

Monaghan's War of Independence 1919 - 1921

in collaboration with
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Maynooth University

MONAGHAN
Músaem Chontae Mhuineachain
COUNTY
MUSEUM



• Tried.
Convicted.
&
Executed
by
IRA



STAMP



Station, Monaghan.



The Diamond, Monaghan.



THE PORK MARKET, MONAGHAN

The Church, The Diamond, Clones.



Huckno Street, Castleblayney.





I Introduction

In 1966, on the 50th Anniversary of the 1916 Rising, members of *Cumann Seanchais Chlochair* published a booklet, *Cuimhneachán Mhuineacháin*, on the history 'of the liberation movement in County Monaghan.' It covered the period from the beginning of the Third Home Rule crisis in 1912 to the end of the War of Independence in July 1921, the years that have now become the focus of the Decade of Centenaries in Ireland. The booklet's chief importance lay in the fact that 'The bulk of the material ... has come from the men who fashioned the county's destinies in this revolutionary period of its history.' This was reference to the immensely important project led by Fr Laurence Marron (1902-96), then parish priest of Latton, who, in the 1960s, along with Fr Peadar Livingstone, Fr Joseph Duffy and Eoghan Smyth, gathered statements from surviving republican veterans of the revolutionary period in Monaghan.

I believe I was the first scholar to have subsequently scrutinised these papers when completing a MA thesis in 1985-86 on Protestant politics and society in Monaghan. The statements were then kept in brown paper parcels, wrapped in twine, in the museum in Monaghan Town. Now known as the Monaghan War of Independence Files, this collection was digitised recently. It is probably the most important collection of War of Independence witness statements available for any county in Ireland, and certainly much more comprehensive and illuminating than the Bureau of Military History Witness Statements for Monaghan collected some years previously.

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The authors of *Cuimhneachán Mhuineacháin* were high in their praise of the men who spoke to them of their experiences in the 'four glorious year':

They were the generation who eventually, after the long centuries, established an independent Irish state. If that generation is to be judged on those of them who survive in Monaghan today, we can truly say that they were sincere, unselfish, and modest people. We were impressed by the spirit of their charity. Never once do they speak unkindly of those who did not make efforts equal to theirs. Nor do they boast of their own achievements even when some of their deeds bordered on the heroic. Boasting and bitterness were later introduced by elements who had no other claim to fame.

This was a warm tribute to men who had fought in a War of Independence, who had taken part in attacks on major police barracks at Ballytrain and

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Carrickmacross; ambushes on crown forces at places such as Annyalla, Ballybay, Carnagh (where the McEnaneys lost their lives), and Tullyvaragh; went on the run with flying columns, often experiencing the most horrendous conditions that had long term consequences on their health; heroically rescued captured comrades (as in the case of Matt Fitzpatrick discussed below); disrupted rail and communication networks; and established an effective intelligence network.

But these men, as the *Cuimhneachán Mhuineacháin* boldly acknowledged, also revealed in their testimonies a darker side to the conflict. It was not until the 1970s that historians began to do likewise, and to interrogate aspects of the war that went beyond the traditional nationalist narrative.

The exhibition that accompanies this programme draws extensively on the Monaghan War of Independence Files and also on the rich variety of primary sources that are now available for the study of the Irish War of Independence at local level: Bureau of Military History Witness Statements, the Military Service Pensions collection, IRA brigade activity records, compensation files, and newspapers, especially the *Dundalk Democrat* and *Northern Standard*. It builds on the nationally acclaimed and award-winning 'From a Whisper to a Roar: Exploring the Untold Story of Monaghan in 1916' Exhibition of 2016. Its aim is similar: to develop a more nuanced interpretation of the conflict at local level, illustrating that the events of 1919-21 were more complex in how they played out than the traditional narrative of the IRA versus the crown forces. While it examines the military aspect, it also illustrates the impact upon civilian non-combatants and those who were perceived enemies of the IRA, and explains sectarian, agrarian, and other social dimensions.

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Stranooden Post Office circa: 1920

II

The Rise of Sinn Féin

Inevitably, in a county such as Monaghan where Catholic and Protestant communities had been divided along politico-religious lines and organised into rival paramilitary organisations (Irish National Volunteers and Ulster Volunteer Force) in the third Home Rule crisis of 1912-14, sectarian tensions once more came to the fore during the War of Independence. There were also social tensions as young men and women, locked into the country as a result of the Great War, became frustrated by the lack of opportunities available to them under the existing social systems. After 1917, small uneconomic farmers and the landless indulged once again in agrarian activities as they sought the break-up of remaining estates and the redistribution of lands. In the general election of 1918, these young men and women, given the vote for the first time under the Representation of the People Act, expressed their frustrations through the ballot box when they turned their back on the procrastinating Irish Parliamentary Party [IPP] and voted for radical change with the election of two Sinn Féin candidates for Monaghan: Ernest Blythe returned for the northern constituency and Seán MacEntee for the south.

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That is not to say that Sinn Féin had it all its own way in Monaghan; remnants of the old IPP were still very much alive and active in the Ancient Order of Hibernians, and unionists (who in 1911 comprised approximately 25 per cent of the county's population) renewed themselves for one last campaign to remain in the United Kingdom. In 1912-13, they had shown their determination to resist the implementation of Home Rule when 5,360 men signed the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant, 5,119 women signed a parallel Declaration, and almost 2,100 joined the Ulster Volunteer Force. However, the Great War had taken away unionism's most charismatic leaders – young and old – and altered the landscape of unionist politics. Following the 1916 Rebellion, the British government's attempts to appease American public opinion by solving the Irish question brought partition to the negotiating table. In the summer of 1920, as the War of Independence gained momentum, the *Belfast Telegraph* published a statement from the Ulster unionist leadership asserting that it was time to 'wring the hands of our brethren in Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan in agony and regret, and bid them goodbye if we are to save ourselves.' In December 1920, the Government of Ireland Act was passed, making provision for the establishment of the new state of Northern Ireland to be comprised of the six north-eastern counties, and Monaghan unionists

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realised their previous loyalty had been in vain. They were deserted by the Ulster Unionist Council at a time when they were simultaneously faced with internal threat in the county.

