

# The National Movement, 1916-1921 period, as it related to areas south of Westport – Drummin, Carrowkennedy, Liscarney, Lankill, Cordarragh.

*By John Joyce*

## THE RISING

The 1916 Rising gave a military boost to the National Movement. All leading men in the Rising were executed. Among those was **Major John McBride** of Westport. A parade organised in Westport 1917 against this man's execution resulted in several people being arrested, tried and sent to an internment camp in Wales known as Frongoch. Included in the number were **Pat Tunney**, Derrykellew and **Manus Keane**, Lankhill. Several people throughout Ireland were sent to this internment camp at that time.

## 1917 and 1918

Sinn Féin took root as a political organisation, with branches in all areas. Heavy manpower losses incurred by Britain in the First World War at the Western Front and the Dardanelles persuaded her government to extend conscription to Ireland. Resistance to conscription was organised throughout Ireland. The following is a directive to Owenwee Sinn Féin Cumann:

SINN FÉIN

6 Harcourt Street,  
Dublin.  
19/4/1918

To:  
The Secretary of each Cumann,  
A chara,

In order to carry out the Conscription Pledge you will give every assistance after Mass next Sunday. This will necessitate careful preparations, that must at once, on receipt of this Instruction, be undertaken by you and such other members of your Cumann as you can communicate with.

The simplest method will be to purchase sufficient exercise books and take the signatures at each Chapel. At the head of each book, in bold and clear writing, the following words must be written **in ink**:

Denying the right of the British Government to enforce Compulsory Service in this country, we pledge ourselves solemnly to one another to resist Conscription by the most effective means at our disposal.

In consultation with the priest, responsible men must be placed in charge of each book, and care must be taken not to take the same signature in more than one book. The books, when completed, must be carefully preserved.

Is sinne,

do cháirde i gCúis na h-Éireann,

AUSTIN STACK

DARRELL FIGGIS

Hon. Secs. Sinn Féin.

## ANTI-CONSCRIPTION MEETING, TOWN HALL

This instruction was received by **James Kearns**, Secretary Owenwee Sinn Féin Cumann. He gives the following account of a meeting in Westport Town Hall, the aim of which was to organise the taking of signatures, and each signature to be backed by a deposit of one pound returnable to signatories at a later date.

While the meeting was in progress a parade was taking place on the streets. The marchers seemed to be fairly noisy shouting slogans as they passed the barracks. The meeting became alarmed as there could be a police raid on the Town Hall. Should a raid take place, preparations were made by the meeting to burn all documents and papers rather than allow them to fall into police hands. As a result of determined resistance throughout Ireland, conscription was never enforced.

The First World War, which had a considerable impact on Ireland ended in 1918. The emergence of several independent countries after the collapse of the Central European Powers was a great boost to the National Movement. The following countries became independent: Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia.

The General Election 1918 gave Sinn Féin a landslide victory, which resulted in the setting up of a parliament in Dublin now known as Dáil Éireann. Sinn Féin demanded an Irish Republic, which was desired by the majority of the people, but would not be conceded by Britain.

## ARRESTS

A collision course was by now inevitable which led to the War of Independence, 1920-1921 period, also known as the Black and Tan War. More arrests were made, and prisoners were sent to jail in Galway. Those arrested were **Laurence Moran**, Killeenacoff, **Peter O'Connor**, Loughloon, two **John Hastings**, Derryherbert, locally known as Big John and Little John, and **Broddie McLoughlin**, Oughty.

## THOMAS LYONS SHOT DEAD

On 21 November 1920, **Thomas Lyons**, blacksmith, Liscarney, when on a visit to his uncle's house in Knappagh, was spotted by cycling soldiers crossing fields in the direction of the house. Some reports say he was called on to halt. However, he was shot dead. British army instructions at the time were to fire on any suspicious person. His funeral was held over for a few days, due to a complaint by a **Mrs. Corbert** to the British officers commanding in Westport, that the remains should be put in a clean condition for relatives and friends. Mrs. Corbert was home on holidays from the U.S.A. visiting her home in Owenwee.

