**‘None of us wanted that’:**

**Gerald Boland’s Irish Civil War, 1922-1924**

**Introduction**

Gerald Boland (Gearóid Ó Beoláin), a militant revolutionary, politician and statesman, has until now ranked amongst the neglected figures of the Irish Revolution, including the Irish Civil War (1922-1923) and the nascent years of the Irish Free State. This article addresses this anomaly. Based on a chronological framework covering the outbreak of the Irish Civil War in June 1922, to Boland’s release from prison in the summer of 1924, this article provides a unique insight into his hitherto overlooked civil war experiences.

Ultimately, at the heart of this article, rests the argument that Boland detested almost every aspect of the Irish Civil War. To use his own words, ‘I was glad [when the civil war ended] … None of us wanted that’.[[1]](#footnote-1) Boland’s civil war experiences confirmed his preference for pragmatism over idealism from a military standpoint, and at the same time, revealed a nascent politician (albeit vastly inexperienced) driven by a sense of realism. As such, the essential elements of Boland’s Republicanism comprised pragmatic realism rather than doctrinarian daydreaming.

Several topics are explored, including Boland’s involvement at the Battle of Blessington (July 1922); his subsequent surrender and imprisonment (July 1922 to July 1924); the death of his brother Harry Boland and his subsequent election as a Republican TD for Roscommon (August 1923); and lastly, Boland’s period on hunger-strike (October to November 1923). The picture that is painted having explored the above episodes is an individual who hated his civil war experiences.

Apart from not wishing to fight against former military comrades, the justification behind Boland’s dislike for the civil war (and thus his determination for it to end as quickly as possible) was also driven out of a sense of pragmatism. Militarily, as he later conceded, the anti-Treaty leadership, ‘had neither policy, nor military leadership nor provisions nor proper clothing’ to maintain the campaign against the provisional government and the National Army.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In fact, the death of Harry Boland convinced Boland of the futility of the IRA’s anti-Treaty campaign. In an extraordinarily frank omission, albeit written in later life, he admitted that anti-Treaty IRA forces should have ‘surrendered’ by the summer of 1922 following his own capture. ‘The only thing to do’, he surmised, ‘was to make the best of things and try to pull the country together’. The use of ‘guerrilla tactics’, he protested, had been ‘useless’.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Boland’s opposition to the civil war was further copper fastened because of his time on hunger strike, which lasted for approximately forty days, from October to November 1923 (and thus some six months *after* the cessation of armed hostilities between pro and anti-Treaty forces). In principle, Boland was wholly *against* the proposed hunger-strike. Contained within Boland’s unpublished personal papers (discussed below) is a fascinating explanation of why he opposed the hunger-strike and why he eventually decided to join the campaign. ‘I was resolutely opposed to hunger striking’, Boland later wrote, ‘which I considered was not a weapon for soldiers to use’.[[4]](#footnote-4) In his thinking, the provisional government had deliberately enticed the anti-Treaty prisoners to undertake a hunger strike in order ‘… to get rid of us’, as he phrased it’.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Reluctantly, as is examined, against his better judgment Boland decided to go on hunger strike. The rationale behind his decision, as he confessed in his unpublished memoir, was thus, ‘If you don’t go on strike you cannot help to call it off when the time comes so you better go on it and I did so’.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Boland’s civil war experiences also played a pivotal role in his future political career, not least as a government minister in several of Fianna Fáil cabinets from 1933 to 1954. Notably, as minister for justice (1939-1946), Boland’s determination to safeguard Ireland’s neutrality during the Second World War, saw him take ruthless action against the ‘new’ IRA, as he labelled them.[[7]](#footnote-7) Working alongside the Special Branch of the Garda Síochána and Irish Military Intelligence (G2), Boland oversaw the establishment of military courts without right of appeal, internment without trial and press censorship. In some extreme cases, Boland also authorised the use of the death penalty against IRA members.

As someone who had, himself, played an active part in Ireland’s pursuit for independence, including during the 1916 Easter Rising and subsequent Irish War of Independence (1919-1921), Boland naturally found it extremely difficult to deal with the IRA as minister for justice. This was most aptly displayed regarding Boland’s treatment of a new wave of IRA hunger-strikers, three of whom made the ultimate sacrifice and died on hunger-strike during the Second World War. For many of Boland’s critics his ruthless suppression of the IRA looked like a classic example of the ‘poacher turned gamekeeper’, given his own revolutionary background. Boland, however, remained unapologetic.[[8]](#footnote-8)

**Gaps in the historiography and a note on primary sources**

Contained within the broad and varied histories of the Irish Civil War,[[9]](#footnote-9) the historiography regarding Gerald Boland’s participation in this milestone event has been understudied. Unlike, for example, Boland’s influential performance as minister for justice during the Second World War, a period when he helped to safeguard Ireland’s neutrality and monitor the internal security of the country,[[10]](#footnote-10) his involvement with the Irish Civil War has almost been forgotten within the relevant secondary literature.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Like so many of his generation on either side of the military and political divide, in later life Boland refused to speak publicly about his experiences during the Irish Civil War.[[12]](#footnote-12) However, not all is lost. Importantly, due to exclusive access to Boland’s unpublished memoir, together with some of his private letters, a fresh picture can be painted of his involvement during this traumatic period of his life.[[13]](#footnote-13) During the early to mid-1960s, as a serving member of Seanad Éireann, Boland decided to commit to paper a biography of his life, along with a history of his immediate ancestors. ‘To fill up some time’, as he explained at the time of writing, ‘I have decided to set down my recollections of a rather full life’.[[14]](#footnote-14) And a full life Boland certainly enjoyed. The availability of this unpublished material is even more important given that, to date, there has been no comprehensive biographical study published on the life and political career of Gerald Boland.

Moreover, this article has benefited from the availability of a plethora of declassified primary sources from several archival institutions in Ireland, including the Irish Military Archives, notably the digitized Bureau of Military History witness statements[[15]](#footnote-15) and the Military Service Pension collection;[[16]](#footnote-16) the University College Dublin Archives;[[17]](#footnote-17) and the National Library of Ireland.[[18]](#footnote-18) Most recently, the availability of the Kathleen Boland Collection (Boland’s younger sister), located at University College Cork Special Collections Archives, offers an intimate insight into the lives of Gerald Boland’s immediate family during this period under investigation.[[19]](#footnote-19)

The use of documentary evidence is complemented by reported evidence, primarily published memoirs,[[20]](#footnote-20) interviews and oral histories,[[21]](#footnote-21) and newspapers.[[22]](#footnote-22)

**Prelude to the Irish Civil War: Gerald Boland and the Irish Revolution**

Gerald Boland was born on 25 May 1885, in Chorlton-on-Medlock, six miles south-west of Manchester, England. Six months after Boland’s birth, the family, including his father James ‘Jim’ Boland and his mother Catherine ‘Kate’ Woods, moved permanently to Dublin, where James Boland took up employment as a foreman pavement-layer with Dublin Corporation. In March 1895, James Boland passed away having fought a spirited campaign against a serious brain disorder. He was thirty-eight years of age. The Boland family was left emotionally and financially devastated by his death.[[23]](#footnote-23)

James Boland left five children behind him ranging from Nellie to the infant Ned, together with his devastated wife Catherine. Gerald Boland was nine-years-old when his father passed away. In later life, he recalled just how precarious a position the Boland family found themselves. ‘I was not ten and the youngest was not three years old … we had absolutely no means [of an income].’[[24]](#footnote-24) As Michael McInerney wrote, on the passing of James Boland, the family ‘knew much poverty’.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Shortly afterwards, in February 1896, following a period attending the Christian Brothers School (CBS) Clontarf, Gerald Boland became a boarder under the Christian Brothers in the O’Brien Institute for Destitute Children, Fairview, Dublin. His subsequent schooling proved to be a godsend, permitting the young Boland to receive a ‘sound primary education’, as he later wrote in his memoir.[[26]](#footnote-26) In September 1900, aged fifteen, Boland left the O’Brien Institute to enter the workforce, eventually securing employment as an apprentice fitter with the Midland Great Western Railway (MGWR) Co. in Dublin City.

