

Plans For Rising In The West Depended On Arms From 'The Aud'

I Was Michael Kilroy's Bodyguard

by

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Moran



Prisoners detained by the British Military after the 1916 Rising.

Continued from Last Week

On Tuesday morning, April 25, 1916, I got word that the Rising had taken place in Dublin on the previous Sunday and I immediately set off for Michael Kilroy's home in Newport, as I had received strict instructions from the Volunteer organiser in Galway, where I was a University student, to act as bodyguard for Michael Kilroy while I was home on Easter holidays.

John Kilroy (Michael's brother) and I, on Michael's instructions, spent that afternoon visiting areas to the north of the town and explaining the position to our neighbours and seeking their goodwill and any support they could give; we were everywhere favourably received. We also had a word with



MICHAEL KILROY

each volunteer in the area we were visiting. I do not know where Michael spent that afternoon or what he did. As a member of the I.R.B. I had learned that my duty was to act as instructed and not to ask curious questions; if it was necessary for a member, to know certain facts he would be given the information in due course; in the meantime it would be safer for him and for the cause if he did not know too much. Were it not for this, my memories of Easter Week would be more informative.

On that day also Dominick Kilroy of Furnace, an employee at Kilroy's, who was a cousin of Michael's, was sent with an urgent dispatch to Crossmolina after being sworn in as a volunteer.

House Barricaded

After the closing of the workshop at Kilroy's on Tuesday evening James Clinton of Shanballyhugh arrived and he remained with us until the end of the week. We set to work at once barricading both house and workshop in such a way that all evidence could be removed before opening time in the morning. Michael was plainly upset not so much by the non-arrival of the expected arms, leader and order to rise as by the absence of any information or explanation. Sentries were posted and maintained day and night throughout the week. The position as we saw it before the Rising was reversed—we had lost the initiative.

As it was expected that Kilroy's house would be raided for arms Volunteers were posted on the Railway Bridge to keep a look out while Dominick Kilroy, Jack Quinn, Tim Lyons, John Kilroy and James Clinton took up positions behind the barricaded windows in the house.

Our belief that the proposed attack on the local barracks would be the first notice of a Rising the police would receive was replaced by the assumption that the police would now attempt to arrest Michael. This we resolved to resist with force, and we looked forward to a siege until such time as the volunteers outside had mobilised and come to our relief as they had already been instructed to do in such an eventuality.

It was that first night too that Michael said that if instructions did not arrive before morning he would himself try to find a person willing to lead the Mayo men into action on Wednesday night, badly armed though they were. It was our tragedy that not one of us there that night, least of all Michael himself, realised, what became obvious a few years later, that in our midst was the man who in those few years was to become the greatest military leader west of the Shannon.

Among the employees in the workshop was a young lad called Jack Quinn (Kilmeena) fourteen years old or thereabouts, whose

duties gave him the run of most of the dwelling house as well as of the workshop. First thing after opening on Wednesday Michael took him aside, had a serious talk with him and asked him would it be better for him return home, but young Quinn said he would not leave and then Michael swore him in as a member of the I.R.B. The boy could not fail to see the callers, the stores and the preparations and might be expected to boast to his comrades of his knowledge, which might thus find its way to the police. To prevent this we had decided during the night to enrol him. And he was sent to James Clinton's with 303 ammunition. I wonder if his membership of the I.R.B. at so young an age constitutes a record. Jack is now living at Castlebar St., Newport.

Visit To Westport

Early on Wednesday morning two young Volunteers from Castlebar arrived but, unfortunately, had no news. Michael accordingly asked me to cycle with him to Westport. For the first time since my arrival we had no police escort, and went straight for our objective. This was a shoe shop owned by a man named Austin O'Malley. This man had previously obtained much fame locally as a soldier of fortune who had fought with valour and distinction in I think, the Balkans and Mexico. Michael wasted little time in coming to the point. Would O'Malley lead the men of the West in the Rising and take over that very day? In the ensuing discussion I learned much more of Michael's plans than I had known before; before I left Michael at the end of the week I knew still more, and his plans (or plan) simply took my breath away.