## SHOOTING IN THE TOWNLAND OF DERRYKELLEW

In 1921 the situation becomes serious. A direct confrontation took place in the townland of Derrykellew between Volunteers and R.I.C. It was a life or death incident depending on who fired first. The Volunteers fired first leaving a **Sergeant Coughlin** dead and **Constable Love** wounded. **Patrick Hoban**, a native of that townland who came on the scene, gives this report:

The wounded man told him to take his bicycle and go to Westport, an 8 mile journey to get a doctor and priest. He found the cycle not working and he had to walk it to Westport. On arriving at the Workhouse, now the Leenane Road cottages, he was called on to halt by the sentry and advance three paces to be recognised, which he did, and told his story to the sentry. On hearing this, the sentry took a whistle out of his pocket, blew a few loud blasts, after which reinforcements arrived. He was then taken to the barracks for further interrogation. His story was not taken as reliable 'till a policeman came on the scene that knew his father. He was asked to travel to the shooting scene in the R.I.C. car, but his option was the doctor's car in whose car he returned.

## O'MALLEY'S HOUSE BURNT

At this time the Crown Forces had stooped to the law of reprisals. The **O'Malley** house in Carrowreivaugh townland was set on fire. A cow in the house was also burnt and the male occupants badly beaten and stabbed with bayonets. Their names were **Owen, John** and **Edward**. Owen had to spend considerable time in Westport Workhouse for treatment.

## SHOP AT CUSHLOUGH SET ON FIRE

In the month of March 1921 **Darby Hastings'** shop was set on fire for reasons which are not clearly known. Speculation is that a number of the Crown Forces was in his pub drinking, when aggravated by being asked to pay for the drink, they set the shop on fire. All food was burnt leaving the Hastings family without anything to eat. The first man to arrive with food was **Pat O'Malley**, Carrowreivaugh locally known as Pat Paddy.

Also in the month of March 1921 **Pat Cox's** house, Drummin, was set on fire, a cow being burnt as well. For a considerable time the Cox family had to live in an outhouse.

At the same time, there is a river in Drummin, the crossing of which seemed a handicap to the Tans. They overcame this by getting a man by the name of **Michael Fergus** from Derrykellew townland to stretch in the middle of the stream. Then each man made good use of the human stepping stone

## MARTIAL LAW, BURNING AT LETTERBROCK

The country was then ruled by Martial Law, which means among other things that people should not group or assemble together. In the townland of Letterbrock a group of young men had assembled at **Patrick Navin's**. They were spotted by a Tan lorry just passing. The men were beaten up and Navin's house burnt. **Thomas Navin's** house was also burnt when the soldiers returned. Thomas Navin put out the fire and saved half of his house. The ill-treated men did not sleep in their own houses that night but moved on to Owenwee and slept under big rocks.

## CARROWKENNEDY AMBUSH

On 2 June 1921 took place the Carrowkennedy ambush which was a successful operation for the Volunteers. Figures killed or wounded are not accurate – ten or twelve killed and about the same number wounded. After the surrender Volunteers went to the townland of Claddy there, to have a meal and prepare for the next journey. Volunteer instructions had been, especially to **Peter O'Malley**, to sympathise with British officers on their loss but to misinform them as to their movements. They did arrive the following day and were told the Volunteers did move in the direction of Partree. As a result all the men in the townland east of Carrowkennedy as far as Bohaun, were brought to Hastings' public house, Cushlough, screened and stripped to see if they had any wounds or marks. None of them had any marks.

Those soldiers who survived the ambush made the journey to Westport on foot, a distance of 8 miles, between 7 p.m. and 10 p.m. that evening. Their first call was to Keane's at Liscarney cross roads. **Mrs. Keane**, who was after milking her cows, was relieved of all her milk without a drink being even asked for.

It should be emphasised there were four periods in recent Irish history, that is:

1) 1916-1921 period characterised by the rebellion and resistance to conscription, General Election 1918, War of Independence 1920-1921 ending in the Treaty.

2) 1922-1932 period leaving a lasting impression on the people. The split in the great Sinn Féin movement resulting in the Civil War. The foundation of the Fianna Fáil Party by Éamon de Valera in 1926.

3) 1932 to 1939 period. First Fianna Fáil Government attained office, retaining land annuities amounting to 3½ million pounds and R.I.C. pensions amounting to 1½ million pounds – total 5 million. Britain retaliated by placing tariffs on all agricultural produce exported by Ireland to Britain. Almost all produce went to England at that time. It did make times very hard for the farming people of Ireland at that time.

4) 1939 period, outbreak of Second World War, 1 September 1939. Declaration

of neutrality by the Irish Government. Ration period commences; tea, sugar, flour, petrol, paraffin, and tyres were all rationed.™ And then started what was known as the Black Market. The rhyme was:

Bless DeValera and Seán McEntee, who gave us the brown bread and the half ounce of tea.

**John Joyce**, a native of Liscarney, Westport, was postmaster there for many years. He served in the local defence force during World War II, and is a committee member of Westport Historical Society.