Significantly, in the development of Boland’s Republican sympathies, his teenage years coincided with Ireland’s so-called ‘long gestation’, a quarter-century from 1890 to 1916, during which time Irish society ‘turned from political to cultural nationalism’, under the auspices of the Gaelic Revival.[[27]](#footnote-27) Boland was himself a product of this pivotal transition in Irish society. His initial interest in the Gaelic Revival was ignited in 1898 during the centenary celebration of the 1798 Irish Rebellion. He was very much caught up in the excitement of the ‘songs and stories of [17]’98’, as he recorded later in life.[[28]](#footnote-28) Thereafter, Boland emersed himself in the cultural, literary, music and sporting renaissance taking place in Ireland.

In 1904, Boland’s experienced his first taste of militant Irish Republicanism by joining the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB). His decision to join the IRB ensured that his lifetime ambition to ‘fight against the British’ had commenced.[[29]](#footnote-29) Several years later, in November 1913, Boland was one of the first batch of Irish nationalists to join the nascent Irish Volunteers, having joined the movement’s 4th Battalion of the Dublin Brigade.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Identified early on as a talented leader, Boland played an active role during the 1916 Easter Rising, in his capacity as a lieutenant of B Company, 2nd Battalion of the Dublin Brigade, based at Jacob’s biscuit factory in Dublin. However, it did not take very long for him to conclude that the Rising, in his own words, was militarily a ‘hopeless’ exercise.[[31]](#footnote-31) Indeed, Boland welcomed news of Patrick Pearse’s general order of unconditional surrender, which reached his battalion on Sunday, 30 April.

Soon after Boland’s capture he, together with approximately 1,800 other prisoners, was transferred across the Irish Sea to Great Britain. He was initially interned at Knutsford Detention Barracks in Cheshire. In and around June 1916, Boland and a sizeable number of his fellow prisoners were subsequently transferred to Frongoch Internment camp, in Merionethshire, Wales. Eventually, on Christmas Eve, 1916, Boland, along with around 300 fellow internees, was released from Frongoch Internment camp in the general amnesty.[[32]](#footnote-32)

In the early months of 1917, Boland re-joined the reorganised Irish Volunteers, but, unlike his younger brother Harry Boland, refused an invitation from Michael Collins to re-join the IRB, ‘contending that a secret oath-bound society was redundant in the altered political climate’.[[33]](#footnote-33) On 1 April 1917, Gerald Boland resumed his rank as lieutenant of B Company, 2nd Battalion of the Dublin Brigade and Kildare Brigade areas: positions he retained during the initial months of the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921).[[34]](#footnote-34) His main responsibilities during this period involved instructing units of the above brigades in drilling, ‘field operations’ and instructions on the ‘use of arms’, as he, himself, phrased it.[[35]](#footnote-35) By this point, Boland had gained a reputation amongst his contemporaries for his leadership and organizational abilities.

In May 1921, Boland was appointed battalion commandant of the newly formed 7th Dublin Battalion, under commanding officer Oscar Traynor, serving the areas from Tallaght to Blessington, taking in Clondalkin, which had an approximate strength of around 279 volunteers.[[36]](#footnote-36) In his capacity as battalion commandant he also sat on the Dublin Brigade Council of the Irish Volunteers.[[37]](#footnote-37) During this period Boland was responsible for commanding ‘activities’ against British Crown Forces.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Boland opposed the Anglo-Irish Treaty signed on behalf of the Irish Republican movement and the U. K. government on 6 December 1921. He was convinced that by signing this Accord the dream of a sovereign, independent and united Ireland lay in ruins. Apart from his categorical refusal to take an oath of allegiance to the British monarchy he was disgusted by the confirmation that Ireland would be partitioned between north and south. Some forty-five years after these events Boland still referred to the period from December 1921 to June 1922 as a ‘kind of a nightmare’.[[39]](#footnote-39) He was left ‘shocked’ by the split within the Republican movement.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Boland could not fathom why Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins and the remaining Irish plenipotentiaries had signed the Anglo-Irish Treaty. He was reportedly ‘mortified’ by their decision and their subsequent performance during the Treaty debates (which took place from December 1921 to January 1922).[[41]](#footnote-41) It was Collins’s perceived willingness to sign away the Irish Republic which underpinned his lifelong bitterness towards the ‘big fella’.[[42]](#footnote-42)

The events that followed, culminating with the outbreak of the Irish Civil War in June 1922 (discussed below), would witness former political allies and military comrades take up arms against one another in what remains one of the darkest and most tragic episodes in modern Irish history. Recent estimates suggest that during the Irish Civil War two thousand people died,[[43]](#footnote-43) including Boland’s younger brother Harry Boland.

**The Irish Civil War: An Introduction**

**The conflict itself, commencing in June 1922 and eventually ending in May 1923, was a culmination of tensions that dated back to the anti-Treaty IRA occupying the Four Courts in Dublin in April 1922, the failure of the Collins-De Valera Pact**[[44]](#footnote-44) **and the assassination of Sir Henry Wilson on 22 June of that year. With these events, as Boland later wrote, civil war was an inevitability;**[[45]](#footnote-45) **although this is not to say that many on both sides of the divide worked tirelessly to avoid the outbreak of armed conflict, foremost amongst them Harry Boland.**[[46]](#footnote-46) **The die, however, was cast. In the words of Dan Breen, ‘war was in the air’.**[[47]](#footnote-47)

**On 28 June 1922, following intensive pressure on behalf of the United Kingdom government (chiefly Winston Churchill),** National Army troops, under the authority of the provisional government (established under Michael Collins’ chairmanship in January 1922), opened fire on the Four Courts. With this action the Irish Civil War had commenced. In the aftermath of Sir Henry’s murder, as Boland subsequently explained in correspondence with Michael Hayes, ‘Churchill ordered Collins to put us out of the Four Courts immediately. He got panicky and obeyed Churchill’.[[48]](#footnote-48)

Until the last minute, the provisional government had pleaded with anti-Treaty Four Courts garrison of approximately 180 men, led by Rory O’Connor, to vacate the Four Courts. Their request was ignored. Overall command of the National Army attack on the Four Courts, under the authority of Richard Mulcahy, as Dáil defense minister, was bestowed on Emmet Dalton. With the use of two 18-pounder field guns, supplied by the British Crown forces, National Army troops pounded the heavily fortified Four Courts. The huge scale of British support, in the words of Ronan Fanning, ‘ensured that once the war began there was no doubt who would win’.[[49]](#footnote-49) Following this attack, at a hastily arranged meeting in the Clarence Hotel, Dublin, a republican proclamation was issued on behalf of the anti-Treaty IRA executive ‘declaring war on the Provisional Government and it’s army’.[[50]](#footnote-50)

Eventually, on 30 June, after repeated shelling (including the destruction of the Public Record Office), the anti-Treaty Four Courts garrison of 130 survivors surrendered. The order to surrender came directly from Oscar Traynor, officer commanding the Dublin Brigade, who by this stage, in his own words, was ‘in virtual control’ of anti-Treaty IRA forces in Dublin.[[51]](#footnote-51) Traynor was determined to ‘avoid a repeat’ of the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin, during which Republican forces had ‘sought unsuccessfully to hold parts of the city until relief’ arrived from other units across the country.[[52]](#footnote-52) In the days that followed National Army troops seized control of Sackville Street and adjacent roads during the concluding phase of the ‘Battle of Dublin’ (28 June to 5 July 1922).

The outbreak of armed conflict in Dublin resulted in IRA units across Ireland taking sides. The majority, especially in the south of the country, sided with the anti-Treaty forces led by Liam Lynch, chief of staff of the anti-Treaty IRA. Soon after, National Army troops secured Dublin, after a weeks’ fighting and then ‘proceeded to secure the other towns and cities’ held by anti-Treaty IRA forces. Over the subsequent weeks and months anti-Treaty strongholds, including in Cork and Kerry, were seized by National Army troops, with the result that by August 1922, it ‘appeared that the pro-Treaty forces had won’.[[53]](#footnote-53)

However, the anti-Treaty IRA refused to surrender. Instead, they mounted a guerrilla campaign against the National Army forces. On 22 August 1922, anti-Treaty IRA forces claimed their most prominent victim when Michael Collins was killed in an ambush in his native Cork. In retaliation and to crush the anti-Treaty IRA forces the provisional government embarked on ‘a policy of executions of captured guerrillas’, to quote John Dorney.[[54]](#footnote-54) The first executions under the Army ‘Special Powers’ Resolution, of four anti-Treaty soldiers, on 17 November, were followed by the execution of senior anti-Treaty IRA propagandist Erskine Childers, killed by a firing squad on 24 of that month.[[55]](#footnote-55)

**The Battle for Blessington, July 1923**

Militarily, Gerald Boland played a minor role during the Irish Civil War. In fact, his involvement in the campaign against the provisional government and the supporting National Army lasted less than a month, following his arrest and subsequent imprisonment in early July 1922. He would spend the remainder of the civil war in prison. Unbeknown to him at the time Boland would be interned the *longest* of all anti-Treaty Republican prisoners.[[56]](#footnote-56) Even after the ceasefire order came from Frank Aiken, Liam Lynch’s successor as chief of staff of the anti-Treaty IRA, thus bringing an end to the conflict in late May 1923, Boland remained in prison until 17 July 1924.[[57]](#footnote-57)

Boland’s Military Service Pension record informs us that apart from his continued involvement with 7th Dublin Battalion, during the first week of July 1922, he also served as battalion commandant, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Dublin Brigade, in Blessington, Co. Wicklow (which had an approximate strength of 328 anti-Treaty IRA volunteers).[[58]](#footnote-58) By this time Boland and his family were living in Crooksling, approximately seven and a half miles from Blessington village.