Would Mean Death Warrant

O'Malley was duly impressed and sympathetic, and tried to convince us that the Rising was bound to fail; when it did Michael and I, if we took part and survived might have to spend a period long or short, probably the latter, in prison or internment camp. He, however, if leader in the West, more especially in view of the notoriety his previous military career had brought upon him, would be shot or hanged. He would not, as in his previous campaigns, be treated as a prisoner of war with rights, but as a rebel with none. If we succeeded in making him change his mind we would have signed his death warrant. Dejectedly we left that shop, called on some of our Westport comrades who were equally in the dark, and finally returned to Carrabaun.

An incident which was amusing but which might have had serious consequences for me occurred that night. As I had no sleep since Monday I was sent at a very late hour to sleep in a room in which the sentry was posted who guarded the front entrance gate. He sat with a loaded shot gun at the first-floor window overlooking the gate. I awoke late in broad daylight to find the holy picture on the wall beside the bed completely wrecked, and the wallpaper under it above the quilt peppered with shot. Coming downstairs I was told I must have slept with an easy conscience; everybody else in the house had been awakened by the double explosion and all except myself had taken up action-stations—it was believed that the police across the river could not fail to have heard and would be coming to investigate. It appears that the sentry, equally worn out, had dozed, thought he saw attackers, and blazed away—in the wrong direction.

Darrel Fggis

In an effort to make up for our failure to find a leader in Westport on the day before, John Kilroy went to Achill on Thursday and interviewed Darrel Fggis, who had gone to Germany in 1914 and brought the Howth guns. What exactly Fggis said I do not know but it seemed to me to amount to this: If the Mayo men arose and proved by their successes that they were winning he would be willing to accept the leadership. It was on Thursday also, I think, that Michael ordered Clinton, myself, and a few volunteers who were present, to action-stations. The volunteer who had the barracks under observation had

reported that all the police had lined up in front of the barracks and were now marching towards the bridge. This, we assumed, was the expected raid to arrest Michael. But it was a false alarm; the police were merely paying a tribute to a dead neighbour whose funeral was leaving the town.

Rumours had been increasing as the days passed of risings in various parts of the country (and in fact these rumours proved to be practically all false), but it was not until Friday or Saturday that we got some reliable information. Their knowledge of the activities of the Galway volunteers during the first few days was fairly detailed and accurate. What was most disappointing to Michael was, not that these boys did not bring word that the expected arms and leader were approaching, but that they had no information that they were to come at all. Michael thereupon decided that I was to travel to the Galway headquarters, place Michael's plan before Liam Mellows, who we had learned was in command, with Alf Monaghan as second in command, and request him to send Monaghan or some other high officer with an adequate supply of arms and ammunition so as to enable the Mayo men to cooperate with them and with those adjoining to the north and on the south. I was coached with information to show that the taking over of complete control west of the Shannon (except a few small pockets which could easily be hemmed in) was not only possible but eminently probable.

A Crack Shot

On Sunday morning Michael and I went to the first Mass. As always we both carried small arms. Michael thought that an effort would be made to arrest him as he left the church, and he told me in the morning that we might have to fight our way out. No effort was made to arrest him. I was always amused at the way Michael assumed that the two of us would not have the slightest trouble in dealing with a mere half-dozen police. Michael was, of course, a crack shot and with the revolver I was pretty good.

That Sunday night I bade goodbye to Michael whose side I had not left since the Tuesday before, and on his instructions went home to prepare for my journey. Up to 7.30 a.m. on Monday, 1st May, 1916, when I left Newport by train no word, not the faintest rumour, of the surrender had reached Newport. The R.I.C. man on duty at the railway station left hurriedly when he saw me arrive.

Passing Westport I saw many of the Westport Volunteers being marched to the train under police escort on their way to prison or internment at Claremorris, where I had to wait some time for the south-bound train, one of the two R.I.C. men on duty at the rail-

way station kept an eye on me while I was in Claremorris, but otherwise did not interfere.