Two months after the election, on 21 January 1919, those of the elected seventy-three Sinn Féin MPs (designating themselves Teachta Dála) not in prison or on the run met in the Mansion House in Dublin, forming the first Dáil Éireann, and proclaimed Irish independence. That very same day, a group of Tipperary Volunteers ambushed and killed two RIC men at Soloheadbeg in Tipperary, an incident traditionally regarded as the first in the War of Independence. The conflict continued until a truce was called on 11 July 1921, opening the way for negotiations that led to the Anglo-Irish treaty.

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UVF 2ND Battalion Banner © MCM

III

Organising the IRA

In the aftermath of the 1916 Rising, the Monaghan Volunteers were re-organised by Eoin O'Duffy. Born on 28 January 1890, O'Duffy was the son of a small farmer and road labourer from Latton. He had been imbued with a sense of nationalism by his maternal uncle, principal of Laragh NS, and provided with a decent standard of education. He became a clerk in the county surveyor's office in Monaghan Town and, as a result of his strong work ethic and organisational abilities, rose quickly to county surveyor and engineer. He also befriended Patrick Whelan, chairman of the Ulster Council of the GAA, who had O'Duffy appointed as secretary of Monaghan GAA Board in 1912, and later the same year to secretary of the Ulster Council. Between 1912 and 1917, O'Duffy transformed the GAA in the county (and Ulster as a whole); he healed north-south GAA divides, largely a result of political constituency lines on a map, and put together a team under his management, drawn from clubs all over the county, that won the Ulster senior football championship in 1914, 1916 and 1917 (as well as the hurling championship in 1914 and who were only narrowly defeated by Cavan in the football final in 1915.)

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In November 1917, O'Duffy met with Michael Collins and Luke O'Toole, general secretary of the GAA, in Dublin. Collins initiated him into the IRB, making him a powerful figure in both GAA and republican circles, and O'Toole introduced him to the importance of the GAA to the national cause. Donál McAnallen makes the point that 'there can be few examples in the world of someone interweaving sport and revolutionary activity so successfully as Eoin O'Duffy and the GAA in Ulster.' And Collins, in time, would come to regard O'Duffy, as 'the best man by far in Ulster.' After the Dublin meeting, O'Duffy later explained, with some exaggeration, that he 'went back to Monaghan a Volunteer and within a short time had recruited virtually every able-bodied member or supporter of the GAA into Volunteer activities.' But there is no doubt he used the GAA club structure to form companies in Clones, Newbliss, Scotstown, Carrickmacross, Ballybay, Castleblayney and Monaghan. O'Duffy and his right hand man, Dan Hogan, certainly had the necessary charisma to bond young men together in both the GAA and the Volunteers.

Dan Hogan, the eldest son of a comfortable farmer from Grangemockler in County Tipperary, was born in 1895. In 1917, he came to Clones as a railway clerk with the Great Northern Railway. There, through his involvement in the Clones GAA club, he met O'Duffy. Both became steadfast friends and Hogan

soon became O'Duffy's closest ally in both the GAA and Volunteers. Hogan commanded huge respect from his men. Tom Armstrong remembered that he was 'a wonderful character – of solid build and great physical strength, strong sense of humour with a hearty laugh, determined forceful drive, and utterly fearless of physical risk. A natural leader amongst men and to me second only to Michael Collins.' Hogan was ruthless when necessary, it seems more so after his brother Michael's death in Croke Park on Bloody Sunday 1920. Dr Conn Ward claimed that 'Bloody Sunday affected him [Hogan] and [he] wanted to get using [the] gun at all opportunities.' Perhaps it was no coincidence that the eight months after Bloody Sunday were the most violent period of the conflict in Monaghan when eighteen people were killed by the IRA.

Up to that point, the emphasis had been on recruitment to the Volunteers. By 1919, there were fifty-six companies divided into five battalions and one brigade with O'Duffy appointed as brigadier. Besides the connections with the GAA some other reasons can be suggested as to why young men joined the movement. Primary school teachers kindled the spirit of Irish nationalism in the likes of O'Duffy; his uncle in Laragh national school also taught the McMahons - Peadar, Brian and Sorcha – all of whom played prominent roles in the republican movement. In Gaelic League classes, Tom Carragher highlighted Henry Morris' teaching of Irish history and traditions that encouraged young men into the IRA in south Monaghan (Carragher also claimed that 80 per cent of the Volunteers in his parish of Donaghmoyne were GAA men.) However, while the Gaelic League may have imbued certain young men with a sense of patriotism, including O'Duffy, its lack of penetration in Monaghan meant it was not as influential as in other counties, at least not in terms of providing rank and file Volunteers.

Monaghan IRA veterans later remembered the turbulent years as a struggle with Britain for independence. Time and again history has shown that youth, enthusiasm for a cause and patriotism very often go hand in hand. The appeal of republican patriotism is difficult to quantify but when O'Duffy was incarcerated in Belfast jail, he found: 'About 160 of the cream of Ireland gathered together, all intelligent, robust & exemplary young men, whose only crime is intense love of country, & irresistible desire to secure the freedom of their mother land.' Many young men and women alike were also frustrated by the lack of opportunity hindered, by the existing social class system. As Monaghan was a predominantly rural county one cannot easily dismiss the recasting of the land question from c.1917 as an inducement to young men to join the IRA. It was certainly the case elsewhere that IRA leaders lured young men into the movement with promises of land. In March 1920, James Shevlin of the south Monaghan UIL criticised the fact that 'The republican party said "help us to get a republic and then we'll settle the land question"'. Revolution promised change.