Boland’s central involvement during his brief stay in Blessington, a small village almost entirely comprised of one long street and situated twenty-nine miles south of Dublin city centre, was to participate, in his own words, ‘in warfare against troops of the Provisional Government’, including carrying ‘out attacks on positions and armoured cars’.[[59]](#footnote-59) Essentially, these tactics, as he later wrote, ensured that his ‘actions’ during the civil were ‘just to hold up reinforcements going into Dublin’.[[60]](#footnote-60)

By this stage, Blessington village had assumed the status as acting headquarters for anti-Treaty forces in Leinster. Those stationed there, in the words of Michael Hopkinson, represented the ‘sole practical response to Oscar Traynor’s plea for relief forces to come to the aid of Republicans in the capital’.[[61]](#footnote-61) Indeed, it seems that the initial plan was to use Blessington as a base to intercept National Army reinforcements and ‘eventually launch a counter-attack’ on Dublin city.[[62]](#footnote-62) Anti-Treaty forces’ strength in Blessington was further increased following the arrival of the 3rd Tipperary Brigade, with a force of 110 men.[[63]](#footnote-63) By 5 July 1922, Michael Collins had received a report that “there was a big concentration” in Blessington and that the anti-Treaty forces there had ‘control’ of the town.[[64]](#footnote-64)

Anti-Treaty forces quickly went about taking over key buildings and commandeering ‘transport … provisions’[[65]](#footnote-65) and ‘food stuffs’ in Blessington village.[[66]](#footnote-66) Everybody entering or leaving the village first had to produce a permit. A field hospital was also established in a dairy, which had a staff including a doctor and nurses.[[67]](#footnote-67) Several outposts were also established in the neighbouring villages of Ballymore Eustace and Brittas, which ensured that the anti-Treaty forces had command of the Blessington to Dublin steam tramway (which was closed in 1933) and the main road to Dublin city. Smaller outposts were also created, including at Poulaphouca and Kildare.[[68]](#footnote-68)

Boland’s time in Blessington coincided with the arrival, on 1 July 1922, of Ernie O’Malley, Seán Lemass and other anti-Treatyites, following the ‘Battle of Dublin’ and the surrender of the anti-Treaty Four Courts garrison (including the surrender of Liam Mellowsand Rory O’Connor). The previous night, Friday 30 June, Boland’s brother Harry Boland had arrived in Blessington (following an expedition to Limerick to secure anti-Treaty IRA volunteers), shortly followed by Boland’s youngest brother Ned Boland.

Their arrival in Blessington was not universally welcomed by Gerald Boland’s battalion. Indeed, in an extraordinarily candid letter to Oscar Traynor, undated but most probably written in the early 1960s, Boland protested that O’Malley, Lemass and their accomplices, whom he described as a bunch of ‘refugees’, had arrived in Blessington ‘to pester me’.[[69]](#footnote-69) Boland’s frustration may be partially explained by O’Malley assuming military control of Blessington on his arrival. To Boland’s irritation, O’Malley wasted little time in establishing his authority, appointing Lemass as director of operations and Boland’s brother Harry Boland as quartermaster.[[70]](#footnote-70) O’Malley set up his military headquarters in the ‘strongly fortified’ Ulster Bank on Blessington village’s main street.[[71]](#footnote-71)

A further explanation for Boland’s frustration was because of a decision by his senior officer brigadier, Andrew (Andy) McDonnell,[[72]](#footnote-72) to retreat from Bray to Arklow, thus failing to secure the Nass Road and the Blessington Road. McDonnell, Boland later complained:

should have done the same but took every man he had from Bray to Arklow and left the road wide open. He brought the whole mob out to Blessington in Furey’s Charabanc and not even one loaf of bread; although I told Harry [Boland] … to go to Bray and tell Andy to send me a lorry load of food and boots and waterproofs, as I had nothing to feed the expected column or my own fellows. Part of the mob sat down, or lay in bed, in Col. Moore’s home in Kilbride, and I was told later when in Mountjoy that they robbed the two Blessington banks. Billy Walsh was responsible, he later became a Book Maker.[[73]](#footnote-73)

On Boland’s orders, Kathleen Clarke’s car was commandeered as she attempted to drive through Blessington village from Cork.[[74]](#footnote-74)

To Boland’s frustration (to put it mildly) within a matter of days anti-Treaty forces were forced to abandon Blessington. This decision was taken by Oscar Traynor (following the departure of O’Malley), who on his arrival to Blessington village in the early hours of 6 July 1922 had been unimpressed by what he saw (Traynor allegedly managed to smuggle a consignment of guns from Dublin to Blessington in Red Cross vans).[[75]](#footnote-75) According to Traynor’s own account, on his arrival ‘everybody’ was asleep, including Boland and McDonnell. While he praised Boland for ‘working like a hero’, he could not hide his frustration concerning McDonnell’s decision to retreat from ‘the whole eastern portion of his area’.[[76]](#footnote-76) Traynor could not fathom why McDonnell’s brigade had failed to cut off roads in the vicinity of Blessington, which would have prevented National Army troops from advancing.[[77]](#footnote-77) Traynor thus demanded an ‘immediate evacuation of the post’, believing that there was now no possibility of advancing on Dublin city form Blessington.[[78]](#footnote-78) On his instructions the two battalions, under the command of Boland and McDonnell, were broken into ‘small formations’ with the intention of evacuating the anti-Treaty forces from Blessington.[[79]](#footnote-79)

Unbeknown to the three Boland brothers this would be the last occasion they would be in the same company. They would never again meet. For Boland, their ‘farewell’ in Blessington was a ‘moment of sacred communion’. In a letter to his mother, Catherine Boland, dated November 1923, Boland recalled with poignancy his ‘loving embrace’ with Harry Boland as they retreated from their position in Blessington.[[80]](#footnote-80) As is examined below, Harry Boland was to die at the hands of National Army troops in August 1922.

**Surrender**

The events in Blessington ensured that ‘no Republican leaders emerged with much credit’, including Gerald Boland, to quote Charles Townshend.[[81]](#footnote-81) In their hasty retreat from Blessington anti-Treaty IRA forces left behind them ‘trashed houses, robbed banks and “a terrible spirit of defeat”’.[[82]](#footnote-82) Anti-Treaty reports were particularly scathing of Andrew McDonnell’s leadership as commandant of the 2nd Dublin Brigade. In a report, dated 5 July, McDonnell was described as ‘quite unfitted [*sic*] to lead more than a dozen men’. Blessington was ‘a hopeless fiasco’. According to the same source, for the two previous days, McDonnell had been aware of ‘the encircling movement’ by National Army troops but ‘took no steps to meet it’.[[83]](#footnote-83)

By the afternoon of 6 July 1922, reports had reached Gerald Boland’s brigade that approximately 2,000 National Army troops were moving from Naas and the Curragh to ‘surround Blessington and wipe out the mutineers’.[[84]](#footnote-84) By 4 pm, a further report noted that ‘nine lorry-loads’ of National Army troops were making their way to Blessington from Ballymore Eustace.[[85]](#footnote-85) Despite receiving this news McDonnell was ‘very slow to act’. It was not until 9 pm later that night that McDonnell finally gave the order to ‘trench the road’ having received information that an armoured car and some 300 National Army troops planned to use this road to gain access to Blessington. Indeed, by this stage, National Army troops were reportedly only three miles from Blessington village. Just before midnight, McDonnell made one last desperate attempt to hold back the advancing ‘enemy troops’. He ordered the main road to be blocked using three railway wagons as a barricade. It proved to be a futile exercise.[[86]](#footnote-86)

