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In memory of my parents, Thomas and Brigid Farry,  
who died before this work was completed.

## **INTRODUCTION.**

**(1992 Edition)**

One night as I was completing the research for my book on Killoran and Coolaney, Sean Lee took me to see Pat Hunt and his wife Mai in Ballymote. As Pat recounted his memories of the War of Independence and Civil War it struck me that these and memories from other survivors should be collected.

That was six years ago and here at last is the fruit of my researches. It soon became apparent that the book would have to extend back in time to 1914 to begin with the founding of the Volunteers in Sligo. It also became clear that two volumes would be necessary to cover the whole period to the end of the civil war. Accordingly this present work ends at the Truce and it is hoped that a companion volume will deal with the period from the Truce to the end of the civil war in the county.

My intention in writing this book has been to present as far as possible a simple chronicle of those years. This is of course much more difficult than might at first appear. Sources, though relatively plentiful, rarely give the full picture. Very few written accounts by participants are available and very few participants now survive. Again and again when making enquiries I was told "It's a pity you didn't call ten years ago!" Many of those I interviewed have since passed to their reward, may they rest in peace.

I have been constantly amazed by the friendly welcome and ready co-operation I received from people, almost without exception, even when I called unannounced. People went to great lengths to locate information and photographs and have been very trusting with precious material.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to all those people who have been so generous with their time. In County Sligo I have to thank Pat and Mai Hunt, Jim Hever, Margaret McBrien, Neil Farry, Joe Hunt and Mrs Kathleen Hunt, Kathleen Carroll, Paddy Dwyer, Mr and Mrs Frank Mulvey, Sis O'Brien, Andy Marren, Alexander Perceval, Kathleen Mullen, Shiela

Kivlehan, Andy Marren, Martin Dan Gallagher, Mary McGuinn, Michael McGovern, Tony Noone, Jackie Conlon, Thomas Clancy, Ena McLoughlin, Michael Burgess, Ted Nealon, Mattie Brennan, Patrick Heraughty, Tom Maguire, Tom Deignan, John Kilcoyne, Willie Frizzell, John Sweeney, Michael Walsh, Thomas Kilcoyne, Michael O'Beirne, Rory O'Beirne, Sidney Gallagher, Gerry Healy, Joe Carolan, Seamus Monaghan, Mrs A. McNamara, James Devins, Mrs Frank Carty, Tony Foley and Sister M. Elizabeth. Others who provided valuable assistance included Seamus Hunt, Tom McGetterick, Brendan Perry, Michael Dyer, Eugene Perry, Bat Keaney, Cannel Potter, Ann Casey, Agnes Farry, Michael Hargaden, Owen Tansey, Mairin Ni Dhomhnalláin, D. Breathnach, Maire Ni Mhurchú, Cecil A. King, S. P. Farragher, J. A. Gaughan and Caitriona Downey.

Special thanks are due to Noel E French who proof read the book and gave valuable advice, encouragement and assistance whenever consulted. Frank Kelly gave important assistance with the typesetting and Rodney Bill was always a source of inspiration and fresh ideas.

I owe much to the personnel of the various libraries and archives I consulted and who in many cases offered valuable advice on sources. In Dublin, the staff of the National Library, UCD Archives and the National Archives deserve grateful thanks as do the staff of the Public Records Office in London. John McTernan and his excellent staff at the Sligo Library deserve a special mention. The Town Clerk in Sligo went to great trouble in searching out dusty files for my perusal. The staff of the Public Records Office in Belfast provided copies of very valuable material. The material on pages 276 and 277 is Crown copyright and is reproduced with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

A special word of thanks is due to those people who gave me photographs for inclusion. These include Rodney Bill, Eugene Perry, Teresita Tiernan, Elsie Clarke, Mary McGuinn, Owen Tansey, Bat Keaney, Mrs A. McNamara, Joe Hunt and Mrs Kathleen Hunt, Michael Dyer, Patricia Devlin and Caitriona Downey, The photographs were expertly copied by Ann Crinion, Trevor Looney, Sean Dempsey and Donncha MacNiallais.

My brothers and sisters have given valuable encouragement and assistance in many different ways and my parents who unfortunately died before the completion of the work

were a constant source of encouragement. Special thanks are due to Barry Flood who gave me a base in London from which to use the Public Records Office there. All my friends, colleagues and relations who have encouraged me over the period of research and writing deserve special thanks. A kind enquiry often gave renewed faith and hope.

Finally how can I thank my wife, Winifred, and my children, Fiona, Oisin, Sinead and Aisling? Their support and understanding while this work was in progress was unfailing and their anticipation of its completion an unfailing source of renewed strength when the struggle seemed too much! I only hope the finished product lives up to their expectations.

Michael Farry, Trim.  
28 September 1992.

## **FOREWORD**

### **(2005 Edition)**

This study of the period 1914 to 1921 in county Sligo has been unavailable for many years and I often get requests for copies. I have decided to make it available as an E-book so that those anxious to obtain a copy may easily do so.

I have withstood this temptation to undertake a revision and updating of the work using the many new sources which have become available since its publication. I have therefore made only a few minor changes. I hope I have corrected most of the embarrassing misspellings and typographical errors in the original. I have included some paragraphs which I omitted from the original because of considerations of length. These are printed in italics in this edition. Otherwise this is merely the original work in a different format. I hope those who read it will consider its reissue worthwhile.

Michael Farry

Trim, Co. Meath.

10 May 2005

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### **More Books by Michael Farry:**

Killoran and Coolaney - A Local History (Trim, 1985)

*(Book out of print, an electronic version is available.)*

The Aftermath of Revolution: Sligo 1921-23. (UCD Press, Dublin, 2000)

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## 1. 1914 - IRELAND ON THE BRINK OF HOME RULE

In 1914 it appeared that Ireland was on the brink of greatness. In the previous decades momentous changes had taken place, which had greatly altered the lives of the people. Land purchase had to some extent solved the age-old land problem and the great landlords of County Sligo, the Wood-Martins, Gore-Booths, Coopers and O'Haras had now sold off much of their estates to the occupiers who were no longer tenants but owners of the land. The same great landlords had also lost their political power as a result of the new system of local government introduced in 1898 and the new County Council had taken over. Changes in the franchise meant that the two Sligo parliamentary seats were no longer fought over by the Ascendancy families of County Sligo but by nationalists. With the land and local government in the hands of the people it only remained for the Irish Party at Westminster under the leadership of John Redmond to have a Home Rule Bill passed. Such a bill had been introduced in 1913 and it seemed that it would become law sometime in 1914.

*(i) "All the outgoing officers were unanimously re-elected".*

County Sligo had been divided in 1885 into two parliamentary constituencies, North Sligo and South Sligo. Both were held by Home Rulers since 1874. In 1891 the sitting member for North Sligo, Peter MacDonald, died and a by-election resulted. There were two Nationalist candidates, local man Bernard Collery an anti-Parnellite, and Dubliner, Valentine Dillon, a pro-Parnellite. After a bitter hard fought campaign the anti-Parnellite won, 3261 votes against 2493. Unionists contested both Sligo seats in the General Elections of 1892 and 1895 being badly beaten in both. A Parnellite also stood for North Sligo in 1895 but fared badly. From then on the Irish Party, dedicated to the achieving of Home Rule, reigned supreme in Sligo and there were to be no more contested Parliamentary elections in the county until 1918.

There were two important political organisations in County Sligo in 1914 - the United Irish League (UIL) and the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH). Both were nationalist and were allied with the Irish Parliamentary Party. The UIL had been founded at Westport, County Mayo in January 1898 as a radical agrarian organisation in response to the depressed state of the West of Ireland. Among its policies was the redistribution of large estates among small farmers and it spread very quickly, first in the West of Ireland and then through the rest of the country. By December 1898 there were twelve branches in County Sligo, by the following March there were



thirty four. Among the prime movers behind the UIL in County Sligo were north Leitrim man and Sligo Champion owner, P. A. McHugh and Bunninadden man John O'Dowd. Born in 1857 at Goldfield, Tubbercurry, O'Dowd spent some years in the United States in his youth. When he returned in 1876 he joined the Fenians. He also took part in the Land League agitation and was imprisoned in Sligo and Dundalk in 1882.

By 1900 O'Dowd was chairman of Sligo County Council and President of the South Sligo executive of the UIL. When a vacancy arose in the North Sligo constituency in January 1900 because of the retirement of Bernard Collery, a UIL convention chose John O'Dowd as the candidate and he became MP unopposed. At the general election later the same year O'Dowd was elected unopposed for the South Sligo constituency, William McKillop being elected, also unopposed, for North Sligo. At the 1906 election McKillop was replaced by P. A. McHugh who was unopposed as was O'Dowd in South Sligo.



*North Sligo MP Thomas Scanlan speaking at a Home Rule rally at Sligo Town Hall.*

When McHugh died in 1909 the Parliamentary Party proposed solicitor Thomas Scanlan, a native of the Drumcliff area, who had been living in Glasgow for some time, as the candidate. He was supported by the majority of the UIL branches in County Sligo but there was some significant opposition to having an outsider imposed on the county. Pat Flynne, a native of Sooeey and a member of the County Council, also sought the nomination and was supported by, among others, the well known Sligo politician, John Jinks. Flynne and his supporters refused to attend the convention and Scanlan was unanimously selected. Flynne then threatened to oppose him at

the election but a letter from party leader John Redmond asking him not to do so had the desired effect and Scanlan was returned unopposed.

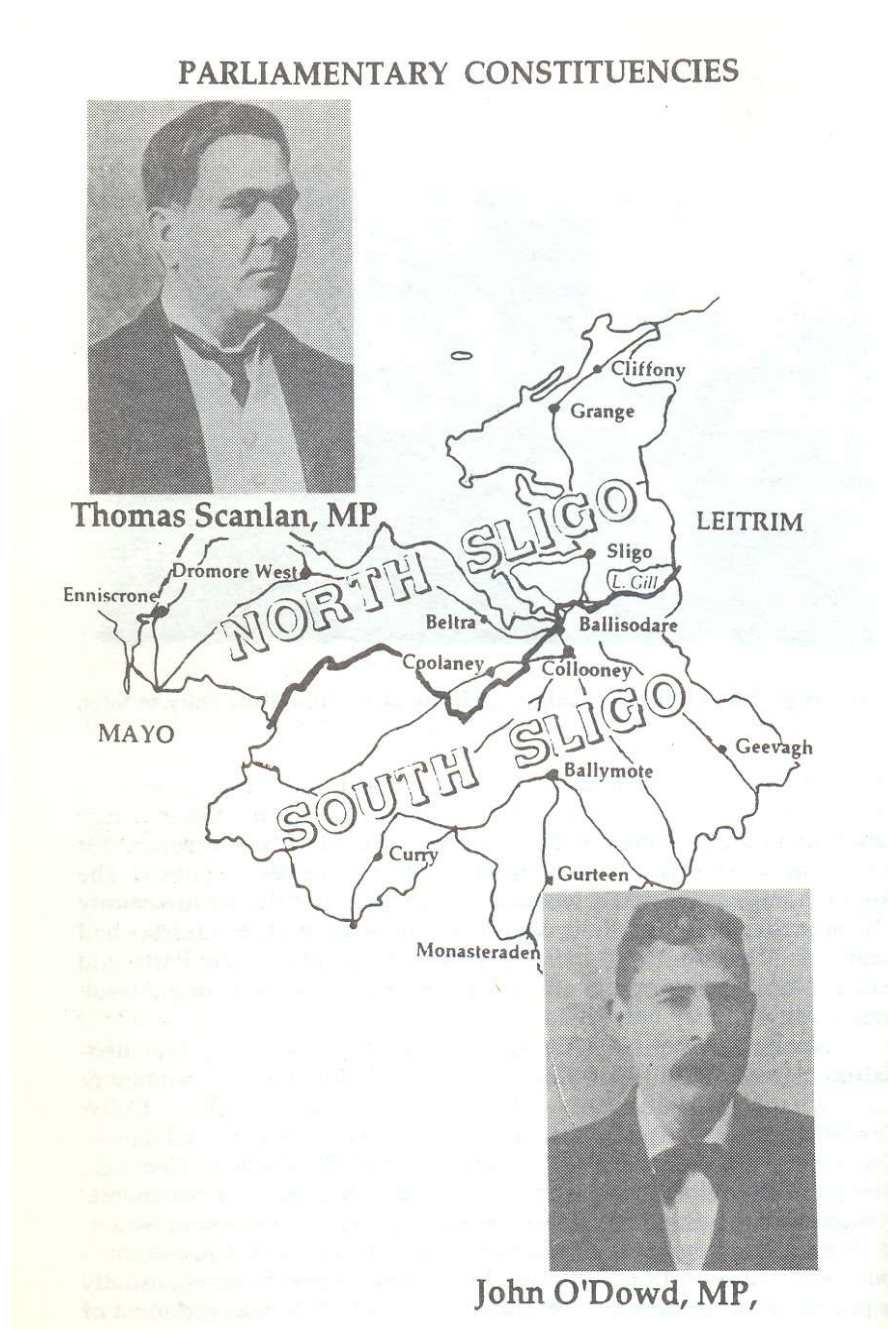
In the two General Elections of 1910 the Sligo members were returned unopposed. They continued to represent the county and never actually faced an electoral contest for the parliamentary seat until 1918. This was not unusual. In the general election of December 1910 for instance, only 41 of the 101 Irish constituencies were contested.

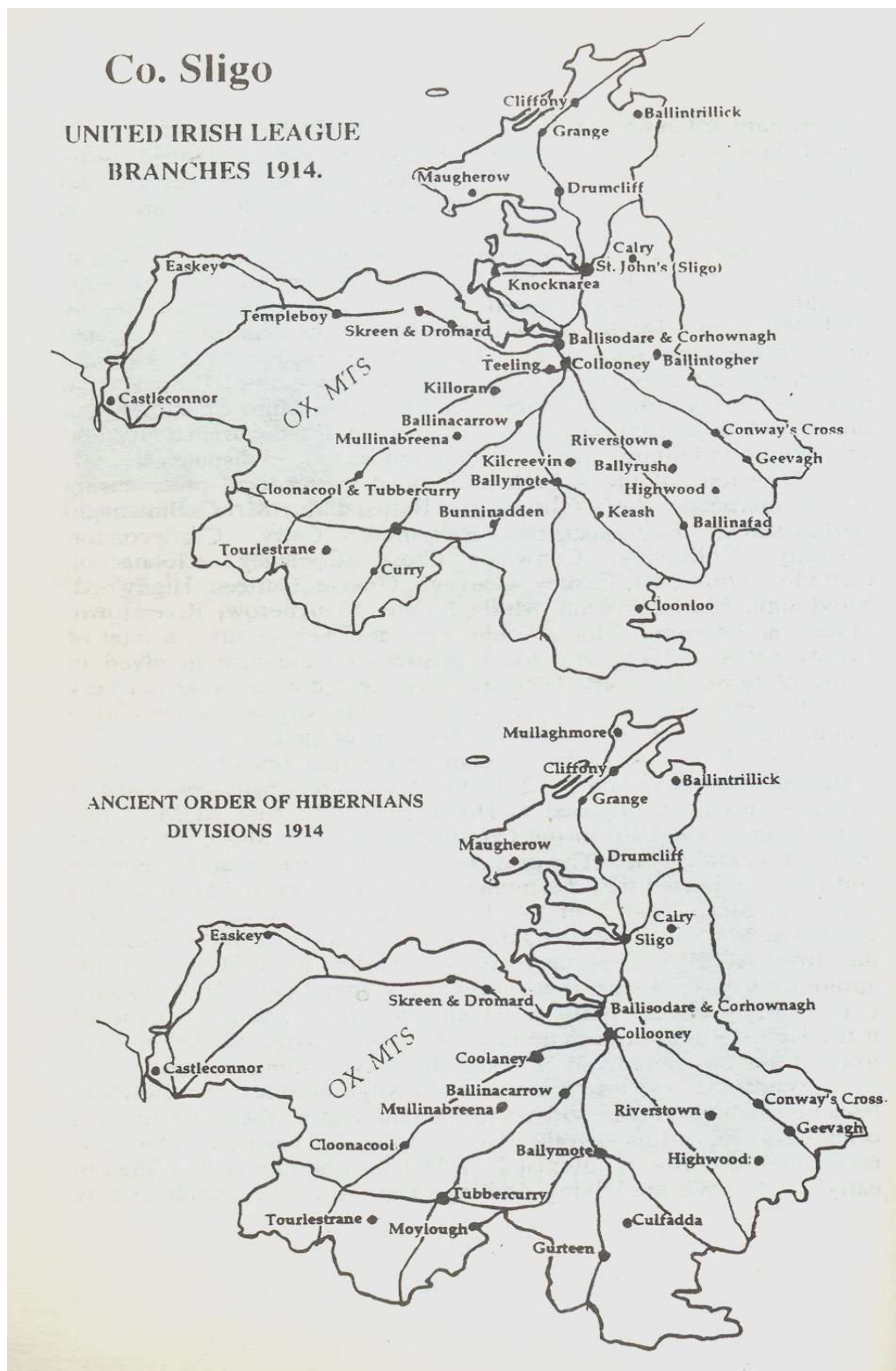
The Irish Parliamentary Party had been split since the fall of Charles Stewart Parnell and the rise of the UIL alarmed the various factions of the Party. This led to the unification of the party in 1900 and of its taking over the UIL under the leadership of John Redmond. From this time on the UIL acted as the constituency organisation for the Irish Party. The number of branches in County Sligo peaked at forty five in September 1902 and remained remarkably constant from then until 1914. The branches were organised under two executives depending on whether they belonged to North or South Sligo parliamentary constituency. Membership of the UIL was essential for anyone seeking office and it generally supported Party policy. The Sligo Champion carried a weekly column of reports from the county UIL branches detailing their concerns. These were often agrarian and local, often national and concerned with supporting their Party and leader. Numerous motions of confidence in both were recorded week after week.

Branches of the UIL active in County Sligo in 1914 included: Ballinacarrow, Ballinafad, Ballintogher, Ballintrillick, Ballisodare & Corhownagh, Ballymote, Ballyrush, Bunninadden, Calry, Castleconnor, Cliffony, Cloonacool & Tubbercurry, Cloonloo, Collooney, Conway's Cross, Curry, Drumcliff, Easkey, Geevagh, Grange, Highwood, Keash, Kilcreevin, Killoran, Knocknarea, Maugherow, Mullinabreena, Riverstown, Skreen & Dromard, Sooeey, St. John's, Teeling (near Collooney), Templeboy, and Toulestrane, a total of thirty four. In many cases local clergy were involved, usually as president of the branch. Rev. Michael Doyle, P.P. was president of Ballisodare & Corhownagh, Rev. P. J. O'Grady, P.P. was president of Keash branch, Canon B. Quinn in Ballymote, Rev. B. Currid, Adm, Drumcliff, Rev. George Coyle P.P. in Geevagh among others. Local politicians, District Councillors or County Councillors were often among the officers of the branches.

Another organisation which had begun to rival the UIL in popularity by 1914 was the Ancient Order of Hibernians. This organisation, over four hundred years old, had been

reorganised by Irish MP Joseph Devlin in the early years of the century. It operated in much the same way as the UIL and there appears to have been a certain amount of overlapping as regards membership. The UIL also had a weekly column of branch reports in the Sligo Champion and these contain similar sentiments of support for the Irish Party and John Redmond though hardly any references to land disputes.





*UIL & AOH Sligo 1914*

Divisions of the A.O.H. mentioned in the local press during 1914 included the following:  
 Ballisodare & Corhownagh, Ballintraillick, Ballinacarrow, Ballymote, Calry, Castleconnor,

Cliffony, Collooney, Conway's Cross, Coolaney, Cloonacool, Culfadda, Drumcliff, Easkey, Geevagh, Grange, Gurteen, Highwood, Moylough, Mullinabreena, Mullaghmore, Maugherow, Riverstown, Skreen & Dromard, Sligo, Toulestrane and Tubbercurry, a total of twenty seven. Clergy and local politicians were also involved in many of these chapters. Officers were elected every year but very often the report in the local press read "All the outgoing officers were unanimously re-elected". This was also true of the UIL.

Unionists in Sligo had organised a junior branch of the Irish Unionist Alliance in late 1912. The IUA was principally composed of southern unionists opposed to Home Rule. The 1st AGM of this Sligo branch was held in the Constitutional Club, Sligo, a favourite unionist meeting place. The president was P. D. Perceval, Hazelwood and it was reported that the membership had reached 331 in its first year. A Sligo branch of the Ladies Unionist Alliance had been formed at Markree Castle in January 1912. Lady Crofton presided at the first AGM in February 1913. Charles K. O'Hara sent his apologies saying, "I trust that success may attend their efforts to save our country from the perils to which it would be undoubtedly exposed if the Home Rule bill became law". An orange lodge existed in Sligo town at this time, the "Star of Connacht" Loyal Orange Lodge, No. 464.

When the war broke out in 1914 Sligo unionists as elsewhere became totally involved with recruiting and joining the war effort and organised opposition to the Home Rule bill ceased. This was confirmed to northern unionist J. N. Wilson when he visited Sligo in early 1916. "We are saying nothing at all since the month of July 1914", "Politics not going on at all" and "Nothing doing, a dead letter" were some of the comments he recorded.

***(ii) "The Council is now principally composed of Labour representatives".***

The Local Government Act of 1898 changed the face of local government in Ireland ending the power of the landed gentry in local affairs and handing power over to the nationalists. The power of the Grand Jury, dominated by the Ascendancy, was ended and its place and duties were taken by authorities democratically elected. These comprised in County Sligo: the County Council, the Borough Corporation, Rural District Councils and Boards of Guardians. Sligo Corporation consisted of twenty four councillors elected from three wards, North, East and West. In January of each year one third of the councillors had to offer themselves for re-election. The Mayor was elected by the councillors every January.

For 1913 the Mayor was Daniel O'Donnell. The Aldermen were John Connolly, John Jinks, auctioneer, Thomas Flanagan, merchant, Edward Foley, merchant, J. P. Higgins, merchant and the Mayor. The councillors were Thomas Scanlon, tailor cutter, Edward Kelly, Dudley M. Hanley, merchant, John Foley, merchant, Michael McDonagh, shopkeeper, John Hughes, merchant, James Gray, dealer, Patrick N. White, chemist, Robert Smyllie, journalist, Thomas Kivlehin, William Gibbons, plasterer, Thomas Hughes, monumental contractor, Edward Harte, painter, Peter Keeley, clerk, Peter Heraghty, trader, John Lynch, stevedore, Henry Monson, merchant and Henry Depew, carpenter. Of these six had been in office since the turn of the century: John Connolly, Edward Foley, John Jinks, Thomas Scanlon, Edward Kelly and Thomas Flanagan. John Lynch was the President of the Sligo branch of the I.T.G.W.U. and had been elected for the first time in January 1913. Also elected for the first time then were Union candidates Monson, Depew, Heraghty and Thomas Hughes. William Gibbons was also a Labour councillor. Robert Smyllie was the only councillor who could be called unionist.

John Jinks was a native of Drumcliff who settled in Sligo town where he became apprenticed to the grocery trade. After some years he started his own business in Stephen Street as a publican, auctioneer and undertaker. He had first been elected to Sligo Corporation in 1900. As we have seen he was a supporter of Flynn against the Party imposed Scanlan for North Sligo.

The usual annual elections for two seats in each ward on the Corporation were to be held on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1914. There were a number of nominations for each vacancy originally but withdrawals before the closing date meant that there were no contests. For the West Ward Michael Burns, cabinet-maker, and John Hughes, were unopposed, for the East Ward John P. Foley, and Patrick Farrell, baker, were similarly successful and in the North Ward Bernard McTernan, journalist, and Peter Keely, were elected. John Lynch of the Transport Union became Alderman for the North Ward when his opponent withdrew and David McSharrey, cabinet-maker, was elected councillor in Lynch's place. "The majority of newly elected members were put forward by the Trades Council and the local branch of the Transport Union so that the Council is now principally composed of Labour representatives", said the Sligo Champion.

On January 23<sup>rd</sup> at the Corporation meeting Alderman John Jinks was unanimously elected Mayor with the salary of £130 per year. After his election the new Mayor hosted a



banquet at which he entertained the Corporation members and a number of his friends. Speeches at the banquet included, according to the local press, many "eulogistic references" to Mr Jinks including one by Canon E. Doorly Administrator, Sligo, to the effect that "The church in Sligo was and ought to be very well satisfied with the appointment made that day."

In April, Sligo businessman and councillor, Dudley M. Hanley, was made a Justice of the Peace, entitled to sit as a magistrate in the local courts. The Sligo Independent described him as "one of Sligo's most prominent and enterprising merchants deservedly popular with all classes and creeds". He was a native of Sligo and had worked for some years in Galway. He returned to Sligo at the end of the previous century and set up his own business in Old Market Street. He became a member of Sligo Corporation in 1908.



*John Jinks*

Alderman Daniel O'Donnell who had been mayor of Sligo for 1913 and Alderman for the East Ward, died in February and an election was held in late April to fill the vacancy. According to the Sligo Independent there was very little interest and less than 50% of the electorate turned out. The victor was Thomas Henry Fitzpatrick, a Sligo chemist who went forward as an independent candidate and defeated the A.O.H. nominee, 240 to 157 votes. Fitzpatrick was later identified with the Sinn Fein movement but his acceptance speech as reported in the Champion showed no evidence of this.

*In spite of the fact that the Corporation was now composed almost entirely of nationalists there were many problems unsolved. Sligo town's housing was notoriously primitive. A report by the Corporation's Medical Officer of Health stated "The housing accommodation of the town is in every way very bad. There are several streets in which there is scarcely one house fit for human habitation - roofs, walls and floors are at fault, lighting and ventilation are deficient and in most cases there is absolutely no sanitary accommodation. The majority of these houses constitute a grave danger to the public health and every effort should be made to clear them away at whatever cost."*

Sligo County Council had twenty six members. The county was divided into nineteen electoral divisions and each returned one councillor except Sligo Urban division which elected two. These twenty councillors were joined by two co-opted members. The other four councillors were ex-officio members - these were the four chairmen of the Rural District Councils in the county.

The Rural District Councils were based on the areas covered by the four workhouses which served the county: Tubbercurry, Dromore West, Sligo and Boyle No. 2 (That part of Boyle Union in County Sligo). Each R.D.C. comprised of District Councillors (D.Cs.) who were elected from District Electoral Divisions. The chairman of Sligo County Council from 1900 had been the M.P. John O'Dowd and many of the other County Councillors had been members for quite a long time and were re-elected every three years unopposed. The councillors at the end of 1913 with the electoral areas they represented were:

Aclare: Henry McCarrick, farmer	Ballymote: James Hannon, J.P. merchant
Coolaney: Peter Cawley, farmer	Banada: James Durkin, merchant
Castleconnor: W J Caffrey, farmer	Cliffony: Patrick Cummins, farmer
Collooney: James Flanagan, merchant and farmer	Coolavin: Patrick MacManamy, farmer
Dromore: James Quinn, farmer	Drumcliff: Thomas Flanagan, merchant
Easkey: William Rouse, shopkeeper	Kilmacoen: Neil O'Donnell, farmer
Kilmastranny: Bernard J.Conlon, farmer	Kilshalvey: John O'Dowd, M.P.
Lisadell: Bernard Harte, merchant	Owenmore: John McLoughlin, farmer
Templevanny: John M Cryan, farmer	Tubbercurry: Edward J Cooke, merchant
Sligo Urban District: John Connolly, James P.Higgins	
Ex-Officio: P J Henry - Tubbercurry R.D.C. Michael Gray - Boyle No.2 R.D.C.	
Roger Davey - Sligo U.D.C. James Gilhool - Dromore West R.D.C.	
Co-Opted: Michael Gallagher, Kilnamonagh. Michael Gethins, Doonally.	



In early June 1914 the local elections were to be held and an editorial in the Champion hoped that there would be "no unnecessary contests". The M.P. for South Sligo, John O'Dowd, was a County Councillor and it was a matter of some considerable surprise that he was opposed in the electoral area of Kilshalvey. His opponent was a Mr John Wynne, a farmer from Everlawn, whose political persuasion, if any, is unknown. He had tried to go forward for election at the previous local government elections in 1911 but his paper was declared invalid. A meeting of Gurteen UIL presided over by Canon O'Connor P.P. condemned "the action of some nonentity and factionist" who forced O'Dowd into a contest "while he is away in the House of Commons fighting for our cause". According to the Sligo Champion Wynne tried to hold a meeting at Cloonanoor on a Sunday afternoon but he and his supporters came in for some "rough handling" and the meeting broke up in disorder. O'Dowd's election address as published in the Champion dated May 12<sup>th</sup> and addressed from the House of Commons began: "Owing to a non-descript crank named Jimmy Wynne, who had nominated himself in opposition to me, a contest will be forced upon you". In the event O'Dowd won easily, 422 votes to 19.

In all, nine divisions were contested. In five of these the outgoing member was re-elected: Castleconnor, Cliffony, Coolavin, Kilmastranny and Kilshalvey, in two the outgoing member lost: Aclare to P. J. Henry, farmer, and Drumcliff to John Hennigan, farmer, and in the other two the outgoing member did not contest the election: Kilmacoen, where Jeremiah Mullrooney, farmer, was elected and Owenmore, where William Henry, farmer, was elected.

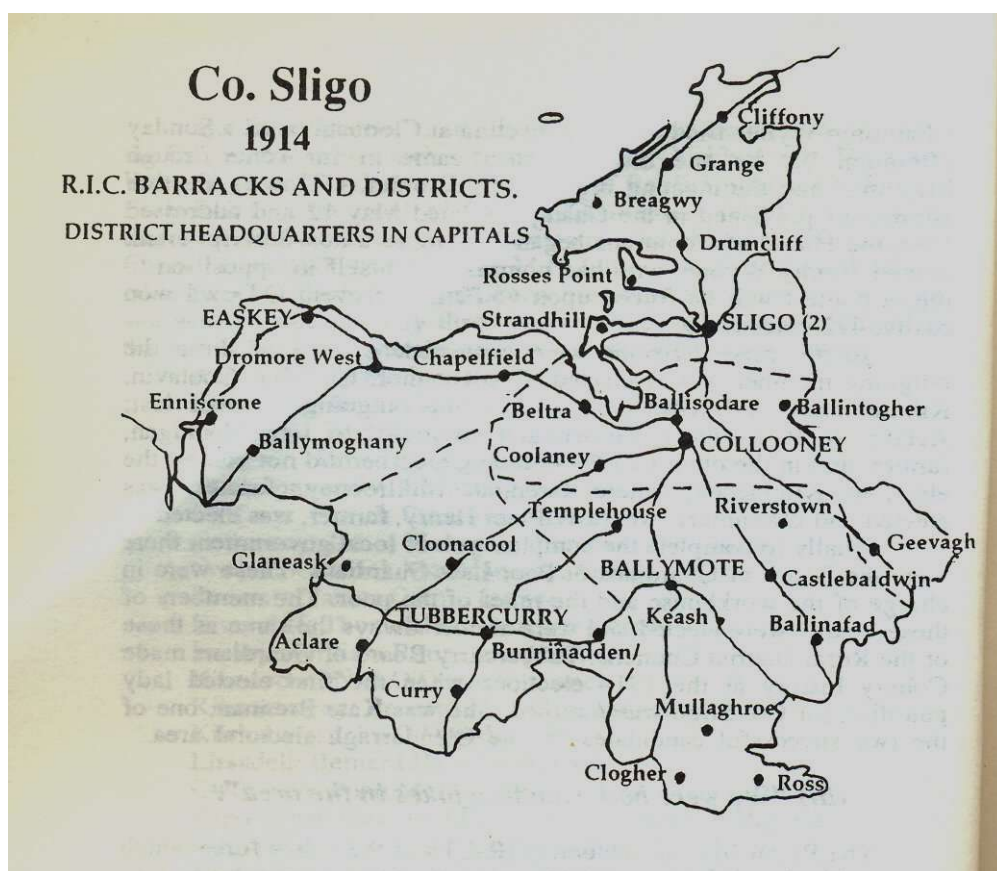
Finally to complete the complex web of local government there were the Board of Guardians or Poor Law Guardians. These were in charge of the workhouses and the relief of the poor. The members of these boards were elected and were almost always the same as those of the Rural District Councils. Tubbercurry Board of Guardians made County history at the 1914 elections when the first elected lady guardian for County Sligo was returned. She was Kate Brennan, one of the two successful candidates for the Glendarragh electoral area.

*(iii) "We were both standing jokes in the area".*

The Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) was the police force which enforced law and order. In County Sligo in 1914 there were thirty four police stations organised in four districts. A County Inspector was based in Sligo and each district was looked after by a District Inspector. In

Sligo district there were eight barracks; two in Sligo town (No. 1 and No. 2) with others at Breagwy, Cliffony, Drumcliff, Grange, Rosses Point and Strandhill. Collooney district had stations at Collooney, Ballintogher, Ballisodare, Beltra, Coolaney and Geevagh. Ballymote district stations were at Ballymote, Ballinafad, Castlebaldwin, Keash, Clogher, Mullaghroe, Ross (Hut) Templehouse, and Riverstown. Easkey division: Easkey, Ballymoghenny, Chapelfield, Dromore West and Enniscrone. Tubbercurry district: Tubbercurry, Curry Aclare, Bunninadden, Cloonacool, Glaneask.

At the beginning of 1914 the County Inspector for County Sligo was Robert Ievers Sullivan. The District Inspector for Sligo was Henry John Moore, a native of Longford and a member of the Church of Ireland. His official records contain the commendation: "Good police duty during the strike in Sligo". The Tubbercurry D. I. was Thomas Walsh. At Easkey the D. I. was Fermanagh-born Catholic, John H. Harrington and at Ballymote the D.I. was Michael J. Glynn. George R. E. Foley was District Inspector at Collooney. The strength of the RIC in the county at this time was just over two hundred, a proportion of about twenty seven police to each ten thousand of the population.



Although Sligo had never figured to any great extent in disturbances over the years there was a small but important Fenian legacy in the county. Martin Brennan, prominent in the IRA in the Tubbercurry area, said that his father Mathew had been prominent in the Fenians at Rhue, Tubbercurry and he said that during the war of independence he took out an old "Fenian gun" which had belonged to his father and fired a shot with it as a mark of respect.

P. J. Sheridan who had lived in Tubbercurry had been County Fenian Centre. With the "new departure" and the founding of the Land League, he became a prominent organiser for the Land League. According to police files he met members of the Fenians in Tubbercurry in February 1882 and formed them into an inner Invincible circle. He helped organise the Invincibles in the provinces often disguised as "Fr Murphy". When the Invincibles killed Cavendish and Burke in the Phoenix Park in 1882 Sheridan fled to the United States where he died in 1918.

With the Irish Parliamentary Party's stranglehold on political life there was very little support for other viewpoints in the county at this time. Here and there however there was opposition. Alexander McCabe was born in Keash on June 5<sup>th</sup> 1886. He was a member of the IRB, the secret Republican organisation. He had been a supporter of the extreme Republican position since his time as a student at Summerhill College when he came under the influence of Fr Michael O'Flanagan, then a teacher at the College.

McCabe then studied to be a teacher at St. Patrick's Training College, Drumcondra 1907-1910. While there he became interested in the principles of Sinn Féin having read Arthur Griffith's booklet "The Resurrection of Hungary". On 10<sup>th</sup> August 1910 he was appointed principal of Drumnagranchy N.S. near Keash. In 1913-14 he attended a third level course in University College, Dublin. While in Dublin he attended the inaugural meeting of the Irish Volunteers in the Rotunda on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1913. He became friendly with many of the leading republicans and Sinn Féiners meeting Arthur Griffith and becoming "a great follower of his all through".

According to McCabe he was one of only two supporters of that party in County Sligo at the time. The other was Patrick Dyar, a shop assistant in Tubbercurry and a native of the St. James' Well area. "We were both standing jokes in the area and being regarded as harmless we were it must be said, treated with kindly tolerance", McCabe said.

At a meeting of Tubbercurry Town Tenants in April 1908 Dyar mentioned an editorial in a previous Sligo Champion which referred to Sinn Féiners and said "I myself am one and I do not make any secret of the fact".

The year 1908 also saw the resignation of North Leitrim Nationalist MP, C. J. Dolan and his standing in the subsequent by-election as a Sinn Féin candidate. There is no mention of any Sligo involvement in the campaign in North Leitrim which resulted in a defeat for Dolan. Another Sinn Féin supporter was John R. Treacy, a native of Youghal, County Cork, who taught in Limerick and Dublin before coming to Sligo in 1904. He taught in Summerhill College and in the Technical School. He had been involved with Griffith and William Rooney in Sinn Féin while in Dublin and was one of the "Apostles of Sinn Féin" in Sligo.

A branch of the Gaelic League, Conradh na Gaeilge, was founded in Sligo in 1903. Irish teachers in Summerhill College, Fr Michael O'Flanagan, 1900-1904 and Fr Tomás Ó Ceallaigh , 1904 - 1913 also taught Irish classes in the Town Hall. One of the best known figures in the language revival in County Sligo was Pádhraic Ó Domhnalláin, a native of Oughterard, County Galway who first came to Sligo in 1904 to teach Irish in the Achonry area. In 1908 he became teacher of Irish in Summerhill College and also taught for many years in Sligo Technical School and the Ursuline Convent, Sligo. He was also at this time principal of Tourmackeady Irish College. He lived in Tubbercurry for most of his stay in County Sligo and married a native of that town, Sile Connolly in 1913.



*Seán Ó Ruadháin*

Another prominent Irish teacher was Seán Ó Ruadháin, a native of Erris, County Mayo, who first came to County Sligo in 1907 to teach Irish at Riverstown and later taught in Sligo Technical School and at Summer Irish courses at Strandhill and Enniscrone.

Fr Brian Crehan, a native of Galway, who served in many parishes in Sligo and was at this time at Grange, was also a noted Irish language worker. He was secretary to the Irish Colleges at Spiddal and Tourmackeady for some time. He was also involved with the Sligo branch of the Gaelic League as was Mrs Henry Monson, a native of the Aran Islands.

One of the main activities of the Gaelic League was the teaching of Irish and especially the instructing of teachers in the language so that they could teach the language in the primary schools. In 1910 a "Sligo School for the Teaching of Irish" was established. The college operated for two hours each Saturday and had 46 students in the 1910/1911 season. The teachers were Pádhraic Ó Domhnalláin and poet and dramatist, Fr Tomás Ó Ceallaigh, a native of Cloonloo, who afterwards was appointed to the chair of Education at University College Galway. The number of pupils had dropped to ten in 1913/14 and in 1920 it was said that the Sligo college had been inoperative "for several years".

At the AGM of the Sligo Branch of the Gaelic League in 1911 a note of disappointment was sounded however with regards to the general public in Sligo learning Irish, "As far as teaching Irish to adults was concerned the work of the branch had been practically nil. Adult Sligo had shown as little disposition as in the past to learn the language of their country".

The trade union movement was strong in Sligo at this time under the leadership of John Lynch. Sligo branch of the I.T.G.W.U. had been founded in 1911 and was one of the most active branches in the country. In 1913 there is evidence that Sligo was "the most flourishing branch", though it seems to have been slow in paying its dues to headquarters and in sending returns of membership in 1914/1915.

In 1913 Sligo port was the scene of a bitter two month dispute. The dispute started on March 8<sup>th</sup> when Sligo Steam Navigation workers unloading a ship claimed either extra help or more wages. Both were refused and the men stopped work. Non-union workers were used to complete the unloading and this led to the calling of a general strike at the port. Carters and other general workers joined the strike and the employers resisted by using non-union labour and

bringing in labourers from Liverpool. Extra police were drafted into the town but they were not able to keep the two sides apart and violent scenes resulted. A striker, Patrick Dunbar from Riverside, was fatally injured during the disturbances. Transport Union organiser P. T. Daly was in Sligo during the duration of the dispute and played a leading role in the strike. Ships continued to use the port loading and unloading carried out by non-union workers protected by police. Finally in early May talks were held under the chairmanship of T. A. Cooper, agent for Sir Josslyn Gore-Booth. These brought the dispute to an end and work was resumed at the port on Wednesday May 7th. "The Irish Transport Union has won a complete victory", the RIC County Inspector reported to Dublin Castle.