Trailed To St. Jarlath's

At Tuam I alighted, for railway travel, further south had ceased the week before, and was trailed as far as the entrance of St. Jarlath's College. For weeks afterwards an R.I.C. man continued to make discreet inquiries among the college servants regarding a stranger supposed to be living in the college.

In the college that evening I received pretty full information regarding the surrender in Dublin and was told that the Galway men had returned to their homes and that the leaders had gone into hiding. After dark my brother Andy, who was to be ordained the following month, cycled with me to the Franciscan Monastery at Annaghdown where I spent the night. Next day in Galway I was assured by some of my Galway comrades that the Rising there was at an end; they said they had no idea where Liam Mellows was, but believed that Alf Monaghan was again in the relative safety of Connemara. It was now exactly one week since I heard that the Rising in Dublin had begun the day before, and reported for active service to Michael Kilroy in Newport. For us both Easter Week 1916 was over.

Joined For One Reason Only

My recollections of the years before Easter 1916 do not support some of the opinions often expressed to-day. It is sometimes said that the Volunteers, used by the I.R.B. to fight against England, never had the least intention of fighting at all. I knew many Volunteers about my own age in Mayo and Galway, and at University College, Galway, I knew some from every county west of the Shannon and a few from the other provinces. Still I never knew one of them to say that he joined the Volunteers for any other purpose except to help drive the invaders from our country.

It is also said that up to a few days beforehand the date fixed for the Rising was known only to a handful at the top. That may be so, but the approximate date was known for weeks at least beforehand by some I.R.B. men in the West who held very minor positions in the Volunteers.

Only Alternative

The notion that the Rising as a military operation was from the start foredoomed to failure, and that the leaders deliberately sacrificed their lives and the lives of

their followers, not for a military success but to shock the nation into a realisation of its mortal danger, the imminent disappearance for ever of its culture, its civilisation, its traditional way of life, I find it impossible to believe of any of the leaders, even of Pearse, except as the only alternative to absolute and complete failure present and future.

I do not believe that up to the capture of the German arms ship, the Aud, the leaders had any more reason to doubt of success than military leaders ever have at the start of a campaign, even in the case of aggression by a mighty power against a small defenceless state. The chances of war are strange, and the history of wars provides many examples of wars ending in a manner nobody could reasonably have anticipated at the start. I am of course not suggesting that the leaders did not risk their lives, as indeed everybody did who took part in the Rising.

In the upshot, the Newport Volunteers, like those practically everywhere outside Dublin, took no part in the actual fighting. In my view this was the direct consequence of the loss of the Aud, since the plan for the Rising in the south and west, of which Plan no complete copy was at the time committed to writing, probably depended wholly on the arms lost with the Aud, and with this loss the Plan could not be put into operation.

Michael Kilroy's plan to which I have referred I presume to be a part of the larger, the complete Plan for the country. I believe this all the more because of the time spent by Sean MacDermott with Michael in Newport in the organising of the Volunteers and of the I.R.B. It was he who told Michael that in Fenian times Tiernaar and Killeena were the two most active I.R.B. areas in the whole country.

Newport Bay Considered

The Admiralty charts of Newport Bay which I saw with Michael suggest to me that Newport was probably being considered when a suitable landing place for the German arms was being sought, and was accordingly a place of some importance in the minds and plans of the leaders.

As far as I know no list has ever been drawn up of Mayo men who actually fought during Easter Week in Dublin or elsewhere. The only shooting in Co. Mayo during the week that I can recall occurred near Ballinrobe, when Colm O'Gaora, who had been a Gaelic League teacher in Newport, wounded a policeman in an unsuccessful attempt to avoid arrest. I should like very much to know if at the time he happened to be carrying a message from Liam Mellows to West Mayo. Michael Stains, who

fought in the G.P.O., was well known in Newport; his sister I think was married in Acres.

