

# Financing the activities of the West Mayo Brigade IRA 1919-1922

Compiled by Vincent Keane

In the years following the Irish Civil War, when a section of the IRA decided to break away and form the new political party, Fianna Fáil, an amount of explaining to the electorate had to be done by the leaders of this new party. As these former IRA leaders contested elections, it was constantly thrown at them that during the lead-up to the Civil War they had ordered the appropriation of money illegally from the banks and post offices of the newly formed Irish Free State. True, IRA personnel in many of the brigade areas had entered banks and post offices, and, at gunpoint had relieved these establishments of many thousands of pounds. This was all carried out by order of the newly formed IRA Executive, under the leadership of Rory O'Connor, at the time using the Four Courts in Dublin as a Headquarters and garrison.<sup>1</sup> The argument was that bills were incurred on behalf of the IRA GHQ, for the purpose of formally training the thousands of men in this volunteer army, and that the good name of the organisation was at stake if its creditors were not paid off. It was often stated at the time, by their detractors, that Republicans were no better than robbers and plunderers, and were only 'feathering their own nests'. In the former West Mayo Brigade area, later incorporated into the newly formed 4th Western Division, it was left to Michael Kilroy, the former Divisional O/C, to explain the tactic of appropriating finance in such a manner. Kilroy was by now, in 1932, a front-runner for Fianna Fáil. It was very important then to set the record straight and to give the reasons for their actions in 1922. So it was, at an election rally at Burren, Castlebar, in February 1932, that Kilroy decided that the time was appropriate to reveal the secrets and reasons behind the financial

situation in the IRA during the War of Independence and the intervening period up to the start of the civil war in July 1922.

From 1919 to 1921 the IRA in the West Mayo Brigade was basically self-sufficient. Men bought their own weapons and equipment and financed their own travelling. The brigade QM, Tommy Kitterick of Westport, had canvassed the traders of Westport and had come up with enough finance to equip a small active service unit. He went to GHQ in Dublin and bought new weapons there. When in the field the ASU never went hungry, the people were right with them and food and shelter were always provided free. All this was to change when the Truce of 1921 came about. GHQ in Dublin now set up the new divisions and ordered that all IRA volunteers should undergo two weeks of intensive training in specially organised camps. In the West Mayo Brigade area these camps were set up in the Westport Workhouse, Delphi, Ballycroy Lodge, Castlebar and several other locations. The men came to these camps with their basic equipment and led a military style life for the duration. These training camps proved expensive to run. The men had to be fed, new military equipment had to be bought and transport had to be arranged. Local butchers, bakers and grocers were brought into the scheme and credit was extended in a big way to the functioning of these camps. The first men to undergo training were the existing officers. They had to make their way to Beggars Bush Barracks in Dublin<sup>2</sup> to attend officer training courses. Newly designed uniforms had to be bought in order that the semblance of a disciplined army was portrayed.<sup>3</sup> The whole affair was proving to be very costly at a time when there was much unemployment.

In the first few months of these training camps GHQ footed the bill. In April 1922 the 4th Western Division received £3,900 from GHQ to settle the debts from running the training camps. Pro-Treaty sympathisers were soon spreading rumours, especially in Westport, that the money was being put back into purchasing weapons and ammunition. To counter these false allegations the divisional staff sent a detailed statement of expenses for the period July 1921 to December 1921 to the local newspapers. This statement makes interesting reading and is published opposite.



# "The Mayo News"

WESTPORT, SATURDAY, APRIL 22, 1922.

## I. R. A.

### STATEMENT RE £3,900 RECEIVED BY 4th WESTERN DIVISION.

It has come to our knowledge that certain statements have been made in Westport with reference to a sum of £3,900 received from General Headquarters towards the payment of expenses in this Division.

We would like to point out that the 4th Western Division comprises four Brigades, namely East Connemara, West Connemara, West Mayo and North Mayo, and that the £3,900 referred to was divided in accordance with the debts incurred by these Brigades.

We feel it our duty to clear the air of such falsehoods, and to maintain the honour and respect already established by the Republican Army of Ireland. It is a sad day for Ireland when an attempt would be made by any Irish man or woman to undermine the standing of this I.R.A., but more especially by one who has held the rank of Officer in that Army.