*(iv) "Let the bullocks fight the Germans".*

The main concern of the UIL branches in County Sligo at this time was without doubt the question of land. The large estates had by now been sold to the tenants who were now small landowners. They now cast their eyes on the larger farms in their neighbourhood. Paul Bew referred to "the land hunger of the Connaught small-holdings peasantry enraged by the larger ranches in their midst". Many of these farms were non-residential, i.e. the owner lived some way away. Most were devoted to the raising of cattle and so were dubbed "grazing ranches". Local UIL branches, composed mainly of these small farmers, agitated to have these ranches sold and divided among the local small farmers. Anyone, local or otherwise, who purchased or intended to purchase such a ranch as a unit was in danger of being made the subject of agitation. Week after week branches of the UIL discussed the sale and division of local farms.

Illegal methods were often tried to force large landowners to sell, to prevent intending purchasers from buying and to force buyers to give up their purchase. These methods sometimes included injuring animals or destroying property but more often "cattle driving" was the method used whereby the owner's cattle were driven some distance away from the farm in the dead of night. The cattle were usually quickly recovered unharmed.

The Congested Districts Board (C.D.B.) was in the process of buying and re-selling many of these large farms. They usually divided the farm and sold sections to local farmers. The Board was slow in its operation and local UIL branches were constantly agitating to have the Board take over more large farms and to deal more quickly with those farms which it had already taken over. Early in 1915 the Sligo Champion devoted an editorial to the Congested Districts Board. It

mentioned the high hopes which had accompanied its setting up, hopes that the "peasants" would have been given enough land to live comfortable on. It admitted that many of the hopes had been realized but said that complaints were pouring in from almost every district "about the slowness of its operations and the inability or unwillingness to deal with the distribution of the thousand of acres of untenanted land now in its possession". Fr Michael O'Flanagan, C.C. Cliffony, in a letter to the same paper later in the year claimed "at the present rate of operation it will take the Board over 200 years to divide the grazing ranches".

The main areas where discontent of an agrarian nature showed itself were the Tireragh district and to a lesser extent, the Collooney area. All through 1913 and 1914 police reports from County Sligo mentioned the continuing agitation against the "grazing system" being carried out in those places. "The people appear determined to have all non-residential farms whether held as tenancies or on the 11 month system sold to the Congested Districts Board for division among the adjoining tenants" the Sligo County Inspector RIC, wrote in his January 1914 report to the Inspector General. A number of cattle drives were reported to the police, eight in the Tireragh area in the first seven months of 1914 and six in the Collooney area during the same period. These agitations reached their peak in May and then decreased steadily. The County Inspector gave as part of the reason for the decline the fact that claims for compensation for cattle drives were pending and later the fact that large amounts of compensation were granted by the County Court Judge.

In November the Tireragh agitation began to resurface and cattle drives again occurred. From January to April 1914 Skreen and Dromard branch considered the question of "ranches" in Carrowcullen and Carrownamadoo. Tenants came before the meetings and submitted their grievances. The occupier of the "ranches" was invited to attend a meeting but did not. The branch also considered the question of the "Dunmorán ranch" and decided to approach the owner, Mr Phibbs of Cultibar House near Coolaney. In early March the Sligo Independent reported tails being cut off cattle at Carrowhubbock South near Enniscrone. During the last week of March cattle were driven off a farm in the Carrowcullen area of Skreen.

Later in the year there was an agitation in the district of Templeboy with the object of having a large farm in the area broken up and sold to some smallholders in the area. The farm was owned by George Coulter of Dooneyflynn Lower in Skreen Parish. The local branch of the UIL had taken part in the agitation and resolutions had been passed by the branch and published

in the Sligo Champion. A number of cattle drives took place including one on the night of 20<sup>th</sup> March, 1914 when twenty head of cattle were driven off, some of them being badly beaten. All were recovered. The cattle actually belonged to Mr W. R. Fenton, clerk of the Crown, Sligo, and he brought an action for £20 damages. He was awarded £7/10/0 but on appeal this was increased to £14. On the night of 13<sup>th</sup> December windows in the house of Mr Coulter were smashed. Nobody was charged with this but early in 1915 Mr Coulter was awarded compensation in the courts. This agitation continued through the early months of 1915 though there was only one cattle drive in those months.

On the first of April shots were fired at a dwelling house in Carrowgarry and windows broken by stones to intimidate the owner from purchasing a grazing farm. Three horses and twelve head of cattle were driven off the farm in question on the same night. Special police protection was given to the house owner and this had to be continued until January 1916 when its continuation was deemed unnecessary. The Sligo Independent, though not the Sligo Champion, reported two cases of cattle driving in the Ballygawley area in mid-January 1914. Cattle were driven off two non-residential grazing farms at Carrowcrin and Doonamurray. All the cattle were recovered and attached to the horns of some were notices saying "The road for the bullocks and the land for the people", a common catch cry of the times. In April the Knocknarea UIL branch passed resolutions about the Gethins estate, Burns grazing ranch, the Cooper estate and the Shaw grazing farm. The C.D.B. made an offer for the Burns farm but it was rejected and it was offered on the open market.

Sooeey and Riverstown UIL branches were in communication with the C.D.B. about the purchase of grazing lands. Sooeey warned "that any attempt to go between the landless people and those ranches which have already been inspected will meet with the entire disapproval of this branch". Maugherow was concerned with the Gore-Booth estate and Calry with the Doonally ranch, Easkey with the Rathlee farm. Cloonacool and Tubbercurry branch was concerned with the sale of Ballyglass and Leitrim farms and did a survey of the tenantry. As a result the branch stated "evidently there will be no room for outsiders on these estates". This was a common theme. In July Ballisodare/Corhownagh branch discussed the sale of the Abbeytown estate and decided "that no migrants be allowed 'til the congested farmers in the locality were supplied with portions". Calry branch in connection with the division of the Dunally ranch said "We strongly protest against any imported man seeking an allotment on the above estate." A protest meeting about this ranch was held in Calry on 12<sup>th</sup> April, Rev. Fr P. Butler taking the chair.



Towards the end of March the UIL branch at Ballisodare and Corhownagh decided "to hold a public demonstration in the near future to put down landlord tyranny and to save some tenants from impending eviction."

At the Summer Assizes 1914 for Sligo the judge was favourably impressed with the state of the county in all respects except one - the number of cattle drives which had been held. He gave as the reasons behind these drives, the forcing of the landlord to sell and the reduction of the price of land as much as possible. In late August Kilcreevin and Riverstown branches were concerned with the announced sale of the Doobeg ranch by Dr. Duke. The tenants came before the UIL branch and decided what they would offer. They also decided against outsiders being allowed to purchase.

A long running dispute began in Knockminagh, Ballymote in November 1914, when a farm occupied by a widow was sold to a medical doctor in Dublin. The widow claimed that she was about to purchase the land herself when the doctor got in before her. The P.P., Rev. Fr Quinn, offered the doctor the amount with interest he had paid for the farm but he refused. A lengthy correspondence took place in the columns of the Sligo Champion between the widow and the doctor about the legal rights and wrongs of the case. The doctor claimed that the widow's letters were written by "an eminent theologian" meaning presumably the Parish Priest. She (or Fr Quinn!) finished one of her letters thus: "My heart is broken, my boys are lost to me, my house is closed, my farm is in the hands of a stranger who County Sligo never knew and every person who tries to befriend me is misunderstood and vilified".

On November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1914 a meeting was held at Keash to agitate for the division of untenanted lands in the vicinity among the small landholders. The P.P. Fr P. J. O'Grady took the chair and local politicians attended and spoke. The demand was for the division of grazing lands among the smallholders for tillage. These lands were then populated by cattle and one of the speakers said referring to the recruiting campaigns then in full swing - "Let the Bullocks fight the Germans!" In early February 1915, another public meeting was held in Keash again under the chairmanship of the Parish Priest Rev. P. J. O'Grady to appeal to the C.D.B. to have some of the grazing farms in the area let to the small farmers so that they could plant sufficient crops. This was part of an agitation to force a "local gentleman to give up more grazing land for conacre" according to the RIC County Inspector. This agitation only lasted a short time and achieved very

little according to the Inspector. "There was never much heart in this agitation" he reported, "as the people concerned had sufficient lands of their own and were offered as much conacre as they wanted on another farm".

A farm at Carrickbanagher was being taken over by the C.D.B. to be sold. Great indignation was expressed when it was learned that some of "the gentlemen farmers" in the area intended to bid for the farm rather than allow the small farmers to augment their "uneconomic holdings".

At the Spring Assizes, 1915, Judge Moriarity congratulated the county on the quiet state of affairs. There was only one agrarian related case, he said. During 1915 there seems to have been very little agrarian trouble in the county and at the opening of the October Sligo Quarter Sessions the judge was presented with a symbolic pair of white gloves as a sign of the peacefulness of the county. "Cattle drives and other agrarian outrages are practically unknown," said the Sligo Independent. Farmers benefited by the war which meant an increase in prices for their livestock and produce and this may have had the effect of dampening their desire for extra acres.

At the end of 1914 Fr Michael O'Flanagan was appointed curate at Cliffony. He was a native of Castlerea, County Roscommon and had been a student at Summerhill College, Sligo. He spent seven years in the United States, fund raising for the Diocese of Elphin and ministering in various parts of the country. On his return in 1907 he was appointed to the teaching staff of Summerhill College and remained there until 1912. In the summer of 1915 Fr O'Flanagan asked the Congested Districts Board to let some of the bogland they had taken over to the people at Cliffony so that they could cut and save turf. The Board, for whatever reason, refused so the priest called a meeting of the people and entered the bog and cut turf without permission. The C.D.B. obtained a court injunction to prevent the people trespassing on the bog but this does not seem to have been very effective. "The incident has caused considerable excitement and local feeling is very strong against the Board," reported the County Inspector in his August report. The turf was stacked in front of the local hall and the local ladies made a banner on which they embroidered the words "Ár Mhóin Féin" and displayed it over the turf.



*Fr Michael O'Flanagan, curate at Cliffony, 1914-1915*

In October Fr O'Flanagan was transferred by his Bishop to the parish of Crossna, County Roscommom. His parishioners saw this as punishment for his involvement with the bog dispute and did not take kindly to the move. They locked up the church at Cliffony and refused to hand over the key to the new curate, Fr McHugh. This dispute continued until Christmas Day 1915. On that morning the key to Cliffony church was handed to the Parish Priest. The people meanwhile were presumably enjoying the warmth of the C.D.B. turf.

There was trouble elsewhere as well. At its meeting on Sunday November 14<sup>th</sup> 1915 Ballintogher UIL decided to investigate a rumour that two grazing ranches were about to be sold "over the heads" of small farmers in the vicinity. At the South Sligo Executive meeting on November 28<sup>th</sup> the branch attempted to have a resolution about the sale passed. However the chairman, John O'Dowd, M.P., said that such disputes should be settled by the local branch and should not be brought before the executive. A watered down version of the resolution was passed disapproving of the action of those who went behind the backs of others to buy grazing ranches.

Resolutions of this ilk continued to be passed during December and January. A meeting was to be arranged on whichever date it would be convenient for Mr O'Dowd to attend but it seems that O'Dowd had no wish to associate himself with this agitation and did not attend. The grazing farms - both small - were sold to two local men. One of these claimed to have been a herd on the farm for forty years and the other bought nine acres which adjoined his small farm. The other purchaser said that he had gone before the local UIL branch to ask permission for the purchase and it was granted. Subsequently however both purchasers and the seller were the targets of considerable agitation.

Between mid-November 1915 and mid-January 1916 police reported six instances of large marches led by bands congregating outside the houses of the three involved and jeering booing and shouts of "Down with the grabber". Those who purchased the farms claimed that they were refused foodstuffs in a shop in Ballintogher and it was reported that ten ton of hay was burned on one farm. During the last week of January 1916 ten men from the Ballintogher area were arrested and charged with intimidation and unlawful assembly in connection with the affair. Towards the end of February ten more were arrested on the same charges. They were all remanded to the Spring Assizes in Sligo and from there to the Summer Assizes. There the jury failed to agree and the men were returned for retrial to the Winter Assizes being let out on bail in the meantime. In spite of the arrests the Ballintogher agitation continued throughout 1916 and early 1917 when according to the police reports it abated.

There was also agrarian trouble on Coney Island, Rosses Point in late 1915. Among other incidents, hay was burned and a house damaged in an effort to prevent a person buying land there. In fact six of the seven indictable offences reported in County Sligo for December 1915 were attempts to burn hay belonging to a Coney Island resident. As a result of this agitation a police protection post was established on the Island to protect the person involved. This protection post was not discontinued until May 1918. It had to be re-established the following month after another attempt at malicious burning. It was finally discontinued in March 1919. Other agrarian agitation occurred during 1916 at Castlebaldwin where parades were held to try to force owners of grazing farms to sell to the C.D.B. Cattle driving here in May forced the police to increase police strength in the local barracks. This agitation ceased as a result of a settlement in June 1916.

## **2. VOLUNTEERS: JANUARY - JULY, 1914.**

At the beginning of 1914 the Sligo Champion expressed the hopes of the nationalists for the year in an editorial: "This year we hope to have placed on the Statute Book the measure which will give Ireland her legislative autonomy and it is extremely probable that before its close an Irish Parliament will assemble in Dublin". It went on to say that if their hopes were dashed, the action of the northern unionists and their English political supporters had shown what should be done. If that day comes "the men who would be our rulers have shown us how to meet it." The reference to the northern unionists referred to the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force which was dedicated to preventing the implementation of Home Rule at least for Ulster.

*(i) "These are the men who have the future in their hands".*

In November 1913 the Irish Volunteers were founded in Dublin as a result of the success of the Ulster Volunteers. The object of the Irish Volunteers was to ensure that Home Rule was granted. The Irish Volunteers were supported - indeed secretly led by - the I.R.B. Redmond's Irish Parliamentary Party did not give the new force its full support for some time. In an editorial in November 1913 the Sligo Champion said about the Volunteers, "This is a movement in which Sligo might naturally be expected to take a prominent and indeed a leading part. We hope the rumour that a start is being made will soon give way to details of definite action taken in the matter".

Whatever about these early rumours it was 1914 before the Volunteer movement spread to Sligo. At the Corporation meeting on January 6<sup>th</sup> the Mayor, Alderman John Jinks, mentioned that there was a feeling abroad in the town that a corps should be started. He was supported by Alderman John Lynch of the Transport Union who said that his union had sent letters suggesting that to the local papers but they had not been published. Colr. D. M. Hanley objected to the Corporation taking action and said that the initiative should come from the people. It was decided that the Town Clerk would call a public meeting to form a corps. By the third week in January the movement was gathering momentum and some preliminary meetings were being held in Sligo. Sligo Borough branch of the UIL appointed delegates to such meetings during the week ending January 24<sup>th</sup>. Other local organisations presumably, the AOH branches, were also represented at these meetings.

Finally a public meeting was called for the Assembly Room of the Town Hall at 3 o'clock on Sunday February 1<sup>st</sup> to form the local Volunteers. An advertisement was placed to this effect in the Sligo Independent. It was announced that the speakers would include the Inspector General of the Volunteers, Colonel Maurice Moore, Alderman P. Macken of Dublin, Pádhraic Ó Domhnalláin and Seán Ó Ruadhin.



*The Advertisement which appeared in the Sligo Independent of Saturday, January 31<sup>st</sup> 1914*

The guests from Dublin arrived on the Saturday night by train and were met at the station by a large delegation led by the Mayor and the AOH brass and reed band. They were paraded to their hotel and Col. Moore and Alderman Macken addressed the crowd from an upstairs window. Prior to the meeting on the Sunday bands again paraded the town.

The Mayor, Alderman Jinks presided at the meeting. Fr Brian Crehan, C.C. Cliffony who was very active in the Gaelic League, and another Sligo curate, Fr P. Butler, were both on the platform. D. A. Mulcahy, Principal of Sligo Technical School was on the platform as were the following Corporation members, Henry Monson, Henry Depew, E. J. Harte, P. Farrell and John Hughes. Neither Sligo MP was present.

Speakers addressed the meeting in Irish and in English and press reports stated that over 450 men were enrolled on the day. Mayor Jinks in his address said "This is a most important meeting and a very solemn one. I am proud to see at this meeting such a lot of the young respectable men of Sligo who I am sure are willing to join the corps". He said that he expected at

least 1,000 Sligo Volunteers to be enrolled. Pádhraic Ó Domhnalláin spoke in Irish and continued in English warming to the theme of "Volunteering" and broadening its vision: "Who shall volunteer to learn and study the literature of his country? Who shall volunteer to wear nothing but Irish manufacture henceforth? Who shall volunteer to help cut down the £13 million spent on drink annually? Who shall volunteer to support Irish games? Who shall volunteer to see justice done between the weak and the strong? These are the men who have the future in their hands, for good if they persevere and be brave, for ill if they quarrel or shrink".

Enrolment continued over the next two weeks and the first drill was held on Sunday February 15<sup>th</sup> at 3 o'clock at the Buttermarket under the command of H. Mullaney, late of the Irish Guards. Eight other retired military men acted as instructors. Drill continued during the week with the men being organized by Wards. For example for the first week in March 1914 the following were the arrangements according to the local paper:

Monday night - No.1 Company, West Ward.

Tuesday night - No.2 Company, West Ward.

Wednesday night - No.3 Company, North Ward.

Thursday night - No.4 Company, East Ward.

Friday night - No.5 Company, East Ward.

Each night the company met at 8 pm and there was battalion drill on the Sunday at the Buttermarket.

In his February report, the County Inspector, RIC, reported on the formation of the Sligo corps of Volunteers and estimated that 700 men had enrolled by the end of the month. "The formation of this body has caused great apprehension among the better classes of both sides of politics", he reported.

The first public parade of the Sligo Battalion of the National Volunteers took place on Sunday March 15<sup>th</sup>. Because the weather was so bad a proposed march to Finisklin was abandoned and instead they marched around the town. Just before 3 pm bugler Williams sounded the "fall in" and about 500 men took part under the command of Sgt. Major Mullaney. "It was a thrilling episode", reported the Champion, "the bugle reverberating through old Sligo calling on the men of the Volunteers to take their stand in the ranks of the Volunteers". On their arrival back at the Buttermarket they were addressed by Fr Crehan and the Mayor. The Sligo Battalion of the Volunteers started an equipment fund to supply proper equipment. Collectors were

appointed and according to the Sligo Champion these included the Mayor and the Union leader, John Lynch.

It was some time before the rural parts of County Sligo followed the example of the town. Bunduff in north County Sligo seems to have been the next place to organize Volunteers. It was reported that on March 8<sup>th</sup> 200 gathered for training there under drill master F. McGuire. On March 14<sup>th</sup> the Sligo Champion started what was to become a regular feature for some time, a column entitled "Volunteer Notes" which contained reports from the county's Volunteer corps. The first "Volunteer Notes" reported that "there is every indication of an army worthy of the great movement being found in Sligo in the near future". It also mentioned the Bunduff corps. This may have been the "Cliffony" corps mentioned by the County Inspector RIC in his March report. He said that it was about 150 strong. "The AOH seem to favour and encourage the Volunteers", said the County Inspector, "but the UIL stand aside". UIL clubs did not take the initiative in forming corps reflecting the Irish Party's lack of support for the Volunteers.

However the Mayor, John Jinks, though an Irish Party supporter, took a leading role in the formation of Volunteer corps in County Sligo. In this he was displaying the independence previously shown in his opposition when Tom Scanlan was imposed as a M.P. by the Party. Alderman Edward Foley usually accompanied Jinks. On March 28<sup>th</sup> they visited Maugherow for this purpose and on April 19<sup>th</sup> they helped form corps at Cliffony and Grange. At Cliffony Rev. P. J. Scott C.C. presided and at Grange Fr Conington P.P. likewise took the chair. The national organ of the movement, The Irish Volunteer, said in April: "These gentlemen (Jinks and Foley) are doing yeoman work for the organization and their pioneer work in the rural districts should never be forgotten by a single Volunteer".

According to the RIC County Inspector there were four corps of the Volunteers in Sligo at the end of April with a membership of 981. These were Sligo, Ballintrillick, Dromore West and Cliffony. "Volunteer Notes" for May 2 said with reference to the Sligo Battalion "The attendance at drill has remarkably improved. Monday night's muster was excellent and has given a decided fillup to the movement locally". From this it may be inferred that the Sligo Volunteers were not progressing very well and that little enthusiasm had been generated.

A large meeting in Keash on May 11<sup>th</sup> was addressed by Jinks and Foley from Sligo and was chaired by the P.P. Fr O'Grady, a strong supporter of the nationalist position. Reports say



that over 200 men were enrolled after the meeting. Bands and contingents were present at the Keash meeting from many centres including Ballymote. Speakers included the chairman of the Boyle Board of Guardians. "Shoulder Arms! Keash in Action" ran the headlines on the Sligo Champion's full page report of the proceeding of the meeting. Alec McCabe was one of those in the area interested from the very start.

Tubbercurry followed suit very soon. A meeting was held on the 6th May to organize a public demonstration which in turn was held on May 17<sup>th</sup> in the town. Among the attendance was Frank Carty from Clooncunny, a few miles outside Tubbercurry. Others at the inaugural meeting included chairman Luke Armstrong, a Nationalist member of Tubbercurry District Council, E. J. Cooke, local businessman and Nationalist member of Sligo County Council and Justice of the Peace, Patrick Dyar, a shop assistant in Cooke's and Pádhraic Ó Domhnalláin. The secretaries were E. A. Devine and T. H. Murrice, manager of the local creamery. Luke Armstrong said - "This is not a day for speechmaking... They had tried the effect of speechmaking long enough (A Voice - Now we'll try the rifle) It was now time they should consider some more effective policy".

The Tubbercurry corps asked for the use of the Workhouse grounds for drilling and when the request was relayed to the Local Government Board in Dublin it was turned down. At a meeting of the Tubbercurry Board of Guardians in early June the Guardians poured scorn on the Board's reply and it was marked "Read". "We will go into the grounds on next Tuesday evening and we will have guns with us too", said member J. Durkin. Mr E. Durkin said, "The Local Government Board won't have anything to say to this place in six months time".

***(ii) "We feel we are already basking in the sunshine of freedom."***

Meanwhile the progress towards Home Rule in the House of Commons by the Irish Parliamentary Party led by John Redmond went on and seemed to be nearing its end. At the beginning of April John O'Dowd was unable to come over from London to attend an executive meeting of the South Sligo UIL. He sent the following telegram - "Final stage crisis of Home Rule will be decided early next week. Cannot leave - O'Dowd". On May 25<sup>th</sup> the final reading of the Home Rule Bill was passed in the Commons and sent to the Lords. This was tantamount to its becoming law. "Ireland a Nation", the Sligo Champion proclaimed. The Government made

clear its intention to introduce another Bill at the same time which would effectively allow some counties of Ulster to remain outside the Home Rule state at least for some time.

Notwithstanding this there was rejoicing in Sligo at the news of the Bill's passage. On the night of May 25<sup>th</sup> a parade was held in the town led by the Brass and Reed band culminating at a bonfire in Pound Street on which an effigy of the Ulster leader Carson was burned. "We got Home Rule in spite of him", a banner read. Celebrations were also held at other centres throughout the county. In Ballymote the AOH band led a parade, in Tireragh there were hill top bonfires and in Coolaney "wild rejoicing" was reported. Both Sligo MPs returned to their constituencies the following week. On Tuesday night, 2nd June, Tom Scanlan was given a great reception in Sligo town. The platform was thronged as his train arrived, he was carried shoulder high to his carriage, the horses were taken from the vehicle and it was drawn by Volunteers as far as the Town Hall where a meeting was held. John O'Dowd was given a similarly enthusiastic reception at Bunninadden.

At a meeting of the North Sligo Executive the following week Scanlan was congratulated. Fr Butler C.C. seconded the resolution "We feel we are already basking in the sunshine of freedom. We feel the contentment around us." Scanlan said that the third reading of the bill meant that it was bound to become the law of the land. "It is the victory of the Fenians, it is the victory of the Land League, it is the victory and the triumph of the people over persecution and oppression." In his speech Scanlan made a strong attack on the Ulster Volunteers - "Carson's Armed Robbers" the Sligo Independent headlined its report. "They are not Irish Volunteers, they are not Carson's Volunteers, they are the Volunteers of the Tory party of England . . . They were never meant to fight, they were meant to pose before the cinematograph", the MP stated.

A feature of the development of the Volunteers at this time in Sligo was the failure of the branches of the UIL or AOH to be in the forefront of the formation of corps. The weekly reports in the Sligo Champion from these branches contain no mention of Volunteers until the end of May when the Ballisodare and Corhownagh branch of the UIL is reported as having decided to start a Volunteer corps.

According to the County Inspector of the RIC there were eight branches of the Volunteers in County Sligo at the end of May with a membership of 1,600. Presumably these

were Keash, Tubbercurry, Sligo, Dromore West, Cliffony, Ballintrillick, Grange and Maugherow. "In the town the force is recruited from shopkeepers and their assistants, artisans and labourers and in the country farmers and their sons and labourers", said the County Inspector. With one exception all the drill instructors of the corps had seen service in the army. The exception was a pensioner from the RIC.

The Volunteers increased in number throughout the country and county and the success of the movement seems to have caught the political leaders by surprise. Eventually Redmond decided to bring the Volunteers under the control of the Parliamentary Party. He asked to be allowed to nominate twenty five members of the governing committee of the Volunteers. The republican committee members were very much opposed to this but in the end they agreed to avoid a split. When Redmond's nominees were announced at the end of June, the Mayor of Sligo, John Jinks, was among their number.

An editorial in the Sligo Independent of June 20<sup>th</sup> commented on Redmond's takeover. "There is now no doubt as to the real aim of those who have secured control of the National Volunteers. For some time quite a number of enthusiastic Irishmen were engaged in organizing that body on non-party and non-sectional lines and we believe they were honest enough in their intentions but during the past week they have made a miserable surrender of their forces to the party leaders and the last pretence of the National Volunteers to be a non-party organization has gone by the board".

This "takeover" of the Volunteers by Redmond and the Irish Party seems to have given a new impetus to the formation of Volunteers corps in Sligo. UIL branches now seem to have felt free to organize Volunteer corps. In the July 4<sup>th</sup> issue of the Champion three UIL branches are reported as deciding to form corps, Skreen and Dromard, Riverstown and Ballymote. In early July corps were formed in Ballisodare, Collooney and Ballygawley, Templeboy, Conway's Cross, Geevagh, Highwood, Riverstown, Ballintogher, Mullinabreena and Bunninadden. The police reports state that at the end of June there were 15 branches of the Volunteers with 2,900 members while at the end of July this had increased to 27 corps and over 3,000 men. "The other political organisations have joined in furthering the Volunteer movement in every way", said the County Inspector.

The increase in numbers and corps continued. The end of August saw 38 branches with a membership of 4,536 and the movement reached its peak at the end of September with 44 branches and an estimated (by the police) membership of 4,951. John O'Dowd MP now seems to have felt free to join the Volunteer bandwagon. He was a versifier of some repute having had a book of verses "Lays of South Sligo" published in 1888. His poetic effort entitled "Ireland's Volunteers" was published in the Sligo Champion of July 11<sup>th</sup> and later included in a volume of Volunteer Verse published by James Duffy & Co.:

"Now God be praised, Our flag upraised  
Floats free o'er tower and steeple  
No more we're slaves, The banner waves  
Above a conquering people.  
The flag long crushed in mire and dust  
Through liberty's light appears,  
'Twill guarded be right gallantly  
By old Ireland's Volunteers."

On July 17<sup>th</sup>, O'Dowd wrote to Volunteer headquarters saying that they had just formed a corps of the Volunteers in his native Bunninadden. On 12<sup>th</sup> July Volunteer corps were formed in Geevagh, Highwood and Riverstown. Attending at each place was a group from Sligo town including the Mayor, Alderman Foley, Henry Monson and M. J. O'Mullane. Local clergy were prominent in each place, Fr O'Dowd took the chair in Geevagh and said that he had joined the Volunteers in Boyle some time previously. At Highwood Fr J. McGowan C.C. presided and at Riverstown there was an apology from Canon John Maher P.P. who was unable to attend. In an editorial in its July 25<sup>th</sup> issue the Sligo Champion said "Mr. Redmond and the Irish Party may be trusted to uphold the dignity of Ireland at Westminster. Here in Ireland our task is to look to our defences, to develop our organization and to complete the equipping of the Volunteer force".

Around this time there was speculation about arms being landed on the remote north western coast and for some time in May a British gunboat patrolled Sligo Bay. On Sunday May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1914 a coal smack on its way to Mullaghmore with coal for Conlon's of Bundoran was stopped and searched by the gunboat. Nothing was found. Early in June a British vessel described as a "torpedo destroyer" was to be seen in Sligo Bay. In July rumours and activities in connection with gun running increased. Local papers made coy references to such events. One report said that an American yacht had been stopped and boarded by British navy off the Teelin

area of Donegal. The Sligo Champion said that nothing in the way of arms had been found on her but the Sligo Independent said that arms and ammunition destined for the Volunteers were seized.

According to the Champion this yacht was only a decoy, arms having been landed in some quantity from an American boat on the Sligo coast on or around the night of July 15<sup>th</sup>. The Sligo Champion, the Sligo Nationalist and the Sligo Independent reported these rumours and give credence to them. The Champion stated, "The presence of Capt. White (Volunteer organiser in Derry and Tyrone) in Sligo on Wednesday last lends a sort of colour to the story". It mentions the Mayor's name in connection with the story and says that he had got 300 rifles for the local Volunteers. The Independent also mentioned the presence of Capt. White in Sligo and said that the Mayor would make no comment when interviewed by the press. The report in the Champion from the Maugherow Volunteers contains the following:

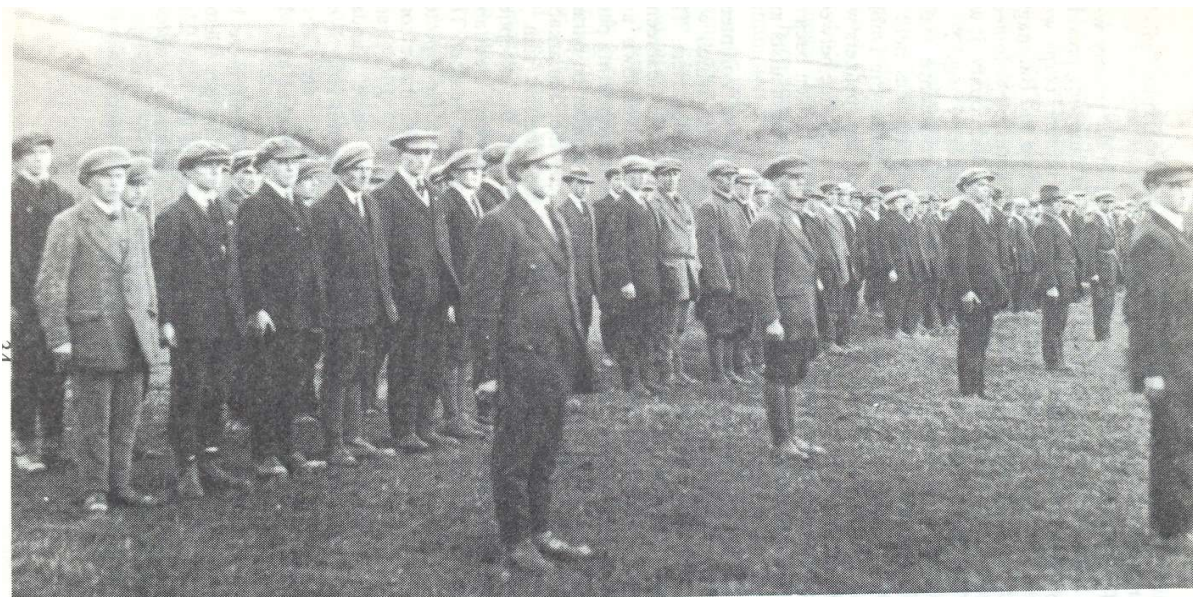
“The Mayor was in Lissadell  
Says the Sean Van Vocht,  
He did his work right well  
Says the Sean Van Vocht,  
Three hundred rifles or more  
He carried from the shore ,  
With ammunition too, galore,  
Says the Sean Van Vocht”.

It went on: "The rifles are safe. They were removed from Ardgoran Wood, Lissadell on last Sunday night by a strong escort of Volunteers, carefully oiled and placed under a strong lock and key awaiting further orders. Long live the Mayor of Sligo". There is no other evidence that arms were landed on the Sligo coast at this time. Capt J. White makes no mention of it in his autobiography "Misfit" nor do the police reports of those months.

The work of establishing Volunteer corps in the county went on. On June 3<sup>rd</sup> a corps was formed at Gurteen at a meeting presided over by the P.P. Canon James O'Connor. Later in June corps were formed at Drumcliff, Carrignagat, Glencar, Cloonloo and Ballinagar.

In Sligo town in late June or early July a corps of Volunteers was formed open to all total abstainers in the town and county. It was called The Sligo Temperance Corps and its secretary was T. D. Fowley. Drill took place twice a week in the Temperance Hall.

During the last week in July a protest meeting was held in O'Connell Street, Sligo to condemn the action of the military in Dublin in connection with the Howth gun-running. Among the speakers was Henry Monson who is reported as having said "The alliance between John Redmond and the Liberal government must be broken because they in Ireland would not tolerate one law for the Nationalists and one law for the Ulster Volunteers".



*Irish Volunteers at Keash, Garland Sunday 1914*

On Garland Sunday, July 26<sup>th</sup>, a large assembly of Volunteers was held in connection with the annual Feis at Keash which was inspected by Major J. Crean of the Volunteers Headquarters. The Volunteer companies from Sligo there were: Mullinabreena, Moylough, Gurteen, Cloonloo, Culfadda, Keash, Riverstown and Geevagh as well as two companies each from the neighbouring parts of Counties Leitrim, Mayo and Roscommon. The total number on parade was about 1,600 and the Major was impressed by the "remarkable enthusiasm" of those taking part in spite of the incessant rain. "I carefully inspected the companies on parade and with the exception of one or two quite recently formed the men showed creditable efficiency not only in company drill but also in general bearing. "The physique of the men was very good," his report states. He reported that a common problem was difficulty in getting suitable instructors. Major Crean complimented the P.P of Keash Rev. Fr P. J. O'Grady for his "wonderful organizing

power". On the same Sunday Volunteers were to the fore in celebrations at Tobernault Holy Well at Sligo. Among those who addressed the gathering were Canon Doorly, Administrator, Sligo, Mayor Jinks, Lord Ashbourne and Mr. Fitzgibbon MP.

No Volunteer company had been formed in Ballymote by Garland Sunday a fact which surprised Major Crean. In fact a letter from a John Clarke from Ballymote was published in the May 23<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Champion bemoaning the "lack of enthusiasm shown in Ballymote and its immediate neighbourhood in this great movement (The Volunteers)". The Keash assembly seems to have galvanised Ballymote into action and a meeting was held in the Loftus Hall on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> July. Rev Fr T. M. Gallagher C.C. was moved to the chair and the press report said that 200 men handed in their names. The secretary of the corps was prominent Nationalist politician and county councillor, W. J. Lipsett.

Elsewhere in the County the movement continued to flourish. The Sligo town battalion was now divided into three companies, one each for the North, East and West wards. In the Volunteer Notes in the Champion of July 25<sup>th</sup> there was a hint that the Volunteers in the town of Sligo were not getting on well. "It would be a very regrettable thing if Sligo town, the capital of the county, was not in a position to show an example not only in the country districts but to every county in Ireland".

On July 19<sup>th</sup> the Mayor and Alderman Foley were on the trail again this time establishing Volunteer Companies at Enniscrone and Dromore West. There were about 2,000 people present at Enniscrone where the meeting was held "within sight of a British destroyer at anchor in the bay". Alderman Foley in the course of a speech said "There is more in the music of a rifle than in a thousand speeches". On their way back to Sligo the group stopped at Dromore West where a meeting was held presided over by Fr Clarke. Skreen, Dromard and Ballinacarrow companies were formed on August 2<sup>nd</sup>.

The memoirs of Constable Jeremiah Mee, RIC, who was stationed in Geevagh at this time make interesting reading concerning the relationship between the police and the Volunteers. "Lest we might overlook accompanying them on their parades they usually marched past the barracks, when the sergeant would detail two men on bicycles to keep them under observation. These manoeuvres were generally conducted in a good spirit after which the Volunteers and their police escort would retire to the local pub to compare notes". He mentions one occasion when



himself and Constable Sweeney in company with the local Volunteer leaders retired to a pub in Ballyfarnon. They played cards there until 7.30 am the following morning!



*Town Hall, Sligo*



### **3. WAR, VOLUNTEERS AND HOME RULE. AUGUST 1914 – FEBRUARY 1915.**

Meanwhile events in Europe were rapidly moving towards war, a war which would change everything and affect Ireland in many ways. On August 4<sup>th</sup> 1914, Britain entered the war and of course Ireland, being part of the United Kingdom was also at war. In the Sligo Champion of August 8<sup>th</sup> the editorial commented on the likely impact of the war on Ireland, "From the Irish point of view the war is likely to result ultimately in much good. England, let us hope, has learned the lesson that the situation teaches that if Ireland is to be her friend in time of stress she must treat Ireland with confidence and justice in times of peace".

*(i) "I join National Volunteers today and will urge every Unionist to do the same."*

The Sligo Independent editorial for August 8<sup>th</sup>, "Europe at War" looked for some good news: "It is something to know that Ireland is the one bright spot in such a time of gloom and suspense . . . Mr. Redmond's magnificent offer in the House of Commons on Monday following upon Sir Edward Carson's patriotic offer on the previous Friday has shown to Germany and the world that while Irishmen may have their differences and acute differences, they are bound together inseparable on one point and that is a passionate love for their native land and today they are joined together in one common brotherhood prepared if needs be to sacrifice their lives in defence of their country."

The offer referred to was that made by John Redmond on the day before war was declared when he told the House of Commons that the Irish Volunteers would co-operate with the Unionists in guarding Ireland's shores during the war. The understanding was that Ireland would show that in time of trouble it would play its part in defence of the Empire and in return it would be granted Home Rule. Redmond's speech caused a wave of interest and a warm response among many unionists in Ireland and many showed a new found interest in the National Volunteers.

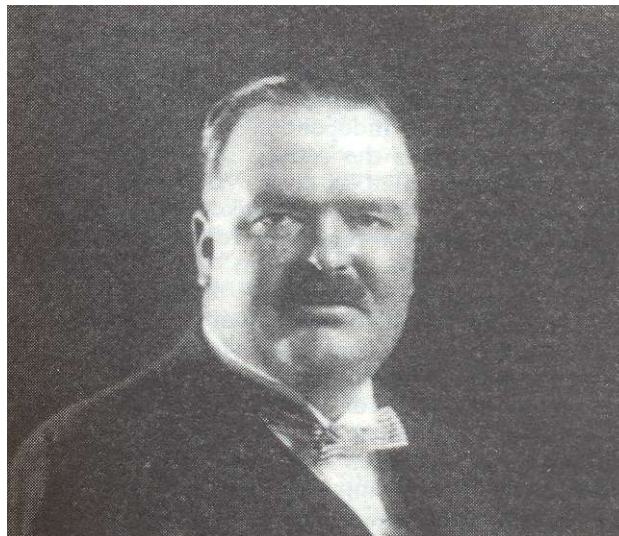
During that first week of August a number of prominent citizens, Nationalists and Unionists, met in the Town Hall and formed a committee for the relief of distress caused by the war. It was mainly concerned with dependants of those serving at the front. The meeting ended with the singing of "A Nation once Again" followed by "God Save the King."