Following the news of the surrender Michael Kilroy ordered that all the arms at the workshop be taken away and hidden. Boxes were made and lined with felt but the task of getting them away unaware of the police posed a problem. Then Dominick Kilroy dressed as a lady and carried the boxes along the railway-line to Derrylahan where they were hidden in a store now owned by Joseph McManamon.

The Rising of Easter Week was the basis of the partial success of the War of Independence a few years later, and of the Republic to-day. The outstanding part which Michael Kilroy of Newport and his men played in the War of Independence justifies the study of the rise of the Volunteers in Newport from their beginning in 1913.

CASTLEBAR DOING WELL FOR TOURISM

"We are playing a big part in tourist promotion," said Mr. Sean Horican (Chairman) at a meeting of Castlebar Urban Council, when a request for an increased contribution towards the promotion of Tourism in the area was sought by the Manager, Galway-Mayo Regional Tourism Organisation.

Mr. Michael Heverin asked the Council to increase their contribution from £50 to £150.

"This town is doing all it can for tourism but we cannot afford any extra this year," said Mr. Horican.

Mr. J. Chambers—Are we not as generous as the other urban councils in the Galway-Mayo tourist area?

Mr. Sean Smyth, Town Clerk, said Ballina Urban Council contributed £20 a year. The Castlebar Urban Council contributed portion of the grant made available to the Tourist Organisation by the Co. Council.

Mr. W. Cresham—We should cooperate with the Regional Tourism organisation as tourism will give something to our people.

Mr. Chambers—We are doing that. The other urban councils will also benefit.

Mr. John F. Cahill said they had given the Regional Tourism organisation the use of the art centre at a very low rent. If they had to rent an office in the town the same as in Ballina and Westport it would cost them anything between £250 and £1,000 a year.

"Indirectly we are providing pretty seriously," he said. The Council agreed to contribute the same figure as last year.

NEWPORT 1916 PLAY WILL REVIVE HAPPY MEMORIES

On Sunday night next Newport will pay homage to the men of Easter Week with the presentation of their three act play "The Gap of Danger", by Malachi Muldoon. This play was first staged in Newport forty-three years ago at the request of the Acting President of the Republic and Sinn Fein, the late Mr. P. J. Rutledge, T.D., who was then in hiding in the Shramore area.

At this time the republican spirit was at a very low ebb and in an effort to rouse again the fires of patriotism the President asked



PEADAR KILROY (Has a leading role)

the young men of the area to stage this play and he often attended their practices and rehearsals.

Production was then in the hands of the late Capt. Tom Cleary of Treanlar and many still thrill to the memory of that night in Newport when the play was staged. Among the overflowing attendance was the late General Michael Kilroy, making his first appearance in his native town since his escape from prison some time earlier. Many of the young men present had just served long terms of imprisonment and hunger strike.

Sunday night's production will bring many memories. The young will experience the thrills and dangers of the fight in Easter Week, while to many of the older people it will bring thoughts of the gallant comrades who had fought the



BRIDIE KILROY (The Producer)

good fight and are now no longer with us.

In the early '30's the play was again presented in the "Salt Pans", now the seaweed factory at the Quay. Producer was Mr. Tommie Kelly, N.T. Included in the cast were Mickie Sammon, Paddy Cusack, Richie O'Connor, Tom Chambers, Jack Chambers, Larry McCormack, Theo Berry, Paddy McCormack, John McDermott and Peter McManamon. On Sunday night next it will be produced by Miss Bridie Kilroy, N.T., who also takes a leading role.

On Sunday night next also Pearse's immortal little classic "Iasogain" will be staged by the children of Newport Boys' School as a tribute to the gentle teacher of St. Enda's, Padraic Pearse.

On the following Sunday night Westport Dramatic Society will stage the Singer by P. H. Pearse, and Newport Dramatic Society will present "Kathleen Ni Houlihan", by W. B. Yeats.

Mr. M. J. McGrath (Chairman, Mayo County Council) said there were enough 'colourful performers' in public life without women entering it. "They are admirable performers in the home, but the cobbler should stick to the last," he said.