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James Mulligan remembered the flying column to have been 'all small farmers.' Patrick Donnelly from Carrickmacross and James Marron from Corduff were labourers. However, there was a diversity of occupations and no clear social profile emerges. For example, Patrick McPhillips was a carpenter, Charles Emerson was a teacher, Thomas Gillanders was a postman, Conn Ward, the battalion's intelligence officer, was a medical doctor, and Joe Shevlin was a post office clerk.

IRA commanders knew there were practical reasons for temperance: as Ernie O'Malley put it, 'drink meant an open mouth, talk and rumour,' all of which could have dangerous consequences for IRA men and their plans.

Family connections were also important. John, Peter, Patrick and Michael Woods from Annyalla were all brothers and their three sisters – Mary, Cassie, and Brigid – were in Cumann na mBan. The two Mohan brothers from Killanny were officers in the local company while their two sisters were also prominent in Cumann na mBan. And the vast majority of these Volunteers were young and unmarried, and, it seems, exclusively Catholic. O'Duffy also demanded of them that they had to be teetotal. IRA commanders knew there were practical reasons for temperance: as Ernie O'Malley put it, 'drink meant an open mouth, talk and rumour,' all of which could have dangerous consequences for IRA men and their plans.

Women such as the Woods and Mohan sisters, the Connollys of Feeha, and McCruddens and Sherlocks of Carna, played a key role. Alice Mullan of Park Street, Monaghan, was county president of Cumann na mBan. Not only did she organise branches 'all over the entire brigade area; she spent a very considerable amount of her money on the movement, and allowed her business (spirit and boot merchant) to almost lapse.' James Mulligan claimed he could name almost thirty families whose daughters were involved in the organisation. Brigid Fitzgerald of Ture was 'one of the most prominent members of the Cumann na mBan organisation' and regularly acted as a scout. These women carried despatches and sometimes arms, organised comfort parcels for prisoners, fed men on the run, and acted as sentries in the hills above safe houses.

In order to operate without fear of arrest, there had to be safe houses for IRA men on the run. Joe McCarville could name nine houses in the Newbliss-Clones area alone. Alice Mullan's home in Park Street Monaghan was safe. Brigid Fitzgerald's home at Ture was a regular meeting place of O'Duffy, Hogan, Matt Fitzpatrick and the other Monaghan IRA leaders. Catholic priests such as Fr Coyle, Fr O'Daly and Fr McPhillips allowed parochial houses to shelter men on the run. Francis Tummons finished his witness statement in praise of safe houses:

Finally, I wish to record the debt of gratitude to those who gave us support in one way or the other, who offered and gave us lodging and food, who stood up against the raids of the Crown Forces and denied any knowledge or information. Were it not for these supporters in various

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forms, our operations, however small they contributed to the final outcome of the movement, could not have been undertaken.

James Mulligan of Scotstown made another important point: 'We could ... depend on the generosity of the poor people of the mountain side for food and these poor people gave us all they had often not having enough for themselves.' In Monaghan, it was generally the less well-off who supported the IRA while the strong farmers tended to remain aloof.

Not all of the IRA's work was done in fields, from behind ditches, and in the streets of towns and villages. For a guerrilla campaign to be successful there had to be administrators as well as fighters. It was in this respect that Bernard O'Rourke of Inniskeen became a key figure. By June 1920, the police noted that he was 'a Sinn Féin leader of some local importance'. By then, the emerging counter state had significant financial commitments. Back in September 1919, Michael Collins launched the Dáil loan, which became its principal source of finance. From late 1919 through 1920, bonds were sold to individuals across the country in denominations ranging from £1 to £100 and bearing interest at 5 per cent per annum, redeemable within twenty years of the international recognition of the Irish republic. From October 1919 to the end of January 1920, O'Rourke collected £766 for the Dáil loan from businessmen, farmers and labourers in Inniskeen, including subscriptions of £50 each from himself and Fr Bernard Maguire. By September 1920, he had successfully raised over £5,700 throughout Monaghan, the most successful contribution from Ulster. Following a raid on his home in 1920, when he was arrested for a second time, documentation relating to the loan was discovered; he was imprisoned in Belfast for several months.

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Eoin O'Duffy © NLI

IV

The Raid on Ballytrain and its Consequences

From early 1920, the Volunteers turned their attention to raiding RIC barracks. Back in August 1919, the terms of a boycott of the RIC had been drawn up by Dáil Éireann in a bid to ostracise the RIC, 'the eyes and ears' of Dublin Castle in every townland in Ireland. These terms challenged the right of the RIC to participate in Irish society 'having been judged guilty of treason to their country ... [and] unworthy to enjoy any of the privileges or comforts which arise from cordial relations with the public.' The boycott was extended to those who associated with the police. In September 1919, there was widespread posting of printed notices in south Monaghan threatening anyone found speaking to the RIC with the penalty of death. There were sporadic incidents including assaults on policemen and family members; the breaking of windows in RIC homes; threatening letters; and even the kidnapping of RIC employees. One young woman was threatened with death if she went through with her marriage to an RIC constable and another had her hair shaved after she was seen talking to a policeman.

The attack on Ballytrain barracks was a huge propaganda success, making national newspaper headlines in the days after; it was only the third such barracks to be overrun in Ireland.

In Monaghan, on 15 February 1920, a group of thirty Volunteers led by O'Duffy and Hogan, and including explosives experts who worked for O'Duffy on the county council, attacked Ballytrain barracks, nine miles north-west of Carrickmacross. Ernie O'Malley, then in Monaghan as an IRA recruiter, was also present. The barracks was guarded by six RIC men: Sergeants Lawton and Graham, and Constables Roddy, Gallagher, Nelson and Murtagh. Despite being called upon several times to surrender, they refused. Their position was rendered hopeless when the gable end of the barracks was blown in on top of them. This was a raid for arms; O'Duffy was very much against killing policemen at this stage. The attack was a huge propaganda success, making national newspaper headlines in the days after; it was only the third such barracks to be overrun in Ireland. After Ballytrain, the Monaghan IRA concentrated on destroying barracks in the villages of Scotstown, Tydavnet, Emyvale and Smithboro (a later attack on the major town barrack in Carrickmacross was unsuccessful.) All of these buildings were subsequently vacated, leaving large swathes of the countryside unpoliced, except for mobile patrols.