At the Sligo Corporation meeting during the first week of August Mayor Jinks proposed a resolution congratulating Redmond on his "magnanimous action" in offering the services of the Volunteers to defend Ireland. This resolution was seconded by Alderman Foley and was passed unanimously. The same issue of the Sligo Champion which reported this also reprinted a letter to the Irish Times from local prominent Unionist, Major Bryan Cooper of Markree Castle:

Sir,

Our response to Mr Redmond's magnificent speech must be an immediate one. I am this day joining the National Volunteers and I urge every Unionist who is physically fit to do the same and to show the world that Irishmen can forget their quarrels and stand united against a common danger.

Bryan Cooper



*Major Bryan Cooper*

Hearing of Redmond's speech Cooper had immediately telegraphed him: "Your speech has united Ireland. I join National Volunteers today and will urge every Unionist to do the same."

Bryan Cooper, a member of an old landed County Sligo family, had been educated at Eton and had become MP for Dublin County South. He was a prominent Unionist and a well known member of the Irish Unionist Association which campaigned against Home Rule. On the August 4<sup>th</sup> Cooper attended the drill of the Collooney company, took charge of a section and offered the use of part of the demesne for drilling purposes.

According to the Sligo Independent of August 15<sup>th</sup> steps were being taken in Sligo towards the setting up of a "Corps of Sligo Unionists who will be enrolled as Irish Volunteers". Drilling had already begun and Col. Wynne was to take charge. At the end of August the RIC County Inspector reported that a "Unionist Volunteer corps" had been formed in Sligo with about 70 members. The next mention of the "Sligo Loyal Volunteers" is in early 1915. A meeting was held in February in Calry schoolhouse and it was decided to hold drill practice twice a week. This practice seems to have been held regularly at the Grammar School grounds. Officers were elected at the end of March. "The object of the corps is not to foster political strife but to fit itself to help our friends in the continent should some unforeseen emergency arise and therefore it should meet with the hearty approval of all sections in Sligo", a report in the Independent said. A "local gentleman" offered to supply the corps with rifles and ammunition according to a press report in March. As the appeals for recruits to join the army continued the Loyal Volunteers found many of their members enlisting. In May 1915 it was stated that half their members had joined the colours.

On August 9<sup>th</sup> 1914 Major R. W. Hillas of Donnecoy, Templeboy, wrote to the head of the Irish Volunteers, Col. Maurice Moore, offering his services. His offer was immediately accepted and he was appointed County Sligo Inspection Officer. The Champion of August 15<sup>th</sup> published a "Call to Arms to the Manhood of Sligo" by the Major: "A state of war exists which is a menace to the safety of the whole county. It is the bounden duty of every man fit to bear arms to enrol himself in the Irish Volunteer force to protect his home and family from the foreign invader. County Sligo as a coastline county is liable at any time to be raided. Enrol in your thousands to protect the liberties of your country and empire." Writing to Maurice Moore on August 12<sup>th</sup> he stressed his priorities: "I will devote major attention at first to the coast. Inland Baronies will form corps for supporting purposes but coastline regiments must be formed first."

This involvement of unionists in an organisation which had been formed to oppose the Unionist position did not meet with anything like universal approval. To many, the "foreign invader" was Britain not Germany and there was no great desire to assist the war effort in any way. This position was bluntly expressed by a member of the Tubbercurry company of Volunteers, Seán T Ó Cinnéide (Kennedy), Chaffpool, to Headquarters on August 18<sup>th</sup>. He noted that there had been no consultation with Sligo Volunteer officers before appointing Hillas and went on, "I or any of the corps to which I belong shall refuse to act under him. We want one

who is in sympathy with our ideals. If you do not have him removed we shall request you to attach us to some other county. We want no British Unionist officers and we won't have them. We are for Ireland and for Ireland alone." This John Kennedy was very active in the Volunteers in the Tubbercurry area. Later he obtained employment in the Arigna, County Roscommon area and moved there.

Maurice Moore's reply was well reasoned - there was no Sligo County Board to consult, the Mayor of Sligo had been consulted and his reply was awaited. County Sligo needed to be organised and this could only be done by trained officers and there were none available of Nationalist views. The choice was between Unionists or none. "When our own officers are trained we can do as we like," he said. On August 19<sup>th</sup> the Mayor of Sligo wrote to Maurice Moore expressing the opinion that the appointment of Hillas would be generally welcomed in the town and county of Sligo.

A Sligo Champion editorial of August 22<sup>nd</sup> sounded a note of caution, "This war which has involved the powers of Europe in a death struggle is not of Ireland's making . . . Ireland is a subject state in an empire in which so far she has not been granted a definite place . . . It would be a great mistake for Irishmen to rely too much on the large amount of soft talk that has been filling the columns of newspapers in lieu of news for the past couple of weeks". The editorial was especially wary of the involvement of Unionists in the Volunteer movement: "Converts have been taken rather too seriously", it said and went on, "Unionist warriors joining the ranks must be given to recognise that despite their ability to pay large subscriptions they are not to be allowed to dominate the movement . . . We cannot allow our new found friends to collar the organisation and shape it to their own ends . . . Our interest should be in Ireland first, last and all the time".

Others took a more pragmatic view. Alec McCabe, then a member of the extreme IRB wrote to Major Hillas welcoming his appointment. "We are delighted to have some responsible person placed at head of affairs in the County", he said.

The Volunteers in Sligo had not been organised on a county wide basis, a fact which was deplored by McCabe in a letter to the Sligo Champion on August 8<sup>th</sup>. He said that he had written to the Mayor of Sligo, John Jinks, to ask him to hold a delegate conference in Sligo on the following Saturday. If the Sligo Volunteers had been organised properly, he said, "We would

not be so backward as regards arms and military equipment". A meeting had been held in the Loftus Hall, Ballymote on August 17<sup>th</sup> to attempt to form some type of a Battalion grouping for the Ballymote area. Alec McCabe would seem to have been the moving spirit behind this. The meeting decided to delay any decision pending action by Hillas.

Very soon the opposition to Hillas diluted his enthusiasm. He wrote to Maurice Moore asking for an urgent meeting which took place in Ballina on Sunday August 23<sup>rd</sup>. Hillas was persuaded to carry on and he wrote to fifteen Volunteers corps in the county for details of their officers and arms. Up to September 2<sup>nd</sup> he had received only five replies and he interpreted this as opposition to him personally. He told the Mayor of Sligo on the 1<sup>st</sup> that he intended to resign and his resignation letter to Maurice Moore is dated September 2<sup>nd</sup>. "It is too evident that people of my class are not required by certain supporters of the movement in the Irish Volunteers and these people have the power to nullify any effort that runs counter to their own ideas and utterly ignore orders from the governing body if it does not suit them to obey them. Under these circumstances the Irish Volunteers must always remain an undisciplined disorganised mob and I for one could not remain as a responsible officer of this force".

Maurice Moore's reply was barbed: "It seems not improbable that the delay in answering your circular is due to carelessness . . considering the people you are dealing with and their unperturbedly casual methods. However it seems to me that as a certain amount of patience and persistence is necessary to carry out any undertaking those who are not prepared to exercise these qualities are quite right to resign".

There are some letters extant containing replies to Hillas' request for information about the various Volunteer Corps and these are interesting because they are by no means from officers who could in any way be described as pro-British or pro-war. Alec McCabe replied on August 23<sup>rd</sup> giving details of the Keash branch, Owen Tansey gave information on the Gurteen Volunteers and Seamus Devins did likewise for Grange. All of these later figured prominently as Sinn Féiners and Republicans. It seems that they adopted the attitude that it was important to have the Volunteers properly organised and were not too concerned about the political views of the organiser.

The formation of new branches of the Volunteers went on in August and September. On August 9<sup>th</sup> corps were formed at Calry, Ballyrush and Cloonacool. At Calry prominent

Unionists attended and spoke. R. B. Anderson, secretary at Calry, proposed a motion of gratitude to Redmond on his offer in the House of Commons. Robert Basil Anderson (Bertie) from Colga, Calry, was a member of a well-known Sligo family. He was educated at Sligo Model School and at Preston Grammar School and then spent some time in Spain and in travelling on the continent. When the war broke out he returned to Sligo and became involved in the Volunteers.

Branches at Kilmacteige and Teeling (near Collooney) were also formed early in August, at Kilcreevin later in the month and at Easkey early in September.

*(ii) "Come forward . . . to uphold the interests of our Empire".  
"To Hell with the Empire".*

The shadow of the great war was stretching further and further by the month. Many corps of Volunteers reported that their drill instructors had enlisted while others reported a falling off in numbers because of the fear that they would be enlisted. One of the motivating factors in keeping farmers out of the Volunteers was, it was said, "the dread of conscription and the idea that a knowledge of drill increases the individuals danger of being pressed into the colours". This fear prompted Alec McCabe to write to the Sligo Champion in early September to say that people would be better off in the Volunteers as if they were needed in the war they would be taken anyway. He cited the "Militia Ballot Act" which he said the Government was about to use to boost the number of recruits.

Mr C. Lyons, a local unionist solicitor, told J. M. Wilson who visited Sligo in early 1916 as part of a nationwide tour to assess the mood of the country: "Once they (National Volunteers) thought they had to fight, whether Carson's men or the Germans, they shuffled out", while Mr. Nelson, jeweller, told Wilson, "The whole thing collapsed July '14".

The local press of September 19<sup>th</sup> carried "An Appeal to the Manhood of Sligo" by C. K. O Hara, H.M.L. for County Sligo. "Come forward in response to Lord Kitchener's call for men to uphold the interests of our Empire and to assist in the war which is being fought in the interests of civilisation . . . Many who are living in apparent safety in this country do not grasp the seriousness of the situation or realise that if the allied armies met with disaster the enemy might land in Ireland within a few hours", the statement said.

An "enthusiastic" meeting was held in the Market House, Collooney in early September "to explain why Britain was at war and to encourage recruiting". The meeting was addressed by Bryan Cooper, who took the chair, local businessman Alec Sims, Michael Gallagher and Rev. Fr Doyle. In the course of his speech Fr Doyle said that he believed that the war was a just war and asked what would the consequences be for Ireland if Germany won. "The Germans have cherished the ambition for the past thirty years of planting their surplus population on the fair fields of Ireland and of relegating the ancient Celts once more in the bogs and the mountains. The old age pension would disappear and land reform would cease because it would have no meaning. "The weekly "Sinn Féin", edited by Arthur Griffith, had some sarcastic comments to make on this meeting ridiculing "some of the local Celtic slaves" who took part in it.

The local press carried reports on the progress of the war from the very beginning and there were local echoes. A German was arrested at Rosses Point having disembarked from a ship from the River Plate, South America in August 1914. A large merchant steamer was sunk off Tory Island towards the end of October. Each week's issue also included a mention of locals who had joined the colours and gone off to war. In early November the departure of Patrick Jinks, eldest son of the Mayor of Sligo was noted.

The RIC County Inspector, reporting at the end of August, said "People in general are taking an active interest in the war, their sympathies being entirely with the British forces" and at the end of the following month he reported an increase in the people's interest and sympathy. An editorial in the Sligo Champion on August 29<sup>th</sup> warned that Home Rule must be on the statute books before any consideration could be given to the Volunteers helping the war effort. "If not, English legislators will find that the invitation to Irishmen to go to be shot to pieces for King and Country will not be responded to with any great enthusiasm."

On September 18<sup>th</sup> Home Rule was indeed given the Royal assent and was placed on the Statute Book but was immediately suspended for the duration of the war. The question of the exclusion of Ulster remained unresolved. Redmond's supporters claimed that this was the granting of their demand. "Home Rule at last!" the Champion editorial proclaimed and went on, "Nationalists are ready to forget all quarrels to welcome their old time enemies as friends. Ireland is quite spacious enough for two several parties, it is not large enough for two systems of government".

On Saturday September 19<sup>th</sup> Tom Scanlan MP visited Sligo town to bask in the glory of Home Rule achieved. He arrived on a late train and was driven to the Imperial Hotel in an open carriage preceded by the Hibernian brass and reed band and a torch light procession. He spoke from the upper window of the Hotel. "I was present yesterday when the King gave his assent to the Home Rule Bill" he said to loud cheering, "Ireland is now and shall be for all times a nation once again." However a note of discord became apparent when Scanlan mentioned Ireland's duties to the empire especially with regard to the war. "The Statute which was yesterday enacted makes Ireland free but this same statute binds Ireland indissolubly to the British Empire". According to the Sligo Independent a voice shouted "You're a d--- liar Scanlan" and there was a certain amount of disorder. More disorder followed when he referred to Ireland taking her rightful place in the British Empire "To Hell with the Empire" a voice shouted. The meeting concluded with the singing of "A Nation once Again" and again, according to the Independent, "while this was in progress several members of the crowd in the street below engaged in a spirited bout of fisticuffs and the proceedings terminated abruptly".

The Sligo Champion did not report the disturbances at this meeting but it did report the proceedings of a meeting of the Trades and Labour Council held on September 22<sup>nd</sup> at which it was discussed. The president, John Lynch, was absent and it was his part in the opposition to Scanlan that was the matter at issue. Some members protested at "the attitude adopted by the chairman and other members of the Council" at the Scanlan meeting. A representative of the Tailors Society threatened to leave the Council if such conduct was not reprimanded. "This was not a pro-Boer age," he said. "The pro-German cranks would not be allowed to have it their own way this time". Seamus McGowan said that he was one of those who took part in the protest. He was not going to allow an emissary of the British Government to come over and try to enlist the manhood of Sligo into the army. Tension became high before finally a resolution condemning the behaviour of the protesters was put and carried. At the next meeting of the Council with Lynch in attendance the matter was again discussed. Lynch said that the discussion should never have been allowed as what a man did outside was his own affair. After a long debate the motion passed at the previous meeting was expunged and a motion of confidence in Lynch passed unanimously.



***(iii)'I never joined Redmond's Volunteers, I joined MacNeill's Volunteers.'***

On the day after Scanlan was heckled in Sligo his leader John Redmond made a speech at Woodenbridge in which he urged the Volunteers to join the British army "in defence of right, freedom and religion" and to be ready to serve wherever they were needed. This signalled the end of the agreement patched up between him and the original leaders of the Volunteers. The original committee headed by Eoin MacNeill at once repudiated this statement and the Volunteer movement split. Those who sided with Redmond, the vast majority, were called the "National Volunteers" while the MacNeill section retained the name "Irish Volunteers". To the leader writer in the Sligo Champion the matter was simple - "Mr Redmond and the Irish Party are the nearest thing to a government that we possess and simple commonsense demands that they should have the controlling voice in the direction of the Volunteer force".

In County Sligo the vast number of the Volunteer corps sided with Redmond under the influence of the UIL and the AOH. However it is noteworthy that all those most active took the MacNeill side and few of the National Volunteer corps survived for very long.

On September 30<sup>th</sup> a meeting was held in Sligo Town Hall to form a County Board for the Volunteers. According to the Champion's report the meeting was "true to a man to Mr. Redmond and the Party". The Mayor, John Jinks presided and the County's two MPs, Mr O'Dowd and Mr Scanlan attended. According to the report there were delegates there from the following corps:- Conway's Cross, Culfadda, Drumcliff, Dromore West, Teeling, Knockarea, Ballyrush, Ballygawley, Sligo National Foresters, Skreen & Dromard, Rosses Point, Bunduff, Cliffony, Gurteen, Tubbercurry, Calry, Ballymote, Easkey, Ballisodare, Maugherow, Ballinacarrow, Templeboy, Drumcliff, Riverstown, Coolaney. Apologies for inability to attend were received from P. Murphy, O.P. and M. Doyle P.P. Collooney, both of whom expressed their support for Redmond. "A few croakers who never did a decent day's work for God or country need not be taken into calculation", said Fr Doyle's letter and the Dominican's apology included the following, "There are some, happily few, factionists in Sligo. They should be summarily dealt with. They are the enemies of Ireland". A resolution was passed severing connection with the MacNeill's Irish Volunteers.

This meeting appears to have failed in its object to form a working County Board and was probably merely a cosmetic exercise designed to show that Redmond had the support of the majority of Sligo's Volunteers.

In any case Jinks wrote to Volunteers Headquarters on November 21<sup>st</sup> saying that a County Board had not yet been formed. "I am anxious to form one", Jinks added and Headquarters sent on a leaflet saying there was no one available to go to Sligo to help. On the same day, September 30<sup>th</sup>, a conference of the clergy of Achonry diocese under Bishop Morrisroe expressed their confidence in Redmond and expressed their gratitude to him and the Irish Parliamentary Party on getting Home Rule on the statute books. The resolution was proposed by Canon Gunning P.P. Tubbercurry and seconded by Canon Mulligan P.P., Curry. On October 10<sup>th</sup> the Sligo County Board of the AOH expressed its confidence in Redmond. A meeting in Ballisodare of the Ballisodare, Ballygawley and Collooney Volunteers presided over by Rev. Fr M. Doyle P.P. congratulated Redmond and condemned the minority.

The Sligo Champion reports from the Volunteer corps for late September and early October contain many expressions of support in Redmond. The only Volunteer corps to publicly support MacNeill was the Tubbercurry corps. At a meeting on October 8<sup>th</sup> they passed the following resolution: "That we reaffirm our allegiance to the principles for which we were enrolled viz to defend the rights and liberties common to all Irishmen. As the Provisional Committee of which Mr. John MacNeill is the chairman is the only national committee now adhering to the above principles we hereby affirm our allegiance to that committee". The secretaries of the corps were Thomas Murrice and Patrick Dyar.

A letter from Charles McCoy, who lived at Ballyara near Tubbercurry, to Volunteer headquarters in early November claimed that the October 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of Tubbercurry Volunteers was not representative. General apathy had reduced active membership from 300 to 17 and the 17 were all of the Sinn Féin camp, he claimed. "None of the pioneers of the plot are Tubbercurry men", McCoy said, "but strangers employed there". According to McCoy, the Tubbercurry Sinn Féiners were branding Redmond as "the mercenary recruiting agent of the British Government". A police report says that the October 8<sup>th</sup> Tubbercurry meeting was a "small special meeting" attended by thirteen anti-Redmondites.

Jim Hever recalled what happened in Kilcreevin when the split came. "We were drilling in the field and when we were on parade somebody spoke about how Redmond wanted us all to go and fight for gallant Belgium and join the British army. Capt. Bernard Brady stepped forward and said 'I never joined Redmond's Volunteers, I joined MacNeill's Volunteers and anyone that wants to fight for gallant Ireland step out here with me.' Four others including Jim Hever himself joined Brady and they left the 60 others and marched up the road on their own. The RIC who had been in attendance left the 56 others and followed the five MacNeillites! According to the Volunteer notes in the Sligo Champion Bernard Brady resigned as captain and secretary on Friday October 15<sup>th</sup> and handed over the books etc in a satisfactory manner.

At the end of October 1914 the County Inspector estimated that there were over 4,000 nominal members of the Volunteers and that 280 of these were Sinn Féiners. He mentioned that three branches, Keash, Tubbercurry and Grange were against Redmond and in favour of MacNeill. At the end of September 1914 the County Inspector was reporting that the Sinn Féiners "who are few in number" and the Transport Union in Sligo were against enlistment "but their influence is small". He also reported that in Collooney, John McMorrow distributed some anti-recruiting handbills among the local Volunteers. "Recruiting generally in this County is very slack", the Inspector said.

A Transport Union meeting was held in the Assembly Room, Town Hall, Sligo, on October 1<sup>st</sup> 1914 which was chaired by John Lynch. The main speaker was P. T. Daly of the Union Headquarters, Dublin and a member of the IRB. His speech was strongly anti-recruiting according to a police report. On the night of October 29<sup>th</sup> a large number of anti-recruiting posters were put up in public places all over Sligo. The posters attacked Redmond's policy and said that the Volunteers were for service in Ireland for Ireland and that individual Volunteers must be true to their pledge and not desert Ireland's army for England's army". Sligo police were soon engaged in tearing down these posters and the Sligo Independent noted in its issue of November 7<sup>th</sup> that "a very marked enlisting spirit" was prevalent in Sligo in spite of the posters. From the Friday the posters were put up to the following Wednesday no fewer than 50 Volunteers left Sligo for the army. The Sligo Nationalist of November 28<sup>th</sup> claimed that over 700 from Sligo and vicinity "are now in the firing line or ready to take their places before the German hosts."

The Sligo Champion at this time carried at least a full page of war news generally from the Western front each week. The deaths of Sligo-born members of the allied armies was also given prominence in the local papers especially the Sligo Independent. Under the heading "The Roll of Honour" many reports included photographs of the dead. Many Sligomen who had enlisted were members of the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Connaught Rangers and they were involved in the battles in northern France in late 1914. In late September Privates Michael McGuin, a native of Ballymote, Patrick May, Tubbercurry, John Meehan, Sligo and Lance Corporal Michael Gilmartin, Ballymote were killed at the battle of the Aisne. Also killed at that battle was 25 year old Lieut. Geoffrey Fenton, the youngest son of Mr. and Mrs. W. R. Fenton of Sligo. At the first battle of Ypres during October-November 1914 the Connaught Rangers were again prominent and there were many Sligo casualties. Among these were Patrick O'Connor, Sligo, Alfred Quigley, Ballymote, James Reynolds, Ballymote, Daniel Connolly, Sligo, James Crefin, Riverstown, Michael Farrell, Sligo, James Howley, Easkey, Patrick McGuinn, Tubbercurry, Terence McGuire, Ballymote, George Meldrum, Sligo, Robert Scott, Skreen and John Walsh, Sligo (both of the Royal Irish Fusiliers) and Patrick Cawley, Emlaghfad of the Leinster Regiment. Also at Ypres on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2nd Lieut. F. E. Robinson, Woodville, Sligo aged 19 was killed in action. He was the son of the late Mr. St. George C. W. Robinson and a nephew of Edward Carson. A brother, Captain G. St. G. Robinson was honoured by the King with the Military Cross in the New Year's honours list. He had been wounded at Ypres and was recuperating at his home in Dublin.

In November A. A. Perceval of the Irish Guards was reported to be recovering at home from the effects of concussion caused by a bomb exploding near him. Towards the end of January Mr. Perceval was the recipient of a congratulatory address from the people of Bunninadden and district. The address was presented by MP John O'Dowd and many local politicians were present. Among the signatories were the parish priest P. J. O'Grady P.P.

On November 17<sup>th</sup>, five families totalling 24 refugees from Belgium arrived in Sligo and were housed in the military barracks. They were met at the railway station by a band and a group of local sympathisers. More arrived in the next few months and in early January there were 56 refugees in Sligo military barracks. "The families and dependents of soldiers are very well looked after" the County Inspector reported at the end of 1914 "and they are generally better off than formerly". A fund was established in Sligo in November 1914, under the chairmanship of C. K O Hara to collect money for the purchase of a motor ambulance which would be sent to the front.

Within two weeks the money needed had been collected. "Well Done, Sligo", said the Sligo Independent editorial.

*(iv) "The young men of the County Sligo do not seem to realise their duty towards their country".*

A convention of the Irish Volunteers (MacNeill's) was held in the Abbey Theatre Dublin on Sunday October 31<sup>st</sup>. The following delegates from Sligo attended: Alec McCabe representing Keash, Charles McGarrigle representing Cliffony, and Patrick Dyar and J. Kennedy (O'Cinneide) representing Tubbercurry.

As we have seen the numbers of branches of the Volunteers reached a peak of 44 in September according to the police reports. In the report for September the County Inspector reported for the first time "a considerable falling off in the numbers attending drills". This was caused in some places by the lack of competent drill instructors as reservists joined the army and also by general bad weather. The October report continues this theme of decline in the Volunteers. They were "notably inactive" during that month, nine branches holding no drill whatever and attendances at others were very poor. The decline was attributable to the war scare according to the Inspector, and to the fear of the enforcement of the Militia Ballot Act. "The Volunteers have the idea that if they were drilling they would be the first sent to the front" said the Inspector. "Plainly this movement is declining rapidly," the November report said, and the December report went further - "In this county the movement is practically dead".

Sixteen corps held drill during November, six during December and only two during January 1915. There was also the absence of a clear aim for the Volunteers. The Parliamentary Party's view was that Home Rule was won and would come into effect at the end of the war. To them the Volunteers had no clear function and they did not waste too much time with them. Reports from the various Volunteer corps in the county continued to be published in the local press week after week many of them including the all too familiar resolutions of support for Redmond. However, now and then a note of disappointment creeps in which confirms the falling off in the interest and numbers taking part.

The Riverstown report in the Volunteer Notes of October 10<sup>th</sup> asks those "who have been absent owing to harvesting operations" to turn up punctually in future "as it is most

desirable that the original strength of our company should be maintained". Similarly the Skreen and Dromard report mentions the "small number turning up for drill" especially in the Highpark section. "It is evident that the glamour of the seaside visitors has dimmed for the time the national spirit in the young men of Massreagh and Dunmoran and now we expect, having worshipped so long at the shrine of Venus that they will turn their attention to the cult of Mars." A week later the same corps notes "very poor attendance from some members of the committee". The issue of November 7<sup>th</sup> notes that "there appears to be a slacking off" in the Ballisodare Volunteers, on November 21<sup>st</sup> a "falling off from drill practice" is mentioned in the Ballyrush Volunteer notes. In the issue of December 5<sup>th</sup> the Skreen and Dromard report complains that "the young men of the County Sligo do not seem to realise their duty towards their country".

Most Volunteer corps were very poorly armed. Grange reported early in September that they had got some few rifles and Tubbercurry reported having obtained a supply of Lee Enfield rifles in mid-September. The County Inspector said at the end of September that "None of the corps carry arms but some of the members have a few rifles and shotguns". A report in the Sligo Champion of September 26<sup>th</sup> said of the Sligo Volunteers that they were "not well advanced in military training because of the lack of skilled instructors." A letter in the same issue of the Champion from James Stanford, former officer of the local Transport Union, said that he was grievously disappointed at the progress made by the Sligo town Volunteers. This he ascribed to the lack of skilled instructors. Without these he said "no wonder that the men will not take an interest in the matter of volunteering". Keash company, according to Alec MacCabe, had only one rifle for instruction purposes and a "few decrepit revolvers".

After the resignation of Hillas the Mayor John Jinks suggested to Maurice Moore that Captain Foley of Rossaville should be approached to accept the position of Inspecting Officer of the Volunteers for Sligo. Moore at once wrote to Foley offering him the position but Foley declined saying that he was holding himself ready for the call to active service in the war. No one was subsequently appointed to the post.

A meeting was called for the Town Hall, Sligo on Tuesday November 10<sup>th</sup> to elect officers for the Sligo Corps for the coming year and to put the movement "on a practical footing". "Since the reconstitution of the movement on the lines suggested by Redmond little has been done in Sligo to demonstrate practically the feelings of the large majority who avowed their

adherence to the Irish Party politics", the Sligo Champion said. The meeting seems to have been less than 100% successful. "A fairly good attendance" the Champion reported. The Mayor spoke and attacked local MacNeillites especially it seems, Seamus MaGowan, referring to him as "this brawny spokesman of Irish manhood".

It seems that there had been some friction in Sligo town between different sections of the Volunteers. A company had been formed by the AOH whose officers included Henry Monson and Michael Nevin. When headquarters heard of this they informed them that it was unconstitutional to have a branch confined to one organisation viz. the AOH. Michael Nevin in a letter in December 1915 said that 50% of the members were non AOH members and that the corps had been formed at the time of the split when "the Volunteers in Sligo had been smashed up". This corps was called the Devlin corps after Joe Devlin leader of the AOH at the time. Many of its members had belonged to the old Sligo corps "but were disgusted at the bad management and lack of discipline existing therein". Monson and Nevin were both Sinn Féin activists later.

In mid-December there were only seven companies of National Volunteers registered in County Sligo: Maugherow, Gurteen, Ballymote, Teeling, Sligo Temperance, Irish National Foresters Sligo and AOH Sligo. There may have been other companies functioning at the time but if so they did not consider it important to register with headquarters.

On February 26<sup>th</sup> 1915 Col. Maurice Moore of the Volunteers wrote to Sligo MP Tom Scanlan asking him to help with the formation of a Volunteer County Board in Sligo. "I have always had great difficulty with County Sligo" Maurice Moore said, "I appeal to you to go to Sligo". He added pointedly, "The Parliamentary Party undertook to manage the Volunteers and caused a revolution. We must ask them now to go to their counties and do some solid work. You are capable of doing the whole thing in no time if you will buckle to". The MP replied on March 1<sup>st</sup> saying that he was too busy to go himself but that he had asked the Mayor of Sligo to call a meeting to form the County Board. During the first week in March 1915 this meeting was held in the Town Hall under the chairmanship of the Mayor to try to reorganise the Volunteers. Among the attendance were Councillors Tarrant, Roche, McTernan, Depew and the secretaries, Flynn and Howley. Deputations were to attend the various organisations in the town to enlist their support.

Further efforts were made during March to form a County Board in Sligo and a delegate named Hamill seems to have spent some time in the County to that end. He reported that Sligo town was not the best place to form the County Board as "there are too many conflicting elements and each is jealous of the other." The Sligo Champion reported in mid-March that "a healthy spirit is making itself evident in the matter of Volunteering locally" and said that "all petty differences should be sunk". Finally on March 23<sup>d</sup> 1915 a Sligo County Board was formed for the Volunteers at a meeting in the Town Hall. As usual the Mayor presided and South Sligo MP John O'Dowd was present. North Sligo MP Scanlan was once again too busy to attend to Volunteer business. In his speech the Mayor mentioned that "some time ago a sort of friction or misunderstanding had cropped up in the ranks of the Volunteers but he was proud to tell them that that little bit of spleen did not long exist." He appealed to the Devlin corps to affiliate. Fr Butler Adm. spoke on behalf of the Devlin Corps and said that they would remain independent but would affiliate.

The list of corps affiliated at that meeting was: Cliffony, Teeling, Maugherow, Skreen & Dromard, Ballintogher, Sligo Town, Devlin Corps Sligo, Ballisodare, Gurteen, Ballymote, Grange, Drumcliff, Bunninadden. The president was John Jinks and the secretaries were T. D. Howley and James A. Flynn. The formation of this County Board did nothing to give the Volunteers new impetus or vitality. The Sligo Champion report of April 17<sup>h</sup> from Skreen & Dromard spoke of the "present apathy" and an editorial in the same issue said "There is no denying the fact that in some districts their (the Volunteers) ranks were depleted and that a certain apathy had set in."

The reports of the County Inspector continually stressed the inactivity of both the National Volunteers and the UIL during 1915. "The UIL made no show of activity. The Volunteer movement appears dead" - March; "No political activity. Drilling among the Irish National Volunteers is practically at an end" - April; "The movement (Volunteers) is dead in this county" - June.

A monster review of the National Volunteers was held in the Phoenix Park, Dublin on Easter Sunday, 1915, and delegates were present from all over the country. The Sligo Independent reported that "Our local corps did not sent as large a contingent as might be expected", only a "fair representation" attending from Sligo. An editorial in the Sligo Champion regretted that Connacht was so poorly represented at the review.



The National Volunteers continued in County Sligo and the Champion continued to publish reports from corps but these were very few. Corps usually mentioned included Skreen and Dromard and Maugherow. In July there were reports that efforts were being made to revive the UIL in County Sligo. Again in August efforts continued. The County Inspector reported that many branches of the UIL "have fallen into decay" and at the end of September he noted that the revival efforts "have not been successful". However at the end of October he says that "some of the UIL branches have been reorganised by local efforts".

*(v)"It was evidently of the cloak and dagger variety which believed in keeping itself dark".*

Meanwhile, the Irish Volunteers, those who had remained true to MacNeill, continued to organise though they eschewed publicity and were rarely mentioned in the local press. The County Inspector's reports estimates that there were 275 of them in January 1915. According to Frank Carty, after the split "in all but a few places in South Sligo Volunteer companies disappeared altogether". Small units remained especially in Keash, where Alec McCabe was active, Tubbercurry, where Patrick Dyar was active, Mullinabreena, where Carty himself continued to organise and Gurteen, where one of the leaders was Owen Tansey. "During the latter part of 1914 and the whole of 1915 we did our best to keep together the scattered units of the Volunteers, to organise new units, to discourage recruiting for the British army and to collect arms" Carty recalls. The Tubbercurry unit had bought six new Lee-Enfield rifles and a small amount of ammunition.

In the Cliffony area the Volunteers were backboned by IRB men enlisted by McCabe and Fr Michael O'Flanagan and most took the Irish Volunteers side at the split. Patrick McCannon says that about sixty men were members there. Willie Gilmartin remained the leader and Seamus Devins was also prominent. Towards the end of 1915 the Cliffony Volunteers were informed that guns were available in Dublin to be collected. Gilmartin and another Volunteer named John Kane went to a man named Millar in Ballyshannon who owned a good motor car and asked him to drive them to Dublin. Millar was a loyalist so they told him that a relative of theirs had died in Dublin and they need to get there urgently. In Dublin however he discovered the true nature of their business and refused to drive them home. They threatened him with a revolver and made him proceed. They also swore him to secrecy. The arms thus obtained consisted of about twenty single barrelled shotguns and a few revolvers. These were used for

secret arms training. There is also a suggestion that the Cliffony Volunteers at least began as a branch of the Hibernian Rifles. This seems to have been a Volunteer type organisation affiliated to the Ancient Order of Hibernians. A curate in Cliffony, Fr Scott, is said to have been very involved in this organisation.

At the end of 1915 the County Inspector reported that the "Sinn Féiners" had twelve rifles and four revolvers while the National Volunteers had two rifles. According to Thady McGowan, Alec McCabe got a number of .38 revolvers sometime before the 1916 Rising which he distributed among the IRB members in his area.



*Bat Keaney, Ballymote, in Volunteer Uniform*

Alec McCabe was, as we have seen, a member of the IRB, the secret Republican organisation. He joined the IRB and in 1914 he was made Head Centre for Connacht and a member of the Supreme Council. He attended the Supreme Council meeting the evening of the

funeral of O'Donovan Rossa which co-opted among others Padraig Pearse onto the Council. He spent some time organising the IRB in County Sligo during 1914 and 1915. He wrote afterwards, "I spent every weekend and every evening after school on the bicycle visiting country parishes and getting a few reliable men in each sworn in". According to Jim Hunt Sean McDermott visited Gurteen in 1914 and organised the IRB there, Owen Tansey being one of the leaders. Jim Hunt himself was sworn in in 1917.

Who exactly was a member of the IRB is not easy to find out because of the secrecy which naturally surrounded the organisation. McCabe certainly recruited a number in Keash and in Ballymote. In each place it seems that about 8-10 trusted people were enrolled. Bat Keaney was a member from Ballymote, Bernard Brady from Keash. In the Cliffony area where his former tutor Fr O'Flanagan now ministered, McCabe helped organise the IRB, according to Patrick McCannon, who with his brother was a member. William Gilmartin would appear to have been the leader here. According to McCabe there was an IRB centre in Sligo town but he was unable to contact it. "It was evidently of the cloak and dagger variety which believed in keeping itself dark," he remarked. Michael Nevin said that Hamiltons of Sligo was the headquarters of Sligo IRB. He himself worked there but never joined, "I had a dread of secret organisations and consequently never saw my way to becoming a member".

John Lynch of the Transport Union was almost certainly an IRB member. He was very friendly with the Transport Union leader P. T. Daly who was an IRB member. Liam Mellows frequently came to visit McCabe and see how things were going. The police reported that Mellows visited County Sligo during the month of June 1915. Liam Mellows also had influence on another Sligo man, Liam "Billy" Pilkington. Liam Pilkington was born in Sligo on June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1894 and was educated at the local convent school, the Marist Brothers' school and the Day Trades Preparatory School. Later he was a student at the Department of Agriculture Forestry College in County Wicklow and he had come into contact with Liam Mellows who initiated the Sligo man into the IRB. On the outbreak of the Great War the College was closed and Pilkington returned to Sligo. He secured employment with Wehrly Brothers Ltd., jewellers and watchmakers, Sligo. Seamus MacGowan from Sligo town may also have been an IRB member.

#### **4. RECRUITING. FEB 1915 - MARCH 1916.**

As the realisation dawned that the war which had begun in 1914 was not going to be a short affair the need for manpower became urgent. Efforts to recruit the young men of Ireland into the British army were begun and would continue for the duration of the war. At the same time those who were seen to be anti-recruiting were likely to be dealt with severely under the wide powers assumed by the Government under the Defence of the Realm Act, (D.O.R.A.), passed on the day of the declaration of war.

*(i)'A recognised associate and leader of an objectionable and political society in the parish'.*

Alec McCabe was a well known supporter of the Republican position, and it was inevitable that sooner or later his position as a principal teacher would come into question. His first open brush with clerical authority came on February 18<sup>th</sup> 1915 when the curate Fr Felix Bourke visited the school. Fr Bourke had been appointed curate to Keash Parish about August 1914 and part of his duty was to visit Drumnagranchy school. Relations between McCabe and the curate were strained. Officially the reasons were that McCabe thought Fr Bourke was "down" on him while the priest thought that McCabe should do better work. The bad blood came to a head on February 18<sup>th</sup> 1915 about 11am. Fr Bourke visited the school and began to find fault. There were four or five infants around the fire warming themselves and he thought they should be with the other infants at the back of the room. Fr Bourke then asked the senior pupils the meanings of some words in their book and being displeased with the answers said aloud, "I wonder what we are doing here from 10 to 3 o'clock". This angered McCabe and there were some "angry verbal exchanges" between the two.

The priest then left but returned as the pupils were going out to play. He asked McCabe to apologise but he refused. When the priest asked for the daily report book in which he was entitled to write notes on his visit McCabe said, "Yes, you can have it my boy". Fr Bourke was so angered by this remark that he raised his hand as if to strike McCabe but did not. The curate then wrote a lengthy account of his visit in the report book including the following: "I found as usual evident signs of laziness on the part of the principal teacher. Never have I found him about his work but sitting beside the fire . . . The children are just now at play roaming the country and the teachers are within the school walls".

When the schools inspector, J. A. O'Connell, next visited the school on February 24<sup>th</sup> he saw Fr Bourke's report. When it was reported to the Commissioners of Education the inspector was ordered to hold an enquiry into the affair. This enquiry was held by the Inspector in the school on June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1915. The Parish Priest was present and both Fr Bourke and Alec McCabe gave evidence. In his evidence McCabe said that Fr Bourke had been appointed to the parish about nine months previously and after about two months he "began visiting the school in an aggressive manner". The Inspector's report recommended that the Parish Priest be informed that they did not approve of Fr Bourke's conduct on the occasion of his visit and that the language used by McCabe was disrespectful and improper. This was seen as a victory for McCabe.

Without a doubt politics was the real cause of the friction between the two. Fr Bourke was later to become a chaplain in the British army and no doubt political differences were the real cause of the problem with McCabe. In May 1916 the Sligo Champion reported that Fr Bourke was home on leave from his army duties in France. It is interesting to note that the inspector's son was J. J. "Ginger" O'Connell, a prominent member of the Irish Volunteers and later on the headquarter staff of the I.R.A.

McCabe's victory was however only temporary. His P.P., Fr P. J. O'Grady, was well known as a supporter of Nationalist principles. He was chairman of the Keash 1914 meeting which demanded land for the smallholders and he was an ardent supporter of the Volunteers. However on July 29<sup>th</sup> he gave Alec McCabe three months notice of dismissal. His reasons he enumerated in a letter to the Commissioners of National Education:

1. The irregularities of McCabe's attendance at school and his absence from school without the Parish Priest's permission.
2. Want of proper supervision of the children during school hours.
3. Disrespect towards the Parish Priest's assistant (Fr Bourke) in supervision of school.
4. A recognised associate and leader of an objectionable and political society in the parish which has been the cause of disunity and outrage.

