves with a haste and heat which makes one fear that they have really welcomed this family tragedy and are happy to exploit it' (21 June 1957). |
| 19 | 21 June 1957 | |
| 20 | 28 June 1957 | |
| | | Adrian Fisher's copies of the <i>Diocesan Magazine</i> of the United Dioceses of Ossory, Ferns and Leighlinn. The 'Bishop's Letter' opens in each issue with comment on the progress of the boycott and on attempts to resolve it. 'The Church of Ireland Monthly' section in the August issue contains a lengthy analysis of the conflict, generally sympathetic to Mr Cloney but critical of the <i>Ne temere</i> decree and of inter-church marriages generally. The same section in the October issue contains a robust reply to statements impugning the trustworthiness of the 'Protestant conscience' in the light of Mrs Cloney's behaviour. |
| 21 | July 1957 | 16pp |

22	August 1957	16pp
23	September 1957	16pp
24	October 1957	16pp
25	November 1957	16pp
26	December 1957	18pp

Issues of *The Vigilant*, official organ of the Grand Orange Lodge of Scotland. The first contains comment on persecution of Protestants by Roman Catholics throughout the world; the second comments specifically on events in Fethard, 'one of the recent black spots in Rome's history of hatred and persecution'.

27	July 1957	12pp
28	September 1957	12pp

29	September 1957	Copy of the <i>Newtownards Parish Magazine</i> containing a report on the Fethard boycott. Adrian Fisher's father, Canon C.P. Fisher, had been curate at St Mark's, Parish Church, Newtownards, 1908-11. The present rector, the Rev. R.J. Chisholm, had visited Fethard while on holiday during the summer, 'was in actual contact with Mr Fisher, and collected a sum of £10 from holiday friends for the victims of the boycott'.	4pp
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- 30 1 February 1987 Full page cutting from the *Sunday Press* entitled 'Fethard Friends', recalling events surrounding the boycott thirty years after Sheila Cloney had left the village with her two children.
1 item
- 31 June 1998 Cuttings from the *Belfast Telegraph* (1 June 1998) and the *Church of Ireland Gazette* (19 June 1998) reporting the public apology and request for forgiveness made by Dr Brendan Comiskey, Roman Catholic Bishop of Ferns, at an inter-church service marking the 200th anniversary of the 1798 Rising in Wexford, for the events surrounding the Fethard boycott.
'Bishop Comiskey had no qualifications or no reservations in his plea for forgiveness. He asked for forgiveness and healing from God, from all within the Church of Ireland community, and from all who have suffered in any way then or since. And he apologised also to members of his own Church who were then and since then "saddened and dismayed – scandalised even – by Church leadership at that time" ' (*Church of Ireland Gazette*).
2 items

D. Notes and memorabilia, 1957-98

- 32 June-December 1957 2 notebooks containing rough notes by Adrian Fisher including draft sermons and letters on aspects of the boycott; notes for the diocesan magazine; notes on his attempts to appoint a replacement teacher to Fethard National School; and notes for a public statement to the press on the boycott, including the involvement of Fr Stafford, the Catholic curate.
40pp
- 33 21 July 1957 Typescript text with handwritten amendments of Adrian Fisher's sermon for the 5th Sunday after Trinity, 21 July 1957, including reference to contributions to the relief fund.
1p
- 34 1957 Black and white photograph of St Mogue's Church, Fethard-on-Sea, taken at the time of the boycott. The view is from the field to the rear of the church and shows the building surrounded by bare trees during winter. Two cows graze in the field.
3½x2½ inches
- 35 1998 Typescript notes by [Mrs Pan Fisher] concerning her husband's career including his successive incumbencies; his appointment to Fethard; the beginning and development of the boycott and relations with the local Roman Catholic curate, Fr William Stafford; his subsequent career and his safeguarding of his papers relating to the boycott. Includes some handwritten annotations by Mrs Fisher.
3pp