The remnants of the IPP were not impressed by what the attack on Ballytrain represented. A couple of weeks after there was a huge AOH demonstration in Carrickmacross, its organisers wanting to emphasise 'that far from being a dwindling power in south Monaghan, Hibernianism is flourishing and calmly

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waiting the summer to assist in marshalling once again the wandering children of our land into the solid ranks of constitutionalism.' The reasons for this civil strife are not hard to find. The AOH was primarily supported by traditional middle class supporters of the IPP. These were the men who had loudly condemned the 1916 Rising believing it the work of socialist revolutionaries.



Aftermath at Ballytrain RIC Barracks following IRA raid © NLI



Local Government, 1920

Shortly after the attack on Ballytrain, O'Duffy and other leaders were arrested and imprisoned. O'Duffy organised a hunger strike that won certain rights for the prisoners. In May, he was released and returned to Monaghan a hero, just in time to prepare for the local government elections of 1920. These were contested in a politically charged climate where Sinn Féin were accused of intimidation, with justification, by Home Rule nationalists, particularly in the south Monaghan constituency. The AOH and UIL held joint pre-election meetings in Carrickmacross, Inniskeen and Killanny but there was a noted reticence to put forward candidates because few were as optimistic as James Shevlin of the south Monaghan UIL executive who contended that 'the promises of Sinn Féin have not been fulfilled and there is nothing left to the people but a return to sanity and the constitutional movement.' It was the physical intimidation of one prominent nationalist, Phil Magee of Inniskeen, assaulted by a gang of around ten men armed with revolvers in his own home, and forced to withdraw his candidature from the local election that prompted nationalist outrage. Thomas McGahon, the editor of the *Democrat* raged: 'That is not freedom. It is tyranny.' This incident of 'disgraceful political thuggery' was deemed the reason for nationalists in the southern constituency issuing a statement that:

having considered the recent act of intimidation against us ... and observing that similar tactics have been adopted in other parts of the county, and fearing that many of our supporters would be subjected to similar treatment on or before polling date [we] ... have decided to withdraw from the contest.

The dozen or so signatories to the statement asked their traditional supporters to abstain from voting. However, as in the 1918 general election, it was a very changed electorate that cast their votes, and when the results were counted Sinn Féin took control of the county and other local councils. The Redmondite editor of the *Democrat* accepted that they had to be regarded as 'representative of the popular will', and urged that 'Toleration towards those Irishmen who have disagreed with them [Sinn Féin] should be the keynote of their home policy, just as unabated opposition to an alien government should be the keynote of their foreign policy.'

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of the local authorities refusing to pay the rates to the Local Government Board. Thomas Toal, chairman since 1899, and Bernard O'Rourke were the only two of the old nationalist block who were returned to the council but both men had thrown in their lot with Sinn Féin. James McKenna, later recalled: 'we were all inexperienced but the chairman, Thomas Toal ... was very helpful to us.' Toal was proposed as chairman by John Coleman (Sinn Féin) on the grounds that he had 'always been very fair and very impartial and had always served the interests of the council very well.' He was seconded by O'Duffy who now found himself a member of the council, as well as its employee. This must have come as something of a shock to the likes of JCW Madden of Hilton Park, born into the landed ascendancy and Big House tradition, who found himself sitting alongside a working man (and furthermore the leader of the IRA) on the council. Toal welcomed O'Duffy, 'one of the most intelligent and competent men that they had in the service of the council. Since the last time he had been there he had gone through a great ordeal both while on the run and in prison, and had won a great victory. It was all to his credit that he had done all this.' This was a very public pronouncement of support for the separatist agenda that O'Duffy now pursued.

The county council was the first in Ireland to pledge allegiance to Dáil Éireann. Sinn Féin arbitration courts were established to provide a popular alternative to the crown courts. People refused to attend petty sessions. The IRA established a voluntary police force to replace the beleaguered RIC. And the IRA also developed a competent intelligence system organised by Dr Conn Ward who used sympathetic RIC officers, employees in Monaghan's post offices, and postmen, to gather information which allowed O'Duffy to begin to identify enemies. These developments gave rise to a darker side in the IRA campaign: Protestants were prosecuted if they refused to swear an oath of allegiance to the republic and 'midnight courts' presided over by IRA officers resulted in dubious executions.

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VI

The General Raid for Arms

If there were enthusiastic young IRA volunteers, they were poorly armed. On 31 August 1920, O'Duffy ordered a county wide raid for arms, primarily focused on Protestant homes because it was believed that many contained stores of private weapons. Attacks were carried out on nearly every loyalist home in the Churchill, Monaghan town, Newbliss, Clones, Ballybay and Carrickmacross areas. This raid increased tensions; one IRA veteran later resented that Protestants 'gave information concerning the IRA to Crown forces and maintained a most hostile attitude to everything republican.' Revealingly, raids were also carried out on the homes of AOH supporters.

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Some families stoutly resisted the IRA attacks. John McGahey of the Rockcorry Company recalled that the first protestant house they raided 'resembled a military fortress in size and strength'. There were six fully armed men in the house, four family members and two employees. A gunfight lasted around half an hour before the IRA were forced to break off their attack. On the night, three IRA Volunteers were killed and one later died of his wounds. There would be repercussions; the IRA would seek revenge and, as Pat McDonnell later remembered, the raids, 'did more harm than good as it made the Unionists and Hibernians more antagonistic than ever.'

Reprisals began two weeks after the general raid when an estimated 100 men arrived back at the McCaul farm, where Volunteer Bernard Marron had been killed. The father was shot and his son ordered out of the country.