There is no doubt that the last of the four reasons given was the most important one. McCabe later wrote: "Notice of my dismissal came like a bolt from the blue from my manager, the Parish Priest. What surprised me was that he had encouraged me to participate in Volunteer activities."

On October 28<sup>th</sup> the notice expired and Alec McCabe was sacked. It appears that the parents of the area supported McCabe and there was pressure on the Parish Priest to re-instate him. The school was closed from the day after McCabe's dismissal, October 29<sup>h</sup>, until February 1<sup>st</sup> the following year. The Bishop, Most Rev. Dr. Morrisroe, was appealed to and, it seems, was about to agree to his reinstatement when a further incident put paid to any chance of McCabe being re-employed as a teacher.



*Fr P J O'Grady, PP Keash.*

He was arrested in Sligo with a Gladstone bag of gelignite on November 6<sup>h</sup>. On that Saturday McCabe had ordered and paid for about a stone of gelignite, fuses and detonators in a shop in Sligo where he usually bought fishing equipment. He told the shopkeeper that the material was for fishing. He had arranged that another person would collect the order but this person "took a few drinks" and McCabe himself collected the order later in the day and went to Sligo railway station to take the 6 pm train home to Ballymote. At the railway station he was arrested by County Inspector Sullivan of the RIC with the assistance of Constables Dolan and McDermott. The shopkeeper had informed the authorities of the purchase of the explosives. When McCabe was searched a fully loaded revolver was found on him.

He was brought to the police barracks and at a special court under Resident Magistrate Captain Fitzpatrick he was charged under the Defence of the Realm Act of being in possession of explosive substances in a public place. He was remanded in custody and on the Monday he was removed under heavy military escort to Arbour Hill Military Barracks, Dublin. McCabe remained in custody until his trial took place early in 1916. It was believed at first that he would be charged with being a German spy but no evidence of this could be brought forward and so the charge eventually was of being in possession of explosives. He felt himself that there was no

chance of escaping conviction. Once he arrived in Dublin McCabe was contacted by friends in the IRB and Nationalist politicians. He was visited by his own MP, John O'Dowd, who asked questions in the House of Commons about the case.

He was provided with a solicitor, Seamus O'Connor. A Senior Council, Mr Hanna, a Protestant, was engaged to defend him and witnesses were brought up from Sligo to give evidence as to the use of explosives for fishing in the west. Other methods were also employed to help have him acquitted. McCabe himself later said "There was not a family connected with the members of the jury that was not canvassed".

The trial took place in Green Street Courthouse in February 1916. Counsel for the prosecution produced evidence of McCabe being arrested in possession of explosives and of his record as a political activist. Evidence was given of finding in McCabe's possession a document predicting "with pride and joy" the victory of the Germans in the war. Evidence was also given of finding a revolver, revolver cartridges and rifle cartridges in McCabe's house. A chemist who gave evidence as to the composition of the gelignite and ammunition admitted under cross examination that the amount of gelignite was very small and would not be sufficient to destroy a bridge. It would be sufficient, he said, to destroy the sluice gate of a canal. Mr Hanna for the defence said that the police had suggested that McCabe was the "Guy Fawkes" of Ballymote who intended to destroy canals even though there was no canal within fifty miles of Ballymote! Defence witnesses testified to the use of explosives for fishing and the absence of any secret society in the parish.

The witnesses, according to McCabe, "had no moral inhibition in presenting my case in a favourable light". The judge summed up by saying that the "fishing" evidence had no bearing on the case. The only question was the possession of the explosives and there was no doubt on that score. There should be no doubt in the minds of the jury as to the verdict, he said. The jury took over an hour to reach their verdict - not guilty. "I must say that I could scarcely believe my ears when I heard this extraordinary decision of the jury against the evidence" McCabe later said. This did not mean immediate freedom however. It was stated that there was another charge against him and he was at once rearrested and kept in Mountjoy for some weeks until finally the authorities decided that they had no other course of action but to release him. This they did on February 18<sup>th</sup> 1916. His trial made history as being the last jury trial on a political charge under British rule in Ireland.

*(ii) "Farmers are getting big prices for their stock but no class has done less for recruiting".*

The Sligo Independent carried advertisements each week urging more men to enlist in the army. Very often these were addressed to the "Women of Ireland". In the issue of February 20<sup>th</sup> 1915 Irishwomen were asked four questions, one of which was: "When the war is over and your husband or your son is asked 'What did you do in the war?' is he to hang his head because you would not let him go?" In March a similar advertisement stated, "If your young man neglects his duty to Ireland the time may come when he may neglect you. Think it over and ask your young man to join an Irish Regiment today".

*Up to December 1915 the headquarters of the recruiting effort in County Sligo and neighbouring counties was at Boyle where Major Murphy was in charge. In December however rooms were obtained in the Town Hall, Sligo, as a permanent recruiting station for Counties Sligo and Leitrim.*

From early in 1915 there was controversy about recruiting in Sligo. This in particular related to the fact that nationalist farmers' sons did not enlist in any number and the argument was to continue all through the war. In its issue of January 23<sup>rd</sup> the Sligo Champion answered the charge that the nationalists of County Sligo did not join the army in sufficient numbers. It charged that the response from the unionists was very poor. "The few unionists who did volunteer took good care beforehand that their place would be in the back of the army. Most of them are attached to the veterinary department" it claimed. It hoped that more Sligo unionists would enlist "and follow the noble and self-sacrificing example set them by the nationalists."

"The general feeling of the public is completely loyal and great interest is taken in the progress of the war" the County Inspector reported to the Inspector General at the end of January 1915. At the end of March he said, "The tone of the local press is very good and its loyalty and moderation reflect the temper of the people".

On June 19<sup>th</sup> the Sligo Champion devoted an editorial to the obstacles to recruiting. These included, according to the writer, the personnel and methods used. An evicting land-agent was not likely to be the sort of person whose advice would be readily heeded by the common people. Attributing cowardice to a district was not likely to increase the number of recruits from that area: "many of military age seek a pretext for remaining at home by inciting others to go".



Early in 1915 the recruiting campaigns started in earnest. At the Sligo Spring Assizes Lord Justice Moriarity said that every person should become a recruiting agent. He said that up to February 17<sup>th</sup> there had been 350 County Sligo recruits, 279 of whom were from the town of Sligo leaving only 71 recruits for the country districts. "It cannot be denied that the county had not contributed its quota", he went on and pointed the finger at one section: "the fault principally lies with the farming classes who have displayed the greatest apathy in regard to the present struggle which is being waged for the preservation of smaller nations". Two hundred reservists had also been called up from the Sligo area.

On Monday March 8<sup>th</sup> a group of over 40 non-commissioned officers and men of the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Connaught Rangers arrived in Sligo for recruiting purposes. The 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been raised in 1914 soon after the outbreak of war. Meetings were held in Sligo town, in Ballymote, Ballisodare and Collooney. According to the Sligo Nationalist they met with a great reception. These visits were to be a regular feature of Sligo town and county for the remainder of the war and at first they seemed to have been well received at least as far as listening goes. Whether they succeeded in significantly increasing the number of recruits is rather more dubious.

On April 8<sup>th</sup> a recruiting meeting was held in the Courthouse, Sligo under the chairmanship of C. K. O'Hara. Judge Wakely adjourned the Quarter Sessions until the following morning to allow people to attend. The Mayor, John Jinks was present on the platform as was Thomas Scanlan, MP for North Sligo. John O'Dowd MP had a poem of his on the theme of a war hero read out. O'Hara praised the men of the town of Sligo and of the neighbourhood of Ballymote for their response to the enlisting appeals but said that he was disappointed with the rest of the county. Tom Scanlan defended the record of Sligo, particularly Sligo town, with regard to recruiting. He claimed that "practically 1,000" recruits and reservists from Sligo had joined the colours and since most were from the town this represented one tenth of its total population of 10,000. W. R. Fenton, clerk of the Crown and Peace in Sligo, also spoke and again brought up the poor response from the farmer's sons. "The labouring and other classes had done very well", he said.

This would appear to be the meeting attended by Alec McCabe and Seamus Devins for purposes of protesting at the recruiting campaign. Neither knew of the others presence until each interrupted speakers. McCabe may have been the first to do so claiming that as the meeting was

packed with County Councillors, Parish Priests and old politicians it had no right to speak on behalf of the youth of the country. Jinks, the Mayor, called him to order for this slight on the clergy and others present and there were shouts of "German Gold", "Sinn Féin Crank" and "Put him out". McCabe replied with shouts of "Cromwell's Army" and "Carson's Allies". However he was pulled down by the coat tails by a Parish Priest sitting near him.

No sooner had McCabe been silenced than another bout of pandemonium broke out when Seamus Devins in another part of the hall started to protest. He too was eventually silenced and the two lone voices met at the door on their way out. With Devins was Seamus MacGowan from Sligo town who frequently contributed patriotic poetry to the local press and to "The Irish Volunteer".

In a later issue of the Champion it was reported that in the week since the recruiting meeting 54 men from the town had enlisted. A recruiting committee had been formed under the chairmanship of O'Hara and it held regular meetings. At the end of April the band of the Irish Guards visited the county and the advertisement in the Sligo Independent was headed "To the Farmers of Sligo" and asked them to lay down their spades and come and hear the band. On Monday 26<sup>th</sup> a recruiting meeting attended by the band was held outside the Town Hall, Sligo and on the following days meetings were held all over the county. Most Rev. Dr. Coyne, the Bishop of Elphin sent a letter of welcome to the band. Speakers at the various meetings included Henry Monson from Sligo, John O'Dowd MP, and Alderman Thomas Fitzpatrick. Rev Canon Quinn, Ballymote presided at the meeting there. Henry Monson also was a member of the Sligo recruiting committee. "No opposition of any sort was displayed", said the District Inspector, "The band received a warm welcome everywhere they went". However he could only report that "a few recruits have volunteered as a result" commented, "The farming class furnishes no recruit for the army".

The reluctance on the part of the farmers and the farmers' sons to enlist was made worse in the eyes of the loyalists by the fact that the farmers more than any other section were benefiting by the war. "Prices of stock and farm produce have risen greatly and farmers generally are profiting by the war" said the County Inspector at the end of February 1915. At the end of May he said, "Farmers are getting big prices for their stock and produce but no class in the community has done less for recruiting", adding that most Sligo recruits were labourers from Sligo town or the other towns.

The recruiting committee took a front page advertisement in the Sligo Champion issue of June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1915 to publicise the forthcoming tour of County Sligo by the band of the Connaught Rangers, June 12<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup>. The heading of the advertisement proclaimed: "Men of Sligo : Remember the Lusitania!" The band of the Connaught Rangers arrived in Sligo late on Friday evening and was accorded a hearty welcome. They were met by a band at the station and the town was decorated. Two meetings were held in Sligo on Saturday, at 12 noon and at 8 pm. Speakers included the deputy Mayor, Alderman Foley, Judge Wakely, Charles O'Hara, Major Murphy, the recruiting agent, and the famous Lieut. Tom Kettle MP.

Meetings were held on the Sunday at Maugherow, Grange, Cliffony and Rathcormack. On Monday the band and speakers moved to Riverstown, Geevagh and Ballymote. Tuesday saw meetings at Tubbercurry and Gurteen, Wednesday Coolaney, Collooney and Sligo again. The recruiting tour finished on Thursday with meetings at Ballisodare, Dromore West, Easkey and Enniscrone. "The results as regards as enlisting farmers' sons was disappointing but as usual men were forthcoming from the towns", the County Inspector said. The Sligo Independent reported that the tour was "very successful" and went on: "The towns throughout the County have more than contributed their quota hence the remarks which were made at all the meetings are principally applicable to the many farmer's sons who are still holding back".

When the meeting was held at Ballymote Alec McCabe did not let the opportunity for interruption pass. He heckled one of the military speakers who replied with a torrent of abuse calling McCabe "a pup" and "a guttersnipe". Lieut. Kettle seeing that the speaker was antagonising the listeners pulled him down and asked McCabe onto the platform to debate the issues. McCabe refused as he did the offer by Kettle to meet in the hotel later in the evening. Another recruiting tour by the Connaught Rangers band took place in County Sligo during the week beginning September 26<sup>th</sup>. "No perceptible result has yet been observed" the County Inspector dryly reported. In his September report the County Inspector reported that a anti-British leaflet entitled "Ireland, Germany and the Freedom of the Seas" had been circulated through the post in Sligo as it had been throughout the country. He also reported that a "seditious" anti-recruiting poster had appeared on walls in Sligo town.

*(ii) "We do not say that all County Sligo men are cowards".*

Various efforts were made to have the recruiting campaigns meet with more success. An effort was made to establish a "Pal's Platoon". Sligo recruits would be kept together in the same unit but the Sligo Independent reported in July 1915 that the slow response did not auger well for the scheme. The military established a military camp at Rosses Point in August of 1915 for about six weeks. The Independent hoped that the camp would have "A stimulating effect on the youth of military age". New recruits had the opportunity of being trained with the Connaught Rangers at the camp.

The local papers continued to report deaths of Sligo natives in the continuing carnage. During February Captain Francis Winchester Wood Martin, the youngest son of the well known historian and land owner Col. Wood Martin was killed in action. On March 14<sup>th</sup> Wood Martin's eldest son, James Isidore, was also killed in action. Trooper E. J. Griffiths of the 3rd Hussars, a native of Finisklin, Sligo was killed in February. One Sligo family, the Conlons, had seven members, all brothers, serving in the British army. One of the seven, Thomas, was killed in action on May 13<sup>th</sup> and another was killed in September. Private William Ward of Aughamore, a member of the Irish Guards, was killed in Flanders on May 18<sup>th</sup>, 1915. He had been in the reserve and was called up at the start of the war. On September 22<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. McDowell of the Connaught Rangers, a Sligo native, was killed in Flanders.

Many of those who had enlisted from Sligo were members of the Connaught Rangers and five of these, in the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion, died in action during fierce fighting on April 26<sup>th</sup> at the second battle of Ypres. These were Lance Corporal William Monaghan, Privates James Timbs, John Whittaker, Thomas Gethins and Stephen Feeney, all from Sligo town, John Chambers from Ballymote. William Harrison of Cliffony was killed on 9<sup>th</sup> May.

The 5th Battalion, Connaught Rangers had been raised during the autumn of 1914 and after training in Ireland and England was sent to Gallipoli where it took part in the Sulva Bay landings on August 6<sup>th</sup>. They took part in attacks on the heights held by Turkish troops. Sligoman Thomas Flynn was killed in the early days of these actions. There were particularly fierce attacks on August 21/22<sup>nd</sup> and August 27/28<sup>th</sup>. At least six Sligo born members of the Connaught Rangers were killed in these actions: Privates Thomas Grady (Tubbercurry), John Henery (Sligo), James Kearns (Sooey), Edward Kelly (Sligo), Patrick J. Reilly (Sligo) and

Sergeant Thomas Kelly (Sligo). Sergeant Edward Thomas Brennan (Sligo) was also killed at Gallipoli before the remainder of the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion was evacuated and went to Salonika, northern Greece where they spent two more years.

On December 6/7<sup>th</sup> the Rangers took part in a heroic defence of a mountain position against fierce Bulgarian attacks. They suffered 576 casualties in this action including Sligomen John Gordon (Easkey), Patrick McGowan (Calry) and Edward Mullen (Ballisodare). Other Sligo natives to die at Gallipoli were Michael Clarke of Ballymote (Royal Irish Regiment), Eugene Dolan of Ahamlesh, James Murphy, Coolaney and Michael Gilmartin, Drumcliff, all Royal Munster Fusiliers, Joseph Little, Drumcliff and Thomas Timoney, Sligo, both Royal Dublin Fusiliers. In far off Mesopotamia Keash native, Private John Kelly of the Royal Irish Regiment, died of wounds on August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1915.

In early September a well known Sligo man, Bobby Burnside, was badly injured at the Dardenelles and was invalided back to England. He died of his wounds at Southampton and his body was taken back to Sligo for burial. He had been a private with the Connaught Rangers, 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, and had been a tailor with Henry Lyons before the war. On September 19<sup>th</sup> he was buried in an impressive military funeral in the town. A Connaught Rangers band and a firing party from Rosses Point were present. A well known footballer, he had played for Sligo United when they won the North Western Intermediate Cup. He was married and left a wife and six children living in Holborn Street. There were other Sligo fatalities at the Dardanelles. Seaman Michael Joseph Gillen was killed there on July 13<sup>th</sup>. On August 7<sup>th</sup> Second Lieutenant Hugh Maurice McDermott was killed in action there while serving with the Royal Irish Fusiliers. He was the eldest son of The McDermott, Coolavin, County Sligo.

Towards the end of 1915 the debate about the non-enlisting of farmers' sons in the army again made headlines. The Sligo Independent carried reports of numbers of farmers' sons emigrating to America to avoid conscription. In its issue of October 30<sup>th</sup> it reported that a number of farmers' sons from the west including some from around Boyle and some from around Ballymote had left the North Wall for America via Liverpool. It said that their emigration was influenced by the threat of conscription. Again in its issue of November 6<sup>th</sup> the Independent reported that a number of young men particularly farmers' sons had booked their passage to America or enquired about doing so. "This is particularly noticeable in the Tubbercurry district where a number of farmer's sons have already left for the land of the stars and stripes", it said.

The November 13<sup>th</sup> issue reported that various transatlantic shipping lines were refusing to carry emigrants to America who were British subjects of military age. "Twenty young farmers' sons of fine physique" had arrived in Sligo to take the train to Dublin and thence to America via Liverpool. They had boarded the train when they were informed that they would not be carried on the ship and, according to the Sligo Independent, they had to get off the train and return home to the Glencar area. The Sligo Champion attacked the Independent for its reporting of this and similar incidents and for sending the report of the train incident which appeared in the Irish Times. The Champion claimed that the Independent was exaggerating the numbers who had emigrated.

The Champion quoted figures from the Registrar General which showed that there was a decrease of 11,692 in the number of emigrants from Ireland during the first ten months of 1915. The newspaper had made enquiries at local booking agents who told them that bookings by would-be emigrants were considerably down on previous years. Mentioning Tubbercurry in particular the Champion asked if the Sligo Independent correspondent had yet informed the Irish Times "that of the very respectable percentage of the Irish Times readers in that area only one has so far joined the colours".

The Independent in reply said that it stood by its reports. "We do not say that all County Sligo men are cowards", the Independent stated, mentioning the fine response from the town to the recruiting appeals. "It is apparent that the farming classes have displayed great apathy in this direction".

At a meeting in Sligo in early October Canon Doorly, Administrator Sligo, defended the County's record as regards recruiting: "He could safely say that almost every available man was now in one capacity or another in the army. The Irish farmer had not all the sons they read about in the papers at the present time".

A recruiting visit by the band of the Connaught Rangers took place in County Sligo from September 19<sup>th</sup> until the 25<sup>th</sup> with meetings at Tubbercurry, Collooney, Ballintogher, Rosses Point, Sligo, Strandhill, Farniharpy, Maugherow and Grange. At a large meeting outside the Town Hall on the final Saturday night the chair was occupied by the Mayor, John Jinks. The Sligo Independent reported him as follows, "He had been a strong Nationalist and he was a strong Nationalist today but when the enemy came into their camp it was his duty to drop for the

time being his political opinions and to join forces with his fellow countrymen in order to defend their shores against the enemy".

The November 6<sup>th</sup> issues of the Sligo Independent and the Sligo Champion carried full page adverts on their front pages calling for recruits for the army. This was in conjunction with a recruiting visit to Sligo by "Ireland's V.C." Michael O'Leary. This war hero arrived in Sligo on Thursday November 4<sup>th</sup> and took part with a band of the Connaught Rangers in a series of recruiting meetings throughout the County. The final meeting was held outside the Town Hall on the Saturday night and was chaired by the Mayor, Jinks. Major Murphy, in charge of recruiting for the Sligo area, spoke. The issue of the farmers' sons was again mentioned. Murphy complimented Sligo town on having supplied so many men for the army and he wished he did not have to ask them for more. He however had to ask for more and the reason was "the countrymen were still staying at home". "He had been appealing to the young countrymen for a long time and he could not get them to join the army", he was reported as saying. Reporting on this recruiting tour the County Inspector summed it up thus: "They were well received but got very few recruits". John O'Dowd had been busy with pen again and had a song published in praise of the V.C. Michael O'Leary. The refrain contained an ingenious rhyme:

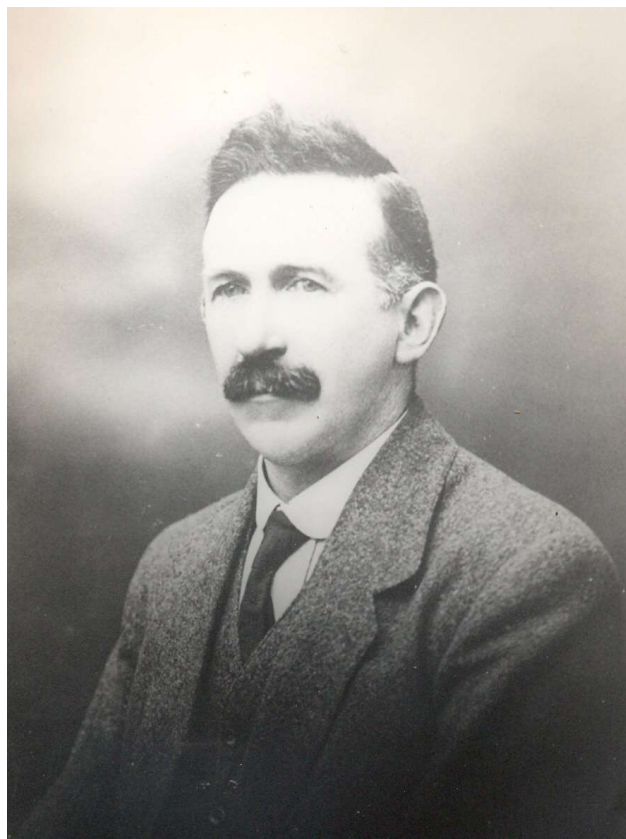
"Then Sláinte Mike O'Leary,  
Faith the Huns have cause to fear ye"

It was usual at these recruiting meetings to dwell on the atrocities inflicted by the Germans especially on "Catholic Belgium" and Alec McCabe recalls the effect these stories had on the listeners at a meeting he attended: "Harrowing details were given about German atrocities in Belgium, nuns raped and their breasts cut off, women and children bayoneted and corpses fried to make fat for German frying pans. It was too much for me so I kept quiet. I argued quietly in the crowd with a few old friends but it was no use . . . I could see by the tears in their eyes that they were deeply touched. The meeting ended with a march en mass to the nearest recruiting office . . . I must say that I could never blame any of these young men for joining. They were carried off their feet by lying propaganda".

*(iii) "Why the b.....s don't they go and fight for Germany?"*

There was also opposition to recruiting in the Tubbercurry area. A circular had been sent around by the Lord Lieutenant on October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1915 asking young men of military age to

join the army voluntarily. On November 3<sup>rd</sup> a notice was posted in the Tubbercurry area asking the young men who had been circularised to attend a meeting in Tubbercurry Town Hall on Friday 5<sup>th</sup>. The notice was signed by Patrick Sweeney, P. J. Durkin, P. J. Gallagher and Patrick Dyar. The meeting was held, "composed mainly of shop assistants of Tubbercurry", it was said in court. At the meeting a document was drawn up which Dyar was to try to have published in the local press. It was signed by thirty three men who stated that they would be willing to enlist for military service under a free and independent national government when such was established in Ireland and that they were prepared to resist with their lives any attempt to enforce compulsory military service on themselves or their country men while Ireland was under foreign rule.



*Patrick Dyar*

Constable Hugh Dolan of Tubbercurry had attended part of the meeting and as a result the District Inspector of the RIC visited Dyar's room in Cooke's premises on November 9<sup>th</sup> to search for explosives or incriminating documents. The document signed at the meeting was produced and as a result Dyar was arrested and charged with "committing an act intended to prejudice recruiting of the army" and of "making statements likely to cause disaffection to his Majesty."



On November 25<sup>th</sup> Dyar was put on trial in Dublin and was found guilty as charged. The police gave evidence as regards the meeting and notice. The RIC District Inspector said that Dyar was a quiet unassuming man who had been in Messrs Cooke's employment for 24 years. The defence called no witnesses and submitted that the documents found were perfectly innocent and were in no way prejudicial to voluntary recruitment. The judge found him guilty and sentenced Dyar to one month hard labour. On December 27<sup>th</sup> Dyar returned to Tubbercurry after being released from Mountjoy jail and there was a great welcome for him in spite of inclement weather. The brass band met him at the train and a bonfire blazed at the square. Local dignitaries welcomed him and an address of welcome was presented by Mr. P. Barrett. Luke Armstrong, J.P. presided and a vote of thanks to all who had stood by Mr Dyar was proposed by Pádhraic Ó Domhnalláin. Patrick Dyar left Tubbercurry early in 1916 to set up a business in Castlerea, County Roscommon and spent the rest of his life there.

Local recruiting officers and members of the Sligo Recruiting Committee attended the meetings of some of the local government bodies early in January to ask them to form recruiting sub-committees. Tubbercurry Board of Guardians was visited by Major O'Hara and Lieut. George Draper, Recruiting Officer. They had been visiting "a number of influential men" in Tubbercurry, O'Hara told the meeting and when they heard the meeting was in progress they decided to visit it. A sub-committee was formed though without much apparent enthusiasm. At the same time a resolution was passed supporting Redmond but warning against conscription. Sligo County Council and Sligo Rural District Council were likewise visited and similar committees formed.

The number of recruits from County Sligo who joined the army for the month ending February 15<sup>th</sup> was 40, for the following month the number had fallen to 18. A special meeting of the County Sligo Recruiting Committee was held in the Town Hall, Sligo on Tuesday February 22<sup>nd</sup>. Among the attendance were local landowners, O'Hara, Perceval, Ormsby, Gore-Booth, Crofton. The Mayor, Jinks was moved to the chair and Alderman Foley was also present. A representative of the Lord Lieutenant was present and gave some figures on recruiting from Sligo. Since the outbreak of the war upwards of 1,000 men including reservists had joined the army from the Borough of Sligo. If the numbers who had enlisted from Ballymote, Tubbercurry and the other villages throughout the county were added the number would come to about 1,500. "This is indeed a record to be proud of", commented the Sligo Independent but added that

it was estimated that the number of recruitable men left in the county after deductions for the different industries including farming was 7,225.

The meeting made plans for another tour of the County by the band of the Connaught Rangers. This tour started on March 13<sup>th</sup> and on March 17<sup>th</sup>, St. Patrick's Day, a meeting was held in Easkey. Major O'Hara proposed that the P.P. Rev. Canon Quinn be moved to the chair which he was. In the course of what was described as "a rousing speech" the Canon said: "They were living in very strange times and they had only to survey the platform that day to see what effect such a change had made. The time was when he would not have stood on the same platform with Major O'Hara, Sir Malby Crofton and Mr. Fenton. But they must remember that they were all united for the purpose of defending their own homes. The day was coming fast when if they did not stand at their guns they would be driven from Ireland in the same manner as the people of Belgium. No doubt Easkey Parish had done extremely well for they had sent between 60 and 70 men to the colours."

From Saturday the band was in operation in the north Sligo area and on Tuesday they moved to the Ballymote district. On the March 25<sup>th</sup> a large recruiting committee meeting was held in the Town Hall, Sligo under the inevitable chairmanship of the Mayor, John Jinks. Attacks were made on the viewpoint of the "Sinn Féiners" who claimed that they would rather fight for Germany than fight for England. "Why the b-----s don't they go and fight for Germany?" said one speaker.

*(iv) "It was men who were reared in the town and who had some stake in it who should sit on the corporation".*

The usual Corporation elections were to be held in January as two councillors in each Ward had to retire by rotation and face re-election. In 1915 two of the Wards saw elections as newcomers challenged the outgoing members. Only in the East Ward was there no election, James Grey and Dudley M. Hanley being returned unopposed. In the West Ward, Samuel Tarrant, a solicitor from Castle Street, and Jordan H. Roche an auctioneer from High Street opposed the outgoing labour councillors Edward Harte, a painter, and William Gibbons, a plasterer.

The challengers seemed to represent the interests of the ratepayers and professional people who felt that the corporation was making a poor effort at running the town in spite of

what they considered the high rates they were paying. In his election address Samuel Tarrant said "though advocating the living wage I am persuaded that for some years certain labour leaders have worked contrary to the best interests of the town and working classes as their conduct has frightened capital from the town".

At a corporation meeting early in January concern was expressed at the contents of an election address by one of the new candidates in the West Ward which claimed that the rate collectors poundage had been increased. This was not the case, the members argued and John Lynch, Transport Union leader, made a blistering attack on the new candidates "It was a nice thing to see a tramp coming into Sligo and when he was not three years in the town endeavouring to seek municipal honours. It was men who were reared in the town and had some stake in it who should sit on the corporation" said Lynch. In the North Ward, James A. Flynn, editor of the Sligo Champion, and Thomas Scanlon, a tailor cutter, opposed the outgoing members Michael McDonagh, merchant, who was proposed by Jinks, and Loyalist, Robert Smylie, journalist. Flynn in his election address said "I am sufficiently long in Sligo to be able to claim citizenship."

The elections were held on January 15<sup>th</sup> and were described as "orderly" by the Sligo Independent. In the North Ward the two outgoing members again were elected: McDonagh polled 202, Smylie 110, James Flynn 77 and Scanlon 46. In the West Ward the two newcomers won the day, Roche got 258 votes, Tarrant 185, Harte 156 and Gibbons 98. In his speech after the declaration Flynn claimed that he had been subject to "overwhelming and to a great extent unscrupulous opposition". He mentioned particularly Lynch's remarks at the Corporation meeting which he regarded as being aimed at him.

In an editorial after the election the Sligo Independent drew attention to the low turnout at the election, little more than one third of the electorate having bothered to vote. This apathy was all the more surprising in view of the state of the town: "Rates are far in excess of those obtaining in many other provincial towns in Ireland. Practically nothing has been done in the matter of improving the housing of the working classes and the condition of the streets is deplorable".

John Jinks was again unanimously elected Mayor for 1915 but a proposal to increase his salary was defeated. Councillor Smylie supported the proposal and said that while the Mayor

was "an advanced Nationalist" he had become very loyal in support of the government during his year as Mayor. Smylie mentioned having seen Jinks applaud the National Anthem. In reply John Lynch said that he wanted no loyalty of that kind. He wanted an Irish Republic. Lynch also said that he did not like men like Tarrant, coming from Kerry, and Roche, an ex-policeman, being elected to the Corporation.

It would appear that the discussion on the Mayor's salary took place at a finance meeting of the Corporation which was not open to the press. At the next Corporation meeting questions were asked as to how the report of the meeting reached the papers and many members claimed that the report was not accurate and that there was no proposal to increase the Mayor's salary. Tarrant admitted that he had given the report to the press and said he would continue to do so in the interests of the ratepayers whenever the press were excluded. In a later controversy Dudley Hanley wrote to the Sligo Independent calling Tarrant a "demagogue" and a "penpusher". During 1915 the pages of the local press, especially the Sligo Champion, were used by Colr. Tarrant to attack members of the Corporation and alleged Corporation abuses.

A lengthy correspondence initiated by Tarrant under the title "Sligo Water Schemers" carried on for some time with replies coming from Colr. Edward Foley, D. M. Hanley and the Mayor, Jinks. The Sligo Champion after some time called a halt to the correspondence whereupon Tarrant wrote to the Impartial Reporter of Enniskillen ("A bigoted Unionist organ" according to the Champion) and complained that the Sligo newspaper refused to publish his letters. Tarrant had "a mania for correspondence" according to the Champion. In its copy of December 18<sup>th</sup> the Sligo Champion published in full what it called "an encyclical letter" issued by "self-advertising Sam".

At a Corporation meeting in the first week in August, Colr. Samuel Tarrant moved a motion of which he had given notice "that the cleaning and repairing of the streets and roads within the Borough be given out on contract". He made a long speech in which he gave detailed figures which purported to show how the Corporation would save money by having the work done by private contractors. Colr. Roche seconded the motion and it was opposed strongly by John Lynch who claimed that Tarrant's figures were not correct and proposed an amendment that no alteration be made in the current system for at least two years. This was seconded surprisingly by Colr. Smylie. Tarrant attacked the Corporation members who were absent from the meeting implying that they deliberately stayed away to avoid having to vote on the issue. His

motion was defeated with only himself and Roche in favour. Those who voted against were Lynch, Smylie, Jinks, Fitzpatrick, Hughes, McDonagh, Heraghty, Grey, Farrell, Depew. Those absent included D. M. Hanley.

In early autumn 1915, some members of Sligo Corporation were surcharged by the Local Government auditor for £105. He alleged that they had neglected to charge persons for the use of water for other than domestic uses. The Corporation had drawn up a scale of water charges in 1906, he said, but these had never been enforced. The resultant loss of revenue to the Corporation was the reason for the surcharge.

On the January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1916, the Mayor of Sligo John Jinks, wrote to Charles O'Hara asking him if he could help him. He had heard that he was to be opposed in the Mayoral election and two of the corporation members who would support him were in the army. Could O'Hara arrange for them to have leave at the opportune time so that they could vote for him since the election promised to be very close? O'Hara promised that he would write to the O/C, Kilworth Camp to see if Pte. P. Keely could be allowed home to vote but he thought there was little chance of Colr. McSharry being allowed home from service in France for the Sligo Mayoral election! O'Hara complimented Jinks: "Your fellow townsmen should be proud of the action you have taken to assist in recruiting and grateful for the services you have rendered since you first took up your responsible position as Mayor of Sligo". He hoped that there would not be a contest for the Mayoralty.

The election for Mayor excited considerable interest because it was known that it was to be close. Jinks was proposed by his old friend and comrade Edward Foley and was seconded by Colr. P. Keely, in khaki, home on leave! D. M. Hanley was proposed by Henry Monson and seconded by T. H. Fitzpatrick. The election resulted in a victory for Jinks 11-9. Both soldiers, Keely and McSharry, had been allowed home on leave and by their votes had ensured Jinks' victory. The others who supported Jinks were Higgins, Foley, McDonagh, Smylie, John Foley, Roche, Tarrant, J. Hughes and T. Hughes. Those who voted for Hanley were Lynch, Fitzpatrick, McTernan, Heraghty, Grey, Monson, Reilly, Farrell and Depew. Many of these were later to pledge their allegiance to Sinn Féin.

In his speech after the election Hanley said that the views of the people of Sligo were not reflected in the result. He had not stood in the interest of opposing recruiting but as a protest against the way Corporation affairs were being managed.

## 5. THE EMERGENCE OF SINN FEIN, 1916.

After the split in the Volunteers the Irish Volunteers continued to exist and in fact over the next year and a half slowly began to gain strength and numbers in County Sligo. The IRB, as we have seen, had also been organised to a limited extent in the County. All these nationalist anti-war, anti-Redmond groups were lumped together in the public's mind under the title "Sinn Féiners". Sinn Féin was an organisation which developed during the years 1905-08 under the direction of Arthur Griffith and was dedicated to winning independence from England. Most of those called "Sinn Féiners" in County Sligo before and during 1916 were not members of that organisation.

*(i) "We have a good many young outlaws among the shopkeepers.  
More numerous than people think".*

The recruiting campaigns of 1915 and 1916 and the ever present threat of conscription were aids to the growth of the Irish Volunteers. "I must confess however, to feeling that it was the fear of Hell in Flanders rather than the virtues of Sinn Fein that influenced a lot of my supporters", Alec McCabe said. McCabe and others who interrupted meetings and speeches gained attention for the movement. The arrests and trials, widely reported, of McCabe and Dyar also gained publicity for their beliefs. The farce of McCabe's trial showed the ineffectiveness of the British government in spite of all their DORA type laws.

In the early months of 1916 there seems to have been a definite increase in "Sinn Féin" membership and activity. Frank Carty said: 'In the early part of 1916 we had increased our membership over the southern part of the county. The climate was more favourable towards Volunteers at this time but the organisation prior to the rising of Easter Week was little more than a skeleton organisation'.

In his reports for the early part of 1916 the County Inspector mentions this growth. "The few Sinn Féiners in the county have to some extent injured the recruiting in country districts", he said at the end of January and at the end of the following month - "there is undoubtedly an undercurrent of some strength against recruiting but no open hostility has been shown". He also reported that newspapers such as The Workers' Republic, Nationality and The

Irish Volunteer were openly on sale in Sligo. In a review of 1916 dated January 24<sup>th</sup> 1917 .he says "The Sinn Féin party were very active prior to the rebellion and were gaining adherents".

In his report at the end of March the County Inspector mentioned that a branch of the Irish Volunteers had been formed at Cliffony and that other branches were in the process of being formed.

He reported that the Cliffony Volunteers had paraded to the number of fifty on St. Patrick's Day wearing uniforms. They attended Mass at Cliffony and then "paraded the roads". Their leaders, William Gilmartin and Andrew Conway, carried revolvers, he reported. On the same day, he said. Alec McCabe led a parade of 69 "Sinn Féiners" in Ballymote. McCabe was reported as wearing the uniform of the Irish Volunteers and the others wearing Irish Volunteer armbands. None carried arms. The parade was made up of thirty two Volunteers who had marched from Keash under McCabe and 36 from Kilcreevin led by Bernard Brady. On the same day J. J. Berreen led a parade of 52 unarmed Volunteers at Mullinabreena local sports. A police report on 1916 estimated that there were a total of 307 Volunteers in County Sligo who were anti-Redmond at the time of the rising. Of these it was estimated that 50 were members of the Irish Volunteers (MacNeill's) and the other 257 were National Volunteers who were Sinn Féiners. The report said that there were a total of 14 firearms in the hands of the Irish Volunteers in the county.

In the April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1916, issue of the Sligo Champion a short article appeared entitled "Irishmen beware of Sinn Féinism" by R. G. Bradshaw. It claimed that "the realisation of our National Hopes" depended on allied victory and that since Sinn Féin was pro-German it was working against the national hopes. Robert G. Bradshaw was a native of Tipperary who came to County Sligo in 1915 or 1916 to work with relations of his who owned the Post Office at Cloughbole, north Sligo. He was a member of the Church of Ireland and later became an ardent Republican and was very prominent during the War of Independence and Civil War in Sligo.

Sligo landowner and unionist, Malby Crofton wrote to the Irish Unionist Association in March 1916 complaining about the government's reluctance to deal with Sinn Féin: "I do not know how the government can go on urging us to use every means to get recruits, while they do nothing to put down a movement which is directed against recruiting and is I fear doing a great deal to stop it".

Northern Unionist, J. N. Wilson, toured Ireland at this time and interviewed unionists to get a general picture of the feelings of such people. He visited Sligo towards the end of February 1916. He interviewed local solicitor, A. M. Lyons, Jeweller, Francis Nelson, the clerk of the Crown and Peace, W. Russell Fenton, local businessman, Arthur Jackson and Charles O'Hara H.M.L. for County Sligo. Asked about the war and the people's attitude to it at the time, all said that most Sligo people were in favour. Fenton said that he thought the younger people would be glad to see England beaten. O'Hara said that some places were "pro-German" and Jackson said that in the county as distinct from the town many were indifferent. Mr Nelson said that while "every intelligent person" was in favour of the war there was "not quite such enthusiasm as at beginning". As regards recruiting, all interviewed stressed that Sligo town had done very well. "All the comer boy class has gone" said Nelson and Lyons said "The men who are gone are those for whom the Government has never done anything". Jackson and Nelson claimed that the Catholic clergy were not doing their bit for the effort and all mentioned the poor response from the country districts.