Taking the circumstances as they are, all that is left for us is to publish a statement of accounts in connection with the money received by us from the old "General Headquarters" on date February 20th, and which was immediately paid over to these traders with whom we had contracted debts.

Hereafter is a statement of accounts referred to above:—

	£	s.	d.
Peter Flanagan, Draper, Westport	70	0	0
Golden Bros., do. ...	10	0	0
Shanley Bros., do. ...	200	0	0
J. O'Donoghue, do., do. ...	100	0	0
Hugh Conn, do., do. ...	150	0	0
Charles Hughes, do., do. ...	100	0	0
James McGing, do. ...	10	0	0
Mrs. O'Hara, do. ...	12	10	0
John P. Joyce, do. ...	20	0	0
M. Cusack, do. ...	10	13	7
P. Gill, do. ...	20	0	0
M. Walsh, do. ...	3	8	7
L. McNamara, do. ...	11	13	4
West Hotel, do. ...	27	1	6
Sarah Clancy, do. ...	3	19	6
Edward King, do. ...	20	0	0
Fitzpatrick Bros., do. ...	10	4	0
Edward Haran, do. ...	10	9	9
M. Flynn, do. ...	5	10	0
Hewetson Bros., do. ...	15	0	0
Margaret McGing, do. ...	20	0	0
Peter O'Malley, do. ...	0	5	9
John P. Broheny, do. ...	20	19	6
John Burke, do. ...	25	0	0
R. Gibbons, do. ...	3	2	0
P. Jeffers, do. ...	20	0	0
Sheridan Bros. do. ...	10	0	0
J. Kelly, do. ...	2	0	0
Irwin P. Browne, do. ...	17	11	3
Joseph Ruddy, do. ...	5	5	0
J. Malone, do. ...	1	0	0
P. Davitt, Newport ...	4	16	6
M. Joyce, Newport ...	20	0	0
W. J. Heneghan, Louisburgh	11	3	0
F. Prondregast, do. ...	10	0	0
Heneghan Bros., do. ...	10	0	0
Chas. Murray, do. ...	15	0	0
Anne Walsh, Westport	2	10	0
John Gibbons, do. ...	80	0	0
P. F. Kelly, do. ...	25	0	0