The following morning, 7 July 1922, McDonnell, together with Boland and approximately twenty others, was captured by National Army troops under the command of Hugo McNeill, not far from Blessington village. By this stage, National Army troops had encroached Blessington from three different directions. McNeill’s party had travelled from Kilteel and then next to Hempstown before taking an anti-Treaty post at a farmhouse near Crosschapel, some two miles from Blessington village. Soon afterwards, McNeill received information that three motor cars were approaching the seized farmhouse. McNeill guessed that the approaching entourage might be comprised of anti-Treaty forces. He was correct. Boland, alongside McDonnell, drove towards McNeill’s awaiting forces ‘confident that they were approaching friends’. They were to be left disappointed. On arriving at the farmhouse, they were greeted by the order “Hands Up”.[[87]](#footnote-87)

Boland subsequently summed up his capture: ‘I was glad. After all it was Civil War. None of us wanted that’.[[88]](#footnote-88) Indeed, according to a report provided by anti-Treaty IRA forces to Traynor, Boland “surrendered, without firing or attempting to fire a shot”, even though he was armed.[[89]](#footnote-89)

In some ways, Boland was lucky to have been captured when he was. If he has been captured bearing arms against the recently constituted Irish Free State by the winter of 1922, he could very well have faced execution at the hands of the National Army. On 28 September of that year, the Dáil passed emergency legislation, the Army ‘Special Powers’ Resolution, which established military courts and allowed for the execution of captured (and armed) anti-Treaty fighters.[[90]](#footnote-90) This legislation passed to the National Army ‘powers of punishment for anyone “taking part in or aiding and abetting attacks on the National Forces”, having possession of arms or explosives “without the proper authority” or disobeying an Army General Order’.[[91]](#footnote-91)

Other anti-Treatyites were not so lucky as Boland, including Erskine Childers (cited above). Indeed, on 8 November 1922, coinciding with Boland’s time in Mountjoy prison (examined below), four of his co-prisoners, Rory O’Connor, Liam Mellows, Richard Barrett and Joe McKelvey were executed by firing squad, in reprisal for the murder of Seán Hales, TD for Cork Mid, North, South, South East and West, the previous day, 7 November 1922. The executions of the four anti-Treaty prisoners was one of the most notorious events of the Irish civil war’, to quote one informed source.[[92]](#footnote-92)

In later life, Boland explained his decision to surrender. Apart from not wishing to fight against former colleagues the justification behind his decision was based on the premise that the anti-Treaty leadership, in his words:

had neither policy, nor military leadership nor provisions nor proper clothing and neither had the reinforcements which came to help us, leaving the whole south-east exposed. We were easy prey to a sudden attack by Free State soldiers.[[93]](#footnote-93)

Despite Boland’s defense, in the final analysis, the performance of his 2nd battalion during the early period of the Irish Civil War was markedly ‘poor’.[[94]](#footnote-94) The National Army suffered only two deaths, while managing to capture over seventy anti-Treaty IRA irregulars.[[95]](#footnote-95)

Boland was to spend the remainder of the civil war in prison. For the time being, his brothers Harry Boland and Ned Boland evaded capture. Before the arrival of National Army troops in Blessington Harry Boland had managed to lead an advance guard of anti-Treaty IRA forces into the nearby mountains. Ned Boland managed to return to Dublin, in the company of Traynor (Traynor was eventually captured by National Army troops on 27 July 1922). Soon after the end of the Irish Civil War, Ned Boland left Ireland for adventures abroad, including spending time in Uruguay and working as a ‘bronco-buster’ on the American prairies.[[96]](#footnote-96) He died in the USA, in 1928, following a short illness.

**Internment at Mountjoy and the death of Harry Boland**

Gerald Boland spent the initial period of his incarceration at Mountjoy prison from 8 July 1922 to October 1923. He was then moved to Kilmainham prison from October 1923 to January 1924, spending his final seven months behind bars at the Curragh internment camp.

Boland’s time in prison coincided with one of the most traumatic episodes in his life: the death of his younger brother Harry Boland, on 1 August 1922. He was thirty-five years of age. On receiving the news of his younger brother’s passing Boland’s ‘heart was broken’, as his son Harry Boland Jnr later noted.[[97]](#footnote-97) To his dismay, Boland was not permitted to visit his dying brother in hospital and to compound his grief he was also refused permission to attend his brother’s funeral.[[98]](#footnote-98)

Significantly, with his younger brother’s passing, Boland was convinced of the futility of the anti-Treaty IRA’s campaign. In an extraordinary frank omission, albeit written in later life, Boland admitted that anti-Treaty IRA forces should have ‘surrendered’ by the summer of 1922, following his own capture. ‘The only thing to do’, he surmised, ‘was to make the best of things and try to pull the country together’. The use of ‘guerrilla tactics’, he protested, had been ‘worse than useless’ as anti-Treaty IRA forces ‘were fighting against a native Government that had got a majority in the 1922 [Irish General] Election’. ‘Of course, I never let the Free State people know I felt like that, but often in talks with other prisoners I urged this view’.[[99]](#footnote-99)

It was an extremely challenging time not only for Boland personally but for his wife Annie Boland (née Keating). Their anxieties were compounded by a daily fear that Boland, like his brother Harry Boland, may face execution at the hands of the Irish Free State apparatus. In the words of his sister Kathleen Boland, “His (Gerald’s Boland’s) time may come any day for they kill four prisoners for every one of their own loses”.[[100]](#footnote-100)

**TD for Roscommon**

Of his time in Mountjoy prison Boland recalled that initially life ‘went fairly well’.[[101]](#footnote-101) Mountjoy prison at this time had just under 700 prisoners, grouped in four wings in a circle, each with three tiers of cells.[[102]](#footnote-102) He enjoyed spending time with likeminded inmates, which included Andy Cooney, Art O Connor, a future cabinet colleague in successive Fianna Fáil governments from the early 1930s to late 1950s, James Ryan. In fact, Boland and Ryan were cellmates for a time at Mountjoy prison. As Ryan recorded in a letter to his partner Máirín Cregan, dated 29 November 1922, ‘I am very lucky in my company here’.[[103]](#footnote-103)

Boland’s final months in Mountjoy prison, before his transfer to Kilmainham prison in October 1923, coincided with the ending of the Irish Civil War. On 24 May of that year, Frank Aiken, chief of staff of the anti-Treaty IRA forces, issued a formal command for anti-Treaty IRA forces to dump their arms and return home. There were no negotiations, no truce terms, no formal surrender. Instead, to quote Charles Townshend, the ‘Republic simply melted back into the realm of the imagination’.[[104]](#footnote-104) Personally, Boland welcomed this decision on behalf of the anti-Treaty IRA leadership. By this point, Boland remained incarcerated, along with an estimated 12,000 other anti-Treaty IRA supporters.

Boland’s time in Mountjoy prison also overlapped with a defining moment in his life: his election, in August 1923, as one of forty-four Republican TDs to Dáil Éireann. This impressive general election result, to quote Brian Hanley, ‘demonstrated that a popular base for anti-Treaty politics existed’.[[105]](#footnote-105) With the death of Harry Boland, Gerald Boland was put forward as his brother’s replacement – without his apparent knowledge – to contest the Dáil Éireann constituency of Roscommon on behalf of Sinn Féin.[[106]](#footnote-106) Unbeknown to him, Gerald Boland’s general election campaign in Roscommon ran with the campaign message ‘The Republic stands for truth, honour, justice … down jobbery, the floggers and the executioners’.[[107]](#footnote-107) Although having never visited Roscommon and knowing ‘scarcely anyone there’,[[108]](#footnote-108) Boland was elected on the eleventh count to the 4th Dáil, as Republican for Roscommon (1923-1927).[[109]](#footnote-109)

Gerald Boland was thus one of eighteen elected anti-Treaty Republican TDs to find themselves incarcerated. Surveying the available newspaper coverage of Boland’s 1923 general election victory it is striking how often he was referred to as the ‘brother’ of the late Harry Boland.[[110]](#footnote-110) The Boland family, together with the Sinn Féin propagandists, were aware of Harry Boland reputation as an Irish Republican *par excellence*, even in death. Indeed, shortly after Boland’s general election victory, at a meeting in Roscommon in mid-September 1923, Countess Plunkett read a letter from Boland’s mother Catherine Boland in which the latter thanked the ‘electors for electing Boland to fill the place of Harry [Boland]’. She was ‘sure their cause would stand until the Irish nation came triumphant, united’.[[111]](#footnote-111)

If Gerald Boland’s own account is to be believed, he was initially a reluctant politician, reportedly ‘not overly pleased’ that his name had been put forward, without his prior knowledge or consent.[[112]](#footnote-112) It did not take long, however, for Boland to embrace his new public role as an elected representative, making up his mind to ‘discharge the duties of the position to the best of his abilities’.[[113]](#footnote-113) In fact, Boland would continue to represent the constituency of Roscommon for almost the next forty years, through the lifetime of thirteen consecutive Dáil Éireann bodies from 1923 to 1961.