As regards the rise of Sinn Féin and the position of the Redmondites, Lyons said that there was a negligible number of Sinn Féiners in Sligo town but they were spreading in some of the smaller country towns. Jackson and O'Hara mentioned that Tubbercurry had a strong Sinn Féin element and O'Hara also mentioned Dromore West and Easkey areas. Jackson mentioned "a sprinkling of clergy" who held Sinn Fein views. Fenton thought that Sinn Féiners in the county were "more numerous than people think", adding "we have a good many young outlaws among the shopkeepers". He also said that he believed there was "any amount" of German money among the Sinn Féiners. As regards Redmond, Lyons thought that his nominee would always get elected in North Sligo though he thought "there may be a break in South Sligo and Redmond's authority may be shaken there."

A measure of the growth of Sinn Féin in the county was the number of times the organisation was mentioned in the local press. In late March 1916 on the occasion of the Connacht Rangers' band's recruiting visit to the Tubbercurry area the Unionist Sligo independent stated: "Throughout the visit the military received an enthusiastic reception despite the fact that Sinn Féinism is fairly prevalent in the district". At the beginning of April 1916 at a meeting of the South Sligo Executive of the United Irish League an attack was made on the "factionists", a common codeword for those opposed to Redmond, by P. J. McDermott, D.C. Bunninadden. On



April 9<sup>th</sup> three members of the Keash branch of the same organisation, the UIL, were expelled "for identifying with the Sinn Féin policy," Alec McCabe may have been one of these.

On April 15<sup>th</sup> at the Sligo County Council meeting the Chairman and MP for South Sligo, John O'Dowd, made a blistering attack on the Sinn Féiners - an indication that they were being taken seriously. He called them "a gang of non-entities" and proposed a resolution of confidence in the Party and John Redmond. Sligo Mayor Jinks added his condemnation and said that he thought that the Irish Party was very slack "in not having the Sinn Féiners sent to the front". A lone voice was however raised in the defence of the Sinn Féiners. John Hennigan, a councillor from the Drumcliff area said that while he did not wish anyone to think he was in favour of the Sinn Féiners he would not condemn them behind their backs. He added that he thought that Sinn Féin had done more against conscription than any other body in Ireland. According to the Sligo Independent, uproar ensued at the meeting as a result of that remark.

***(ii) "The country is in a state of rebellion and there is no knowing where it will end".***

According to the memoirs of some of those involved the Sligo members of the Volunteers and the IRB were aware that a rising was to take place in 1916. "The Volunteers in Cliffony were eager for the fray and kept themselves in readiness", says Patrick McCannon. The Cliffony Volunteers mobilised in the early hours of Easter Monday, 60 strong, including Fianna boys. At the break of day they were ready to advance on Sligo when a messenger arrived cancelling all active operations pending further orders from H.Q. The Volunteers remained in readiness for over a week in the hope of taking part in the rebellion but with the surrender in Dublin all hope ended and they disbanded. According to another account the members of the Hibernian Rifles in Cliffony assembled at Kinlough, County Leitrim on Friday night intending to go by train from Bundoran to Dublin to take part in the rising on the Saturday. Their leader did not turn up and they went home. On Sunday April 30<sup>th</sup>, the day after the surrender in Dublin, a parade was held by the Irish Volunteers in Cliffony. No arms were carried.

In Sligo town itself the Volunteers were expecting the rising on the Sunday and were confused by the cancellation. On the Monday word came through that the rising had started. The Volunteers met and Jim Keaveney was sent to Cliffony to contact the Volunteers there. He was to arrange that the two groups were to meet outside Sligo to commence operations. However

Keaveney was stopped by the RIC and taken to the Barracks. He was soon released but there was no action by the Sligo Volunteers.

In Keash the local IRB had planned to attack Keash police barracks which was occupied by one sergeant and four policemen and mobilised on the Sunday night. Alec McCabe did not turn up and another IRB centre turned up in his place. The men refused to accept his leadership and the attack was called off. In the Tubbercurry area there was also anticipation and excitement. Frank Carty says that on Easter Saturday they had had an order from G.H.Q. asking them to hold units in readiness, to have food supplies prepared and to await further instructions. As a result of this a meeting was held on Sunday of representatives of the various parish units in the area in Tubbercurry Town Hall following a football match and Volunteer parade. The Volunteers interpreted the G.H.Q. message as indicating that something in the nature of a round up by the British was on foot.

On Tuesday Tubbercurry heard of the Rising and Carty went to Ballaghaderreen, an IRB stronghold, where he hoped to meet Paddy Ryan who had gone to Dublin on Sunday for information. Ryan had not returned from Dublin and Carty came back to Mullinabreena.

Alec McCabe was at this time teaching in an industrial school in Killybegs, County Donegal. He went to Dublin on Easter Saturday morning. On the Saturday night he met members of the Military Council who were planning the rebellion. James Connolly told McCabe to go back to the west and with the IRB men cause as much disruption to communications as possible. He left Dublin on Sunday morning by train. He jumped off the train as it reached Mullingar and drove by hired car from there to Granard, County Longford. On Monday morning he continued his journey and reached Boyle. He made contact where ever possible with IRB members and asked them to sever communications. From Boyle on Monday night he went to Ballaghaderreen to try to obtain rifles which he knew to be in the possession of Redmond's Volunteers there. He failed. He returned to Keash then and with some of the IRB members travelled to the Tubbercurry area.

They arrived in Mullinabreena on Wednesday morning and stayed in a house attached to Achonry Creamery. Carty and McCabe with some other Volunteers met on Wednesday night and decided that they should begin military operations on Friday night. They cut some telegraph wires. They sent Andrew Lavin to Cliffony for some gelignite which they knew to be hidden

there. He however was arrested on his way. Their plans were to cut rail and road links and to attack some of the many RIC barracks in the county. Before any action could take place or gelignite obtained news of the surrender in Dublin put an end to such plans.

When news of the rebellion reached Sligo there was a fear among those in authority that it would spread to Sligo. A meeting of the magistrates of Sligo town and County was called on the Saturday of Easter week, April 30<sup>th</sup>, in the Courthouse to consider steps to prevent such an occurrence and to deal with it if it happened. At the meeting it was decided to enrol Volunteers to assist the police in the event of an outbreak and the public were invited to go to the nearest police station and give in their names as volunteers. However as word of the surrender reached Sligo that night the project was not proceeded with. Charles K. O'Hara had been on his way to Dublin on the Monday when he was stopped by police at Lucan and advised to return home which he did. On April 28<sup>th</sup> he wrote: "Please forgive the delay in replying but as you know the country is in a state of rebellion and there is no knowing where it will end." On May 2<sup>nd</sup> he wrote to the Lord Lieutenant Lord Wimbourne asking on behalf of her family for news of Countess Markievicz and remarked. "We hear wild rumours down here but so far the county is quiet and I trust will remain so".

Well known Volunteers and "Sinn Féiners" in Sligo were likely to be arrested as soon as the rising started. McCabe had to hide out in the Mullinabreena area during the week and in fact remained "on the run" for a long time afterwards. On the Wednesday of Easter Week, April 26<sup>th</sup>, Thomas Cryan of Keash was arrested in Ballymote by the Head Constable. At a special court in Sligo on May 5<sup>th</sup> the Head Constable said that Cryan was a "well known Sinn Féiner and member of the Volunteers" and said that when questioned, Cryan had refused to answer questions. The County Inspector described him as "the local organiser of the Keash Branch of the Irish Volunteers". Cryan was remanded in custody and was later sent to Wandsworth detention centre in England.

On Saturday May 6<sup>th</sup>, about 60 men attached to the North Staffordshire regiment arrived by train in Sligo, were met by local RIC and escorted to No. 1 police barracks which they made their headquarters. Their mission was to search for arms and to round up any Volunteers considered dangerous. Early on Sunday morning they commandeered cars and went to Cliffony district where they searched many houses. Many of the Cliffony Volunteers were on the alert and evaded capture but fifteen were arrested. It was alleged that arms and ammunition were found in

some of the houses. Those arrested were John Gilmartin, William Gilmartin, Charles McGarrigle, Edward Hannon, John Hannon, Bernard Meehan, Hugh Foley, Hugh Crystal, Andrew Conroy and George Gardiner all of Creevykeel, Robert Garrigle, Laurence Garrigle, Charles Gilmartin and Patrick Rooney of Carrickduff and Patrick Burke of Bunduff.

They were held in Sligo until Thursday morning when they were transferred to Dublin for court-martial. On Friday May 12<sup>th</sup> they were sent to Wandsworth detention centre in England.

Although there was no action in Sligo during the Rising some Sligo persons were engaged in action elsewhere. Nurse Linda Kearns opened a field hospital in North Great George's Street on Wednesday of Easter week and treated many wounded until ordered to close by the British authorities. She then acted as dispatch carrier for the rebels as well as giving first aid. It is said that she was one of the first to come to the aid of the O'Rahilly when he was fatally wounded in the retreat from the G.P.O. She escaped arrest after the surrender. Linda Kearns was born in Dromard in 1888 and was a qualified nurse. She had been associated with, though not a member of, both the Volunteers and Cumann na mBan in the years before 1916.

Countess Markievicz, formerly Constance Gore Booth of Lissadell, County Sligo, took a prominent part in the Rising. She had been active in Nationalist circles for many years having been involved in the founding of the "boy scouts", Na Fianna, in 1909 and having helped the workers in the great Dublin lock out of 1913. She played a leading role in the founding of the Citizen Army and it was as a member of this group that she participated in the Rising. She was second in command to Michael Mallin in the St. Stephen's Green garrison and was arrested at the surrender. She was court-martialled and sentenced to death but this was commuted to life imprisonment. She was imprisoned in Aylesbury jail. England.

Another Sligo born member of the Citizen Army was William Partridge. He had been born in Chapel Street Sligo in 1874, the eldest son of an English born father. The family soon moved to Ballaghaderreen. William moved to Dublin where he worked with the Midland and Great Western Railway Company. He became very involved with Labour and Sinn Féin politics and was elected to Dublin Corporation in 1903. He was a well known speaker at Labour rallies in Dublin and went on a lecture tour of Britain. He contributed to many Labour newspapers. He was sent to Tralee to supervise the distribution of the rifles which were to be landed from the

German ship and when this plan miscarried he hurried back to Dublin. He was a member of the Citizen Army garrison which occupied the Stephen's Green area under Michael Mallin and Countess Markievicz. He was court-martialled after the Rising and sentenced to fifteen years' penal servitude in Dartmoor.

Martin Savage of Streamstown Ballisodare, born in 1898, went to work in Dublin in 1915 and soon became a member of the Volunteers. During the Rising he fought in the G.P.O. with Pearse and Connolly. After the surrender he was imprisoned in Richmond Barracks and on April 30<sup>th</sup> he was deported to Knutsford Detention Barracks. On the same day and in the same batch of prisoners was deported F. Murphy of Curry. County Sligo described as a school teacher. His name is later given as Martin. Presumably he was a Curry native, teaching in Dublin who fought in the G.P.O. Later in 1918 he spoke at a meeting in Curry and was introduced as a local "who fought in Easter Week". In 1918 in a letter to Sinn Féin Headquarters the secretary of Cashill Sinn Féin club, Curry, said that he had fought in the G.P.O. in 1916. Presumably this was the same man. Others deported after the Rising with Sligo addresses and presumably having taken part in the Rising while staying or working in Dublin were: John Brown, Sligo; Michael Coyne, Sligo; Patrick McDermott, Drumcliff, Labourer.

J. J. O'Connell was born in Sligo, son of J. O'Connell a schools inspector. Nicknamed "Ginger", he became very involved in the Volunteers though he was not confided in by the IRB who planned the Rising. When O'Connell heard of the planned rising he, like Eoin MacNeill, tried to stop it but failed. After the surrender he was arrested by the British and deported even though he had not taken any part in the affair.

Six of those arrested at Clifony were soon released: L. Garrigle, J. Gilmartin, C. McGarrigle, C. Gilmartin, E. Hannon and J. Hannon were released at the end of May 1916 and they returned from England. In his May report the County Inspector mentioned their release and remarked that the reasons for their release had not been made known and were not apparent. John Brown and Michael Coyne, Sligo were released early in June 1916. At the end of May Tom Scanlan, the MP for North Sligo, had visited the Clifony prisoners and had asked a question in the House of Commons asking for their release.

Those who were deported were held in prisons for a few weeks after which time they were either released or sent to an internment camp in Frongoch. North Wales. Most of the

leaders were kept in prisons. The following Sligo prisoners spent some time in Frongoch: J. J. O'Connell, Sligo, Martin Savage, Ballisodare, Patrick Burke, Castlegal, Hugh Foley, Castlegal, Andrew Conway, Cliffony, Hugh Crystal, Cliffony, George Gardiner, Cliffony, William Gilmartin, Cliffony, Robert Garrigle, Cliffony, Patrick Rooney, Cliffony and Martin Murphy, Curry. Thomas Cryan, Keash, arrested in Ballymote was also in Frongoch. Ginger O'Connell was made Commandant of the South Camp, Frongoch but on July 11<sup>th</sup> he was one of the thirty leaders who were moved from the camp to Reading prison.

One Sligo man was killed in the Rising, a member of the RIC. This was Constable James Gormley of Ballintogher. He was stationed at Navan and was a member of a patrol sent to Ashbourne where rebels under Thomas Ashe had attacked the RIC Barracks. The party was ambushed and James Gormley was killed instantly. He was 25 years old and had almost four years service in the RIC having served in Slane, Longwood and Enfield all in County Meath. He was buried in Navan, County Meath on April 30<sup>th</sup>. Jeremiah Mee was stationed in Ballintogher at the time and he notes that "nearly all the people, including the local Volunteers, turned out to attend a Requiem Mass for the dead constable". James Gormley's brother was an active member of the Ballintogher Volunteers.



*James Gormley, RIC, a native of Ballintogher, killed in 1916.*

Another Sligo man took part in the same action at Ashbourne, Constable Michael J. Duggan son of Patrick Duggan of Strandhill, County Sligo. He was injured while lying in the cover of a motor car and firing at the rebels. The police had to surrender and he said that the rebels treated them well and sent the wounded including himself into Navan to be treated in the hospital. Constable Duggan made a speedy recovery. He was 19 years of age at the time and had only just over one year service in the RIC. Another Sligo member of the RIC received an award for dedication to duty during the rebellion. This was Constable Bernard Conway from Cliffony a brother of Volunteer Andrew Conway who had been arrested and interned.

*(iii) "The Government has gone a bit too far with regard to taking the lives of fifteen true Irishmen".*

Charles O'Hara had no doubt where the blame for the rising lay. While the rising was still in progress he wrote, "As these men have been allowed to go about Dublin fully armed and practice street fighting for some time past we can all assume that the powers that be are in full sympathy with the Sinn Féin movement". Later in the year O'Hara again commented adversely on

the Government's handling of the Irish situation. "I think the Government made a great mistake in not having conscription in this country at the time it was put in force in England. Had it been done then there would have been very little opposition as it was expected and probably we should have had no rebellion."

Soon after the rising a report from the Keash branch of the United Irish League as printed in the Sligo Champion contained the following: "The rebellion in Dublin was a terrible shock . . . The Sinn Féin policy was a ruinous and insane policy and was detrimental to the best interests of Ireland. They should be all proud of the stand their branch made against them and their parish today was a united parish under the banner of the UIL". They then passed the usual motion of confidence in Redmond and the Parliamentary Party. This was a very early reaction to the rising but very soon matters became less simple. The executions of the leaders carried out as they were over a period of ten days and the deportation of so many prisoners who had taken no part in the rising helped change people's minds and arouse sympathy and support for the rebels.

A Sligo Champion editorial of May 20<sup>th</sup> spoke of "the daily toll of executions and a sickening thud went through the heart of Ireland with each fresh announcement". The Sligo Nationalist of May 20<sup>th</sup> said "The strong military measures taken to put down the 'Rising' in Sligo and Leitrim are beginning to be regarded with amused contempt by the people of these counties." Another editorial in the Sligo Champion on May 27<sup>th</sup> said "A good deal of dissatisfaction has been caused in many places by the wholesale arrests which have been made by the military authorities of persons who had little or nothing to do with the Dublin revolt".

"The feeling of the people was generally against the rebels at the time", reported the County Inspector at the end of 1916. However he went on: "The subsequent feeling of the people was opposed to the executions, arrests and internments". He also said that in general the attitude of the Catholic Church was against the "Sinn Féin Rebellion". He named some few Sligo priests who were known to hold Sinn Féin views "but they gave no open expression to their views". These included Rev. Brian Crehan C.C. Grange, Rev. William O'Flaherty C.C. Sligo and Rev. John O'Donohoe, P.P. Templeboy. "When, however, the Sinn Féin leaders surrendered and were shot or deported for long terms of penal servitude the local people began to harden their hearts against the British government", says Jeremiah Mee who was then stationed in County Sligo.



The various branches of the UIL and AOH in the county responded to the events in the time honoured way by passing resolutions of support for John Redmond and his party. Here and there these were coupled with condemnations of the executions. The continued imprisonment of some Sligo people was also the subject for frequent resolutions demanding their release. For example in late June Bunninadden UIL passed the following resolution and had it printed in the Sligo Champion: "That we demand the immediate release of our countrymen and women who are held without trial in prison on suspicion of complicity in the late revolution. The brutal execution of the leaders of the revolution who surrendered had alienated a great deal of sympathy from the government and the continued persecution of these people who were deported and imprisoned will certainly aggravate that feeling and breed feelings of resentment and revenge in the minds of thousands who had no connection or sympathy with the rising. We call on Mr Redmond to insist on their prompt release and request our representative Mr O'Dowd to continue to exert himself in their interest." Ballyrush branch of the UIL inserted a report in the Champion of July 15<sup>th</sup> which included the following with reference to the conduct of the authorities: "No wonder the public mind had undergone such a change in Ireland during the past few months."

When prisoners were released this attracted more attention in the press. At the meeting of the Sligo Board of Guardians in the first week of June 1916 Guardian Charles McGarrigle, who had been one of the Cliffony prisoners and had recently been released, was present. The Mayor, John Jinks, welcomed the released man and said that he was proud that there was present at the meeting a man who had been in Wandsworth Detention Barracks - "While they all did not approve of the recent rebellion in Dublin, it was most unfair to the men who were in no way connected with the disturbance and who lived in districts far away from the metropolis to be arrested and sent to detention prisons". He proposed a resolution calling on the authorities to release the remaining Cliffony prisoners.

The Mayor got another opportunity to voice his sympathy for the executed leaders at a meeting in Sligo to appeal for funds for the Irish National Aid Association. This association was set up to help the dependents of those killed and imprisoned on the rebel side in the rising. The Mayor presided and among the attendance were Alderman Foley, Alderman Fitzpatrick, D. A. Mulcahy, J. Tracey, J. J. Clancy and other councillors. The meeting had been called by the corporation and the Mayor while saying that it was not a time for speechmaking went on to talk at length about his attitude to the executions: "The Government has gone a bit too far with

regard to taking the lives of 15 true Irishmen". He knew some of those executed he said "I have heard them speak, I have heard them voice the cause of Ireland". He recognised the change of mood in the country "I have always advocated recruiting and I am sorry that this thing has occurred because I am afraid that recruiting had been injured". Alderman Edward Foley and J. J. Clancy were appointed secretaries of the fund in Sligo.

The local newspapers reflected the change in public attitude to the rising by including pen-pictures of the 1916 leaders. In the Sligo Champion of May 27<sup>th</sup> there was an article by Seamus MacGowan on Seán MacDermott. The Sligo Nationalist in its issue of July 1<sup>st</sup> printed "P. H. Pearse - A Delightful Personality", an article written by S.H.D. This was followed in the subsequent weeks by articles on James Connolly and Thomas Clarke.

Seven more of the Cliffony prisoners were released in July and they arrived in Sligo by train on Friday 21<sup>st</sup>. These were William Gilmartin, Andrew Conway, George Gardiner, Edward McGarrigle, Patrick Rooney, J. Foley and W. Burke. They received a warm welcome in Sligo, stayed the night there and were driven home to Cliffony on the Saturday accompanied by Owen Healy, Seamus MacGowan and Jim Kirby. The last of the Cliffony prisoners to be released from Frongoch arrived in Sligo on August 3<sup>rd</sup> and were given a "cordial welcome", as the Sligo Champion put it. They were escorted to Cliffony by well wishers. T. W. Cryan who had been arrested in Ballymote during Easter Week was also released at this time.

***(iv) "Three fourths of Ireland in the hands of Irishmen will not be bad for a start".***

Just at the time when they could least afford it the Parliamentary Party became embroiled in another controversy which was to rob them of much of their remaining credibility. This was the "Exclusion" controversy. Lloyd George brought forward a measure under which the Home Rule Bill was to be put into force at once but with the exclusion of six counties of northern Ireland. It was not at first made clear whether this exclusion was to be temporary or permanent. Redmond and his followers accepted this plan but they misread the mood of the people. The matter was discussed at the meetings of the public bodies and of the nationalist organisations in County Sligo and received much publicity in the local press in the summer of 1916. The Sligo Champion took the official party line. In an editorial of June 17<sup>th</sup> it said "though the proposed settlement is not all that Irishmen could wish it is we believe the best that at present England could give. Three fourths of Ireland in the hands of Irishmen will not be bad for a start".

In its June 17<sup>th</sup> issue the same paper printed reports of resolutions against Partition from the Sligo Board of Guardians, Sligo District Council, Sligo Corporation and Tubbercurry Board of Guardians. At the Sligo District Council meeting the following resolution was passed unanimously: "We consider it our duty to express the opinion that nothing less than an undivided Ireland will satisfy the aspirations of the Irish people and this is the well known opinion of the people of this district". In its issues for the following weeks resolution after resolution from UIL branches was printed stating their opposition to the exclusion of Ulster from Home Rule. A lone exception was Kilcreevin UIL where Canon Quinn is reported to have said, "It is great to have Home Rule even for twenty six counties."

Writing his June report early in July the County Inspector noted "No one seems pleased at the proposed partition of Ireland but the choice seems to be between following the Irish Party and absolute chaos". Later, in his end of year report, he said "The people were strongly opposed to the proposed Home Rule settlement involving the partition of Ireland and were pleased when the scheme fell through".

A meeting of the National Directory of the Irish Parliamentary Party was to be held on Monday July 10<sup>th</sup> and the question of partition was to be discussed and voted on at that meeting. John Jinks, Mayor of Sligo was on the Directory and at a meeting of the North Sligo Executive of the UIL on July 1<sup>st</sup> the matter was discussed. A proposal was put to the meeting that the Mayor should be instructed to vote against the exclusion of Ulster and this was carried by 14 votes to 8. The Sligo Champion refused to report this meeting fully saying that only five of the thirty North Sligo UIL branches were represented. At the meeting it was pointed out that the Mayor was under no obligation to abide by the executive's recommendation. Mr Jinks did not and voted loyally with Redmond.

The next monthly meeting of the North Sligo Executive promised to be heated, and it was. Mr Jinks took the sensible step of absenting himself from the meeting and instead sent in a letter which included: "In all sincerity I would ask you as Nationalists to stand with your leader, his party and your representative. I believe myself that I would not be doing justice to the County Sligo if I did not support John Redmond and his Party". He was attacked at once. "He wanted the opinion of the executive - we told him and he went and did the opposite" said Mr Kilawee of Sligo Borough branch. Henry Depew accused the Sligo Champion of not printing a full report of the previous month's meeting only because the meeting went against the Parliamentary Party. He

also remarked with regard to their Parliamentary representative Mr Scanlan, "There are men as good as he is North Sligo".

The chairman, Rev P. Butler, Sligo, then called for a resolution of confidence in the Irish Party. This brought forth a torrent of scorn. "Glory be to God we are tired of supporting them" said Mr Feeney. "We are tired of passing resolutions". Finally a compromise of sorts was arrived at and a resolution (!) condemning the British Government for deceiving Redmond and the Party was passed.

By that time Redmond had withdrawn his support from the proposed partition scheme when the exact nature of the proposals had been revealed to the House of Commons. In an editorial the Sligo Nationalist said: "England has once again broken her imperial word to Ireland. Let the country once again fall into line and form a solid phalanx behind the Irish leader and his party". The affair however had done immeasurable damage to the leader and party nationwide and to people like Jinks locally who were tainted with blind devotion to that leader. It thus aided the growth of Sinn Féin.

By the end of June the County Inspector could write, "The sudden concern shown by the Government for Home Rule after the rebellion has strengthened the Sinn Féin party which in my opinion is growing in numbers and influence. There is a very general feeling of unrest and apprehension". At the end of July he said, "The Irish Party and Mr Redmond have undoubtedly lost ground and the Sinn Féin party is growing". At the end of August he mentions the Irish Volunteers who "do not appear publicly but they have gained many adherents especially young men of military age who believe that the Sinn Féin party have prevented and are preventing conscription in Ireland". In the September report of the Military Intelligence Officer he said "It is doubtful if the majority of the later recruits to the Sinn Féin society are genuine. More probably many express sympathy with the society through fear of conscription and openly shelter behind Sinn Féinism without in any way knowing what it means".

Echoes of the Easter Rising were still in the air. At their August 9<sup>th</sup> meeting Sligo Corporation passed a motion recording their deep regret at the execution of Roger Casement on August 3<sup>rd</sup>. It was proposed by Colr. Monson and seconded by Colr. Hughes. The country was still under martial law and now and then resolutions against martial law crop up in the local papers from branches of the UIL. Early in September 1916 Thomas Scanlan MP attended the

Sligo Borough Branch of the UIL. His speech shows the extent of the support and sympathy for the rising there was even in an organisation supposedly loyal to Redmond. Scanlan tried to avoid as far as possible giving any offence to these supporters while at the same time advising "common sense" attitudes and methods. It is worth printing the speech with audience comments as printed in the Sligo Champion: "There has been a rebellion (applause) and the men who fought in that rebellion fought as nobly as it is possible for men to fight in any cause. (Loud and continued applause). They fought a good fight but gentlemen it was a foolish fight. (Several voices - No!). They fought an impossible fight gentlemen, they fought not only against the British Empire but against the national interests of Ireland. They fought and died like noble men. If I quarrel with them, do not take me as despising their courage or determination. On the contrary I acknowledge it and am proud of it. (Cheers). But here in sober common sense we talk and discuss the future of our country. How is the future of Ireland to be served? How are the interests of Ireland to be enhanced, how is Ireland to gain the place all of us, Sinn Féiners and others, want Ireland to have, a place in the sun, a place among the nations, a place of power and prosperity and happiness for our people?"

John Redmond himself visited Sligo on October 29<sup>th</sup> for the unveiling of a memorial to the famous P. A. McHugh who had been MP for Sligo and proprietor of the Sligo Champion until his death in 1909.

The County Inspector notes inactivity among the UIL branches in June and July as the controversy about the partition scheme raged. He then notes that Sinn Féin seemed to increase its support. In his September report he says that efforts were being made to reorganise and strengthen the UIL "and to recover for the Irish Party the influence lost by their acquiescence in recommendation of the partition scheme". He thought that this effort had met with some success but he also mentioned that Sinn Féin was organising a determined effort to oust the two Irish Party MPs in County Sligo. By October he could say that "the Irish Party appear to be gaining strength". "The Sinn Féiners make no outward show but are undoubtedly recruiting".

During the month of November the Sinn Féin party in Sligo town started a club in a room in a building in Pound Street. It was called "The Wanderers Gaelic Club" but was popularly called "The Sinn Féin Club". Among those involved were John R. Treacy, Jim Kirby and Jim Keaveney. The County Inspector noted that the club organised an entertainment in December in aid of the National Aid and Dependents Fund which was very poorly attended. The Inspector

estimated that there were thirty members in the club. Larger premises were later obtained by the club in Temple Street.

Recruiting for the army in County Sligo was very poor during the latter part of 1916. In May the County Inspector reported that recruiting in the County appeared to be decreasing and that in his opinion "very few more recruits will be obtained by voluntary enlistment". In June he said "Recruiting for the army has fallen off" and by the end of July recruiting had almost ceased according to the inspector. At the end of October he said "Any attempt to enforce conscription will lead to grave disorder". For the month ending November 15<sup>h</sup> there were only seven recruits, for the following month eight enlisted and the month ending January 15<sup>h</sup> fifteen, "a miserable return for a county containing 7,000 recruitable men", the Inspector remarked.

On September 10<sup>th</sup> 1916, Major Charles O'Hara wrote in reply to a Major Burke who had asked him for information as to the state of the county. "I would be almost the last person to be told anything privately" he wrote. "I would not for a moment say the country was thoroughly disloyal though there is no denying some parts are far worse than others . . . I am told the Sinn Féin movement is growing though things appear quiet at present. Very few of their arms were taken after the Rebellion and I don't suppose they are being kept for ornament". In his report for December 1917 the Military Intelligence Officer said "Public feeling cannot be said to be loyal. The people as a whole are indifferent to everything relating to the war and are centred on making money, amusing themselves at football, coursing and race meetings and the war appears very remote to them".

As if to remind Sligo that there was a greater struggle still taking place in Europe the Sligo ship the S.S. Liverpool was sunk by a mine on the night of December 19<sup>th</sup>. The ship, the property of the Sligo Steam Navigation Company was on her way from Liverpool to Sligo with a large general cargo when she struck a mine near the Calf of Man. The crew was mainly from Sligo but only three were lost, Daniel Garvey, James Costello and J. P. Gillen.

## **6. SINN FÉIN ORGANISES. JANUARY 1917 - JANUARY 1918.**

Early in 1917 the death of the MP for North Roscommon, James J. O'Kelly, meant that a by-election had to be held. It was decided by those on the more extreme side of the nationalist spectrum that the Irish Parliamentary Party should be opposed and they selected Count Plunkett as their candidate. He was the father of Joseph Mary Plunkett who had been executed after the Rising and he himself had recently been expelled from the Royal Dublin Society for his republican sympathies and connections.

*(i) "Count Plunkett is brought into the political arena at the present moment as a sort of 'red herring'".*

The by-election was fought in January 1917 with polling day on February 3<sup>d</sup>. All those on the republican side, though as yet not united, rallied around Plunkett. Many from Sligo took part. Alec McCabe, who had been on the run since the rising took part as did some from Sligo town including probably J. R. Treacy, D. A. Mulcahy, Henry Monson, Harry Depew and T. H. Fitzpatrick. Former Cliffony curate, Fr Michael O'Flanagan, played a major role in the campaign.

When the votes were counted Count Plunkett received over 3,000, his nearest opponent 1,700 and the result was a major blow to the Parliamentary Party. Count Plunkett announced his intention of not taking his seat at Westminster. The election of the Count was celebrated by lighted tar barrels at Sligo, Tubbercurry and Gurteen. The proceedings at Gurteen were considered to be serious enough to be reported to the Competent Military Authority for possible prosecution.

Redmond's supporters tried to put a brave face on the result. An editorial in the Sligo Champion said that the result was "Ireland's verdict on the executions, the idiotic arrests of innocent persons, the blundering of military despots." It went on to say that the decision of the Parliamentary Party to oppose Plunkett was "an impolitic one": "There is no place in Ireland for more than one constitutional movement and one pledge bound Irish Party". It ended with a plea for unity behind Redmond and asked for a more persistent demand for the immediate grant of self government.

Sligo Corporation had now a new Mayor, Colr D. M. Hanley having been unanimously elected in January. It also had a majority composed of councillors who described themselves as Sinn Féin or Labour or more usually both. At its meeting on February 7<sup>th</sup>, the new Mayor proposed a resolution congratulating Count Plunkett on his Roscommon victory. Colr. Reilly seconded the resolution. Alderman T. H. Fitzpatrick said that arising out of that resolution he wished to propose that the corporation offer the freedom of the borough of Sligo to Count Plunkett. This caused some questioning even from D. M. Hanley, the Mayor, who wondered if this was a "big order". Alderman Foley thought that the matter should be discussed in committee but eventually the motion was carried without opposition. It appears that Alderman Jinks was not present at the meeting. It also appears that if the proposal to grant the Count the freedom of the town was planned by the "Sinn Féin" element before the meeting Mayor Hanley did not know of it.

Not all County Sligo public bodies were of the same mind as Sligo Corporation. On Monday February 12<sup>th</sup> Tubbercurry District Council held their meeting. What was described as "a heated discussion" took place when Colr. Jack Brennan proposed a resolution congratulating the people of North Roscommon on electing Count Plunkett. The resolution was seconded by Mr Gorman but was attacked by a majority. "When Count Plunkett was getting a big salary from the English government Mr Redmond and his followers were fighting for the Irish people" declared Colr. John Lee, who proposed that the resolution be rejected. Five councillors voted for the resolution, Colrs Jack Brennan, Gorman, M. J. Gallagher, Joseph Brennan and J. C. Burke. Fourteen voted against the resolution which was lost. At the South Sligo executive meeting of the UIL in Ballymote in February resolutions of "unaltered confidence in the patriotism and integrity and policy of the Irish Party" were passed though the proposer, County Councillor P. J. McDermott, also mentioned that he thought Mr Redmond was "too gullible and too ready to accept statements of British ministers".

On March 11<sup>th</sup> Major Charles O'Hara wrote to Sir Bryan Mahon, Commander in Chief of British troops in Ireland, to draw his attention to the possibility of trouble on the occasion of the visit of the Count to Sligo. "If he [Count Plunkett] is to be allowed to go through the country preaching sedition and working up another rebellion it would be better to hand the country over to the Sinn Féiners at once", said the Major. "I fear if he is allowed to come here on the 17<sup>th</sup> inst. to receive the Freedom of the town of Sligo there will be, as a leading Redmondite expressed to me a few days ago, 'bad work'. It is common knowledge that both parties have arms and



ammunition in plenty and it was only from want of organisation that we escaped a rising in Sligo last year".

The Major's advice to prevent the Count coming to Sligo was not taken however and the visit passed off peacefully. Later, in August when O'Hara was writing on another matter to Mahon, he said "I was glad everything passed off quietly on the last occasion I wrote to you and as far as I can learn we may thank the R.C. bishop that there was not the trouble that we expected." The freedom of Sligo was actually granted to Count Plunkett on St. Patrick's Day, March 17<sup>th</sup> 1917. The County Inspector reported of the conferring: "There was a very large gathering but no enthusiasm was shown and the general results were very disappointing to the Sinn Féin party who I think regret their choice of Count Plunkett as their champion". The crowd numbered 2,800 according to one police report. The Military Intelligence Officer reported that "None of the local Nationalists except the Mayor . . . and a few labour members of the Corporation were present. No violent or seditious language was used by any of the speakers". Another police report however said that "the speeches, especially that of Count Plunkett, were strong and disloyal". Others to make speeches were Arthur Griffith, M O'Mullane, Fr Dolan C.C. and the Mayor.

The "Wanderers Gaelic Club" in Sligo had increased in numbers and the Temple Street premises were no longer suitable so a larger premises was obtained in Teeling Street. Count and Countess Plunkett were entertained in these premises by the light of paraffin lamps and candles. The secretary of the "Wanderers" club wrote to Sinn Féin Headquarters in September 1917 asking if it was possible to affiliate to Sinn Féin while retaining their own name. There is no record of the reply.

Count Plunkett issued a manifesto inviting delegates from public bodies to a conference in the Mansion House, Dublin, on April 19<sup>th</sup>. This conference was an attempt to unify the various groups loosely termed "Sinn Féin" and to clarify their aims. On April 4<sup>th</sup> Sligo Corporation discussed the manifesto which asked for two delegates to be sent to the conference. Henry Depew proposed that the request be acceded to and C. Connolly seconded that. The Mayor, Alderman Hanley, proposed Alderman Lynch and Alderman White as representatives but Alderman Lynch declined saying he would be in Dublin the previous week. Colr. Reilly was proposed in his stead.

At this juncture Alderman Jinks rose to propose a direct negative. "Count Plunkett is brought into the political arena at the present moment as a sort of 'red herring' across the trail of the Irish Party's work and with the object of breeding dissension among the people of Ireland." The Mayor, Colr. Hanley, then made a long speech. He began by praising the Irish party and saying that Sligo was represented by "a very able man". However he then went on to say that the Party had not achieved very much in the previous ten or twelve years. When the resolution was put it was carried by twelve votes to three. The three against were John Jinks, Edward Foley and M. McDonagh.

When the same resolution was presented at the meetings of the other public bodies in County Sligo it received much less favourable consideration. On April 17<sup>th</sup> Dromore District Council decided to mark it "read". Sligo Board of Guardians considered it at their meeting of April 7<sup>th</sup> and it was also marked "read" on a vote of 17 to 12. When the conference proposed by Plunkett met in Dublin, Sligo people in attendance included the Mayor, D. M. Hanley, Jim Keaveney, Seamus MacGowan, Bernard Brady and J. J. Clancy.

J. J. (Jack) Clancy was a native of Ballygrania, Collooney, born in 1892. He was a nephew of a former Bishop of Elphin, Dr. Clancy. He had been educated at Summerhill College, Sligo and had afterwards worked with the Congested District Board in Dublin. In 1912 he obtained a position as secretary to the County Sligo Committee of Agriculture and took a prominent part in the organising of Sinn Féin in the county.

***(ii) "To weld the increasing numbers of Sinn Féiners in South Sligo into a solid organisation".***

While all this was going on, the organising of Sinn Féin clubs was proceeding quietly all over the county. This got very little publicity in the local newspapers which were still strongly pro-Redmond. However there are some indications of the growth of the branches. "There is no doubt that Sinn Féin is growing at the expense of the Irish Party", reported the County Inspector at the end of February 1917. He reported two clubs in existence in County Sligo at the end of March, one was Sligo town but which the other was is not clear though it possibly was Ballintrillick. "At this time the energy of the Volunteers was devoted to building up the Sinn Féin organisation. They assisted in organising Sinn Féin branches all over Sligo County", Frank Carty recalled. As early as February 1917 the secretary of Ballintrillick Sinn Féin club, John Ferguson,

was in contact with Headquarters in Dublin and on April 24<sup>th</sup> of the same year, Peter O'Hara, secretary of Aclare Sinn Féin club, sent affiliation fees and asked for rules. Also by April Achonry had been in correspondence with Sinn Féin Headquarters.

In the April report of the County Inspector he mentions noticing an increased circulation of Sinn Féin papers in the county. Sean Milroy of Sinn Féin was in Sligo from May 26<sup>th</sup> to the end of the month and he visited various parts of the county organising clubs and addressing meetings. By the end of June the Inspector was reporting that there were five Sinn Féin clubs with a total membership of 283 members "and several more are being formed". In his July report, the number of Sinn Féin clubs is given as 15 with membership of 773. There was one branch of Cumann na mBan with a membership of fifteen.

On February 18<sup>th</sup> what was described as "an entertainment" was held in Cloonacool School organised by among others Terence and Philip Sheridan from Tubbercurry. The night consisted of a play entitled "The Patriot Priest" followed by songs and recitations "of a seditious character" according to the County Inspector. The Sheridans were later charged with "committing an act intended to cause disaffection to his Majesty the King." The act involved was speaking and reciting words of a seditious nature. Among these "words" were the following "Who is Ireland's enemy? It is not Germany or Austria or Russia or France. It is England." The couple worked in the premises of Mr Cooke in Tubbercurry and lived over the shop. Both cases were adjourned for three months and were then dismissed.

It would appear that South Sligo was particularly well organised possibly as a result of the work of Alec McCabe and Frank Carty since the rising. Linda Kearns tells how she was asked by Michael Collins and Diarmuid O'Hegarty of the IRB to take messages "to a man called White who lived at a place called Ballinabole about three miles from Collooney". These messages were for Alec McCabe who was on the run. She also carried messages from McCabe to O'Hegarty including "little bags of bullets".