EAMONN CONNOLLY (Plays role of a British Officer)

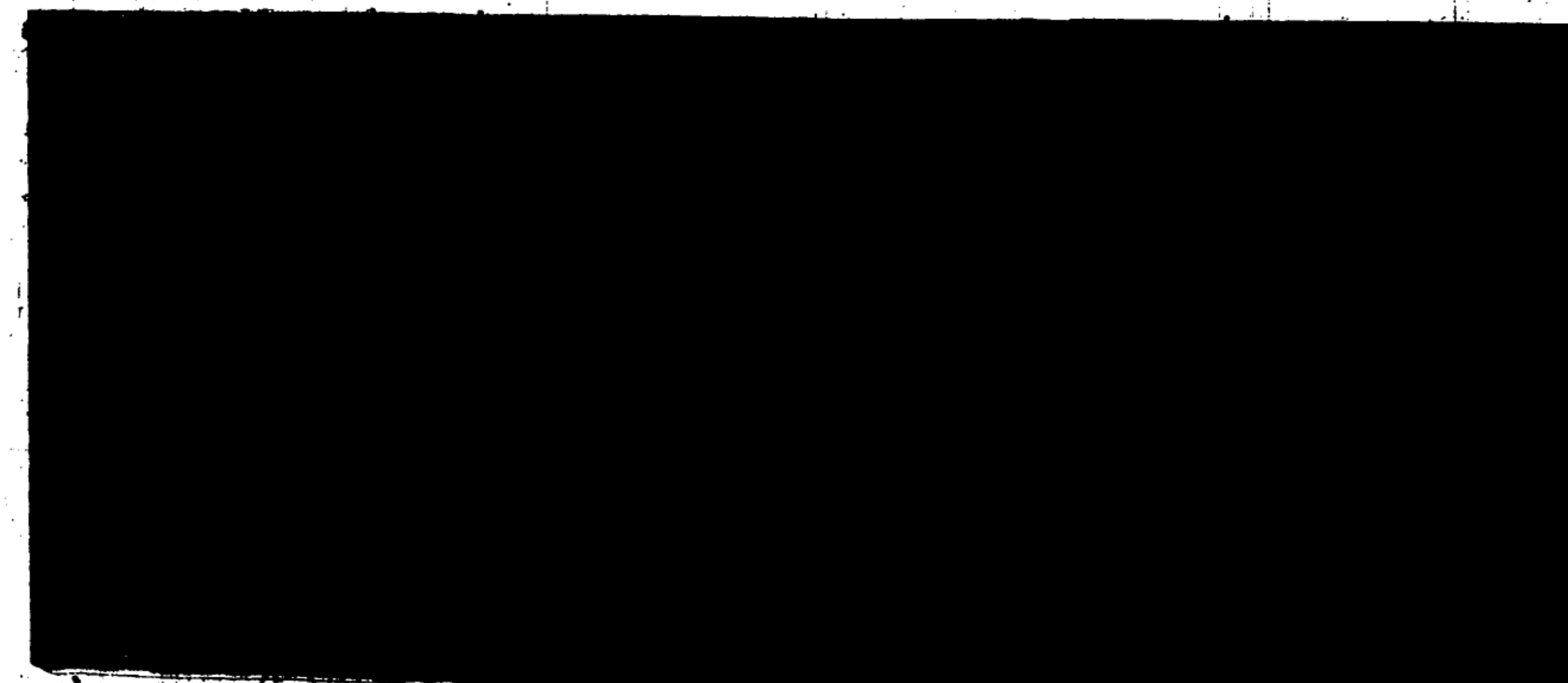
ENOUGH 'COLOURFUL PERFORMERS' IN COUNCIL

The probability of I.C.A. members in the county contesting the forthcoming County Council elections, was referred to at a meeting of Mayo Committee of Agriculture in Castlebar on Saturday.

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Photo by MANDEL



Pupils of St. Gerald's N.S., Castlebar who gave a display of gymnastics recently in the Town Hall.