**Hunger-striker**

Despite Sinn Féin electoral success, anti-Treaty Republicans soon ‘faced a prison crisis’.[[114]](#footnote-114) In mid-October 1923, six months after the cessation of armed hostilities, there was a mass hunger-strike by an estimated 7,800 Republican prisoners (including fifty women).[[115]](#footnote-115) The Republican hunger-strike campaign first erupted in Mountjoy prison and quickly spread to ten or more prisons and internment camps, including Kilmainham prison, Cork jail, Dundalk jail, Kilkenny jail and the Curragh interment camp. Evoking the memory of Irish Republican hunger striker and martyr Terence MacSwiney, the anti-Treaty Republican hunger-strikers promised that they would continue until they had achieved “freedom or the grave”.[[116]](#footnote-116)

The central demands of the hunger-strikes’ protests focused on prison conditions, as well as the ‘prolongation of internment’.[[117]](#footnote-117) In the words of Austin Stack, himself an inmate at Mountjoy prison, what the prisoners wanted was ‘unconditional release’.[[118]](#footnote-118) In pursuit of their demands, the hunger-strikers refused to take food or drink anything except water. Most hunger-strikers ceased their hunger-strike campaign, individually or in groups, within a month. However, about 200 hunger-strikers, including Boland, continued their campaign for approximately forty days.[[119]](#footnote-119) Denis Barry and Andrew O’Sullivan ‘starved to death’, before the hunger strike was officially called off on 23 November 1923.[[120]](#footnote-120)

The decision to go on hunger-strike was not universally welcomed by anti-Treaty Republican prisoners. In fact, there was ‘considerable unease’ within the prisons about the decision to go on hunger-strike.[[121]](#footnote-121) The available figures bear this out. Of the approximately 12,000 anti-Treaty Republican prisoners in custody, an estimated one-third, some 4,200, did not participate.[[122]](#footnote-122) For example, Pax Whelan (O’Faoláin) initially objected to the proposal to go on hunger-strike , but joined ‘rather than let down his companions’.[[123]](#footnote-123) Whelan wrote that the hunger-strike was launched “in despair” because a “fermentation of anger at their prolonged inaction arose in the camps and jails”.[[124]](#footnote-124) Austin Stack also joined to huger-strike despite his ‘pessimism about the prospects of success’.[[125]](#footnote-125)

What of Boland’s attitude to the proposed hunger-strike? Like Messrs. Whelan and Stack above, in principle, Boland was wholly *against* the proposed hunger-strike. Contained within Boland’s personal papers is a fascinating and refreshingly honest explanation of why he opposed the hunger-strike and why he eventually decided to join the campaign. ‘I was resolutely opposed to hunger striking’, Boland later wrote, ‘which I considered was not a weapon for soldiers to use’.[[126]](#footnote-126) In Boland’s thinking, by commencing their campaign, Republican prisoners were falling into a trap set by the ‘Free State leaders … to get rid of us by hunger-strike’ and ‘we had plenty of fools ready to fall for this, amongst us’.[[127]](#footnote-127)

Despite Boland’s misgivings, he was part of the first batch to go on hunger-strike at Mountjoy prison in mid-October 1923. He subsequently explained the rationale behind his decision. ‘If you don’t go on strike you cannot help to call it off when the time comes so you better go on it and I did so’.[[128]](#footnote-128)

After the first week of their campaign several of the hunger-strikers based at Mountjoy prison, Boland included, were sent to Kilmainham prison where ‘we continued the strike’, in his own words.[[129]](#footnote-129) Looking back on events during the early 1960s Boland was prophetic about his experience on hunger-strike explaining that his regular practice of yoga ‘disciplined him to withstand the rigours’,[[130]](#footnote-130) that ‘it was hardly any trouble to me’.[[131]](#footnote-131) Indeed, in a letter to his wife Annie Boland, dated 11 November 1923, Boland was at pains to emphasize his general good health and high spirits. ‘[W]e are going to win this fight, and I feel as sure as is humanly [*sic*] possible that I will have the unspeakable joy of being with you and my darling babies in a very short time’. He continued:

As to my grand health – Glory to God, it is grand still, and 40 days’ fast will not harm it, for I have never abused the precious gift. I am never cold or hungry. This is absolutely true, however strange it may seem. You see, the mind controls the body and its desires and appetites, and when the Ego controls the mind, all is well. This is a glorious chance in my life to completely subdue my body to my spirit, or in other words, my real self, and I am enjoying it, so don’t fear, don’t doubt of the victory and lastly don’t worry. The prayers are great, for they strengthen all our spirits, so keep them up.[[132]](#footnote-132)

On the 39 day of his hunger-strike (circa 21 November 1923), convinced of the futility of the hunger-strike campaign, Boland decided to visit as many of his fellow hunger-strikers in Kilmainham prison. One by one Boland pleaded with his comrades to end their campaign (although Boland deliberately did not approach Frank Gallagher, the so-called ‘hunger strike king’ because, in Boland’s own words, there ‘was no use talking’ to him).[[133]](#footnote-133)

Boland remembered that in his conversations with his fellow hunger-strikers he had ‘to use different arguments for coming off the strike, according to who I was dealing with’. ‘I started off my case by confessing that I was wondering what would happen if Seán Buckley died, as he was in a very bad state’, Boland recalled.[[134]](#footnote-134) For the ‘religious men’ on hunger-strike, to use Boland’s own description, he also used the ‘unscrupulous’ argument that Christ had only lasted forty days on hunger-strike thus it would be ‘sacrilegious’ to strike longer than that.[[135]](#footnote-135)

Boland’s intervention was not universally welcomed by all the hunger-strikers in Kilmainham prison. On hearing the news of Boland’s meeting with Buckley, Frank Gallagher ‘came over to my cell and asked me was it true that we were going to call off the strike’. Boland confirmed that this was the case. In a revealing comment, perhaps hinting at his newfound political ambition as an elected representative for Roscommon, Boland said that he intended to ‘live’ in order ‘to put out the Free State crowd if I could’. If this strategy failed, and the hunger-strikers decided to instead continue their campaign and ‘die’, he ‘would take my family away from a country which bred such lunatics’.[[136]](#footnote-136) Boland’s threat had the intended result. As he later wrote, ‘That shook Frank and he agreed to come off [the hunger-strike]’.[[137]](#footnote-137)

Boland’s mediation was no doubt influenced by contemporary events. On 20 November 1923, Denis Barry died on hunger-strike in the Curragh prison hospital. Two days later, on 22 November, Andrew O’Sullivan died on hunger-strike in Mountjoy prison. The following day, 23 November, the hunger-strike was officially called-off.[[138]](#footnote-138)

In the weeks following the collapse of the hunger-strike, in early January 1924, Boland was transferred from Kilmainham prison to the Curragh interment camp. Eventually, on 17 July 1924,[[139]](#footnote-139) he was released from prison ‘with the last batch of about a dozen’, as he phrased it.[[140]](#footnote-140) He had spent over two years behind bars and was proud of the fact that ‘I was by far the longest in internment’.[[141]](#footnote-141) Coincidently, Eamon de Valera was released from Arbour Hill Prison the previous day, 16 July.[[142]](#footnote-142)

**Conclusion**

Gerald Boland’s prison experience and more broadly the events of the Irish Civil War only copper-fastened his resentment for many of the pro-Treatyites politicians, which by 1924, fell under the auspices of the Cumann na nGaedheal led Free State government in Dublin. ‘My attitude towards the Free State crowd’, he later wrote, ‘was just one of complete contempt. I looked on them as a pack of careerists’.[[143]](#footnote-143)

On his release from prison, Boland was confronted by the realities of Irish society as someone who had fought on the ‘wrong side’ during the Irish Civil War. Unfortunately, Boland had lost his reasonably well-paid job with the Dublin Corporation and was now desperate to find employment. ‘When I was released in July 1924’, he recalled, ‘my first problem was to earn something to try an [*sic*] keep my family going’.[[144]](#footnote-144) It was a very strenuous time for the Boland family. Throughout Boland’s incarceration his wife Annie and their four children were seemingly not in receipt of financial support on behalf of the Irish Republican Prisoners’ Dependents’ Fund (IRPDF).[[145]](#footnote-145) It, therefore, seems likely that the Bolands had been forced to rely on personal savings and family donations.