On Sunday April 29<sup>th</sup> a meeting was held in the Town Hall Tubbercurry of South Sligo "adherents of the Sinn Féin policy". According to an article in Nationality, the Sinn Féin paper, delegates were present from the following areas: Tubbercurry, Killoran, Keash, Moylough, Gurteen, Emlaghmaghton, Ballinacarrow, and Kilcreevin. Sinn Féin clubs may not have been in existence in all these areas at this time but it seems certain that they were established very soon

after. The stated aim of the meeting was "to weld the increasing numbers of Sinn Féiners in South Sligo into a solid organisation". Pádhraic Ó Dómhnailláin presided at the meeting and it was decided to establish an executive for South Sligo. Owen Tansey of Gurteen and Seamus Marren, Achonry, were appointed secretaries to the meeting.

By the beginning of June 1917 this South Sligo grouping had been renamed "The South Sligo Sinn Féin Alliance" and on June 3<sup>d</sup> a meeting of this was held in the Town Hall, Tubbercurry. Delegates were present from Culfadda, Tubbercurry, Keash, Mullinabreena, Emlaghmaghton, Cloonacool, Tourlestrane and Kilcreevin.

On Sunday, June 24<sup>th</sup>, another meeting of the South Sligo Sinn Féin Alliance was held in Tubbercurry. The meeting heard its president Pádhraic Ó Dómhnailláin report very satisfactory progress in the previous month. "Enthusiastic meetings" had been held at Ballyrush, Gurteen, Achonry, Killoran and Keash at which Sinn Féin clubs were formed. The Tubbercurry meeting was attended by delegates from the following clubs Tubbercurry, Keash, Mullinabreena, Emlaghmaghton, Ballymote, Achonry, Kilcreevin, Ballyrush, Culfadda, Gurteen, Moylough. Tourlestrane, Cloonloo and Sooley were also represented, though it seems that clubs had not been formed in these parishes by that time. The meeting reported that "there was active cooperation of the clergy in some of the above districts."

According to Nationality, Sinn Féin clubs were formed in Skreen and Tubbercurry early in May 1917. Affiliation fees were received from Mullinabreena, Achonry and Ballisodare by the end of May. Curry and Emlaghmaghton clubs were affiliated by the middle of June and by the end of the month Keash, Killoran and Coolera clubs were affiliated. Early in July Sooley, Ballintogher and Grange clubs were formed.

There were attempts to reorganise the UIL branches in County Sligo during early 1917. "An organiser has been appointed and the local MPs have attended the executive meetings. Efforts are being made to have league officials suspected of a leaning to Sinn Féin expelled", the Inspector reported at the end of April and mentioned it again at the end of June.

The end of April saw the anniversary of the Easter Rising and to commemorate the event republican flags were flown on various buildings in the county. On the 26<sup>th</sup> people of Sligo woke up to find a large republican flag flying over the Town Hall. "Police were immediately on

the scene", reported The Sligo Independent "and the flag was soon removed." A large republican flag was raised on a dangerous part of the old castle at Ballymote and the Champion said "police hesitated in removing it and some sure footed and daring youths were requisitioned to remove the banner." Similar flags were flown in the Grange and Castlegarron districts. Seamus Devins was responsible, possibly at this time, for erecting a tricolour on or near the summit of Benbulbin.

Two publicans from Gurteen were charged in May with having a green flag with the words "Remember Easter Week 1916" suspended between their premises. The defendants said that the flag must have been put there during the night and that they were not aware of until their attention was drawn to it. The case was dismissed on the majority vote of two of the magistrates. The Resident Magistrate, Captain Fitzpatrick, dissented from the verdict.

Joseph McGuinness, the Sinn Féin candidate, scored a narrow victory over Redmond's Party's nominee in the South Longford election on May 9<sup>th</sup>. When news of the victory reached Sligo there was great rejoicing. The Sligo Independent, whose sympathies were Unionist, reported "extraordinary scenes" and stressed that at various times in the celebrations there were interruptions from wives of soldiers at the front and from soldiers invalided home. Tar barrels were lit at various points around the town, a parade took place to the station to meet Sinn Féin workers who had been in Longford and there was a parade to the Sinn Féin Hall where a meeting was held and speeches made. Among the speakers were Henry Depew, Seán Ó Ruadháin and Seamus MacGowan.

A victory celebration at Gurteen had a sequel later in the month when some of the leaders were charged with "assembling . . . to the disturbance of the peace." The Sinn Féin leader in the Gurteen area was Owen Tansey and on May 10<sup>th</sup> a crowd numbering up to 60 assembled at his house at Rathmadder. Sinn Féin flags were brought out and Tansey together with John Finn and Michael Roddy led the procession towards Gurteen where a bonfire was lighted. By the time the march reached Gurteen it had grown to number about 200. Revolver shots were fired as the parade started and more shots were fired as the parade passed by Mullaghroe police barracks. On the morning of June 21<sup>st</sup> Owen Tansey, Michael Roddy, John Finn and Thomas Hayden were arrested and brought to Ballymote where at a special court that evening they were charged. They were remanded and bail was offered and accepted. When the case came up at Mullaghroe Petty Sessions later in the month the defendants were found guilty and Owen Tansey

sentenced to one month in jail. John Finn and Michael Roddy were sentenced to a week in jail and the case against Thomas Hayden was dismissed.

In the meantime the East Clare election had been held on July 10<sup>th</sup> and Eamon de Valera had won for Sinn Féin. Another victory parade was held in the Gurteen district on the night of July 11<sup>th</sup>. Again the assembly point was Tansy's house at Rathmadder. The parade was led by a band and revolver shots were again fired. The parade went to Gurteen and on to Mullaghroe where they met another group from Cloonloo and then back to Gurteen. As a result of this second demonstration Owen Tansey, Joseph Tansey, Patrick Roddy, John Finn and John McDermott were charged with "assembling . . . to the disturbance of the public peace." They were arrested on August 4<sup>th</sup> and remanded on bail. Later six others from the Gurteen district were arrested and charged in connection with the same events. They were Patrick Mulligan, James Grady, Paul Murray, M. Brennan, J. Brennan and Nicholas Sharkey. They were also remanded.

The significance of the East Clare result was not lost on the Sligo Champion editorial writer: "There can be no concealing the fact that the return of the Sinn Féin candidate marks the beginning of a new epoch in the political history of this country . . . if something is not done and done promptly to conciliate Irish sentiment Sinn Féin will take the place of constitutionalism and the fires which flared on the hills of Clare will be ablaze in every part of Ireland". There was great rejoicing in Sligo when the news of the success reached the town. Bonfires were lit and a meeting was held at the Sinn Féin Hall. Among the speakers were Mayor Hanley, Seán Ó Ruadháin, M. O'Mollain, and J. J. Clancy. One speaker said that if there was a vacancy in Sligo there would be a Sinn Féiner elected.

***(iii) "Sinn Féin is the only live political organisation in this county".***

The remaining Sinn Féin prisoners arrested in 1916 were released on June 16<sup>th</sup>. These included de Valera and Countess Markievicz. At a special meeting of Sligo Corporation on Wednesday, June 27<sup>th</sup>, it was decided to confer the freedom of Sligo on the Countess "as a mark of our appreciation to her as a Sligo lady and her action in the cause of liberty". Alderman Jinks was the surprise seconder of the resolution saying that as a Sligo lady she was better entitled to the freedom of the Borough than other people who had got it, no doubt a reference to the recent granting of the honour to Count Plunkett.

The ceremony of conferring the freedom of Sligo on the Countess was to take place on Monday July 23<sup>rd</sup> and the Countess and Darrell Figgis, a prominent member of Sinn Féin, arrived by rail in Sligo on the Saturday. An enthusiastic welcome awaited them with large contingents of country supporters present to greet her. The Mayor, Mr Hanley and Mrs Hanley welcomed the Countess and a bouquet of roses was presented by Miss Ita Tracey, daughter of the chairman of Sligo Sinn Féin club. A brass band led the parade to the Sinn Féin Hall, Teeling Street. The Grange Pipe band also took part.

A feature of the march to the Sinn Féin Hall and the meeting which took place there was the conduct of the so called "separation women". These were the wives of soldiers serving in the Great War and got their name from the "separation money" they were paid. At a number of points along the parade route "separation women" gathered waving Union Jacks and at the same time "indulging in very objectionable expressions", as the Champion delicately put it. Another group sang pro-British songs on the outskirts of the meeting at the Hall. The Sinn Féin group was escorted by almost 300 young men armed with short sticks and led by Alec McCabe and J. J. O'Connell.



**Group on the steps of the Town Hall, Sligo on the occasion of the granting of the freedom of Sligo to Countess Markievicz. From left: Harry Depew, John Shea (Town Clerk), Laurence Ginnell, Count Plunkett, Darrell Figgis, Eamon De Valera, D. M. Hanley (Mayor), Mrs Hanley, Countess Markievicz.**

At the meeting Countess Markievicz thanked those present for their welcome and said that she stood there as a soldier of Ireland for the policy for which James Connolly died - a free and independent Ireland. The following morning Sinn Féin members addressed meetings all over



the constituency of North Sligo from Grange and Maugherow in the north to Easkey and Templeboy in the west. In all fourteen meetings were held, the Countess, the Mayoress, William Reilly and John Hennigan Co. C. covering the area north of Sligo town and the Mayor, Darrell Figgis and others covering the Tireragh area. A meeting at which Figgis was to give a lecture was scheduled for the Town Hall on Sunday night. The hall was filled to overflowing, the Mayor's party was late in arriving from Easkey, republican songs were sung and Figgis delivered a short lecture which was well received. As the car in which the Mayor and Darrell Figgis were travelling back to town on Sunday evening was passing an area known as the Ropewalk, a group of "separation women" hurled mud and sods at the occupants. The Mayor was "badly smeared" according to the Sligo Nationalist. That paper also reported that a number of policemen sitting on the ditch on the opposite side of the road did not interfere and laughed at the whole performance.



*Darrell Figgis addressing a meeting in County Sligo, July 1917*

The freedom of the Borough was conferred on the Countess on Monday evening. On the mid-day train another group of Sinn Féin notables arrived for the ceremony. These included Eamon de Valera, Joe and Frank McGuinness, Laurence Ginnell, Sean Milroy and Count Plunkett. These were escorted to the Imperial Hotel (!) by a large body of Sinn Féiners. The ceremony was timed for eight o'clock in the Town Hall and special precautions were taken by the organisers in view of previous incidents involving the "separation women". Volunteers armed with batons kept order outside the Hall and formed a cordon around the platform. Before the



meeting began some people "who were making themselves objectionable" were removed quietly. Only a few policemen were present under the control of County Inspector Sullivan.

The Mayor presided at the meeting, the Town Clerk read the address of welcome and presented the Countess with a scroll. In her reply Countess Markievicz told the huge crowd "I became a rebel because the older I grew and the more I thought . . . the more I realised that nothing could help Ireland only get rid of England bag and baggage". Among the many others who spoke Eamon de Valera said that the days of speaking were over, they lived in times of action. The meeting was followed by a banquet at the Imperial Hotel.

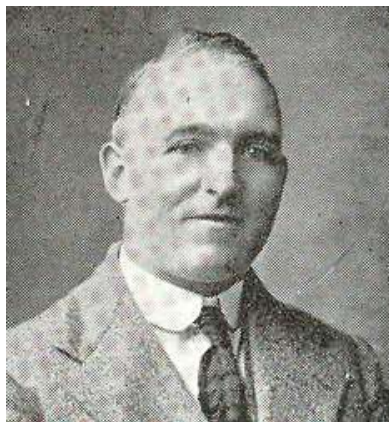
Members of the Countess' Guard of Honour during her visit included Bat Keaney, Jim Keaveney and Eugene Gilbride. Bat Keaney recalls that the Countess expressed a wish to visit her mother at Lisadell. They had to wait until her father Sir Josselyn Gore Booth, who did not approve of her political activities, had retired for the night. Around midnight the party drove to Lissadell in the mayor's official car. The Countess spent some time with her mother and then returned to the Mayor's residence where she was staying.

More meetings were held in the county later in the week. On July 28<sup>th</sup> in Ballymote the speakers included the Countess, Harry Boland and J. McGuinness MP. The following day a meeting attended by over 1,500 people was held at Keash. The County Inspector reported that an attempt on the same day to hold a meeting at Easkey by Sean Milroy and D. M. Hanley had to be abandoned owing to the hostility of the crowd led by W. J. Caffrey J.P. Co.C.

The formation of Sinn Féin Clubs went on. On June 10<sup>th</sup> a club was formed in Keash which had the support of Parish Priest, P. J. O'Grady who became president. He had previously been very supportive of the Irish Parliamentary Party and of the Volunteers. On July 8<sup>th</sup> a club was formed at Riverstown and on the following Sunday one was formed at Sooey after a meeting at which Alec McCabe spoke. In its issue of July 21<sup>st</sup> the Sligo Champion started a column of reports from the Sinn Féin Clubs as it previously had done for the UIL and the AOH. The clubs whose reports were included in this first column were Riverstown, Cloonacool, Grange, Achonry, Sooey and Skreen and Dromard. In late July the Mullinabreena Sinn Féin Club reported that the "old committee" had handed over the band instruments to the new organisation. One nationalist organisation had been replaced by another. The Sligo Nationalist followed the

Champion's lead and in its issue of August 18<sup>th</sup> began to publish a column of reports from Sinn Féin clubs.

The reports of the County Inspector for September, October and November 1917 are full of alarm at the rise of Sinn Féin. "The Sinn Féin movement has spread all over the County" (Sept). According to him there were 32 clubs in existence at the end of that month with a membership of 1747 - "This is an alarming state of affairs when it is remembered that these clubs are organising for a rebellion and are now ready to try their strength by coming into conflict with the local authority". At the same time the Inspector had to report that the county was in a "peaceable state" with very few disturbances of any kind taking place. "Sinn Féin is the only live political organisation in this county", the Inspector said in November, "no real effort is made to maintain any of the other bodies". At the end of October 1917 the County Inspector reported the number of Sinn Féin clubs at 40 with 2,509 members, and by the end of December this had risen to 43 with 2,762 members. At the end of December the Military Intelligence Officer for the Midland and Connacht Districts said that Sligo was one of the six most strongly Sinn Féin Counties in his district.



*Henry Monson*

In Sligo town the problem of dual membership of Sinn Féin and the AOH was causing concern. Colr. Henry Monson was a member of the AOH, and had been appointed Provincial Director for Connacht. He then began to publicly support the Sinn Féin policy and as a result was suspended from his position. The Sligo County Board was at the same time suspended as it had expressed support for Sinn Féin. A meeting of the local branch was held in Sligo on July 27<sup>th</sup> to try to resolve the difficulty. The National body of the AOH sent Mr Bergin to put their case but the meeting endorsed Mr Monson's position. The attendance of about 200 included the Mayor, Mr Hanley. On the following night a meeting of the County Board was held at which Mr

Bergin also attended. At this meeting when officers were being elected Mr Monson was proposed for the presidency. Mr Bergin objected but in spite of this Monson was elected. These proceedings were later declared null and void by the National Board. The Sligo Division of the AOH remained suspended until a meeting of the Division on September 2<sup>nd</sup>. At this meeting the suspension of Monson was endorsed and the Division soon afterwards returned to the fold. It appears that the Sinn Féin supporters had decided to leave the AOH by this time having made their point and embarrassed the National Leadership.

On Sunday September 9<sup>th</sup> a meeting was held in the Mayor's parlour, Town Hall to form a Sinn Féin Executive for the North Sligo Constituency. Delegates attended from the following Sinn Féin clubs: Ballintogher, Ballisodare, Calry, Cliffony, Collooney, Drumcliff, Grange, Killoran, St. John's, Skreen, Templeboy and Sligo. J. J. Clancy was appointed president of the Executive. The next executive meeting was held on September 30<sup>th</sup> and the securing of the election of a Sinn Féin member for North Sligo was discussed. It was also decided to try to ensure that a corps of Volunteers was started in connection with each Sinn Féin club. A similar proposal had been agreed at a meeting of the South Sligo Sinn Féin Alliance in Tubbercurry on August 5<sup>th</sup>.

The rest of 1917 saw a strengthening of the hold of Sinn Féin on the public mind. Meetings, lectures and aeriocht were regularly held, widely reported in the local press and very well attended if these reports are to be believed. An aeriocht was held at Mullinabreena on August 12<sup>th</sup> and speakers included Fr O'Flanagan and Pádhraic Ó Dómhnailláin. A similar aeriocht was held in Cloonacool on September 9<sup>th</sup> and Ó Dómhnailláin again was one of the main speakers. A well attended Sinn Féin meeting was held at Ballymote on September 23<sup>d</sup> at which Seamus MacGowan of Sligo was reported as saying "We are going to stand up for Ireland and to Hell with the British Empire". On October 7<sup>th</sup> a similar meeting was held at Kilglass and the police report quotes Fr Davis as saying with reference to forcible feeding of prisoners, "Johnny Bull is talking about how Germany treated Belgium but she was a lot worse than her in her treatment of Ireland".

On October 7<sup>th</sup> what was described as "the largest meeting seen within the memory of the oldest resident" was held by Sinn Féin in Tubbercurry. Despite very inclement weather the attendance was estimated at over 5,000. Sinn Féin members from south Sligo marched behind ten bands. Pádhraic Ó Domhnailláin was the chairman and speakers included Alderman Walter

Cole, Michael Lennon and Sean Milroy from Dublin headquarters and Alec McCabe. Sinn Féin clubs represented at the meeting included Aclare, Achonry, Banada, Ballina, Ballymote, Bunninadden, Cloonacool, Culfadda, Cully, Cashill, Castlebar, Gurteen, Killaville, Keash, Killoran, Kilcreevin, Moylough, Mullinabreena, Rooskey, Swinford and Tubbercurry. The contingent from Cloonacool came in for special praise from the Champion reporter: "This contingent, headed by a band, a tricolour banner, together with some eighty horsemen made a very great impression on those who witnessed the procession. The military like bearing and smart step immediately caught the eye of the onlooker."

*On October 10<sup>th</sup> Sean Milroy delivered a lecture in Sligo Town Hall on the subject "The Economic necessity for Irish Independence" and on November 2nd Arthur Griffith lectured in Sligo also in the Town Hall. On November 25<sup>th</sup> another lecture, this time in commemoration of the Manchester Martyrs, was delivered in Sligo Town Hall. The speaker was W. T. Cosgrave, Sinn Féin MP for Kilkenny. A meeting in Dromard on November 11<sup>th</sup> had as speakers Sean Milroy, M. Lennon, D. A. Mulcahy and J. J. Clancy. Other meetings on the same day were held at Carrownaboll and Bunninadden and were addressed by Alderman Cole and Sean Milroy.*

The Sinn Féin newspaper, Nationality, edited by Arthur Griffith, reported regularly on the formation of new Sinn Féin branches. In October it reported new clubs at Kilcreevin, Cashill and St. James' Well. Later in the year it reported the formation of Kilshalvey and Curry clubs.

At a meeting of Mullinabreena Sinn Féin Club held at the end of October the president, Thomas O'Donnell, proposed that the club establish an arbitration court "for the settlement of disputes between members." The members or judges of the court were selected from the club membership and any member who went before a British court was to be expelled. By the middle of December the arbitration court was established and the club renewed its call for a boycott of the British courts which, they said, "Form a link in the chain by which we are held in bondage." In many ways these Sinn Féin arbitration courts were merely continuing the practice where the nationalist organisation, usually the UIL, in a parish settled disputes, especially land disputes, between members. Such "courts" were not illegal as they were merely arbitration courts and their decision was not enforced. The establishment of Arbitration Courts by the Sinn Féin Clubs went on in the early part of 1918. In the first week of January Collooney announced the formation of a committee which was to decide on disputes between members especially disputes about land. On

January 20<sup>th</sup> Cloonacool announced that its court had been established and seven "justices" appointed.

On December 2<sup>nd</sup> delegates from Sinn Féin clubs in South Sligo met in the Loftus Hall, Ballymote to form a Comhairle Cheantair for the constituency. This in effect was merely a new title for what was previously known as the South Sligo Sinn Féin Alliance. The following clubs were represented, according to the Sligo Champion: Ballymote, Bunninadden, Emlaghmaghton, Gurteen, Cloonloo, Mullinabreena, Cloonacool, Cully, Curry, Cashill, Moylough, Tubbercurry, Mullinabreena, aclare, Kilcreevin, Keash, Culfadda, St. James' Well, Riverstown, Ballyrush, Sooeey, Highwood, Deroon and Kilshalvey. The officers elected were: President, Pádhraic Ó Dómhnailláin, Vice Presidents, Alec McCabe and Thomas Murrice, Secretaries, Owen Tansey and James Marren. In a contest for the position of representative on the National Council Alec McCabe defeated Pádhraic Ó Dómhnailláin. This contest was keenly contested and was in fact a forerunner of the contest for the nomination for Sinn Féin candidate for South Sligo in the 1918 general election.

Sometime early in October a vacancy arose for a Councillor in the Ballintrillick area of Sligo Rural District Council and the local Sinn Féin club put forward a candidate for co-option, Pat Connolly. He was co-opted without opposition.

At the end of 1917 according to official papers there were 267 affiliated Sinn Féin cumann in Connacht. Sligo had 45, Leitrim 43, Roscommon 57, Mayo 60 and Galway 62.

*(iv) "They had taken over the old ancestral spirit to continue with the struggle for Ireland's freedom".*

As the number of Sinn Féin clubs increased the other nationalist organisations declined rapidly though many preserved a nominal existence. The Freeman's Journal reported a meeting of the North Sligo Irish Party Executive early in September in Sligo Town Hall at which the MP referred at length to the growth of Sinn Féin. "I see in the heart of Ireland no signs of a wavering from the ideals of the constitutional movement . . . I see no inclination amongst the people to take up anything like a will of the wisp attitude towards the serious concern of the country's well being", he was reported as saying. "Sinn Féin, I maintain, is not a policy. I think it could best be described as a form of enthusiastic patriotism . . . They have no policy before the country and no

men before the country able to carry out a policy helpful to the country and leading to the country's emancipation".

As the new organisation took over, it also attempted to take over the buildings and equipment of the older groups. In Sooeey, for instance, after Mass on October 14<sup>th</sup> the local Sinn Féin club took over the hall which up to then had been used by the UIL. The club's report in the Sligo Champion stressed the continuation of the struggle: "They had taken over the old Sooeey fortress where many a brave battle was fought and won by Sooeey men, but they had also taken over the old ancestral spirit to continue with the struggle for Ireland's freedom." In the same parish on October a meeting was held between officials of the Sinn Féin club and officials of the Sooeey UIL at which it was agreed that the band instruments owned by the UIL would be handed over to Sinn Féin. The Sinn Féin club agreed to lend the instruments to the UIL branch any time they required them. Early in September there was an attempt by Highwood Sinn Féin club to take over the AOH hall in the area. Details of what happened are scarce but the AOH resisted, police were called and the hall remained for the time being in the hands of the AOH. Around the same time the St. James' Well Sinn Féin club organised a petition asking the Geevagh Division of the AOH to give them the use of Geevagh Hall to hold meetings.

Feelings were running high in many places between Sinn Féiners and those they had replaced in the public affection. At Killaville on the night of December 30<sup>h</sup> a confrontation occurred which had a sequel in the local courts. An entertainment, a concert and play, was organised by the local clergy with the backing of the Nationalists of south Sligo for that night. For some reason, probably because the hall had previously not been given for the use of the Sinn Féin club, the Sinn Féiners of the area organised a "boycott" of the function and enforced the "boycott" by blocking roads and attempting to prevent patrons and artistes reaching the hall. A crowd gathered at the Hall and some windows were broken.

At subsequent court cases P. J. McDermott, a Nationalist councillor from Bunninadden, gave evidence that while cycling with a companion to Killaville to the play they were met by a crowd of about fifty who tried to stop them. They managed to get through. Another witness was a car driver who was bringing people from Tubbercurry. He was stopped by the crowd and told to go back because the concert was boycotted. He turned his horse and car and as he drove back he heard a shot being discharged. Five men were arrested and charged in connection with the concert "boycott". They were remanded on February 7<sup>th</sup> on bail to the next County Petty

Sessions. Later they were charged at a Crimes Court and again remanded to a Criminal Law court under Captain Fitzpatrick on February 15<sup>th</sup>. They were found guilty of unlawful assembly and sentenced to one month with hard labour. The courthouse in Sligo was heavily guarded for the hearing.

On appeal to Sligo Quarter Sessions in April the convictions were confirmed but the sentences were lifted provided the men gave guarantees to be of good behaviour. This they did. At this appeal evidence was given that the window said to have been broken by the crowd had already been broken. Rev. Fr O'Grady who had organised the concert described the defendants as "hardworking respectable young men". Fr P. J. O'Grady wrote "a long letter of complaint" to Sinn Féin Headquarters about the incident. Others who wrote about the incident including Owen Tansey, Alec McCabe, P. J. McDermott and James Durkan. Another Christmas entertainment brought a protest from Keash Sinn Féin club. They alleged that an attack had been made by the Keash Constables on one of their members on his way to a Christmas dance in the White Hall, Keash on Christmas Night.

In the last week in January a dance was held in Collooney organised by some of the local farmers and priests. It appears that it was in aid of the Red Cross and was seen as pro-war. The local Sinn Féiners decided that action would be taken to deter people attending. People attending were, according to Charles O'Hara, pelted with muck and broken bottles and even though the dance did take place the Sinn Féiners occupied the streets of the town for a considerable time that night. The police did not interfere, their reason being, according to O'Hara, that they feared an attack on the Barracks and had to stay and protect it. As a result of the affair the Parish Priest, Fr Doyle, and the curate, Fr Durkan, denounced the attackers from the altar. A group of Sinn Féin supporters then visited the priests and demanded they sign an apology. The priests refused to tender any apology. Supporters of the Parish Priest's position then held a meeting under the chairmanship of Nationalist D. P. Bree protesting against the Sinn Féiners's actions.

Dr. Morrisroe, the Bishop of Achonry, wrote to the meeting expressing his dissatisfaction at "a series of incidents more or less against religion that have been committed in this diocese during the past year and under the same auspices." He instanced the "profanation" of several churches by the flying of republican flags above the cross; "The battering and smashing of school houses that were not given for purposes forbidden by ecclesiastical law", persons going

peaceably to a concert in aid of the local church were prevented by "bludgeon and revolver". He added that he did not entirely blame those who had carried out these deeds, "Their noble natures and their generous enthusiasm have been played upon by designing men who have an object to gain and care not how they get there". According to the organ of the Irish Unionist Alliance, extra police were drafted into Collooney but the meeting and a Sinn Féin demonstration timed to coincide with it passed off quietly.

On August 19<sup>th</sup> Charles O'Hara wrote to Sir Bryan Mahon, Commander in Chief of British forces in Ireland, saying that he had heard that troops were being posted to various places in Ireland, "I hope you will not forget Sligo if you have any to spare!" he wrote, "Things appear peaceful here at the present but the new organisation is spreading rapidly". Whether it was as a result of this representation or not troops did return to Sligo Barracks in the last week of November 1917. A detachment of about one hundred members of the 6th Cameronian Scottish Rifles took up residence in the Barracks. "Their presence has given great satisfaction" said the County Inspector. Early in January the detachment of the Scottish Rifles left Sligo and seem to have been replaced by a group of the Royal Scots and later in the year the Essex Yeomanry and the Norfolk were stationed in Sligo.

On March 4<sup>th</sup> 1918 Sligo was visited by Field Marshal Lord French and General commanding British troops in Ireland, Sir Bryan Mahon. They were met by County Inspector Sullivan and the County Lieutenant Major O'Hara together with the officers and men of the Norfolk Regiment then stationed in Sligo. The visit lasted no more than a half an hour. O'Hara wrote to Sir Bryan on March 11<sup>th</sup> stating that there had been "a marked improvement in the state of the County" since his visit. "I feel sure this will be maintained so long as the Government shows they intend to uphold the law."

Recruiting for the war effort was very poor during 1917. There was "a slight increase in the miserable return of army recruiting" in February. Eight joined the colours for the month ending February 15<sup>th</sup>, eleven joined for the following month, nine for March/April, five for month ending May 15<sup>th</sup>, six for the next month and four for month ending July 15<sup>th</sup>. *Few attempts at recruiting were reported at this time. A "Concert and Film Show" was advertised for Ballymote early in 1918 which featured the King and Queen (on film!). Some of the local Republicans including Bat Keaney attended and booed, yelled and pelted the stage with tomatoes, soot and eggs. Each offender had to be dragged out causing considerable commotion. After the show the*



*cars carrying the artistes and equipment back to Sligo were pelted with missiles and shots were fired in the air.*

"Ginger" O Connell was released from Lewes gaol in mid-1917 and when he returned to Sligo he began to hold classes for Volunteer officers. These classes were held on Tuesday nights from 7 - 9 pm in what was then Kelly's Hotel near the bridge. Among those who attended was Frank Carty who started to attend in October 1917. He travelled to and from Sligo by train and recalls one night in October when he found himself in the same compartment as a British soldier returning from leave to the front in France. The soldier was armed with a service rifle and Carty disarmed him just outside Collooney. He threw the rifle out the window, left the train at Collooney and with the help of Sean MacMorrow from Collooney went back and collected the rifle which he brought home.

Another who travelled by train to attend these lectures was Bat Keaney from the Ballymote area. On two occasions he came across soldiers in a state of intoxication and relieved them of their arms, a Lee Enfield rifle and a kit bag on the first occasion and a rifle and a Webley revolver on the second. On both occasions he threw the weapons out the window and collected them later on.

The organisation of the Volunteers continued during this time. By its very nature it is not to be expected that the information of the County Inspector on the Irish Volunteers to be fully correct. He gave the number of Volunteer branches in County Sligo as five all through 1917 with the number of members as just over 200. Three cases of illegal drilling without arms were reported to the Competent Military Authority at the end of November but it was decided not to prosecute. Each of these cases involved Volunteers from Sligo town being drilled by Liam Pilkington and Jim Kirby. In late November Head Constable Murphy, reporting one of these instances, said of Pilkington and Kirby, "no doubt they are anxious to be prosecuted in order to gain a little notoriety". He suggested that if the pair were prosecuted then Michael Nevin, Seamus MacGowan, James Bree and Michael Reynolds be also prosecuted. County Inspector Sullivan noted that this was the fourth time the pair were reported for illegal drilling. The Major General for the army district said, "Pilkington is a most aggressive Sinn Féiner as is Kirby. I have received several reports concerning these men. It is time they were arrested and tried". The drilling incident referred to took place on November 25<sup>th</sup> and there were about 50 men involved

in a march from the Sinn Féin Hall in Albert Street to the townland of Maugheraboy where some drilling took place in a field. Police constables accompanied the march.

A police report in February 1917 estimated the number of arms held by the Volunteers in County Sligo as follows: At Battlefield near Ballymote - 6 automatic rifles, 11 shotguns and 30 revolvers/pistols were concealed belonging to the Irish Volunteers: At Tubbercurry - 12 Lee Enfield rifles, 2 shotguns and 4 revolvers/pistols were in the possession of members of the Irish Volunteers ; In Clifffony, 1 shotgun and 5 revolvers were in the possession of individual members of the Irish Volunteers.

(v) *"The streets are the dirtiest I have seen in any part of the world".*

Sligo Corporation found itself in serious financial trouble in late 1917. Non-payment of rates, extra financial liabilities and lack of representation by ratepayers were contributory causes of the crisis. So bad was the situation that at one stage the sheriff was called in by a debtor and the Town Hall furniture was put on the market to pay the debt. Cleaning, lighting and other services were curtailed. An official sworn inquiry was set up to consider the position. It blamed mismanagement and irregularities, "a lack of prudent business-like management".

The crisis in the affairs of the Corporation received widespread publicity. An article in the Daily Mail in December gave great offence to many people. "The streets are the dirtiest I have seen in any part of the world", the reporter wrote: "Some of the Councillors, I am assured, can scarcely write their own name." The crisis was blamed on "the utter lack of business instinct" "The result is that Sligo is governed by a Sinn Féin Corporation, that nine tenths of its population adheres to Sinn Féin, and that Sinn Féin drilling is the prevalent fashion of week-end entertainment for the young."

Among the replies to this article was one from Young Warren, a businessman and J P in Sligo. He said with reference to Sinn Féin, "Keen political observers are assured that in the event of a contested election in North Sligo the sitting Nationalist MP Thomas Scanlan, would be returned by a majority of 2 to 1." Events would later show who was the keenest observer, the English reporter or the Sligo business man!

Although 25% of the electorate in Sligo Borough voted Unionist few Unionists could win a seat on the Corporation because of the "first past the post" system. Since the reform of local government in 1898 the Corporation had been under Nationalist control with no opposition of any significance. Another problem for the Corporation was the fact that because of the Sligo Borough Improvement Act of 1869 the Corporation was unable to raise sufficient funds to cover costs and was falling further into debt each year. It was agreed that that the 1869 act should be amended to allow the Corporation to raise the funds it needed. The Ratepayers Association declined to support this unless a way could be found to give the people they represented a fair share of the seats on the Corporation. Tadhg Kilgannon raised the question of Proportional Representation as a fairer method of election and explained the system in articles in the local newspapers. A Bill was drafted including the amendment to the 1869 Act and the use of P.R. in the corporation election. The Corporation approved of the Bill at a meeting of February 13<sup>h</sup>, 1918, the Ratepayers approved at their meeting on February 26<sup>h</sup> and at a meeting of the citizens of Sligo three days later it was also accepted. On July 30<sup>h</sup> the bill received royal assent and the Corporation election under the PR system was fixed for January 1919.

## 7. SINN FEIN AND THE LAND QUESTION.

By the end of 1917 the number of Sinn Féin clubs in Sligo had almost reached their maximum and Sinn Féin dominated the political scene. What next? The war still dragged on delaying the general election and the Peace Conference which must follow its end. It was intended that Sinn Féin, having been successful at the general election, would appeal to the Peace Conference to recognise Ireland's demand for independence. Volunteers were drilling but for what? It was no wonder that there were some signs of a fall off in interest at the end of 1917 and early in 1918.

*(i) "Men, we have come here to take this land in the name of the Irish Republic".*

In his report at the end of December 1917 the County Inspector sounded a note of hope from his point of view: "As regards that body (Sinn Féin) much of the old energy and enthusiasm have waned". In the report of the Military Intelligence Officer for November 1917 a similar note is struck: "Active interest in Sinn Féin is somewhat dying down. Drilling is not carried out with that zest it formerly had and it requires the continued efforts of Sinn Féin organisers to keep clubs going". The Sligo Champion report from the Killoran Sinn Féin Club for January 19<sup>th</sup> contained the following - "We call those milk and water members to attend the next meeting and to render an account of their absence. If not extreme steps will be taken." The following week a similar message appeared in the Collooney Sinn Féin notes: "Those members absenting themselves are requested to attend the next meeting to be held on February 3<sup>d</sup> to give account of their non-attendance." Mullinabreena Sinn Féin club expelled some members at the beginning of February. "We want only members who are true to Sinn Féin principle", they said.

This decline was dramatically halted and new interest in Sinn Féin and the Volunteers was generated by a new activity under their auspices. This concerned the age old question of land. The question, indeed, had not gone away in all the excitement of the growth of Sinn Féin in 1917. The long standing agrarian dispute at Ballintogher had continued for most of the year and a police protection post was still being maintained at Coney Island. There was also trouble on the farm of Colonel Duke near Ballymote. Two cattle drives took place there in September and four in November, the purpose of which was, according to the RIC, to warn off potential purchasers of the property. Local small holders and herds hoped to get portions of the farms. A cattle drive

was carried out in the Ross district in October and there were four cattle drives in the county in December.

At this time there was an appeal from the Government that as much land as possible be brought under cultivation to ensure that there was no scarcity of food because of the war. The Sligo Nationalist of February 16<sup>th</sup> printed an editorial entitled "Till More Land". It included the following . . . "The farmers hold the situation in their hands, therefore let them put every available piece of land under tillage immediately. Only thus shall a repetition of Black '47 be prevented in our generation."

On January 6<sup>th</sup> the Ballymote Sinn Féin Club had passed a resolution declaring that £4 per acre on residential land and £2 per acre on "ranches" was sufficient price for conacre. "We advise people to pay no more and pledge our support to those who stand out for their rights and refuse to make themselves the victims of any extortions." Taking their lead from this and from the Government's appeal to till more land the Sinn Féin clubs started a campaign to force graziers to give conacre at reduced prices.

A large crowd would assemble, accompanied by at least one band, with banners proclaiming "The Land for the People" and would proceed to the land of a large farmer and offer him no more than £4 per acre. They would then enter the land and proceed to divide it among small farmers, members of the local Sinn Féin branch. This campaign occupied the pages of the local press in County Sligo for all of February, 1918.

The County Inspector dated much of the agrarian trouble of early 1918 as stemming from a speech by Laurence Ginnell MP at a meeting at Bunninadden on January 6<sup>th</sup> 1918 when he allegedly advised cattle driving. "No doubt he was preaching to the converted", the Inspector remarked, "and plans had previously been made and orders issued to the clubs". In the course of his speech Ginnell said "Put your heads together and draw up your plans for all south Sligo and the police can't mind all the ranches . . . The sound of guns and bombs is the language John Bull understands and the Volunteers were required to buck up Sinn Féin so that their voice at the Peace Conference would not be one crying in the wilderness". This portion of the speech was censored and was not published in the local press.

Mr Ginnell also spoke at a meeting in Sooeey on February 3<sup>rd</sup> at which, according to the County Inspector, he again advocated cattle driving. Remarks made by Mr Ginnell at this meeting with regard to the taking of local farms were later the basis of a charge of inciting people to violation of the law against the MP in a Dublin police court.

At the end of January the Inspector reported that the agrarian trouble was mainly in the Ballymote and Tubbercurry areas but by the end of the next month he said that the trouble had spread to the whole county even though the aforementioned areas were still the most disturbed. The Inspector General of the RIC reported to the Chief Secretary that the police force in Sligo had been augmented early in February by an additional 50 men. The military then stationed in Sligo were also used by the police on numerous occasions.

"When men supported by a crowd of two or three hundred or more enter a man's farm and demand his land and if he refuses surround him and hold a flag over him and declare the land taken by the Irish Republic, I think you will admit he has not much chance of executing his right of self defence", Charles O'Hara said in a letter of February 23<sup>d</sup>. "Is it any wonder that would-be loyal subjects are rapidly joining the Sinn Féin branches who appear to be all powerful at present". "I have to report that the present condition of this county is very disturbed owing to the outbreak of agrarian agitation organised by the Sinn Féin clubs", reported the County Inspector at the end of February.

The number of indictable offences in the county for February was fifty of which forty eight were related to the agrarian agitation. The figure for the previous month was eight. Unlawful assembly offences made up the majority of the offences but there were also cases of firing into houses, malicious injury, threatening letters and stealing rifles. The police were active and 24 prosecutions were ordered involving about 150 defendants. As well as that many landowners took out writs and injunctions in the High Court to prevent trespass on their land. The report of the Military Intelligence Officer for February 1918 says, "In Sligo alone over 100 farms were visited" and "that more violence has not taken place is due to the fact that practically no resistance has been offered". Mentioning the police, it says that they "have generally been in too small numbers to interfere with any hope of success". The Intelligence Officer also said that "the great bulk of the poorer classes are eagerly joining this movement (Sinn Féin) from cupidity. They now hope to get land on their own terms and believe Sinn Féin will do it for them".