In September 1920, a large loyalist meeting was held in Monaghan town and it was decided to form 'town guards'. The first of these was established in the village of Drum to defend property 'against the marauding bands of ruffians who under the guise of political organisations are robbing and terrorising the peaceful inhabitants in other parts of the county'. Over the previous year, there had been the usual increase in sectarian tensions that had traditionally accompanied periods of political crisis in the county's historical past. The crime statistics compiled by the police are merely indicators of a rise for, as the police conceded, many crimes went unreported. In June 1920, there were seventeen outrages reported by the CI; these included the burning of Braddox Orange Hall; raids for arms on Protestant houses in Clones and south Monaghan; and malicious damage to a Protestant shop in Carrickmacross. In July, seventeen crimes against Protestants were reported including cases of intimidation,

robbery, malicious damage and the burning of Lough Fea Orange Hall. That October, the secretary of the First Monaghan Presbyterian Church wrote to Fr McNamee in Monaghan town to 'point out to him that some more panes of glass in the church window were broken since our last interview with him.' Windows were broken repeatedly between 1918 and 1920 and in August 1921 offensive graffiti was painted with tar on the walls of the church. Shortly after the Monaghan town meeting, another was held at Smithboro where steps were taken for the formation of a County Monaghan Protestant Defence Association. Less than three weeks after this meeting, on 12 October, Michael Kelly, a Catholic hackney driver, was shot dead by loyalist paramilitaries as he drove home Fr Murray of Tydavnet. Reprisal and counter-reprisal bred a cycle of violence that characterised the War of Independence from then to the Anglo-Irish truce in July 1921.

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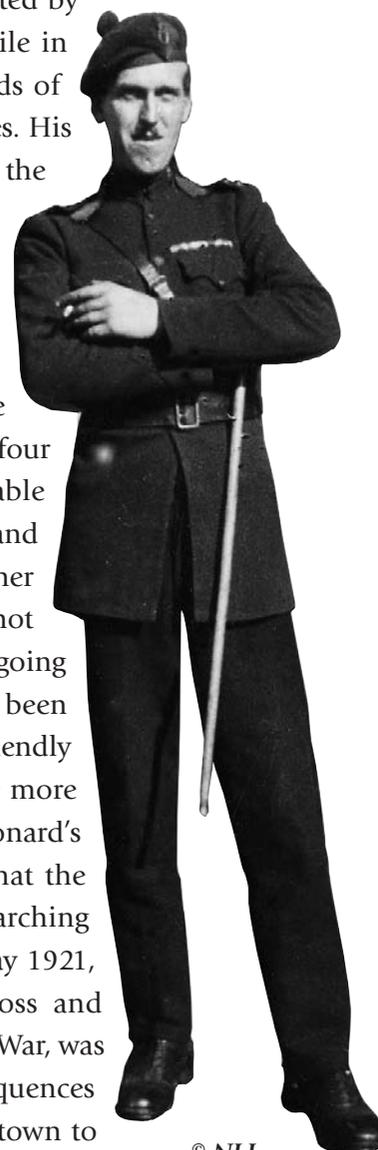


VII

The Black and Tans

In the first six months of 1920, the British government restructured their security forces in Ireland, reinforcing the Royal Irish Constabulary that was suffering greatly from resignations as a result of the escalation in violence. 10,000 specially recruited 'temporary constables', dubbed Black and Tans because of their mixed uniforms, and 2,300 Auxiliaries, recruited from former army officers, arrived in Ireland. On Christmas Eve, the Black and Tans, stationed in Hope Castle, went on a rampage in Castleblayney. When a reporter of the *Dundalk Democrat* visited the town, he found the people in a state of terror. In February 1921, Patrick McCabe of Rockcorry was arrested by Black and Tans and subjected to brutal treatment while in custody: 'He was maliciously beaten with the butt ends of rifles, his ribs broken and his body left a mass of bruises. His boots were stripped off and he was made walk through the village of Rockcorry with a Union Jack wrapped round his head.' These aggressive actions by the Black and Tans were responsible for long-held memories of their atrocities and their infamous reputation.

The arrest of Patrick McCabe came in the aftermath of the Ballybay ambush on 1 January 1921 when a patrol of four policemen was ambushed on Main Street. Constable Michael Malone was killed, two others were wounded, and a civilian, John Somerville, a Presbyterian loyalist butcher from the Main Street, was found dead beside Malone. Shot as he ran from Coyle's pub, Somerville might have been going to the aid of the wounded policemen or he may have been deliberately targeted since he was known to have been friendly with the police. Later that month, on 22 January, three more policemen were ambushed and killed after they left Leonard's public house in Corcaghan. Philip Marron recalled that the police had been acting in a 'blackguardly manner' searching local houses and generally causing mayhem. On 30 May 1921, another patrol was ambushed between Carrickmacross and Castleblayney. Constable Perkins, a veteran of the Great War, was killed. The following day there were inevitable consequences when the police ordered all schools and shops in the town to



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close and people from the rural areas coming into the town were turned back. The Thursday market was empty and the Black and Tans adopted an aggressive attitude to the local people.

The Monaghan IRA also faced the added threat of the Ulster Special Constabulary, more commonly referred to as B Specials, first organised in Monaghan after the September 1920 loyalist meeting in Smithboro. O'Duffy, probably with a degree of exaggeration, estimated that there were 620 men from Monaghan serving in the force, drawn predominantly from border areas with strong Protestant populations, especially Clones and Drum.