Initially, after saying ‘good-bye to my old job’, Boland, together with Séumus Robinson, established a roof-making business renting a small garage, ‘but it was not a success’, to quote Boland.[[146]](#footnote-146) Boland’s financial woes were compounded by his inability to receive a salary as Republican TD for Roscommon (1923-1927). Under Oireachtas rules abstentionist elected representatives who refused to take an oath of allegiance to the British monarchy, and thus did not take their seat in Dáil Éireann, were refused a parliamentary salary.

Despite such setback, shortly after his release from prison, Boland was invited to Roscommon to meet his constituents for the first occasion, where a meeting was held in his honor at an ‘old ruined Castle outside the town’.[[147]](#footnote-147) It was a joyous occasion, Boland remembered, as a ‘large crowd with a pipe and drum band’ greeted him on his arrival to Roscommon town.[[148]](#footnote-148) Included in the welcoming party were several senior Sinn Féin figures, including Mary MacSwiney and Barney Mellows.

Celebrations aside, Boland pinpointed this occasion of convincing him of the futility of Sinn Féin’s dogmatic abstentionist policy, in the party’s refusal to take its seats in Dáil Éireann. ‘There was a lot of flamboyant talk about the living Republic’, Boland later wrote, ‘which nearly made me ill’. ‘For as far as I could see the Republic was dead as it could be. In fact, it was stillborn, as it never was in a position to function properly’.[[149]](#footnote-149) He continued: ‘If I had been asked to stand on such a futile policy’, he recorded, ‘I would have declined’.[[150]](#footnote-150) In taking this pragmatic stand, Boland was one of the first senior Sinn Féin members to articulate the need to abandon abstentionism and ‘devise a method of utilising Free State political institutions to achieve republican aspirations’.[[151]](#footnote-151)

This was a bold move on Boland’s behalf, demonstrating his single-mindedness and ability for brutal honesty; characteristics that would later define his political career as a Fianna Fáil government minister. In his thinking, as he later explained, it was ‘ridiculous to be abstaining from the Dáil’, but rather he ‘should be in the Dáil and making all the trouble I could’.[[152]](#footnote-152) By attacking the usefulness of abstentionism Boland was openly undermining a central plank of Sinn Féin’s political ideology. He was, however, unapologetic. In the words of Skinner, Boland was ‘one of the first’ to assert that Sinn Féin had ‘outlived its usefulness, and that a positive policy must be adopted, to meet the changed circumstances, if Republicanism was not to become a dead letter’.[[153]](#footnote-153)

Despite such displays of provocation, it did not take long for Boland to rise-up the ranks of Sinn Féin, initially being appointed a secretary for the organization shortly after his release from prison in July 1924. In this role, Boland was responsible for helping to organize the movement across the country. He travelled from Castleisland to Letterkenny reorganizing the movement, with the policy, “the time for fighting is over, and we were not that good at it. The time is here now for Sinn Féin to put Cosgrave out”.[[154]](#footnote-154) Soon afterwards, operating from Sinn Féin’s headquarters in Suffolk St., Dublin, Boland was elected to the organisation’s standing committee, which met weekly.

As a surviving member of the 2nd Dáil and someone who had voted against the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, Boland was also a member of the Comhairle na dTeachtaí (Council of Deputies).[[155]](#footnote-155) It is fair to say that Boland had little time for this rival shadow parliament to the 3rd Dáil, believing it to be comprised of “a lot of cods”.[[156]](#footnote-156) In his thinking the Comhairle na dTeachtaí was a talking shop for rabid Republicans, including members of the 2nd Dáil who ‘had been beaten … [and] lost their seats’, as he phrased it. ‘I will never forget the first meeting of this body’, Boland recalled. ‘We had ridiculous speeches from Miss Mac Sweeney [*sic*] and a few others and I could not stand for the rubbish that was spoken, so got up and made my protest’.[[157]](#footnote-157) Boland continued: ‘I told Miss Mac Sweeney [*sic*] to face the fact that the Republic was gone and to give up her mysticism and face the hard facts’.[[158]](#footnote-158)

At the same meeting of the Comhairle na dTeachtaí cited above, Boland recorded that on the intervention of Seán MacEntee, a motion was passed that ‘whether we considered ourselves the *de jure* Government or not, and of course, that was the official attitude, we must accept the *de facto* position of the Free State Government and not claim the right to make war or take life’. In later life, Boland explained the rationale behind this support for this motion and more broadly his opposition to any suggestion that the use of force by the IRA remained a viable option in the pursuit of the Irish Republic:

We had a *de jure* Government [Eamon] De Valera was President and, in spite of the fact that we had agreed that we had no right to make war, we continued to pretend to have an army, though nearly all our men were gone away, mostly to America, there was no hold on emigration at that time. I had told the I. R. A. as soon as I was released, that I was having no more to do with them, as I said, we did not fight when we might have had a change in July 1922 and it is criminal to carry on in our present circumstances.[[159]](#footnote-159)

According to Boland’s own account, he left the IRA in July 1924. Thus, by the summer of 1924 Boland severed his remaining links with militant Irish Republicanism. As he noted above, in his thinking it was ‘criminal’ (and a waste of time) to continue down the road of physical force nationalism. Instead, what was now needed was a dose of political realism. Henceforth, he embraced constitutional methods in the pursuit of his two central political objectives: the establishment of an Irish Republic and the ending of partition. He would spend the remainder of his political career, initially under the auspices of Sinn Féin and later as a prominent personality within Fianna Fáil pursuing these dual political objectives.

In the final analysis, Gerald Boland’s civil war experiences confirmed his conviction that militarily anti-Treaty forces had wasted their time during the conflict. Arriving at this position Boland believed that the anti-Treaty leadership, to use his own words, had been ‘useless’, devoid of policies and military strategy.[[160]](#footnote-160) He was thus more than happy to leave this event to the annals of Ireland’s recent history. To again quote Boland. ‘I was glad [when the civil war ended] … None of us wanted that’.[[161]](#footnote-161)