On February 8<sup>th</sup> over 200 members of Sinn Féin clubs, led by Alec McCabe, assembled at Bunninadden with three bands. They visited eight different farms and asked the owners to let conacre at £2 - £3 per acre. Three farmers consented, the others refused. The crowd entered the lands of those who refused and took the lands "in the name of the Irish Republic". The RIC were present and warned the leaders. Questions were asked in the House of Commons about this "outrage" and the Chief Secretary, Mr. Duke, said that all available means would be taken to protect occupiers of land. On February 6<sup>th</sup> a crowd of about 120 with three bands gathered in Collooney with ploughs and carts and proceeded to the land of Alexander Haire. The leader was John McMorrow who said, according to a police report, "Men, we have come here to take this land in the name of the Irish Republic."

His Majesty's Lieutenant for Sligo, Charles O'Hara, wrote to Sir Bryan Mahon on February 8<sup>th</sup> to express his concern at the state of the County. "The district around here is in a state of utter lawlessness" he wrote, "a whole countryside was driven last Monday night and the Sinn Féin party have been going about the county entering farms and ploughing them up against the wishes of their owners". Once again he complained of the inaction of the Government. On February 11<sup>th</sup> he wrote again this time to Chief Secretary Duke repeating the same message: "For the past two days or so cattle driving has been carried out almost nightly. Organised gangs of men are going through this district and the neighbourhood of Ballymote accompanied by bands and ploughs and forcibly entering the lands of others and ploughing them."

O'Hara was particularly bitter about the inaction of the Government which he said had resulted in that state of affairs. "There is no doubt it [Sinn Féin] has been growing daily since the release of the rebel leaders as anyone in this county foresaw would be the case when educated men are allowed to preach treason, sedition and lawlessness through the country". Even as he wrote the letter on February 11<sup>th</sup> he received a request to let an outlying farm of his for £3 per acre. "I have replied saying they could have it for £4 rather than having any trouble", he said. Charles O'Hara considered that the Government had made a bad mistake in not taking stern action at first to stop the land seizing. "It would probably have been stamped out within a week" if such action had been taken, he said. O'Hara asked that his letter be treated with the utmost confidentiality as he feared the consequences if it were known locally that he was writing to Dublin Castle.

What exactly the reply to O'Hara was we do not know but we do know there was a reply stating in general terms that the government viewed the state of the country with concern. O'Hara replied again on February 23<sup>rd</sup> expressing his delight at this but stressing that the state of affairs he complained of continued. "I can hear the bands going this afternoon as they are taking land from a poor widow in the neighbourhood", he said. "These men seem to think they have the Government behind them . . . As you are of course aware they have lately commenced raiding houses so they are getting more daring every day". At Ballyhara about a half mile from Tubbercurry a group led by the "Tubbercurry Food Production Committee" entered lands and took conacre for which they said they would pay £4 per acre. The owner had previously got a letter from the committee asking him to let the land at that price. The letter was signed by Terence Sheridan, a shop assistant, and Robert Nicholson, both prominent local Sinn Féiners.

On February 12<sup>th</sup> a similar gathering was convened at Kilcreevin. According to the police about 300 people with three bands proceeded to the lands of Joseph Gorman, Kilcreevin. The leaders, again according to the police, were Alec McCabe and Bernard Brady who wore a green cap, a bandolier and a Sam Browne belt. McCabe and Brady, together with Thomas Langton, Thomas Cawley, Bat Keaney, Edward Killeen, Patrick Farry and Patrick Rogers were later charged with unlawful assembly on that date.

At Ballinafad lands belonging to the Ffolliott family were targeted. They received a letter from the local Sinn Féin club asking that they should give their lands for conacre. On February 11<sup>th</sup> a group numbering between 100 and 200 entered the land saying that the land was to be let at £2 per Irish acre "In the name of God and the Irish Republic." On February 19<sup>th</sup> the lands were again entered and ploughed up. In March the landowners sought and got an injunction restraining Batty Shannon and fourteen other defendants from entering the land.

In the Ballymote area part of the Lord Harlech estate was entered and about 25 acres taken over and ploughed up in the name of the Irish Republic on February 13<sup>th</sup>. On February 14<sup>th</sup> land leased by Michael J McKim at Branchfield was taken over and given out in conacre at £4 an acre. On February 15<sup>th</sup> a similar incident occurred at Sooley when three farms were entered and conacre taken without the owners' permission.

On the following day Ballintogher was the venue for a similar gathering. Constable Jeremiah Mee of the RIC was stationed in Ballintogher at the time and gives an account of what



happened. The farm in question, at Toberanania, had been the subject of an agitation for some years and was one of the farms involved in the cases which resulted in the arrests in Ballintogher in late 1915 and early 1916. Now the local Sinn Féin club decided to divide it out among local "deserving small farmers". "Since all the farmers around were 'deserving' and 'small' they all turned up on the appointed day at the farm due for division". The Sinn Féin secretary, John McGarry, asked for a show of hands from those who wanted part of the farm. Every hand went up. "It was at that moment", says Mee, "that the secretary showed real leadership". He said that they would collect all the names and decide on those who were to get land later. They would however mark out plots with the plough and take over the land in the name of the Irish Republic on that day. Another "monster meeting" was to be held on that day week to continue the work. "Fortunately for the secretary", remarks Mee, "he was safely behind the bars of Sligo jail that day week." The division of the farm was postponed indefinitely. The secretary, John McGarry, his brother Timothy (Thady) and Michael Mulligan, all of Correa, were arrested and later sentenced to six months in jail for their part in the affair.

Cliffony area saw similar action taken against the farm of W. W. Ashley where conacre was taken and distributed at £3 per acre. Andrew Conway, the 1916 prisoner, was one of the leaders at this action. Patrick McCannon, in his recollections, tells how the local RIC sent for the British military from Finner Camp in Donegal. A sentry was posted to warn of the troops' arrival and the church bell was rung as a warning. When the troops arrived they found the fields deserted! When this happened a few times the troops decided to leave some men on duty at the Ashley estate all day. The answer to this by the Volunteers was to plough the lands at night which they did pulling the ploughs themselves. How effective this was in providing extra tillage land for the people is doubtful but it did provide a victory of sorts for the people over the British.

Streamstown, near Collooney, saw the farm of Alexander Sims visited on February 22<sup>nd</sup>. On February 21<sup>st</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> the lands of Thomas Kennedy of Carrowloughan, Tireragh were similarly treated. The Sligo Champion reported on February 23<sup>rd</sup> that "Farms have been commandeered in the name of the Irish Republic in Collooney, Dromahair, Drumlease, Coolaney, Riverstown, Ballymote, etc." during the previous week.

Cattle driving did not disappear during the conacre campaign. It was reported that cattle from the Wellmount farm near Cloonacool were driven off on February 9<sup>th</sup> and discovered seven miles away the next morning. The owner, H. Wood-Martin, had been asked by the local Sinn

Féin committee to give land cheaply for conacre. During the same week the Sligo Champion reported that "cattle driving on a most extensive scale", had taken place in Skreen and Dromard. Eleven farms were completely stripped of stock in what appeared to be a systematic action. The Champion commented "Skreen and Dromard holds the unenviable reputation of possessing more land given over to grazing than any other part of County Sligo". Again the Sligo Champion reported cattle driving on a large scale during the week ending February 23<sup>rd</sup>. "A dozen farms in the Bunninadden district were cleared of stock last week", it reported.

On February 17<sup>th</sup> shots were fired into the dwelling house of a farmer named Patrick McDonagh in Riverstown breaking windows but causing no injuries. Four local men were arrested and charged with the offence. The Riverstown Sinn Féin club said, "We condemn the action of the ruffians who recently made an attack on the house of a respectable resident at Rusheen and we are certain this outrage was committed for the purpose of giving a bad name to this peaceable locality." The four men were eventually tried at Derry Assizes early in July and the Jury disagreed on their guilt. Put back until the next Assizes, they were found guilty and sentenced to six months imprisonment.

*(ii) "If this state of things continues there is an end to everything".*

All the action as regards land in Sligo in February 1918 gave rise to concern that free rein was to be given to anybody who wished to take land and not only large landowners but those with medium sized farms as well began to feel threatened. There was a danger that the whole campaign would rebound against Sinn Féin if it appeared to be going too far and getting out of control. Alec McCabe had a letter published in the Irish Independent on February 28<sup>th</sup> 1918 which included the following: "As the impression seems to have got abroad that the Sinn Féin Executive gave unqualified licence to land commandeering and countenance all kinds of indiscriminate interference with the rights of private property, let it be known that the South Sligo Sinn Féin Ceanntair rules that no residential farm under forty acres is allowed to be entered on. Lands devoted to the feeding of milch cows, or the production of other necessities, are also exempted. So that taking everything into consideration it is evident there is little victimisation of any class in this movement."

On March 2<sup>nd</sup> the Champion published an editorial on the "Tillage Campaign" in which it said that the campaign had an acceptable aim but seemed to have got out of control. "The Sinn

Féin organisation could not have embarked on a more popular campaign . . . whether however it be due to imperfect organisation or the want of control on the part of the leaders, the tillage campaign has brought more discredit than credit on the Sinn Féin organisation. A reign of terror similar to that of the Bolsheviks was inaugurated in some districts. The theatricals employed on some occasions were so elaborate that many regarded the cry for land skilfully managed for political purposes".

The RIC attended most of these "unlawful assemblies" and prosecutions followed. The large number of these prosecutions with frequent remands occupied most of March and provided more publicity for the Sinn Féin organisation. Usually the leaders were arrested but in other cases innocent onlookers found themselves arrested. Willie Frizzell remembered that a man who came to see the excitement was asked by a ploughman to move a stone to mark a straight line. He did so and was later arrested by the police as a leader.

This conacre taking type of action ceased towards the end of February partly because the arrest of many of those involved especially Alec McCabe who was the moving force behind the campaign in County Sligo. In his February report the County Inspector said that the action taken by the police had resulted in a great decrease in cattle driving and the seizing of land and he looked forward "to the restoration of order in a few weeks".

By March 16<sup>th</sup> the arrests and prosecutions were having the desired effect and O'Hara was able to write to Duke, the Chief Secretary: "Matters as far as this county are concerned have greatly improved since you took action and I sincerely hope that the wave of lawlessness that recently seemed likely to overwhelm us appears to have receded for the present at any rate." "The disorder caused by the commandeering of lands by Sinn Féin clubs for conacre has subsided and no fresh cases have arisen" said the County Inspector in his March report.

On Thursday, February 21<sup>st</sup>, Alec McCabe was arrested at Ballymote Railway Station. He resisted violently and reinforcements had to be called for. He was carried to Ballymote RIC Barracks and brought to Sligo jail in the evening by car. Others from the Ballymote area to be arrested were Bernard Brady, Edward Killeen, Bartholomew Keaney, Thomas Cawley, Patrick Farry, Patrick Rogers and Thomas Langan. They were all charged before the Resident Magistrate Captain Fitzpatrick on Wednesday in Sligo Courthouse on a charge of unlawful

assembly at Kilcreevin on February 12<sup>th</sup>. They were brought from the prison under heavy police escort. Forty extra police had arrived in the town that morning by the 10.05 am train.

When the prisoners were brought into court they were asked by the magistrate to remove their caps. They refused, ignored the proceedings and began to smoke. The courthouse was packed with Sinn Féin sympathisers. After a while McCabe said "I think we'll have a song" and the prisoners began to sing "songs referring to Ireland and freedom" as the Sligo Champion put it. There was uproar in the courthouse. The magistrate made another attempt to conduct the case but this was answered by another bout of singing. Captain Fitzpatrick warned the defendants that he would sentence them for contempt of court but McCabe said that he had no regard for him as the representative of a British institution. The magistrate then sentenced the defendants to seven days in prison for contempt. The police tried to remove the men but they lay on the floor and had to be dragged. The large crowd in the building then became threatening and help was sent for to the barracks. A squad of soldiers, who had been kept in readiness at the nearby police barracks, arrived with fixed bayonets. Some of the crowd outside were armed with hurleys and for a while it seemed that a conflict was inevitable. However the prisoners were brought to a waiting lorry and conveyed back to the jail without any major incident.

Six men from the Collooney area were arrested and charged with unlawful assembly on February 22<sup>nd</sup> at Streamstown on the occasion of another "conacre taking" incident. They were Frank O'Beirne, James Benson, James Maye, Patrick Mullen, J. Gilligan and James Fallon. They were returned for trial at a Special Crimes Court on the 15<sup>th</sup> and were released on bail. They were again in court on March 16<sup>th</sup>. Captain Fitzpatrick said that he did not look on this case as seriously as he did some of the others. They were sentenced to one month in jail and had to give bail that they would be of good behaviour or serve a further six months imprisonment. Mullen and O'Beirne refused to give bail, the others did.

Some of the prisoners in Sligo jail went on hunger strike in January and February 1918. These included McCabe, Keaney, Farry, Brady, Rogers and Cawley from the Ballymote area, John Murray from Sligo and John Corcoran and Thomas Ruane from Mayo. On March 6<sup>th</sup> the Ballymote prisoners were again in court before Captain Fitzpatrick. The prisoners had been on hunger strike for most of the time they were in prison but were reported none the worse for that. There was a large force of police and military in the vicinity of the courthouse and only those with a direct involvement in the case were allowed in. A tricolour was flown from the Sinn Féin

Hall. McCabe had a large bandage over one eye and he later claimed that he had been hit by Head Constable Murphy. When the magistrate entered McCabe gave the order "Attention, hats off".

The main witness was Sergeant Patrick Fallon, RIC, Ballymote, who reported on the illegal assembly at Kilcreevin. The court adjourned for a time to enable the defendants to get bail and finally at 5.30 pm the men appeared on the steps of the Courthouse. They marched accompanied by a large crowd through the town and a short meeting was held in O'Connell Street. The men were then marched to catch the evening train to Ballymote. "A Soldier's Song" was sung at the Railway Station.

The special Crimes Court was held on March 20<sup>th</sup> before Magistrates Captain Fitzpatrick, Sligo, and Mr Byrne, Athlone. The Ballymote defendants entered the court in military fashion. McCabe addressed the court saying "I have nothing to regret or withdraw. I have no apology to make for anything I have done or any action I have taken to secure land for the people of Sligo." When there was an outburst of cheering the magistrates threatened to clear the court. When McCabe tried to raise the question of his eye injury he was stopped and when there was further uproar in court it was cleared. McCabe and Brady were sentenced to three months hard labour, the others one month. In addition they were required to enter a bond of £50 with two sureties of £25 each to be of good behaviour for twelve months or go to jail for six months. Killeen, Farry and McCabe refused to give bail, the others did. According to Bat Keaney, McCabe told the others to accept bail rather than waste time in jail and they did. McCabe and Keaney were transferred to Crumlin Road jail in Belfast.

Early in April it was reported that Alec McCabe was among those on hunger strike in Belfast jail and as a result was removed to hospital. At the end of April it was reported that he had been removed to Mountjoy jail and that he had completely recovered.

On Tuesday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, two men from Clifony were similarly charged with unlawful assembly. The men were Charles McGarrigle and Patrick McHugh. They were remanded on bail. It was claimed that while the men were being driven to Sligo broken glass and barbed wire were strewn across the road. At about 2 am on the morning on Wednesday March 12<sup>th</sup>, six men were arrested in the Skreen and Dromard area, M. Carty, Michael Gilhool, James Leonard, Patrick

Maye, J. Maye and J. Dooney. They were brought to Sligo jail. On the following day they were charged with unlawful assembly at Lecarrow on February 26<sup>th</sup> and were remanded on bail.

The Sligo Spring Assizes were held early in March and the Judge in his address spoke of "a gloomy and a sad state of things". He said that while in 1917 the number of serious crimes reported was nine, in the present year it was seventy five. Most of these were cases of unlawful assembly. "It is my duty to tell you that these records disclose wholesale disorder and anarchy. If this state of things continues there is an end to everything". He went on to mention a silver lining to the dark cloud - the series of prosecutions undertaken in the previous weeks. "I am happy to be able to tell you that these proceedings are having the effect of bringing the people to their senses."

At the same Assizes the Crown Jury, made up with a few exceptions of Unionist sympathisers, passed the following resolution: "We view with consternation and dismay the serious state into which the County has been permitted to drift for some time past. Owing to the freedom allowed to persons who have been and are preaching anarchy and sedition the county is passing through a state of lawlessness almost unparalleled in the history of our country." The Mayor of Sligo, D. M. Hanley, and Alderman Edward Foley dissented from the resolution.

A group from Cloonacool, D. Henry D.C., J. Gilgan, J. O'Donnell, and James Marren, were charged on March 22<sup>nd</sup> with unlawful assembly at Branchfield in February. They had been arrested the same morning. They were remanded on bail. Later on the same day a group from Skreen, Patrick Kilcullen, Bernard Mahon, Michael Kilgannon, John Brady, John Barrett and Michael Browne were brought up on a similar charge and likewise remanded to a further court. They agreed to give bail.

On Tuesday of the following week the prosecutions went on. From the Sooley district seven men, John McLoughlin, Martin Clancy, James Loughlin, Patrick O'Brien, D. Flynn, James Clerkin and James Donnelly, were charged in connection with conacre taking efforts in the Sooley area. On the same day men from the Collooney area, John McMorrough, James Conlon, John J. Conlon, Martin Corcoran, John Davey and John Kelly. They were remanded on bail. On the Wednesday John McGarry, Eddie McGarry, T. McGolderick, M. Mulligan, P. Duggan, John Clerkin, Matthew Healy, James Kelly (Snr), John Cleary, John Gilmartin, John Devaney and Thomas Murphy, all of Ballintogher were similarly charged and remanded.

With feelings running high because of the procession of prisoners into Sligo on charges of unlawful assembly at this time it was inevitable that there would be friction between Sinn Féin supporters and the soldiers. On the evening of March 27<sup>th</sup> there was a scene at Ballisodare Railway Station when some members of the Norfolk Regiment being transferred from Sligo were travelling by train. It appears that on the way between Sligo and Ballisodare they took grave offence at the flying of the Sinn Féin flag from another carriage. A large crowd were travelling on the train, farmers returning from Sligo fair and boys going home on holidays from school. Presumably there were "rebel" songs being sung as well. The soldiers were reported to have rushed to the carriage in which the civilians were travelling, pulled some from the train and to have beaten some people with trench tool handles.

The following night, Thursday, there was a similar fracas at Sligo Station. A group of ten soldiers and two officers marched to Sligo Station to meet some soldiers arriving on the evening train. On the way they were booed. At the station a group of Sinn Féin supporters jeered the soldiers and sang rebel songs. The military replied with what the local papers called "patriotic ditties". It was also later alleged that stones were thrown at the soldiers. As the train pulled into the station the soldiers charged the Sinn Féin supporters and dispersed them. In the Sligo Champion an eyewitness was quoted as saying that the soldiers "struck out in all directions, bludgeoning women between the shoulder blades and young men on the head . . . struck out indiscriminately at most respectable and orderly citizens who were wounded." The same paper quoted a member of the Constabulary who had been on duty at the station as saying, "They only charged those who were booing and shouting at them. They are not Irishmen and can't stand that sort of thing. There is some sort of ill feelings between the soldiers and civilians." The report in the Sligo Independent supported this interpretation of the events.

Those remanded in March came up before the courts again in April. On the 5<sup>th</sup> the Cloonacool men were before the magistrate and were sentenced to three months and ordered to give bail to be of good behaviour or serve a further three months in jail. On the same day the Sooley defendants came before the court. James Clerkin was acquitted being given the benefit of the doubt. Clancy and McLoughlin were not professionally represented, the others were. The magistrate said that as Clancy and McLoughlin were the leaders they would have to serve three months in jail, the others getting one month each. All were asked to give bail as to their future conduct. All but Clancy and McLoughlin did, Clancy said "I don't recognise the court" and

McLoughlin said "I regard this court as a farce. I am a soldier of the Irish Republic, sworn to be free. Up de Valera." John McLoughlin was the son of John McLoughlin J.P. an ex Nationalist County Councillor. Martin Clancy was a son of Thomas Clancy Nationalist District Councillor and a half brother of prominent Sinn Féiner, J. J. Clancy and a nephew of the late Dr. Clancy, Bishop of Elphin. Both men were released on July 16<sup>th</sup>.

At Sligo Quarter Sessions in mid-April before Judge Wakely some of those convicted earlier on unlawful assembly charges appealed their sentences. In all cases the judge refused to change the sentences.

Unlawful assembly cases, still referring to February events, continued into the month of May. On Wednesday May 1<sup>st</sup> two groups were charged, one in connection with a meeting at Killaraght, the other at Moygara. Owen Tansey was one of the defendants in the latter case. Both groups had to give bail as to their future good behaviour. On May 4<sup>th</sup> the Ballinacarrow defendants case came up. John Butler was described as the ringleader and was given two months while the others were given fourteen days.

These cases had filled the pages of the local press for three months, involving people from most parts of the county and giving the Sinn Féin party more publicity and heroes. Sinn Féin clubs organised farm work for those in prison and "Welcome Home" demonstrations for the released men. At the meeting of the Mullinabreena Sinn Féin club on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> it was decided that every member would help cut a supply of turf for those members in jail. A May 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of Sooeey Sinn Féin Club decide to have work done for five members who were in jail. On Sunday May 20<sup>th</sup> a "meitheal" was organised by Gurteen Sinn Féin club to cut a year's supply of turf for Owen Tansey who was in Belfast jail serving a six month term. On the same day a year's supply of turf was cut by members of the Carrickbanagher club for John McMorrogh from Collooney who was in prison. Constable Jeremiah Mee says "In many cases the prisoners had very little interest in politics going to jail but after the torchlight processions (on their release) there was no turning back and they became dedicated republicans."

*(iii) "A reckless display of patriotism has been always a suitable mask for selfishness".*

The Volunteers had been secretly drilling since early 1917. One of the main difficulties they faced was the shortage of arms. To remedy this they began to raid houses where they knew



arms were available. Houses of prominent unionists were an obvious target and many of these were the first victims of this weapon gathering campaign. Many of the arms collected were old and obsolete and most were shotguns. Eventually by an order from Headquarters, issued through the press on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, Volunteers were forbidden to raid private houses for arms though this order was not always obeyed.

On the morning of February 7<sup>th</sup> at about 12.30 am a group of Volunteers raided the residence of Graham Shaw of Riversdale near Bunninadden. They took one shotgun, two revolvers and eight rounds of ammunition. They gained entrance by knocking on the door and asking for help to get a horse out of a ditch. Shaw's mother opened the door and five or six men entered. All but one had a revolver and they had their faces blackened. They asked for the guns and the ammunition and Shaw handed over what he had. He claimed to recognise three of the intruders and as a result three men from Gurteen were arrested and charged with the raid. John McDermott, Michael Roddy and James Pallas were released on bail in late February. They were eventually found guilty at Derry Assizes in early July. The leader of the raid on Shaw's was Michael J. Marren of Killaville and Pat Hunt of the same area also took part.

On the evening of February 12<sup>th</sup> three rifles were stolen from the steamship S.S. Tartar as it was berthed at Sligo Quay. The Tartar provided a scheduled service between Sligo and Ballina. The rifles were stolen while the crew were gone into the town. Sligo Company of the Volunteers carried out the operation.

On February 21<sup>st</sup> a more serious arms raid was carried out, this time on Rockingham House near Boyle, County Roscommon, the residence of Thomas Stafford. The raid was organised by the IRB in the Ballymote-Gurteen area. According to Batt Keaney, Alec McCabe asked him and P. J. Rogers to organise the use of a car for the night. They hired a car from Frank McDonagh, and partly dismantled it pretending that parts were on their way from Dublin. Albert Farry arranged a decoy car which drove around Ballymote to attract the attention of the RIC. Michael McGuire drove the car out of Ballymote, picked up Keaney and McCabe a few miles out the road and proceeded to Boyle. A few miles out the Boyle - Carrick on Shannon road they met the Boyle men. Batt Keaney was given the task of going to the door and knocking on it calling out the name of an employee. When the door was opened by the butler Keaney attacked. McCabe and the others then rushed the door and having gained entry, collected the arms and ammunition in the house.

In all three rifles, fifteen shotguns and two thousand rounds of ammunition were taken and loaded into the car. Driving by back roads they arrived in the vicinity of Ballymote and at the gates of Townagh Graveyard the arms were handed over to a group which carried them across country. They were concealed in a barn until the hue and cry died down. McGuire drove the car back into Ballymote and Keaney and McCabe alighted outside the town and walked into Ballymote.

There were large scale searches by the authorities following the raid and five men were arrested, George Plunkett, son of Count Plunkett, James Turbitt, Patrick Delahunty, James Feely and James Haran all from the Boyle area. All had taken part in the raid except Plunkett. On the April 8<sup>th</sup> Plunkett was released when the Crown withdrew the case against him. Later the cases against Delahunty and Turbitt were also dropped and when eventually the two others were put on trial the case collapsed for lack of evidence and they were released.

The Bishop of Elphin sent a letter to the Parish Priest of the area in which the raid took place. "The outrage . . . must remain a blot and a cloud on the fair name of your young people until the stigma is removed and due reparation made", the letter said, "Burglary is a crime against God and against the neighbour . . . a reckless display of patriotism has been always a suitable mask for selfishness."

On the 13<sup>th</sup> April the shop of Andrew Rogers, Ballymote was raided by armed masked men. Mr Rogers was tied up and over 700 rounds of sporting ammunition were taken. From 24<sup>th</sup> April the carrying of firearms, ammunition or explosives by members of the public unless authorised by a County Inspector of the RIC was prohibited in several counties including Sligo.

The Military Intelligence Officer said that the local press in his area had been as a whole captured by Sinn Féin by December 1917: "that is, it produces what will be acceptable to its readers".

On the 20<sup>th</sup> January an after-Mass meeting was held at Maugherow to establish a Sinn Féin club there. Speakers included J. J. Clancy, S. MacGowan, and J. Hennigan Co.C. A march through the village with a republican flag followed the meeting. On Sunday January 27<sup>th</sup> a public Sinn Féin meeting was held at Curry, a parish which the Champion claimed was the best organised parish in Ireland having at the time five Sinn Féin clubs! Dr. O'Doherty took the chair

and the speakers included M. Murphy, a local who had been interned in Frongoch after Easter Week. He said, "The work of Easter Week has borne fruit, the seed of independence then sown would soon blossom into freedom". Pádhraic Ó Domhnalláin also spoke.



*Most Rev. Dr. Coyne, Bishop of Elphin.*

The RIC County Inspector wrote at the end of January 1918 "The formation of Sinn Féin clubs appears to have reached its limits". He calculated that there were 43 clubs in the county with a membership of 2,769. Two more clubs were formed during February and one during March. By the end of May the number of Sinn Féin clubs in the county had reached 47 with a membership of just under 4,000.

Dramatic Societies served a dual purpose, they provided a "cover" for meetings of Volunteers and the plays put on were usually of an extreme nationalist hue. Cliffony Young Ireland Dramatic Club presented "The Dawn of Freedom" in the Fr O'Flanagan Hall, Cliffony in mid-January, 1918. Among the cast was Andrew Conway, 1916 internee. Members of the Mullinabreena Dramatic Club staged two plays "O'Donoghue Insurgent" and "Ná Bac Leis" in the local Technical Hall around the same time. They presented two "Irish-Ireland" plays, presumably the same two, in Tireragh on Easter Sunday. Among those taking part was Frank

Carty. On March 10<sup>th</sup> Cloonacool Dramatic Club presented an historical drama, "Robert Emmet".

A by-election was held in South Armagh on February 1<sup>st</sup>. The Sinn Féin candidate was defeated and there were celebrations in Sligo by the anti-Sinn Féin Nationalists. Tar barrels were lighted and some of these were thrown into the river by Sinn Féiners. The Sligo Independent reported that "for a considerable time the streets were turned into pandemonium" as Sinn Féiners and Nationalists roamed celebrating and countering. The same paper also reported the breaking of windows in the residence of a prominent public Nationalist supporter. Most of the leading Sinn Féiners from Sligo had gone to Armagh to take part in the campaign. A group of Volunteers under Captain "Ginger" O'Connell met them at the station on their return and marched into town. A meeting was held at the Sinn Féin Hall. There were scenes at the station and elsewhere as the Republicans were heckled by "separation women" and Nationalists.

At the next Tubbercurry R.D.C. meeting a resolution was proposed by P. J. McDermott congratulating the Nationalists of South Armagh on the victory. "Irish political life was not yet wholly bereft of sober thought and sound judgement", he said. At a meeting of the Sligo Division of the A.O.H. the Armagh electors were again thanked: "Sinn Féin has met its Waterloo at the Gap of the North", the president said. John Jinks seconded the motion. It was generally felt that Sinn Féin had been defeated in South Armagh because Unionists voted with the Nationalists against them. In early February the Grange AOH division decided to dissolve "on account of the action of Mr J. Devlin (AOH leader) in joining hands with Sir Edward Carson at the South Armagh election." The funds in hand were to be sent to the Sinn Féin election fund.

At the South Sligo Comhairle Cheantair meeting on January 20<sup>th</sup> the following clubs were represented: Ballymote, Gurteen, Emlaghmaghton, Tubbercurry, Mullinabreena, Kilshalvey, Killaville, Killaraght, Cloonloo, Culfadda, Keash, Cloonacool, Bunninadden, Moylough, Achonry, Ballinafad, Deroon, Riverstown, Ballinacarrow, Cashill, Ballyrush, Curry, Kilcreevin. This total of twenty three was just one less than the attendance at the December meeting. The February meeting was attended by delegates from twenty four clubs while the March meeting was attended by twenty nine clubs. At the March meeting Owen Tansey was appointed to represent the constituency on the Ard Comhairle during the enforced absence of Alec McCabe.

On May 11<sup>th</sup> a meeting of North Sligo Comhairle Ceantair of Sinn Féin was held under the chairmanship of J. J. Clancy. According to the Sligo Nationalist the following clubs were

represented: Ballintrillick, Cliffony, Grange, Maugherow, Calry, Sligo, St. John's, Coolera, Skreen and Killoran.

A Sinn Féin meeting was held at Templeboy on March 10<sup>th</sup> and one of the speakers, John Brown from Sligo, advised the Volunteers present to seize any rifles they could get their hands on. A prosecution was ordered because of this.

On St. Patrick's Day 1918 meetings and parades were held in various places in County Sligo including a large demonstration in Sligo town. "The gathering was not as large as many had anticipated", said the Sligo Independent. A march took place from the Town Hall to the Market Yard where a meeting was held. There were contingents there from the following districts: Maugherow, St. James' Well, Skreen Dromard, Templeboy, Sooey, Collooney, St. John's, Calry, Grange, Drumcliff, Coolera, Mullinabreena, Cloonacool and Achonry. Mayor D.M. Hanley presided wearing his chain of office. A resolution was passed saying that Ireland was a distinct nation with a right to sovereign independence. A report of the Mayor's speech was sent by the police to the military authorities but no prosecution was ordered.

A march was held in Ballymote on St. Patrick's Day by the Sinn Féin club as a show of strength. The club had no band instruments but this was remedied by a raid on the AOH Hall one night. The door was smashed in and the necessary instruments and banners taken. In Maugherow the local Temperance Society held a march with its band and banner on St. Patrick's Day. According to a report in the Sligo Champion some "hooligans" attacked the parade and tried to take the drum. The paper suggested that the reason behind the incident was that the local Sinn Féin Club had asked for the use of the band instruments for the Sinn Féin rally in Sligo and were refused. "This is not the first blackguardly attack committed in the district since a Sinn Féin club was started", the Champion report darkly added. At the end of March the Geevagh division of the AOH reported that their hall had been broken into and their band instruments stolen.

On April 7<sup>th</sup> a branch of Cumann na mBan was established in Sooey. On the 19<sup>th</sup> a branch was started in Tubbercurry. A branch was established at Collooney on April 21<sup>st</sup>. Mrs O'Mullane and Mrs Flanagan from Sligo were present. In-mid May a branch was started at Ballinacarrow and on May 12<sup>th</sup> a branch was formed at Ballintogher with the assistance of the same two ladies from Sligo. On June 30<sup>th</sup> Drumcliff Cumann na mBan was formed. Clubs were also formed in Mullinabreena by June 21<sup>st</sup> and Skreen and Dromard by July 20<sup>th</sup>.

The numbers of AOH divisions and UIL branches in County Sligo had decreased dramatically and there was a corresponding drop in the number of reports published in the local papers. For January the following AOH divisions were mentioned in the Sligo Champion: Ballisodare, Collooney, Drumcliff, Ballygawley, Highwood, Culfadda, Ballinacarrow, Ballintrillick, Geevagh and Calry. For the same month these were the UIL branches mentioned: Maugherow, Ballymote, Bunninadden, Rathscanlon and Drumcliff. For February - April these clubs were mentioned: AOH: Ballymote, Ballisodare, Sligo, Ballintrillick, Collooney, Calry, Culfadda, Geevagh, UIL: Ballymote, Highwood, Maugherow, Drumcliff, Bunninadden, On Saturday April 20th the normal quarterly meeting of the County Board of the AOH was held. There was a large attendance according to the short report in the Champion and all the old officers were re-elected.

The reports on the County Inspector for the early months of 1918 makes it clear that the UIL and the AOH were almost dead as political organisations. "No political body shows any sign of vitality except Sinn Féin" (January); "Sinn Féin is the only active political organisation in this county" (March); "The UIL and AOH and National Volunteers are practically dead and no real or sustained effort has been made to resurrect them" (June). In his July report he noted "UIL has at last held a public meeting viz. at Breaffy on 14<sup>th</sup> ult. It was very poorly attended".

## 8. UNITED AGAINST CONSCRIPTION.

In his March 1918 report, the County Inspector, commenting on the ending of the Sinn Féin conacre campaign said "Many people are apprehensive of some new move on behalf of the Sinn Féiners". However it was a move by the British government which led to the next crisis. In April 1918 the British army was under severe pressure on the western front in the Great War and it was decided that conscription should be extended to Ireland as soon as possible. To this end a Conscription Bill was passed in the British Parliament on April 16<sup>th</sup>.

*(i) "Conscription if attempted would have to be enforced at the point of a bayonet".*

The Irish Party voted against the Bill and returned home to fight the enforcement of conscription. On April 18<sup>th</sup> a conference, consisting of Nationalists, Sinn Féiners and Labour representatives met in Dublin and drafted an anti-conscription pledge which was to be solemnly taken in every parish the following Sunday. "The passing of the conscription act, the fear of which has been Sinn Féin's trump card had drawn the county into a state of consternation. People care very little for Home Rule in comparison with conscription", said the Sligo County Inspector in his April report. "The control of the money collected and the general management (of the anti-conscription campaign) are with the Sinn Féin party" he said.

Jeremiah Mee, RIC, then stationed in Ballintogher, said "It was this act of folly (Conscription) on the part of the British authorities that re-kindled the smouldering fires of Easter Week and led to the elimination of the Irish Parliamentary Party." The Sligo Champion printed an editorial on the subject of conscription in its April 6<sup>th</sup> issue: "The duty of Irishmen is clear", it said, "there will be no alternative to active and vigorous resistance . . . Conscription in any form or accompanied by any conditions would not be accepted . . . Conscription if attempted would have to be enforced at the point of a bayonet." Its editorial the following week continued the theme: "Not for a century has a more serious crisis arisen in Ireland than that which at present confronts its people."

At the Sligo Corporation meeting in early April the councillors, Sinn Féin and Nationalists, agreed in opposing conscription. One councillor suggested that since the RIC had proven so good at arresting men for entering other people lands (a reference to the conacre campaign) they should be sent to France to arrest the Germans for doing the same thing!

Maugherow and Bunninadden branches of the UIL registered their opposition to the proposed conscription at meetings early in April. At the Sligo County Council meeting on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> April the attempt to enforce conscription was attacked. Similar sentiments were expressed at the meeting of Sligo Board of Guardians. At Mass in Holy Cross Church, Sligo on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup>, reference was made to the threat of conscription and the people advised to be prudent. They were advised if the worst came to the worst to adopt a policy of passive resistance. It was reported that similar advice was given at many churches on the same morning in the County.

In his April report the County Inspector assessed the situation in County Sligo: "It is now becoming fairly convincing that conscription will be strenuously opposed by (practically) the whole people. Passive resistance will be the order and this must very soon merge into violence. Prisoners will be rescued from small escorts. The police will be thoroughly boycotted and transport will cease and railway bridges etc will be destroyed. The outlook is exceedingly serious".

At a confirmation ceremony in Curry in early May the Bishop of Achonry, Dr. Morrisroe, said that he regretted that there should be discord among the leaders of the Irish people. "There should be a strong united front to the enemy that threatened the lives and liberties of the Irish people" he was reported as having said.

On Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> a meeting of three hundred railwaymen and representatives from the Sligo Trades and Labour Council was held in the Wine Street Railway Club protesting against conscription. Henry Depew (carpenters) was reported as having said "In one street alone in Sligo, Holborn Street, twenty one had been killed in the war. That was good enough for any place."

On the Sunday night a large anti-conscription meeting was held in Sligo Town Hall. The anti-conscription pledge was solemnly taken by all present. A letter was read from the Bishop of Elphin, Most Rev Dr. Coyne, regretting his inability to attend but assuring them of his support, "I am with you in heart and soul in the strongest protest you can make or in any action you may decide on against conscription." Among the speakers were Rev P. A. Butler, Administrator, St. Mary's Sligo, Alderman John Lynch, Dr. Duignan, President Summerhill College and J. J. Clancy. Also introduced to the meeting was R. G. Bradshaw, described as "a man of Unionist



principles". He denied this saying that he had not the choice of his own parents, one a Protestant and the other a Quaker. "Nationality" he said "is before everything".

The Irish Trades Union Congress called a general strike on April 23<sup>rd</sup> to oppose conscription and according to the County Inspector, a public holiday was declared in Sligo and a large anti-conscription meeting was held on that day. All local UIL, AOH and Sinn Féin clubs expressed their opposition to the enforcement of conscription and the Sligo Champion editorial of April 27<sup>th</sup> boasted "A United Front". Another anti-conscription meeting was held in the Town Hall on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> presided over by the Mayor, Colr. Hanley. A meeting was held after last Mass in Collooney at which the Parish Priest, Fr Doyle advised the people to keep cool and to be guided by the "recognised leaders". A similar meeting was held at Drumcliff presided over by Canon Currid, P.P. Other meetings were held on the same day in Ballisodare and Ballinacarrow.

The prominence of clergy in these protest meetings against conscription is noticeable. The parish priest of Killoran led a march through the parish and on Sunday April 28<sup>th</sup> people of Skreen and Dromard marched to join the people of Templeboy with their priest, Fr Heffernan. Fr John Maher took the chair at a meeting in Easkey at which 1,200 people were reported to have attended. A protest meeting at Maugherow at which Canon Currid presided was a lively affair. Local landowner Sir Josslyn Gore Booth made a brave speech in which he said that he thought the young men present should join the British army. "The war was as much that of the people of Maugherow as it was any of the allies", he said. These sentiments were not popular and he was repeatedly heckled. Others to speak at the meeting with words more in common with the feelings of the listeners were Rev Fr Crehan C.C., J. J. Clancy, John Hennigan, Co.C. and R. G. Bradshaw.

A large anti-conscription meeting at Foxford, County Mayo, on Easter Sunday had a sequel in July when four of the main speakers were charged with unlawful assembly. The four were William Sears, a native of Ballinrobe, Dr. Francis Ferran Foxford, W. O'Leary Curtis and Pádhraic Ó Domhnalláin. They were found guilty and they were ordered to give sureties as to their future good behaviour. On their refusing to comply they were sentenced to four months in jail. Ó Domhnalláin spent his term in Sligo jail.

During the Conscription controversy a new Viceroy, Lord French, was appointed and within a few days of his taking up duties in May 1918 Dublin Castle announced that they had

discovered a "German Plot" in Ireland and seventy three Sinn Féin leaders were arrested. In Sligo there were two arrests, J. J. Clancy and Jeremiah "Ginger" O'Connell. On Saturday morning, May 19<sup>th</sup>, at about 4 am they were arrested at their homes. Both went quietly and were sent by the morning train to Dublin under heavy escort. From there they were deported to England. At the meeting of Sligo Board of Guardians later on Saturday there was condemnation of the arrests by all members including Alderman Jinks and Alderman Foley. The latter said "If the Government go on this way they are up against it and blood will be shed".