Healy Bros., do. ...	10	0	0
James Gavin, do. ...	1	12	0
Mark Meane, do. ...	4	10	0
J. J. Connolly, do. ...	10	12	0
J. O'Grady, do. ...	10	0	0
P. Carney, do. ...	9	15	0
Patk. Malone, do. ...	3	5	0
A. Malone, do. ...	3	17	0
H. McNamara, Louisburg	10	0	0
E. Hagan, do. ...	15	0	0
A. Hearney, do. ...	15	0	0
B. Philbin, do. ...	2	1	9
J. Kilmoy, Newport	12	16	1
Carey's Ltd., do. ...	30	0	0
Margaret Gavin, do. ...	4	7	04
J. Heterin, Castlebar	68	0	0
Langan's, Castlebar	60	0	0
Daynes's, do. ...	60	0	0
Lavelle and Co., do. ...	60	0	0
J. O'Boyle and Co., do. ...	60	0	0
M. J. Murray, do. ...	7	17	0
M. Kitterick, do. ...	1	19	11
Connahught Cycle Works, do.	15	0	0
Gavin Bros., do. ...	2	2	0
Do. Do. do. ...	4	16	0
"Connahught Telegraph," do.	7	9	6
P. Browne, Crossmolina	4	19	7
M. Browne, Ballina	12	7	9
J. Browne, Ballinastla	10	0	0
M. Hopkins, Ballina	6	0	0
M. Durcan, Boniniconlon	6	0	0
P. Lawrence, do. ...	2	15	3
Miss Canavan, Crossmolina	12	0	0
J. Copican, Ballina	20	0	0
J. Dodd, do. ...	80	0	0
Mrs. Gafferty, do. ...	20	0	0
Ward, do. ...	30	0	0
Shanley Bros., do. ...	20	0	0
J. Moran, do. ...	1	0	0
P. Berne, do. ...	30	0	0
J. O'Connell, do. ...	30	0	0
P. O'Hara, do. ...	1	0	0
J. McConn, do. ...	10	0	0
Moylerts' Stores, do. ...	182	1	5
D. Hopkins, do. ...	100	0	0
Whites' Motor Works, do.	40	0	0
A. O'Boyle, do. ...	2	8	6
M. Hughes, Crossmolina	3	2	0
G. Howson, Ballina	3	15	0
M. Faherty, Galway	5	0	0
J. J. Ward, do. ...	489	14	10
P. Clancy, Glifden	80	0	0
M. Ward, do. ...	85	0	0
A. J. King, do. ...	25	0	0
S. Stanley, do. ...	15	0	0
P. K. Joyce, do. ...	20	0	0
D. Cliffe, Lfennane	122	0	0
R. H. McKeown, do. ...	100	0	0
P. J. McDonnell, do. ...	170	0	0
M. Faherty, Oughterard	125	0	0
S. A. Sweeney, do. ...	40	0	0
John Kilmoy, Newport	198	10	10
McNamara, Galway	10	0	0
J. Hanley, Kylemore	2	0	0
Coghrave Bros., Galway	15	0	0
J. Rohan, do. ...	20	0	0
J. W. Monaghan, Oughterard	5	0	0
T. Sweeney, Galway	55	0	0
A. Mpon and Co. ...	85	0	0
Co-Operative Store, Oughterard	30	0	0
J. H. Joyce, do. ...	23	0	0
M. A. Byrne, do. ...	24	10	0
N. Egan, do. ...	87	10	0
Amount on hands	236	12	10

(Signed)

M. KILROY,  
Commandant-General, O.C.  
4th Western Division.  
C. MAOKEN, Div. Adjt.,  
Colonel-Commandant.  
J. FEEHAN, Div. Q.M.,  
Colonel Commandant.

The monies due from January 1922 came to a halt when the political divisions became evident within the ranks. The IRA divided into Pro and Anti-Treaty factions and the 4th. Western Division stayed true to its Republican ethos. GHQ stopped paying for the expenses of the division for that reason and several thousand pounds were owed to various traders from the previous months. The divisional QM was now Jack Feehan and he made several applications to Mulcahy and Collins at GHQ for finance, but was refused. The IRA Executive at the Four Courts now made a decision that the money owed to the various divisions should be taken from the banks. Michael Kilroy was the Divisional delegate to the Executive and he actually voted against this move, knowing of the consequences that would ensue. Being a disciplined officer, however, Kilroy brought the orders back to the Divisional staff and subsequent plans were made to visit the banks.

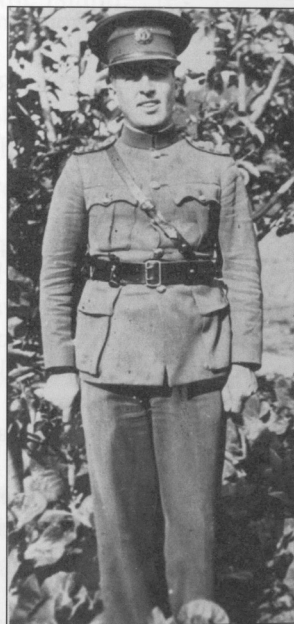
In Westport the responsibility for visiting the Bank of Ireland fell to James 'Broddie' Malone, O/C of the Westport Battalion. On 6 May 1922, Malone, dressed in his full IRA uniform, and accompanied by Johnny Gibbons, West Mayo Brigade Adjutant, met at the bank and paid the manager, Mr Gardiner, a visit. A lorry load of armed IRA men had been placed outside of the bank to secure the area. Malone and Gibbons eventually exited the bank carrying the sum of £2679, they had failed to get access to the strong room. At the same time the Bank of Ireland at Castlebar was visited by local IRA officers and £10,000 was received there. The proceeds of these withdrawals were then given to the Divisional QM, Jack Feehan, for safekeeping. Kilroy had devised a plan whereby Feehan would travel around the Divisional area locating all those creditors that were owed money. This work took almost two weeks to complete and a Divisional staff meeting then gave Feehan the authority to pay all outstanding bills and to get stamped receipts in return. In 1932, Michael Kilroy still had these receipts in his possession. When Dr. John Madden was contesting the elections in 1924 on behalf of Sinn Féin, a list of these receipts was published in the *Ballina Herald* in order to counter the charge of 'bank robbers' being levied against republicans. This move stopped all the rumour mongering at the time. As Michael Kilroy said in 1932 - "I knew that if our creditors accepted this money which was taken