1. Comments by Gerald Boland. *Irish Times*, 10 Oct. 1968. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See comments by Gerald Boland. *Irish Times*, 10 Oct. 1968. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Gerald Boland Papers (GBP)-3069-10(e). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See GBP-3063-4(e). See also comments by Gerald Boland. *Irish Times*, 10 Oct. 1968. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See GBP-3063-4(e). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See GBP-3064-5(e). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See GBP-10(b). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Stephen Kelly, ‘Poacher turned gamekeeper: Gerald Boland, the IRA and Nazi spies, 1939-1946’, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vol. 33, No. 1 2022, 199-219. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Below in chronological order, based on the most recent year of publication, is a *selection* of secondary works related to the Irish Civil War. See, for example, Síobhra Aiken, *Spiritual wounds: trauma, testimony and the Irish Civil War* (Kildare, 2022); Diarmaid Ferriter, *Between two hells: the Irish Civil War* (London, 2021); Seán Enright, *The Irish Civil War: law, execution and atrocity* (Kildare, 2019); John Dorney, *The Civil War in Dublin: the fight for the Irish capital, 1922-1924* (Kildare, 2017); John Crowley, Donal Ó Drisceoil and Mike Murray (eds) *Atlas of the Irish Revolution* (Cork, 2017); Diarmaid Ferriter, *A nation and not a rabble: the Irish Revolution, 1913-1923* (London, 2015); Roy Foster, *Vivid faces: the revolutionary generation in Ireland, 1890-1923* (London, 2014); Charles Townshend, *The Republic: the fight for Irish Independence* (London, 2014); Ronan Fanning, *Fatal path: British government and Irish Revolution, 1910-1922* (London, 2013); Bill Kissane, *The politics of the Irish Civil War* (Oxford, 2005); David Fitzpatrick, *Harry Boland’s Irish Revolution* (Cork, 2003); Michael Laffan, *The resurrection of Ireland: the Sinn Féin Party, 1916-1923* (Cambridge, 1999); Jim Maher, *Harry Boland* (Cork, 1998); and Michael Hopkinson, *Green against green: The Irish Civil War* (Dublin, 1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See, for example, Kelly, ‘Poacher turned gamekeeper: Gerald Boland, the IRA and Nazi spies, 1939-1946’, 199-219. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The notable exceptions to this are the respective works by Stephen Kelly, *Gerald Boland: A life* (Dublin, 2024), 65-81 and Liam Skinner, *Politicians by accident* (Dublin, 1946), 209-211. See also ‘Gerald Boland’ by Laurence William White, *Irish Dictionary of National Biography* (*IDNB*). See <https://www.dib.ie/biography/boland-gerald-a0762>; and David Fitzpatrick, ‘Gerald Boland’ entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*ODNB*). See <https://www.oxforddnb.com>. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Comments by Harry Boland Jnr. ‘1916 Rising Oral History, Episode 6, Boland and Harry Boland - Part 1’. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTO26Hj26kE>. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See Gerald Boland’s unpublished memoir. A copy is in the possession of this author. In 2008, this author was provided with a copy of Gerald Boland’s unpublished memoir, together with a collection of private letters, by his late son Harry Boland Jnr. I am forever indebted to Mr Boland for this generous donation. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See GBP-3036-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See, for example, Bureau of Military History (BMH) witness statement, 586, Kathleen O’Donovan (née Boland), 27 Sept. 1951. Available from <https://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/bureau-of-military-history-1913-1921/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0586.pdf>. Readers should note that Gerald Boland did *not* provide a BMH witness statement. For those on the anti-Treaty side, this was not uncommon, as many perceived the project as engineered by the ‘Free State’. Consequently, the BMH does not include detailed statements from prominent anti-Treaty survivors such as Tom Barry. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See, for example, ‘Gerald Boland - MSP34REF15471’. This file, comprised forty-six pages, relates to Gerald Boland’s receipt of a military service pension in respect of his service with the Irish Volunteers prior to and during the week of 23 to 30 April 1916, his subsequent internment until Dec. of that year, his service with the Irish Volunteers and IRA through the Irish War of Independence, the truce period and Irish Civil War from 1917 to 1923. See <https://www.militaryarchives.ie/en/collections/online-collections/military-service-pensions-collection-1916-1923/search-the-collection>. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See, for example, University College Dublin Archives (UCDA) the Michael Hayes Papers (P53); and the Maurice ‘Moss’ Twomey Papers (P69). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See, for example, the Joseph McGarrity Papers MS 27,578/1/29; and the papers of Dr James Ryan and Máirín Cregan, MS 50,155/10/5. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See University College Cork (UCC) Special Collections Archives, the Kathleen Boland Collection. See <https://libguides.ucc.ie/archivesservice/archivalcollections>. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See, for example, Ernie O’Malley, *The singing flame* (Cork, 2012) and Dan Breen, *My fight for Irish freedom* (Dublin, 1989). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See, for example, author’s interview with the late Harry Boland Jnr, 22 Feb. 2008. See also comments by Harry Boland Jnr. ‘1916 Rising Oral History, Episode 6, Boland and Harry Boland - Part 1’. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. For example, in Oct. 1968, the *Irish Times* published a series of articles (ten in total), entitled the ‘Gerry Boland series’, based on interviews conducted between Michael McInerney and Gerald Boland. See *Irish Times*, 8 to 19 Oct. 1968. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. See GBP-3037-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See GBP-3040-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See *Irish Times*, 9 Oct. 1968. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See GBP-3043-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Quoted in Foster, *Vivid faces*, xv. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. See GBP-3041-6 to 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Comments by Harry Boland Jnr. ‘1916 Rising Oral History, Episode 7, Boland and Harry Boland - Part 2’. Interviewee Harry Boland (Jnr, b. 1925), interviewer Maurice O’Keefe, 2012. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTO26Hj26kE>. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. See BMH MSP collection, MSP34REF1547, Gerald Boland. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See GBP-3052-A-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See GBP-3059-A-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See ‘Gerald Boland’ entry by White in *IDNB*. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. According to Gerald Boland’s MSP records he held the rank of lieutenant of B Company, 2nd Dublin Battalion of the Dublin Brigade and Kildare Brigade areas from 1 April 1917 to 31 March 1919. See BMH MSP collection, MSP34REF1547, Gerald Boland. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See MSP34REF1547, Gerald Boland. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. MSP34REF1547, Gerald Boland. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Skinner, *Politicians by accident*, 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. MSP34REF1547, Gerald Boland. See also Skinner, *Politicians by accident*, 204-205. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. See Gerald Boland to Michael McInerney, 9 April 1966. UCDA P7/D/118. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See comments by Gerald Boland. *Irish Times*, 10 Oct. 1968. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Skinner, *Politicians by accident*, 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. See Gerald Boland to Michael McInerney, 9 April 1966. UCDA P7/D/118. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. The conflict would last for approximately one year and lead to approximately 2,000 deaths (between 1922 and 1924). See John Dorney, ‘What was the real death toll of the Irish Civil War?’, *Irish Times*, 10 May 2022. See <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/what-was-the-real-death-toll-of-the-irish-civil-war-1.4858308>. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. The Collins-de Valera Pact, signed on 19 May 1922, agreed terms for the establishment of a national coalition panel for a general election (held in June 1922) ‘on the ground that the national position requires the entrusting of the Government of the country into the joint hands of those who have been the strength of the national situation during the last few years’. ‘The proportion of candidates chosen for the panel was to be according to their then strength in the Dáil’. Quoted in Hopkinson, *Green against green*, 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. *Irish Times*, 10 Oct. 1968. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. See, Ferriter, *A nation not a rabble,* 257-259. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Breen, *My fight for Irish freedom*, 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Gerald Boland to Michael Hayes, 9 April 1966. UCDA P53/279. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Fanning, *Fatal path*, 336. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. See Gerald Shannon, *Liam Lynch: to declare a republic* (Kildare, 2023), 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Copy of ‘Sworn statement made before Advisory Committee by Oscar Traynor’, 18 Jan. 1935. See BMH MSP collection, MSP34REF236, Oscar Traynor. Available from <http://mspcsearch.militaryarchives.ie/docs/files//PDF_Pensions/R1/MSP34REF236OSCAR%20TRAYNOR/WMSP34REF236OSCARTRAYNOR.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Quoted in ‘Oscar Traynor’ by Marie Coleman in *IDNB*. See also BMH MSP collection, MSP34REF236, Oscar Traynor. In 1935, Gerald acted as one of Traynor’s referees in support of the latter’s MSP application. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. The contents of this paragraph are sourced from John Dorney, ‘The Irish Civil War – a brief overview’. See <https://www.theirishstory.com/2012/07/02/the-irish-civil-war-a-brief-overview/#.YWWmdRrMIdU>. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. See Dorney, ‘The Irish Civil War – a brief overview’. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. For an account of Childers’s execution see Enright, *The Irish Civil War*, 36-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. See MSP34REF1547, Gerald Boland. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. See *Irish Independent*, 18 July 1924 and *Westmeath Chronicle*, 19 July 1924. According to Gerald Boland’s Military Service Pension record he was released on 19 July 1924. See MSP34REF1547, Gerald Boland. In his memoir, Boland notes that he was finally released from prison on 20 July 1924. See GBP-3068-9(e). [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. See MSP34REF1547, Gerald Boland. See also Skinner, *Politicians by accident*, 214-215. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. See MSP34REF1547, Gerald Boland. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Handwritten letter from Gerald Boland to Oscar Traynor, undated. GBP-3190-2(P). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Quoted in Hopkinson, *Green against green*, 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Fitzpatrick, *Harry Boland’s Irish Revolution*, 309. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Dorney, *The Civil War in Dublin*, 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Quoted in Dorney, *The Civil War in Dublin*, 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Hopkinson, *Green against green*, 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Dorney, *The Civil War in Dublin*, 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Maher, *Harry Boland*, 305. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. See Maher, *Harry Boland*, 304. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. See Boland to Traynor, undated. GBP-3190-2(P). [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. O’Malley, *The singing flame*, 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. See Maher, *Harry Boland*, 305. See also Fitzpatrick, *Harry Boland’s Irish Revolution*, 309. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Andrew McDonnell ‘served as Officer Commanding 2 Dublin Brigade IRA from its foundation and during the Truce period was an IRA representative on a joint IRA/National Army General Headquarters staff according to Ernie O'Malley. At the outbreak of the Civil War in June 1922 McDonnell took part in fighting against National Army forces in Dublin and County Wicklow and was captured at Blessington in July the same year and interned for the remainder of the Civil War. He was finally released in June 1924’. In 1936, Gerald Boland wrote a reference in support of McDonnell’s MSP application. See MSP34REF16644, Andrew McDonnell. Available from <http://mspcsearch.militaryarchives.ie/detail.aspx>. See also BMH witness statement, 1768, Andrew McDonnell, 25 March 1959. <https://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/bureau-of-military-history-1913-1921/reels/bmh/BMH.WS1768.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Boland to Traynor, undated. GBP-3190-2(P). [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Fitzpatrick, *Harry Boland’s Irish Revolution*, 310. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Dorney, *The Civil War in Dublin*, 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. See MSP34REF236, Oscar Traynor. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Hopkinson, *Green against green*, 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. See MSP34REF236, Oscar Traynor. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Maher, *Harry Boland,* 308. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Quoted in Fitzpatrick, *Harry Boland’s Irish Revolution*, 311. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Quoted in Townshend, *The Republic*, 411. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Quoted in Townshend, *The Republic*, 411. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. See file marked ‘Copy - Blessin’. Report on Blessington, Twomey to Liam Lynch, 5-10 July. UCDA P69/77(108). [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. See file marked ‘Copy - Blessin’. UCDA P69/77(108). [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. See file marked ‘Copy - Blessin’. UCDA P69/77(108). [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. See file marked ‘Copy - Blessin’. UCDA P69/77(108). [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Quoted in Maher, *Harry Boland,* 310-311. According to another source, McDonnell was captured, not while in a car, but while erecting ‘barricades on the road’. See Dorney, *The Civil War in Dublin*, 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. *Irish Times*, 10 Oct. 1968. See also file marked ‘Copy - Blessin’. UCDA P69/77(108). [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Fitzpatrick, *Harry Boland’s Irish Revolution*, 312. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. See Enright, *The Irish Civil War*, 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. # See John Dorney, ‘Today in Irish History 27 September 1922, the Passing of the Public Safety Act’, 27 Sept. 2013. See <https://www.theirishstory.com/2013/09/27/today-in-irish-history-27-september-1922-the-passing-of-the-public-safety-act/#.Yr2WdXbMK3A>.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. # See Seán Enright, ‘8 December 1922: The Mountjoy executions abandoning the rule of law: state executions during the Irish Revolution’. Available from <https://www.rte.ie/centuryireland/index.php/articles/8-december-1922-the-mountjoy-executions#:~:text=The%20execution%20without%20trial%20of,of%20the%20Irish%20civil%20war>..