In February 1921, B Specials, operating along the border, were accused of intimidating and searching Catholic boys in the small Fermanagh village of Roslea, checking to see if they were carrying IRA dispatches. O'Duffy's ordered the execution of one Special, a Protestant trader named Gerry Lester, who had achieved notoriety in this respect. On the morning of 23 February, Lester was shot and wounded. As a reprisal, ten Catholic homes in Roslea were burned. An incensed O'Duffy wrote to headquarters: 'We cannot let this wanton conduct to go unpunished' and asked: 'Am I right in assuming I have a free hand in this matter?' Hogan claimed Michael Collins gave O'Duffy the 'free hand' and on the night of 21 March the IRA burned fourteen unionist homes in Roslea and killed two Specials. O'Duffy was smug in his report to GHQ: 'this lesson had apparently the right effect as leading unionists have since approached some of the Catholic clergy with a view to having a truce'. An all party conference was held at Clones. O'Duffy informed those present that 'there would be no truce until the B Special constables surrendered their arms and ceased all hostility towards us'. Roslea, as Dr Tim Wilson has argued, brought an end to loyalist resistance in Monaghan.

During the raid on Roslea, several IRA volunteers were wounded. One of these, Matt Fitzpatrick, was captured. He was taken to Monaghan Infirmary. His subsequent rescue by his comrades, planned by Dan Hogan, became 'the epic of the War of Independence in Monaghan'. The plan had to be carried out to perfection as the infirmary was heavily guarded, and the RIC and Black and Tans were stationed less than 300 yards away. The stealthy rescue party overcame the sentries and Fitzpatrick was taken by motor car in the dead of night to the home of Eliza Brennan in Tassan where he was attended to by Dr Joseph Duffy of Castleblayney. Over the next three weeks, he was moved from one safe house to another. When he was fully recovered he resumed his duties. In early 1922, as the country teetered on the brink of Civil War, Fitzpatrick was shot dead at Clones railway station when he and his men got involved in a shootout with B Specials who had illegally crossed the border by train.

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VIII

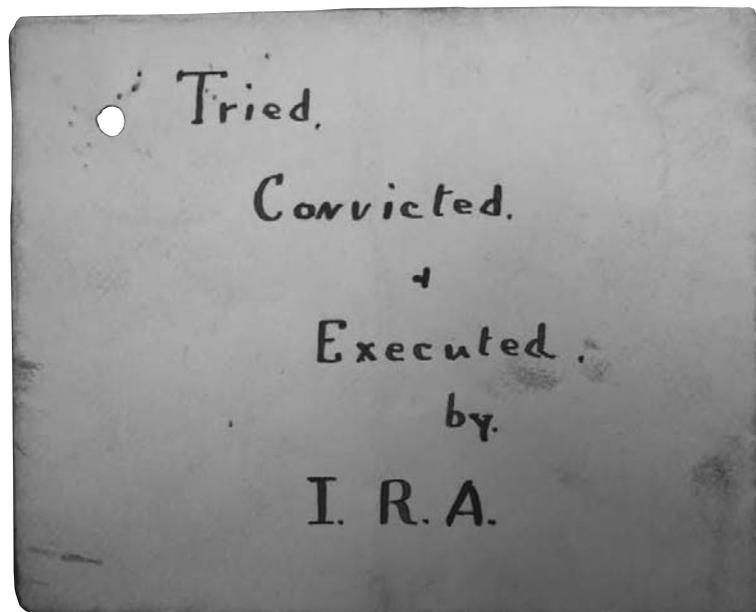
Civilian Casualties

It was civilians who bore the brunt of violence in Monaghan. In early 1920, a former British soldier named Joseph Gibbs who had tried to infiltrate the IRA, was found out, executed, and secretly buried.

There were a number of brutal sectarian killings that coincided with the Roslea attack, but which were also related back to the general raid for arms in August 1920. At the end of March 1921, between forty and fifty IRA men returned to the Fleming homestead outside Castleblayney where Patrick McKenna had been shot. The *Dundalk Democrat* reported that William and Robert Fleming, father and son, were escorted from the house and 'placed against the ditch by the armed men and a volley of shots directed at them.' Both were mortally wounded. As well as having shot McKenna, it seems the Flemings were also B Specials.

On 25 March 1921, Henry Kerr, a sixty-five year old Catholic bachelor farmer, was abducted from his house at Corvoy. A card bearing, 'Convicted as a spy, executed by the IRA' was pinned to his chest.

On 25 March 1921, Henry Kerr, a sixty-five year old Catholic bachelor farmer, was abducted from his house at Corvoy. A card bearing, 'Convicted as a spy, executed by the IRA' was pinned to his chest. John McGahey claimed Kerr's alleged treachery had been revealed in a letter intercepted by the IRA. The county inspector of the RIC admitted that a few weeks before Kerr had been 'visited & he chatted with the military officer.' He was also known to have been



Courtesy of Pdraig O'Ruairc

'One of the old school of nationalism' who 'expressed his opinions freely and fearlessly'. This may refer to the fact that he was a Hibernian.

On 1 April 1921, Hugh Duffy from Rockcorry, an army pensioner who worked on the delivery of telegrams for Rockcorry post office, was found dead in a lane at Moylemuck. He had been sent with a bogus telegram to Greacons. The usual notice, 'Spies and informers beware', was pinned to his chest. He had three large wounds on the side of his head, one from a bullet wound but the other two were the result of blows from a blunt instrument; there were also numerous puncture wounds on the left side of his chin possibly caused by buckshot; and two other exit and entrance wounds on his left shoulder and left side of his chest. Again, this was a particularly vicious killing where the multiple wounds suggest a vindictive sadism beyond the routine execution of a spy. His wife, Margaret, claimed that 'he had no personal enemies and was very popular as far as I am aware.... He was an army pensioner and was well known as a loyal subject.' In her naivety she probably revealed the motivations that lay behind his murder. The CI came up with another motive rooted in neighbourly jealousies regarding patronage: 'He was acting in the absence of the regular postman who was sick & though he had so acted for years it is believed that those who opposed his appointment thought that this was a good time to use the terror of the IRA name to remove him.' However, one IRA veteran later claimed that Duffy was a B Special. This may be significant as this was around the time of the Rosslea burnings, the motivations for which were rooted in B Special activity along the border.