publicly and without secrecy whatever, we would be to a great extent justified in our actions, and as a consequence our opponents would be silenced.....no individual who was offered any of this bank money has refused to take it. We feel, at least, that those people do not look upon us as bank robbers."

As in all armies, there was an amount of indiscipline in the republican ranks. In Castlebar an IRA court martial had to deal with three of its members that were found to have commandeered a car and gone on a spree of robbery in the Castlebar area. The civil war intervened and there was no finality to this case. In Westport, a volunteer was found guilty of sheep stealing and was dealt with by being chained to the church railings on a Sunday. Two other volunteers were found guilty of intimidating people whilst armed. Young men with guns, without mature supervision, were a dangerous combination. In the civil war all property belonging to the new Irish Free State was deemed 'fair game' and an amount of post offices were raided for cash and stamps.

'Broddie' Malone was seriously injured in the Civil War in action at Claremorris. He was then interned until 1924.<sup>4</sup> Johnny Gibbons was also interned and in 1924 he and Malone were charged with robbery of the Bank of Ireland in Westport.<sup>5</sup> A well-known high-ranking Free State Army officer named McNamara was dispatched to the internment camps to interview the two men. Several court appearances were held in Westport during 1924 and 1925, until the case was finally dropped by the state. Kilroy was also seriously injured during the civil war and was interned.<sup>6</sup> He was the one delegated by IRA HQ to travel about the various prisons in an effort to bring the mass hunger strikes to a halt. He escaped from Hare Park, The Curragh, on 10 May 1924 and evaded capture until the general release of republican prisoners in late 1924.



*James (Broddie) Malone.*

## Bibliography

*Mayo News*, 22 April 1922, 6 May 1922, 27 February 1932

Photograph of 'Broddie' Malone supplied by Vincent Keane

## Notes

1. Mulcahy, the Chief of Staff of the IRA and a Pro-Treaty supporter, refused a call from the ranks to hold a convention of the IRA to determine its future stance to the Treaty, resulting in a split.
2. As part of the Treaty arrangements, the British Army had vacated Beggars Bush Barrack in Ballsbridge and allowed the IRA to use it as its HQ.
3. The newly trained IRA volunteers in the West Mayo Brigade area made their first public appearance at the funerals of Volunteers Marley at Glenhest Cemetery in March 1922 and of Volunteer Duffy at Aughavale Cemetery, February 1922.
4. 'Broddie' Malone joined Fianna Fáil in 1926 and was a life-long worker for that party. He was Area Organiser for the Volunteer Reserve, ('Aikens Volunteers') of the Irish Free State Army that was formed in 1934, with the rank of Captain, which was organised to draw recruits away from a resurgent IRA at the time.
5. Johnny Gibbons, Quay Road, Westport, was West Mayo Brigade Adjutant. He was captured at the 'Battle of Newport', November 1922. He became a solicitor in Dublin and on his death his former comrades erected a fine memorial to him at the old Sutton Cemetery, Dublin.
6. Michael Kilroy was captured at Kilbride, Newport in November 1922. He was shot through the wrist and lung. Five Free State soldiers were killed in action on that occasion. He was made walk up the main street of Westport whilst surrounded by a hostile crowd, many of whom were relations of the deceased soldiers. He was selected by the IRA leadership, whilst imprisoned in Mountjoy Prison, to visit all the detention centres where men were on hunger strike in 1923, in order to bring the strike to an end. He went on to become a Fianna Fáil TD and long-time County Councillor.

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