    [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. See comments by Gerald Boland. *Irish Times*, 10 Oct. 1968. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Dorney, *The Civil War in Dublin*, 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Dorney, *The Civil War in Dublin*, 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Comments by Gerald Boland. *Irish Times*, 19 Oct. 1968. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Comments by Harry Boland Jnr. ‘1916 Rising Oral History, Episode 6, Boland and Harry Boland - Part 1’. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. See Kathleen Boland to Joseph McGarrity, 17 Aug. 1922. NLI MS 27,578/1/29. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. See GBP-3069-10(e). [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Comments by Kathleen Boland. *San Francisco Chronicle*, 12 May 1923. I would like to thank Dr Margaret Ward for drawing my attention to this reference. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. See GBP-3061-2(e). [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Dorney, *The Civil War in Dublin*, 199. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. ### James Ryan to Máirín Cregan, 29 Nov. 1922. NLI Papers of Dr James Ryan and Máirín Cregan, MS 50,155/10/5. I am grateful to Michael Lougham for drawing my attention to this reference.

     [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Townshend, *The Republic*, 447. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Brian Hanley, ‘Frank Aiken and the IRA, 1923-1933’, in Bryce Evans and Stephen Kelly (eds), *Frank Aiken: nationalist and internationalist* (Kildare, 2014), 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. See Skinner, *Politicians by accident*, 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. See broadside election message, circa Aug. 1923. NLI EPH E165. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Skinner, *Politicians by accident*, 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. At the Irish general election of 1923 in the constituency of Roscommon, Gerald Boland secured 3,843 votes of 12.32%. See <https://electionsireland.org/candidate.cfm?ID=1417>. See also Skinner, *Politicians by accident*, 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. See, for example, *Westmeath Independent*, 18 Aug. 1923 and *Belfast Telegraph*, 1 Sept. 1923. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. *Irish Independent*, 19 Sept. 1923. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Quoted in Skinner, *Politicians by accident*, 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Quoted in Skinner, *Politicians by accident*, 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Hanley, ‘Frank Aiken and the IRA, 1923-1933’, 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. See Michael Biggs, ‘Hunger strikes by Irish Republicans, 1916-1923’, 4. A paper prepared for Workshop on Techniques of Violence in Civil War Centre for the Study of Civil War, Oslo, Aug. 2004. Available from <https://www.prio.org/Global/upload/CSCW/Violence%20in%20civil%20war/Irish%20hunger%20strikes%20(US).pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Quoted in Seán McConville, *Irish political prisoners 1848-1922: theatre of war* (London, 2003), 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Hopkinson, *Green against green*, 268. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Quoted in James Healy, ‘The civil war hunger-strike: October 1923’, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Autumn 1982, Vol. 71., No. 283, 213-226: 216. See also *Drogheda Independent*, 20 Oct. 1923. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Healy, ‘The civil war hunger-strike: October 1923’, 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. See Biggs, ‘Hunger strikes by Irish Republicans, 1916-1923’, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Hopkinson, *Green against green*, 269. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Healy, ‘The civil war hunger-strike: October 1923’, 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Quoted in Biggs, ‘Hunger strikes by Irish Republicans, 1916-1923’, 11-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Quoted Healy, ‘The civil war hunger-strike: October 1923’, 217. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Quoted in Biggs, ‘Hunger strikes by Irish Republicans, 1916-1923’, 11-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. See GBP-3063-4(e). See also comments by Gerald Boland. *Irish Times*, 10 Oct. 1968. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. See GBP-3063-4(e). [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. See GBP-3064-5(e). [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. See GBP-3064-5(e). [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. See ‘Gerald Boland’ entry by White in *IDNB.* [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Comments by Gerald Boland. *Irish Times*, 8 Oct. 1968. At least one contemporary press report contradicts Gerald Boland’s account. The *Irish Independent* noted that Boland was reportedly ‘very weak’. See *Irish Independent*, 20 Nov. 1923. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Gerald Boland to Annie Boland, 11 Nov. 1923. NLI MS 17,378/1/30. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. See GBP-3064-5(e). [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. See GBP-3064-5(e) & GBP-3065-6(e). [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Comments by Gerald Boland. *Irish Times*, 10 Oct. 1968. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. See GBP-3066-7(e). [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. See GBP-3067-8(e). [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. See Healy, ‘The civil war hunger-strike: October 1923’, 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. See *Irish Independent*, 18 July 1927. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. See GBP-3068-9(e). [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. See GBP-3068-9(e). [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Ronan Fanning, *Éamon de Valera: a will to power* (London, 2015),146. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. See GBP-3068-9(e). [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. GBP-3070/71-1(H). [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. See ‘Irish Republican Prisoners; Fund Summary’. This ledger contains the names and addresses of beneficiaries, mostly prisoners or ex-prisoners on the anti-Treaty side of the Irish Civil War and later Free State internees. Gerald Boland name is not recorded in this manuscript. See NLI MS 42,024. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. GBP-3070/71-1(H). [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. GBP-3070/71-1(H). [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. GBP-3070/71-1(H). [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. GBP-3070/71-1(H). [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. GBP-3070/71-1(H). [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. See ‘Gerald Boland’ entry by White in *IDNB.* [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. GBP-3076-6(H). [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Skinner, *Politicians by accident*, 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Quoted in the *Irish Times*, 10 Oct. 1968. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Comhairle na dTeachtaí: an Irish republican parliament established by opponents of the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty and the resulting Irish Free State and viewed by anti-Treaty republicans as a successor to the 2nd Dáil. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. See commends by Gerald Boland. *Irish Times*, 10 Oct. 1968. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. GBP-3072-2-3(H). [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. GBP-3073-3(H). [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. GBP-3073-3(H). [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. See GBP-3069-10(e). [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Comments by Gerald Boland. *Irish Times*, 10 Oct. 1968. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)