On 9 March 1921, Francis McPhillips' body was found in a laneway in Aghabog. A note was pinned to his body which read, 'Convicted informer. IRA'. McPhillips was a member of the AOH. He had been suspected for some time of providing information to the police and it was also believed that he was too loose in his conversation with Presbyterian neighbours about local republicans. A few months before his abduction, he had been warned by the IRA and in a very public punishment tied to the railings of the church at Aghabog for all his neighbours to see as they filtered out from Mass. He didn't heed the warning and a short time later he was duped by IRA officers disguised as police, subsequently tried by court martial in March 1921, over which O'Duffy is said to have presided, and executed. Years later, Fr Maguire, the Sinn Féin-sympathetic parish priest of Aghabog, who had heard McPhillips' final confession, expressed a measure of remorse:

After the court martial the boy was brought to me. I was convinced then, and since I have got no evidence to change my opinion, that the boy should not have been put before the squad.... Moreover, it was commonly stated then and since that local bitterness influenced the evidence and court-martial decision.

A few months before his abduction, Francis McPhillips had been warned by the IRA and in a very public punishment tied to the railings of the church at Aghabog for all his neighbours to see as they filtered out from Mass

His last sentence suggests that while McPhillips was executed as an informer there were other circumstances related to local factionalism, particularly his AOH membership and his antipathy towards the IRA.

In total, three members of the AOH were executed. The first had been Michael O'Brien from the Bawn area shot by the IRA on 20 November 1920 when he came across an ambush site. In March 1921, McPhillips was the second. And on 25 June 1921, Arthur Treanor from Dunmadigan in Emyvale was the most high profile local politician to be killed; he was a rural district councillor but also president of Davagh AOH and a vociferous opponent of Sinn Féin from when he organised an anti-Sinn Féin demonstration in the lead up to the 1918 general election. He was suspected of informing and his guilt proved when a cheque payable to Treanor from Dublin Castle was intercepted in an IRA raid on the mails.

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under torture by
the Tans.'*

Patrick Larmer was found dead beside Francis McPhillips. Larmer was a member of the IRA, or at least he was carrying dispatches for them when he was arrested outside Rockcorry Catholic church while playing a game of pitch and toss. After he was released from Belfast prison he fearfully informed his IRA superiors that he had only told the authorities what they already knew. However, a roundup of suspects in the Rockcorry neighbourhood in the days after his release cast doubts on the veracity of his claim. John McGonnell was sympathetic towards young Larmer, contending that he had received 'severe beatings while a prisoner in Belfast' and that was why he divulged the names. Similarly, John McGahey claimed that Larmer 'was an intelligent country boy who unfortunately for everybody concerned was timid and easily scared', and he could have forgiven him for 'his weakness in yielding to threats under torture by the Tans.' At the court martial McGahey was sure he had convinced O'Duffy that it would not be right to execute Larmer until 'Dan Hogan arrived on the scene and intervened in a manner most aggressive towards myself.' McGahey regretted 'that only for Hogan's untimely arrival, I could have succeeded in influencing O'Duffy to spare Larmer's life.' For the rest of his own life McGahey's conscience obviously played upon him, so much so that he used his witness statement as an opportunity to vindicate Larmer: 'I was fully convinced at the time of his court martial that he did not merit execution and from what I have since heard I am convinced that his execution was much too drastic [a] punishment in his case.... I feel that his memory deserves this vindication from me.'

The only woman executed by the IRA in Monaghan was Kate Carroll, a middle-aged Catholic spinster, who lived with her elderly parents and mentally challenged brother near Duffy's Cross, Tydavnet, who was taken from her home on 17 April 1921 by a number of armed men and shot. Once more the usual warning to spies and informers was pinned to her chest. Carroll came to the

IRA's attention for illicit distilling, a practice that the IRA waged war against. She had compounded her offence by writing to the RIC informing on other illicit distillers. The letter was intercepted by the IRA. Kate was an informer, but not about IRA activity. Moreover, her execution was in contravention of an IRA general order that women spies were not to be executed, but instead exiled from their homes.

Fergal McGarry has rightly concluded that the ruthlessness of these spy/informer killings has to be seen in context; the IRA believed they were essential to their freedom of movement and were necessary deterrents. Contradictory claims confuse the exact motivation for some abductions and killings but equally they reflect the fact that there may have been local as well as national reasons; Thomas McGahon, the editor of the *Dundalk Democrat*, was canny enough in his last editorial of 1921 to know that sometimes 'private vengeance exacted its toll over cover of civil turmoil.'



Funeral of William and Robert Fleming, Castleblayney 1920 © MCM.

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IX

Big House Burnings and the Belfast Boycott

The burning of a country house resulted in the loss of everything that was personal and precious to a family; it signalled the end of a way of life as their owners left never to return; and it changed the local landscape forever.

There were further dimensions to the War of Independence that demand some attention. Firstly, the burning of Big Houses, the homes of former landlords. The first house burned was Castleshane on 15 February 1920. Rumours were widespread that it was to be occupied by the military, although the official reason later given was that it was accidental. That, however, may have been related to insurance claims. Whichever, the subsequent activity on the demesne suggests a strong agrarian motive, the desire of local people to have what remained of the unsold estate and the demesne lands divided amongst the local people. The same applied to the other three houses burned. Gola, the unoccupied residence of William Black, was burned in March 1921, allegedly because of a rumour that it was to be used as a billet for the crown forces, but local agitation for the redistribution of its demesne and untentanted lands was ongoing. When Ballybay House was burned in June 1921, military reasons were cited but local agrarian tensions were high because the estate had not yet been sold under the land acts, tenants were unwilling to pay their rents, and the landless were demanding access to its lands. In early July, Shantonagh House was burned. Once again, a combination of military and local agrarian reasons were cited.

Attacks on other houses such as Glaslough (now Castle Leslie) and Hilton Park were prevented by the fact that their employees, some of them former UVF members and serving B Specials, were trained and armed to protect them.

The burning of a country house resulted in the loss of everything that was personal and precious to a family; it signalled the end of a way of life as their owners left never to return; and it changed the local landscape forever.

Secondly, the operation of the Belfast Boycott. Until 1920, Monaghan was more commercially linked to Belfast than Dublin. In the course of that year, an estimated 11,000 Catholics were expelled from their jobs in Northern Ireland, and of 455 people killed, 58 per cent were Catholics even though they made up only 24 per cent of the population. On 6 August 1920, Sean MacEntee, TD for South Monaghan, read a petition in the Dáil drawn up by Sinn Féin members of Belfast Corporation appealing for help in 'the war of extermination being waged against us'. The petition called for a boycott of goods from Belfast and a withdrawal of funds from Belfast-based banks by people in the rest of Ireland.

Monaghan's War of Independence

It was in Monaghan that the boycott was most successful. Shopkeepers were cautioned by the IRA not to deal with Belfast firms, and members of the public were warned not to enter the shops of those who were supplied from Belfast. Protestant merchants who refused to honour the boycott had pickets placed outside their premises. The IRA also prevented Belfast goods entering the county by rail and road. As deliveries became more uncertain, prices continued to rise and it was estimated that the working man in Monaghan town who observed the boycott had to pay five shillings per week extra for the cost of living. Thus the boycott added to the woes of the ordinary man and woman on the street, fuelled sectarian tensions, and ultimately had a disproportionately negative effect on Protestant trade.

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Castleshane House © MCM

X

The Truce, July 1921

The IRA had to be careful not to alienate support for 'the cause' by attracting odium from the majority because of their actions. There was a very thin dividing line that could not be crossed.

1920-21 was a bloody time in Monaghan. The local IRA brigade was the most violent in Ulster and the third most lethal outside Munster. During the course of the War of Independence, five policemen were killed. Seven men and one woman were executed as spies and informers. Five were Catholics, two were Protestants and one, Joseph Gibbs, was an outsider whose religion was unknown. Two Monaghan IRA Volunteers were killed in combat with the government forces: Michael and Thomas McEnaney, killed on 30 June 1921, by Auxiliaries at Carnagh railway station. Four more Volunteers, as alluded to above, were killed on the night of the general raid for arms in August 1920.

Following the atrocities of March 1921, the wider public, Catholic as well as Protestant, condemned the escalation in civilian murders, and even the Sinn Féin-dominated county council called for a halt to them. The bishop of Clogher, Dr McKenna, yearly railed against violence perpetrated by all sides in his Lenten pastorals. The IRA had to be careful not to alienate support for 'the cause' by attracting odium from the majority because of their actions. There was a very thin dividing line that could not be crossed. And by the summer of 1921, the IRA was also under intense pressure. In June scores of Volunteers were arrested when the police and military swept through the county, taking in men aged between sixteen and sixty-five for questioning in camps at Lough Egish,



IRA Volunteers at Lough Bawn, Monaghan © MCM

Carrickatee and Latton. With depleted numbers and arms, it is difficult to see how much longer the local IRA could have continued to operate.

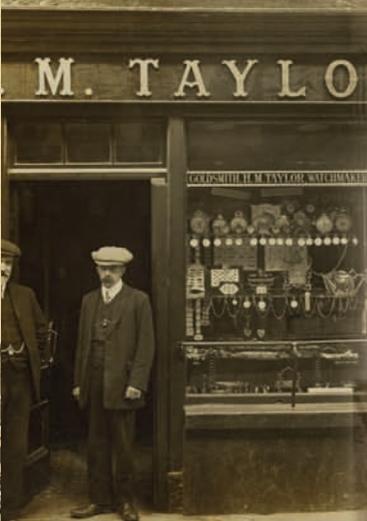
A few weeks later, on 11 July 1921, the Anglo-Irish truce came into being. For most people the truce signalled a return to peace and the hope that all could resume their lives in an atmosphere free from fear and threat. The public was war weary. In the run up to Christmas 1921, businessmen of all classes and creeds were said to be looking forward to a return to prosperity. The truce brought respite to the non-combatants whose lives had been incommoded by travel restrictions, trenching of roads, and disruption to markets and fairs. People looked forward to a halt in the rising cost of living. In August the *Democrat* rejoiced at the renewal of social events: 'It is a long time now since we had occasion to refer in happy terms to a successful entertainment.' Several areas saw a revival of GAA activities, Gaelic League classes and Protestant soirées. Towns, villages and rural crossroads were the scenes of jubilation and celebration.

For Monaghan loyalists who did not wish to live under a Dublin parliament, Northern Ireland provided an obvious focus of migration. It was an option that many were to take in the years that followed. In the inter-censal period 1911-26, the total population of Monaghan declined by 9 per cent, the Protestant population by almost 23 per cent such was the impact of the revolutionary period with the dislocation of Protestant trade coupled with the fierce desire to continue to live under British rule.

Unfortunately, strife was far from ended. In less than a year, the country would be plunged into a civil war.

Professor Terence Dooley lectures in the History Department at Maynooth University, where he is also director of the Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses and Estates. His latest books include *The Irish Revolution, 1912-23: Monaghan* (Dublin, 2017), and *The Decline and Fall of the Dukes of Leinster: Love, War, Debt and Madness* (Dublin, 2014).

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North Road, Monaghan.



Main Street from Railway Station, Castleblayney.



Main Street Carrickmacross.

FERMANAGH STREET CLONES.



ASLOUGH VILLAGE, CO. MONAGHAN.



MAIN STREET, CARRICKMACROSS

FAIR, BALLYBAY.

Monaghan

The Diamond

Sources:

A full list of the primary sources used in this programme can be got from Terence Dooley, *The Irish Revolution, 1912-23: Monaghan* (Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2017), pp 152-55. ISBN 978-1-84682-616-0. Professor Terence Dolley would like to thank Four Courts Press for allowing me to reproduce extracts from this book in this programme.

For further reading on Monaghan during this period, see:

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