On the following Tuesday a meeting of Sligo County Committee of Agriculture was held. J. J. Clancy was secretary of this committee and it was proposed that his wife would act as secretary in his absence. This was agreed unanimously. A proposal that a protest be sent to the Government and that if this was ignored the Committee refuse to carry out Government schemes ran into trouble. Mr Creighton said that that was a political matter and there were not there to discuss politics. The appointment of Mrs. Clancy as secretary was sanctioned later in June. Henry Monson resigned his commission of the peace as a protest at the arrests of the two Sligo-men. A meeting of the Sligo County Council on May 25<sup>th</sup> under the chairmanship of John O'Dowd unanimously passed a resolution protesting at the arrests.

On June 14<sup>th</sup> the sentence which Alec McCabe was serving came to an end and he was released. However he was at once re-arrested and deported to join the other "German Plot" deportees. A letter from his wife in the Sligo Champion of June 22<sup>nd</sup> complains of being kept in the dark about her husband's whereabouts. She travelled to Dublin for his release but was told nothing and had to return home only to read later of his deportation. A "Women's day of Protest" was planned nationwide for Sunday June 9<sup>th</sup>. It was intended that the pledge against conscription would be signed on that day. In Sligo it had to be postponed to the following Sunday because of inclement weather.

The British government was taken aback by the amount of opposition to conscription and it was not enforced. Instead they asked that Ireland supply 50,000 recruits voluntarily. Sligo's quota of this would have been 1,000 men. "There seems little prospect of getting our 1,000 men" said the County Inspector at the end of June. Numbers of recruits for the year up to then were: For month ending January 15 - 10, February 15 - 4, March 15 - 6, April 15 - 1, May 15 - 2, June 15 - 8.

At the end of May the County Inspector's report said "Fear of conscription has caused many to join the Sinn Féin party. The great bulk of the people are firmly determined to resist conscription and they are well organised. The Nationalist party has been completely swallowed by the Sinn Féiners". The secretary of Grange Sinn Féin club wrote to Headquarters at this time asking for advice regarding "doubtful members" who joined owing to the conscription crisis. In the same May report the Inspector mentioned a development which in the future would assume a much greater importance - "It is becoming noticeable that people are beginning to hold themselves aloof from the police".

Recruiting went on during the remainder of the war to try to raise the 1,000 Sligo recruits but with little success. Major Murphy who was in charge of recruiting in the Sligo/Roscommon/Leitrim area moved his headquarters from Boyle to Sligo in early August 1918. The Victoria Hotel was opened as the recruiting depot for all branches of the army and navy. Recruiting meetings were still being held but were subject to almost constant interruption from hecklers.

In August 1918 Major O'Hara wrote to Major Murphy saying that he would be glad to help in recruiting at any time and that he felt sure that many of the old committee would as well. However he warned that they should expect very little support from the nationalist side. Only nine recruits joined the army from County Sligo for the month ending August 15<sup>h</sup>.

The Sligo Champion headed its reports of recruiting meetings in early September "Variety Entertainments". On September 3<sup>rd</sup> a meeting was held in the fair green, Sligo. A number of Sinn Féin supporters on the outskirts of the meeting subjected the speakers to incessant interruption. During the following days meetings were held in Ballymote and Dromahair which met with very little success. The climax of the week was to be the meeting on Friday night in the Town Hall, Sligo at eight o'clock. For some time before the meeting the band of the King's Own Scottish Borderers played outside. The room was filled to capacity as the chair was taken by Charles O'Hara H.M.L. When the chairman began to speak he was constantly heckled by the Sinn Féiners, "Up the Rebels", "What about Batchelor's Walk?", "Let the Men out of Jail", "Three cheers for the German Plot" were some of the remarks shouted at him. Attempts by various speakers to be heard were in vain and in the end the meeting concluded prematurely with the band playing "God Save the King". This caused more uproar. When the audience left the Sinn Féiners held another meeting outside the Town Hall which was addressed by Seamus

MacGowan and Harry Osborne. The "Imperial Reporter" from Enniskillen headlined its report of the Sligo meeting "Bolshevists in Sligo".

On the Saturday another recruiting meeting was held in the Market Yard which was also disrupted by Sinn Féiners. On Sunday a similar meeting was held in Strandhill to which many Sligo republicans cycled for the purpose of disruption.

*(ii) "Sit down, me bucko, you're not in Tubbercurry now".*

The Sligo Young Republican Club held its annual general meeting in early June, 1918. They had premises at Bridge Street, Sligo. It appears that they were a breakaway group from the original Wanderers Gaelic or Sinn Féin Club. The Young Republican Club was often called the Hottentot Club. Among those involved were Harry Osborne and Seamus MacGowan.

On Monday June 10<sup>th</sup> the Annual Statutory Meeting of Tubbercurry R.D.C. which involved the election of officers was held. The re-election of James Durkan, an old-style Nationalist, was proposed by J. Lee but this was opposed by the Sinn Féin faction on the Council. M. J. Gallagher proposed Joseph Brennan saying "he was a man who had not turned with the wind". J. P. Brennan seconded this. In the course of discussion a bone of contention appeared to be the signing of the chairman in his official capacity as magistrate of warrants or summonses in connection with the "conacre arrests". Mr Kilcoyne suggested that the chairman retire and not force a contest on the Council. "Let them (Sinn Féin) have a chance and see what they will make of it," he said. This was agreed. On taking the chair Joseph Brennan said that he would not take his place as a magistrate. Michael Gallagher, Sinn Féin, was proposed vice chairman and selected unanimously. M. J. Gallagher was the outgoing vice-chairman but he declined to go forward when proposed. Mr Lee, an Irish Party supporter was replaced as representative on the County Council by Joseph Brennan. At the subsequent Board of Guardians statutory meeting the outgoing chairman M. Gallagher, Sinn Féin, and vice chairman Mr Kennedy were unanimously selected. J. P. Brennan, Sinn Féin, was elected Deputy Vice Chairman. At Sligo R.D.C. and Board of Guardians the outgoing officers were re-elected.

On June 16<sup>th</sup> at Cliffony a meeting was held in the Sinn Féin hall followed by a march to Grange. William Gilmartin took charge of the march, called on the men to form in military formation and march. At Grange they drilled for about thirty five minutes under the command of

Gilmartin. Members of the RIC accompanied the march and as a result three men, William Gilmartin, Thady Harrison and James Lambert, were later arrested and charged with "gathering together for the disturbance of the public peace". Gilmartin was arrested on his way to Mass and made a determined effort to escape the six policemen who arrested him. He was at the time the secretary of Cliffony Sinn Féin club. When asked if he wanted bail, Gilmartin replied "As soldiers of the Irish Republic we refuse to give bail".

At a subsequent court on July 5<sup>th</sup> Gilmartin was sentenced to four months hard labour and the others two months each. At the end of that time they would have to lodge bail to be of good behaviour or serve a further six months.

At the annual statutory meeting of Sligo County Council the election of officers was held. John O'Dowd the outgoing chairman was proposed and seconded. John Hennigan and Joseph Brennan stood to dissent from the election. They were heckled and prevented from speaking. When Brennan, newly elected chairman of Tubbercurry R.D.C., said to the chairman, O'Dowd, "You are one of the four Irish members who voted with Lloyd George, aren't you, one of the four that voted against Home Rule", Peter Cawley replied according to the Sligo Champion "Sit down me bucko, you're not in Tubbercurry now"!

On May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1918, Sligo Corporation decided to confer the Freedom of the Borough on Fr O'Flanagan, the priest who had been a leading light in Sinn Féin and who, while ministering in Cliffony, had organised IRB and Volunteers there. The conferring was fixed for Sunday 23<sup>d</sup> June. The proceedings took place outside the Town Hall, Sligo shortly after 6 pm. The County Inspector estimated the crowd at two thousand.

The Mayor of Sligo presided and he welcomed Fr O'Flanagan, reminding the listeners of the work the priest had done in Cliffony, the great victory in North Roscommon and the very recent Sinn Féin success in East Cavan. Alderman Fitzpatrick and Henry Depew also spoke. The Town Clerk, Mr. Shea read the illuminated certificate which the Corporation presented to Fr O'Flanagan. Fr O'Flanagan then spoke, reminding his listeners that it was on the same steps sixteen years previously that he had made his first public speech at a Gaelic League meeting. He mentioned the North Roscommon election when after a hard day's electioneering in the snow he was cheered by the sight of a group from Sligo come to help the Sinn Féin candidate. He also

spoke of the hope of getting Ireland's case heard at the Peace Conference which would follow the soon expected end of the Great War.

Other speakers included Mr O'Hanrahan, Dublin, Alderman Meade, Cork, Dr. White, Waterford, returning from the Cavan election and P Ó Domhnalláin and J. R. Tracey from Sligo. Among the clergy mentioned by the Champion as being present were the following County Sligo priests: Rev P. J. O'Grady, P.P. Keash, Rev M O'Reilly C.C. Ballyrush and Rev Fr O'Connell, Keash. In an editorial the same paper, with tongue in cheek, suggested that Sligo confer the freedom of the Borough on Kerensky the Russian Premier, then in London. He was, the paper added, "a champion of the rights of Labour".

The East Cavan election was held on June 20<sup>th</sup> and the Sinn Féin candidate, Arthur Griffith, was elected. In Sligo bonfires blazed at street corners, flags were flown and the Republican Club premises were decorated and illuminated. There were some incidents between civilians and soldiers and there were allegations that soldiers had ill treated some females. The Sligo Nationalist reported that tar barrels were lighted at various points in the streets of the town including one at the unionist Constitutional Club. This, the paper said, was later moved by some Sinn Féiners. A group of soldiers who appeared on the scene charged the cheering crowd with trench tool handles and the crowd broke up, many making their way to the decorated Republican Hall. A lorry of soldiers arrived from the Barracks and for a time it seemed that there would be a major incident but the newspaper says "Wiser councils prevailed and the soldiers returned to barracks". The only result was, the Nationalist said, a bayonet mark on the Republican Club's door.

The Sligo Independent published an account of the events of the night under the heading "The Real Facts". It stressed that "on the whole, proceedings were conducted with decorum and public propriety which reflected much credit on the Sinn Féiners." The incident was caused, said the paper, by the lighting of a bonfire near the Constitutional Club, "the rendezvous of many gentlemen whose sympathies are with the Empire in the great struggle for liberty against the Germans". Two passing soldiers were jeered and when it appeared they were going to be attacked the crowd was rushed and it broke and fled, some to the Republican Club.

Two men, R. B. Anderson from Calry and James Hayes a native of Tipperary who had been working as a railway clerk in Sligo, had to go on the run in June/July as a result of a

meeting at Colga at which they spoke. The Sligo Nationalist of July 6<sup>th</sup> reported that the police had proceeded to arrest the two men on the previous Thursday on a charge of making seditious speeches but found neither at home. Again on the night of Tuesday October 8<sup>th</sup> there was a big police search for the pair in the Calry district to no avail. A large scale search was carried out in the Gurteen area in the early hours of Wednesday July 10<sup>th</sup> by military and police. The house of Owen Tansey, president of the local Sinn Féin club was surrounded and searched but nothing incriminating was found. The Sinn Féin Hall and houses of other Sinn Féin sympathisers were also carefully searched but nothing incriminating was found though some pictures were taken from the hall.

Major O'Hara wrote in late June and early July to George Seward and Lord Midleton, two leading southern Unionists and leading figures in the Irish Unionist Alliance, saying that he was unable to attend meetings of the IUA. In the letter to Lord Midleton he said that he had done all he could to prevent a split in the organisation. He strongly expressed the opinion that because of the recent events, presumably the land agitation, Home Rule in any form was in his opinion out of the question. "It would mean handing over the country to Sinn Féiners", he said and in that case we "might as well consent to its being handed over to the Kaiser at once." Lord Midleton was leader of a minority section of the IUA which supported coming to terms with the fact that some form of Home Rule was inevitable.

Michael Collins was arrested in Dublin during the first week of April and charged with making a seditious speech in Granard, County Longford. He was remanded to Sligo Jail and arrived on Thursday, April 4<sup>th</sup>. His arrival was anticipated and some Sligo Sinn Féiners met the train at the station. In late May word arrived in Sligo that bail bonds should be signed immediately for Collins in order to have him released. J. J. Clancy and Michael Nevin went to see the Governor of Sligo Jail, Mr Reid, and Collins, when brought to the office agreed to have the bail bond signed. However because Collins had been committed at Longford it was necessary to have the bonds signed there and Clancy set off for Longford returning the following morning with the necessary papers. Collins was released and set off for Dublin at once.

On August 15<sup>th</sup> there was a nationwide protest by the Sinn Féin organisation against the banning of the organisation and the banning of meetings in Ireland. At various places throughout the land speakers read a printed statement from Sinn Féin and as a result were arrested. In County Sligo a large meeting was held outside the Town Hall. The statement was read by J. R.

Tracey. The Mayor presided and Alderman Lynch and Seamus MacGowan also spoke. Another meeting was held at Cliffony and there the statement from the executive of Sinn Féin was read by John Hennigan Co.C.



*John Hennigan*

At Collooney a meeting was about to be held when the police informed those taking part that they would be prevented, by force if necessary, from holding the meeting. The crowd were advised to disperse by the organisers but they regrouped outside the town where they were addressed by D. A. Mulcahy and Harry Osborne from Sligo. Other meetings were held at Calry, where two men on the run, Anderson and Hayes, spoke, and at Drumcliff and Ballintrillick. Fr Crehan, Grange spoke at the latter.

A meeting was also advertised to be held at Kelly's Cross in the Skreen-Dromard district. That morning a group of 75 military and 40 policemen under the County Inspector arrived in the area to ensure that no meeting took place. Acting in accordance with a prearranged plan the meeting was held some distance from Kelly's Corner while the military and police were in occupation of that place. The Sinn Féin statement was read out and Daniel Kilcullen and D. Clarke spoke.

As a result of their action on August 15<sup>th</sup> Professor Tracey and John Hennigan were arrested on Thursday night/Friday morning and taken into custody. They were still in Sligo prison awaiting trial a week later and both men were offered some hours liberty to visit their families on Sunday August 18<sup>th</sup>. Treacy accepted but Hennigan refused. On Tuesday, 27<sup>th</sup> August, the pair were removed to Galway prison. On September 5<sup>th</sup> a meeting of the Sligo Urban Technical Committee was held under the chairmanship of Rev P. Butler. Treacy was a teacher at the Sligo Technical School and had been there for fourteen years. His appointment was part time



subject to annual re-appointment. A letter from Treacy was read at the meeting in which he stated that "owing to circumstances over which I have no control I shall be absent for some time". The committee decided unanimously to re-appoint him and to appoint a substitute pending his return.

On September 24<sup>th</sup> at a court martial in Renmore Barracks Galway, Tracey and Hennigan were found guilty. At the trial Hennigan admitted reading the Sinn Féin manifesto and said that he would do so again if the occasion arose. Both men were sentenced to two years imprisonment. In the case of Professor Tracey he was released at the beginning of October on medical advice. When he arrived at Sligo Station he was met by a large crowd of Sinn Féiners and escorted to his home.

In the summer it was not surprising to find a fall off in attendance at political club meetings because of good weather and farm work. In the summer of 1918 there was also a fall in the "political temperature" following the conacre campaign of February and the resultant trials and the conscription scare which by summer had receded. At its meeting on Sunday August 1<sup>th</sup> Ballintogher Sinn Féin club called on "all members to attend meetings otherwise their names will be stroked off the books". The same weekend the St. James' Well club requested "a full attendance of members" for their meeting the following Sunday and the Sooeey Cumann na mBan club "is desirous that members will attend club meetings more regularly."

On August 24<sup>th</sup> the Killoran club called on "all members to attend the meetings otherwise their names will be struck off the books. Now is not the time for falling away. Membership should be more punctual than ever in view of the General Election". For the same date Sooeey club said "A large number of members are absenting themselves from the club meetings of late." A similar message was printed under the name of the Skreen and Dromard club, "Every member of our club and in particular every member of the committee are urgently requested to attend". On Sunday September 8<sup>th</sup> the Killoran club was again castigating the absentees, "A large number of members are absenting themselves from the club's meetings of late and as the General Election is fast approaching it is up to every true Irishman to do his best".

The organisation of the Volunteers went on of necessity in secret, each Sinn Féin club was expected to have a company of Volunteers and the officers of both organisations were often the same. The commandant of the Sligo Brigade was J. J. O'Connell until his imprisonment at the

time of the "German Plot". He was succeeded by James Keaveney. A letter exists from Michael Collins to Keaveney dated October 10<sup>th</sup> 1918 informing him of a meeting of the General Executive of the Volunteers in Dublin on October 18<sup>th</sup>.

OGLAIGH NA h-EIREANN.

General Head Quarters,  
Dublin.  
October 10th 1918 .

Jim Keaveney,  
John Street,  
SLIGO.

A Chara Dhil,

There will be a meeting of the General Executive held at  
No. 46 Parnell Square on Friday October 18th at 8 p.m. sharp.

As most important matter will be dealt with , including  
all points to be ~~paid~~ before the Conference on the following night  
it is absolutely essential that you should be present.

You will be informed of the exact place of meeting of the  
Conference when you come to the Executive meeting.

Do chara go buan,  
MICHAEL O'COILEAM  
Adjutant General.

Copy.

*Letter from Michael Collins to Jim Keaveney October 10<sup>th</sup> 1918*

The county was slowly and haphazardly being organised into Battalions. Frank Carty was elected Commandant of Tubbercurry Battalion early in 1918 and he held classes for company officers in Pádhraic Ó Domhnalláin's barn once or twice a week. Among those who attended were Charles Gildea, Moylough, M. J. O'Hara, Aclare and Jack Brennan, Cloonacool. Carty also drilled the Mullinabreena Company of the Volunteers. He attended a meeting of Battalion and Brigade officers in 5 Blackall Place, Arran Quay, Dublin in the early summer of 1918. "From the beginning of 1918", claimed Carty, "We had Volunteer companies organised in practically every parish in south Sligo".

At the time of the conscription threat there was an influx into the ranks of the Volunteers but when the danger was passed the numbers dropped again. "Those who remained on formed the bulk of the men who participated actively in the subsequent armed conflict against the Black and Tans" says Carty. The monthly reports of the County Inspector gave figures for the number of Volunteer companies and the total strength. At the end of January the estimate was five companies with 225 members. This rose to seven by the end of March and eight at the

end of July with 429 members. Four cases of illegal drilling were reported to the military authorities during May and prosecutions were ordered in three of them.

On September 14<sup>th</sup> Lieut Colonel J. W. Royce Tomkin asked the Sligo Board of Guardians for accommodation for 250-300 soldiers of the Suffolk Yeomanry who were then stationed under canvas at a camp at Collooney. Guardians were divided on the issue. Alderman Lynch said "We should not have anything to do with the English conscripts" and Colr. Hughes thought "They can go down to Carson's country, let them get accommodation there". The chairman J. P. Higgins thought that they should come to some arrangement since the army would probably take the workhouse over even if the Guardians refused them. Colr. Monson proposed that the request from the military be refused and this was passed on a vote of nine against seven.

The number of inmates in Sligo Workhouse at this time was 274. Other Workhouses including Boyle and Claremorris had been taken over by the military. At the Guardians' meeting of October 5<sup>th</sup> a letter was read from the Local Government Board saying that they had pointed out to the military authorities the difficulty involved in moving the sick and infirm from the workhouse. As a result the military were now requesting accommodation for 200 soldiers in the workhouse but not the taking over of the whole building.

The Guardians called a special meeting for Tuesday October 8<sup>th</sup>. The Local Government inspector, Mr Lynch, attended and explained the position which was that the military demanded accommodation for 200 men. "Neither you or I have any power to say 'Nay' to them", said the Inspector. Later, representatives of the military entered the meeting. Mr Monson's resolution of a previous meeting was again reaffirmed i.e. not to allow the military to use the Workhouse. It was passed 10 - 5. This was to have no effect.

On October 19<sup>th</sup> the able-bodied inmates were removed to Tubbercurry, 43 by train and 15 less able by motor vehicles supplied by the military. The military, about 300 soldiers, then took possession of the greater part of the workhouse on the 25<sup>th</sup> October. The hospital part which was still occupied by patients and which was not to be taken over had been "disconnected" from the main part of the workhouse.

***(iii) "There is no getting away from the fact that Sinn Féin was Labour  
and Labour was Sinn Féin".***

During 1918 there was a drive in Sligo and neighbouring counties to found new branches of the Transport Union and in March William J. Reilly, a councillor and local tailor, was appointed full time secretary of the Sligo Union branch.

Branches in existence before 1918 appear to have been Sligo itself, Ballisodare (February 1917) and Maugherow. Ballisodare branch was based on the flour mills there and its secretary was Patrick Connolly. Maugherow branch was in fact formed by the amalgamation of the Maugherow Labourers Union with the Transport Union. This amalgamation had been discussed as far back as 1913 but appears not to have taken place until 1917. Maugherow branch was based on the workers on the Gore-Booth estate. Its secretary was B. Madden.

William Reilly founded a branch in Ballina on April 10<sup>th</sup> and at this time came in contact with the migratory labourers of Erris who went to Scotland each year for the potato harvest and whose conditions and pay were very bad. There was a steamship service between Sligo and Belmullet and it appears that O'Reilly persuaded the labourers to join the Sligo branch of the union. Demands were drawn up and sent to the Scottish Potato Merchants' Association. John Lynch, Sligo and Michael Masterson, Belmullet went to Glasgow to negotiate and while some increase in pay may have been granted the negotiators failed to achieve any improvement in living conditions.

Branches of the Union were founded in County Sligo, at Geevagh in January, secretary Andrew Doyle, at Riverstown in April, secretary J. Ellis, Ballymote in August, secretary J. A. Farry and Tubbercurry, secretary Charles Gildea, in November. Both Farry and Gildea played prominent roles as members of the republican movement during the War of Independence. A census of the membership of the County Sligo branches in June 1918 gives the branches and the number of active members as follows:-

Sligo town - 504,	Maugherow - 130,
Ballisodare - 75,	Geevagh - 37,
Collooney - 43,	Riverstown - 21.

The last three were deemed "uneconomic". In the Ballisodare branch fifty six of the members worked in the corn and flour mills. Twenty five of the Collooney members, fifteen of those at Riverstown and twenty two of those at Geevagh were agricultural labourers. At Maugherow one hundred members were agricultural labourers.

A Special Conference of the Irish Trade Union Congress in Dublin in February 1919 decided to press for a shorter working week and wage improvements. As a result there were many industrial disputes throughout the country. Some days after this conference the Sligo Trades Council discussed the woollen mills and the carbide factory at Collooney. The workers in the factory received 30/- per week, working daily from 6 am to 6 pm with two hours off. They demanded an increase of 10/- and eventually were accepted 6/- increase. Women working in the mills from 6.30 am to 6 pm received an average weekly wage of between 8/- and 12/-. Both sets of employees went on strike and eventually won concessions. The secretary of the Collooney Union branch was Joseph Connolly as a result he was the subject of an assault at Collooney MGWR station in early March at the hands of a carbide factory foreman.

A labour dispute was in progress in the Arigna Mines, County Roscommon and John Lynch, Alderman and Trades Union official from Sligo, was invited to Boyle to address a meeting on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1918. This he did and as a result he was charged with unlawful assembly. He was arrested on Monday September 23<sup>rd</sup> and taken to Boyle. In evidence it was alleged that he said "I am a soldier of the Republic and I expect you are all the same. The time is coming when we will have our own soldiers, our own navy and our own police. This is not our war. We are at war with no-one, the only enemy we have is England." "I don't recognise any of you" he said at the court, "I don't recognise you at all." John Lynch was remanded on bail until October 9<sup>th</sup>. At the next trial he was found guilty and sentenced to three months imprisonment. "You and I may change places yet, the day will come when I'll be trying you" he told the judge. He was removed to Sligo jail.

William O'Reilly helped establish a union branch in Boyle towards the end of 1918 and in March 1919 he called a strike there for an increase in wages and shorter hours. The strike dragged on until Count Plunkett intervened as arbitrator and the men won a wage increase and a small reduction in working hours. More County Sligo branches of the ITGWU were founded in 1919 and 1920, Easkey and Coolaney in the former and Ballintrillick and Bunninadden in the latter.

At a meeting of Sligo Trades Council in early May there were harsh words spoken about the attitude of Sinn Féin to Labour. Colr. William Reilly asked that a deputation be sent from the Council to Sinn Féin to ask that a prominent member of Sinn Féin who worked in the asylum be asked to join the Asylum Attendants Union. He threatened that if the attitude of Sinn Féin did not change then Labour would put up a candidate for the General Election in North Sligo. James Hayes, a member of the Railway clerks union said "there was no getting away from the fact that Sinn Féin was Labour and Labour was Sinn Féin". Colr. Depew said that a person could not be forced to join a union and that there were sixteen or seventeen attendants at the asylum not union members. It was unfair to single out anyone, he said. "This man is a ringleader" was the chairman's reply. The man in question appears to have been James Devins from Sligo town.

## **9. THE VOTERS DECIDE: SEPT 1918 - JAN 1919.**

In February 1918, the Representation of the People Act was passed, giving the vote to all males over 21 years and most women over 30. This would mean a large increase in the electorate. In North Sligo the electorate increased from 8126 in 1911 to 18448 in 1918. The increase for South Sligo was from 6929 to 18003.

*(i) "Sinn Féin is the only live political organisation in the county and is well prepared for the election".*

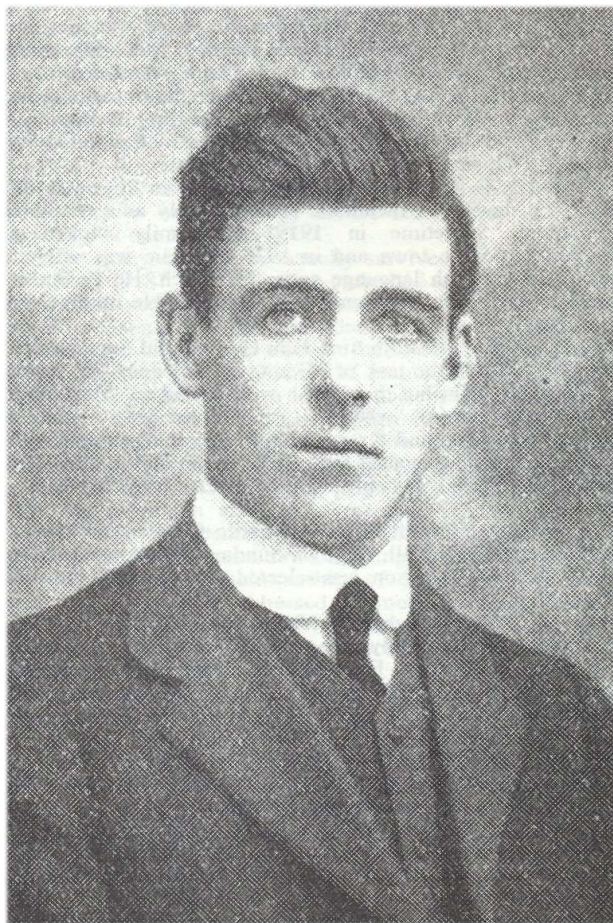
All through the summer of 1918 Sinn Féin clubs were aware that the ending of the war would see a general election and they were determined to be ready. To that end examination of the electoral register and ensuring that all their supporters entitled to a vote had one, occupied much of their time.

In June, for instance, Deroon, Skreen and Dromard, Cully, Drumcliff, Templeboy and Grange clubs made mention of such matters in their Sligo Champion reports. The County Inspector in his June report said that the Sinn Féiners were in the process of "perfecting their organisation". "The new franchise act which gives practically manhood suffrage will enable the Sinn Féin party to sweep Ireland at the next General Election". In his August report he said that Sinn Féin activity during the month consisted of revising voters' lists. "They intend to contest both divisions of this County and will probably carry them".

The joint secretaries of South Sligo Comhairle Ceanntair, Sinn Féin, wrote to the headquarters on September 5<sup>th</sup> asking if they wished to recommend anyone as a candidate for the South Sligo constituency. The reply stated that the candidate should be selected locally and on September 15<sup>th</sup> the South Sligo Sinn Féin organisation met in Tubbercurry to select their candidate. There were four names put forward, Alec McCabe, Pádhraic Ó Domhnalláin, Owen Tansey and Seamus Marren. McCabe and Ó Domhnalláin were both then in prison. Fr O'Grady of Keash was said to be in favour of Ó Domhnalláin while Frank Carty favoured McCabe. Ó Domhnalláin had been very prominent in Sinn Féin and Volunteer circles in Sligo but was an older man and less associated with the physical force side. Tansey and Marren withdrew and the vote between the other two resulted in a win for McCabe by a vote of 21 to 19. The nineteen

who voted for Ó Domhnalláin were from the Tubbercurry area and they refused to accept the result.

On November 3<sup>rd</sup>, according to the Irish Independent, a Sinn Féin Executive meeting at Ballymote found the selection of Alec McCabe was irregular. That meeting was adjourned to November 10<sup>th</sup> when McCabe was again selected, this time apparently within the rules. Pádhraic Ó Domhnalláin was put forward for the South Mayo constituency because of his association with Tourmakeady but he was defeated for the nomination here as well, this time by William Sears, a native of Ballinrobe.



*Pádhraic Ó Domhnalláin*

Pádhraic Ó Domhnalláin was released from Sligo jail later in the year and developed rheumatic fever possibly as a result of his term in jail. Sometime in 1919 the family moved from Tubbercurry to Sligo town and in 1920 Pádhraic was offered the editorship of the Irish language paper *Misneach*. He accepted and they moved to Dublin. This ended his considerable involvement in Sligo affairs.



At a meeting of Keash Sinn Féin Club in mid September Fr P. J. O'Grady said that the task of electing a Sinn Féin MP for South Sligo would be light but that Keash would send an "Expeditionary Force" to East Mayo "where it is believed every species of opposition, rowdyism and tyranny that money can purchase will be brought into operation against Sinn Féin". John Dillon, the leader of the Nationalist Party was being opposed in East Mayo by Eamon de Valera.

A meeting of North Sligo Comhairle Cheantair of Sinn Féin was held in the Town Hall, Sligo on Sunday, September 15<sup>th</sup> and J. J. Clancy, then in Usk prison, was selected as the Sinn Féin candidate for North Sligo.

On September 30<sup>th</sup> the Nationalists of South Sligo held a selection conference in Ballymote to select a candidate to contest the seat at the next General Election. According to the item in the Champion the following areas were represented: Achonry, Ballymote, Cloongeevy, Culfadda, Knocknagrine, Emlaghmaghton, Bunninadden, Mullinabreena, Tubbercurry, Kilcreevin, and Harristown. Very Rev Canon Daly P.P. Ballymote attended the meeting and James Hannon, J.P. Ballymote presided. John O'Dowd, the sitting member was unanimously selected.

On Friday, September 29<sup>th</sup> a meeting of Nationalists in the Town Hall, Sligo, selected Tom Scanlan as the Nationalist candidate for the North Sligo constituency. He warned the Sinn Féiners that they were ready for them. *On the Saturday he attended the Sligo County Board meeting of the AOH and on the Monday evening he addressed a meeting at Ballintrillick.*

The coming General Election was on everyone's mind and a meeting of Sligo Trades and Labour Council discussed the matter. Some delegates were in favour of putting forward a Labour candidate but others who were also involved with Sinn Féin disagreed. It was decided to hold a "plebiscite" of the membership to decide the issue. At their next meeting however the Council was informed of the decision of the T.U.C. not to contest the election.

"Fears of conscription are greatly diminished" the County Inspector wrote at the end of October 1918, "Much interest is now being taken in the coming general election". His opinion of the probable outcome was that Sinn Féin would take both Sligo seats. "Sinn Féin is the only live political organisation in the county and is well prepared for the election" he added. He estimated

the number of Sinn Féin clubs in the county at 47, the highest ever and the membership at one less than 4,000.

How many UIL clubs actually survived in County Sligo in the latter half of 1918? The following clubs had reports of or notices of meetings published in the Sligo Champion at this time: Highwood, Drumcliff, Maugherow, Bunninadden, Ballymote. In the list of contributions to the Scanlon election fund late in 1918 the only UIL branch mentioned was the Drumcliff branch. The following AOH divisions were in existence or at least had reports published in the same paper: Drumcliff, Collooney, Sligo, Monasteredan, Geevagh, Mullinabreena, Culfadda, Ballisodare. This represented a complete collapse of the power base of the Nationalist Party in the county.

Tom Scanlan MP arrived in Sligo on November 20<sup>th</sup> to start his election campaign and held a meeting in the Town Hall on Wednesday. He also attended the County Board meeting of the AOH on Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup>. On the same day a meeting of Sligo County Council was held under the chairmanship of John O'Dowd, MP. He introduced the MP for North Sligo, Tom Scanlan who addressed the meeting. "If Sinn Féin does not want to go to Parliament why do they want to be elected?" he asked. A councillor, P. McMenamy spoke against Scanlan and the Parliamentary party but was continually called on by the chairman to make his remarks brief. He finally left saying that when he returned he would get fair play.

On November 17<sup>th</sup> the Sinn Féin election campaign opened in North Sligo with meetings at Mullaghmore, Cliffony and Killoran. At Mullaghmore a Sinn Féin club was formed and speakers included Fr C. McHugh, C.C. Cliffony, Liam Pilkington and Seamus MacGowan. On Monday evening a meeting was held in the Town Hall, Sligo. The Mayor presided and Fr Michael O'Flanagan returned, as he said "to fire the first shot". At Grange fair on the Wednesday Sinn Féin held another meeting. On Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> a meeting in support of Clancy was held at Calry and the principal speaker was James Hayes who was on the run. Michael Nevin also spoke at this meeting.

By now the campaign was in full swing. "Never was an election fought with such determination", said the Sligo Champion. In the last week of November Scanlan held meetings at Calry, where there were some interruptions from Sinn Féiners, Maugherow, where he received an enthusiastic reception, and at Drumcliff where it clashed with a nearby Sinn Féin meeting. In

Kilglass Mr Scanlan was well received according to the Sligo Nationalist but his reception was not so cordial at Easkey on the same Sunday. Other Sinn Féin meetings were held at Rosses Point where among others Mrs Sheehy Skeffington spoke, and Ballintogher.

## To the UNIONIST ELECTORS

— OF —

## North and South Sligo.

## SINN FEIN v. NATIONALIST.

ELECTORS,

Your duty is to vote for neither Candidate at the General Election. A Unionist who supports Sinn Fein votes for—

- 1—The people who rebelled in 1916, thus assisting the Germans whom they called their "Gallant Ally," and thereby attacked Great Britain, the United States of America, France, and the other Nations who were fighting for freedom.
- 2—The creation of an Irish Republic entailing complete separation from England and Scotland, thus imposing—
  - (a) Enormous taxation on this country.
  - (b) The closing of English and Scottish markets to Irish traders and farmers.
  - (c) The end of Land Purchase.

If you vote for the Nationalist you support a Party pledged to Home Rule, and

- 1—Whose leader boasted he never stood on a Recruiting Platform, and as a matter of fact, never did.
- 2—The Party who, during the major part of the greatest struggle in history, maintained an attitude of callous indifference to the success or failure of the Allied cause—the cause of liberty and freedom.
- 3—The Party who, when the Armistice was declared, sat silent in the House of Commons, although the Armistice placed the seal on the Victory of the Allies, and saved the lives of many thousands of our countrymen.
- 4—The Party, some of whose members are now canvassing for the Unionist vote, but who as a Party never did anything for Unionists save to threaten them.
- 5—The Party whose contribution towards assisting in winning the war, with a few honourable exceptions, was nought.

UNIONISTS,

If you vote for the Nationalists, you vote for the Party whose policy was declared by Mr John Dillon in the House of Commons on or about the 7th November, 1918, to be as follows—

"As regards the demand of Ireland we do not differ in the least degree, and never have differed from, the demand made by the present Sinn Féiners, or by any of the Nationalist Revolutionary Parties in the past."

## Vote for NEITHER Party.

Issued by the Sligo Centre of the Irish Unionist Alliance.

*From The Sligo Independent, November 30<sup>th</sup> 1918*

The Sligo Independent of November 30<sup>th</sup> carried a large advertisement on page two "to the Unionist Electorate of North and South Sligo". It advised all Unionist voters to vote for neither candidate in those constituencies. "A unionist who supports Sinn Féin votes for the people who rebelled in 1916 thus assisting the Germans whom they called their 'gallant ally' and thereby attacking Great Britain". "If you vote for the Nationalist you support a party pledged to Home Rule . . . a party who during the major part of the greatest struggle in History maintained an attitude of callous indifference to the success or failure of the allied cause". This advertisement was inserted by the Sligo Centre of the Irish Unionist Alliance.

Among the proposers of Scanlan for North Sligo were J. P. Higgins Chairman of Sligo Board of Guardians, and Rev P. A. Butler Adm., Sligo. In South Sligo Canon Daly, P.P. Lavagh, Ballymote and Rev T. Quinn, P.P. Toulestrane, were two of the proposers of John O'Dowd while one of McCabe's proposers was Rev P. J. O'Grady, P.P. Keash, the man who had dismissed him from his teaching job. In North Sligo Fr Joseph Lennon presided at a Sinn Féin election meeting at Maugherow and Fr Crehan C.C. Cliffony also spoke. Clergy mentioned in the

list of subscribers to the Scanlan election fund included Fr Butler, Adm., Sligo, Fr Doyle P.P. Collooney, Rev Fr Durkan, C.C. Collooney and Rev Fr Mulligan C.C., Sligo.

The County Inspector in his report for November said that the county was "in a very unsettled state owing to the impending election", "Both people and clergy are divided". He said that the Sinn Féiners were much better prepared and organised than the Nationalists. "Their canvassers are more active and their flags and election addresses appear everywhere". "The Sinn Féiners worked hard and the organisation was complete down to the last detail" he reported after the election. No clashes had occurred between the parties during November.

*(ii) "Somewhere in County Sligo".*

A virulent strain of flu had hit Ireland and by November many were laid low in County Sligo. There were at least 240 cases in Ballymote alone according to the Sligo Champion of November 30<sup>th</sup>. One of the best known victims of the epidemic was Owen Tansey, the chairman of the South Sligo Sinn Féin Executive and the leader of the Gurteen Volunteers. He died during the last week of November. His funeral on December 2<sup>nd</sup> was a show of force by the Volunteers. The coffin was accompanied by a group of at least 70 Volunteers in military formation from the church at Gurteen to Mount Irwin cemetery. The Volunteers all wore black sashes. The RIC attempted to enter the cemetery but they were prevented. "You will not enter the graveyard. It's ours and we do not want any Government official present. I will use physical force to keep you out. We are burying a soldier of the Irish Republic", an RIC sergeant was told. His wise reply was, "As you threaten physical force I will not enter". A volley of shots was fired over the grave.

On January 6<sup>th</sup> Joseph Bereen of Rinbane, Ballymote was arrested and charged that on the day of the funeral he with others "did unlawfully assemble for a disturbance of the peace." After being remanded on bail twice he was found guilty and sentenced to two months imprisonment. The Champion of February 15<sup>th</sup> 1919 reported that police aided by military searched houses in the Gurteen area apparently looking in vain for two other Volunteers in connection with the Owen Tansey funeral. On February 25<sup>th</sup> Dominick Murray, said to have been on the run for three months, was arrested and charged in connection with the funeral. It was charged that he was one of those who fired the volley over the grave. He was asked to give bail for his good behaviour for twelve months. He did and was released.



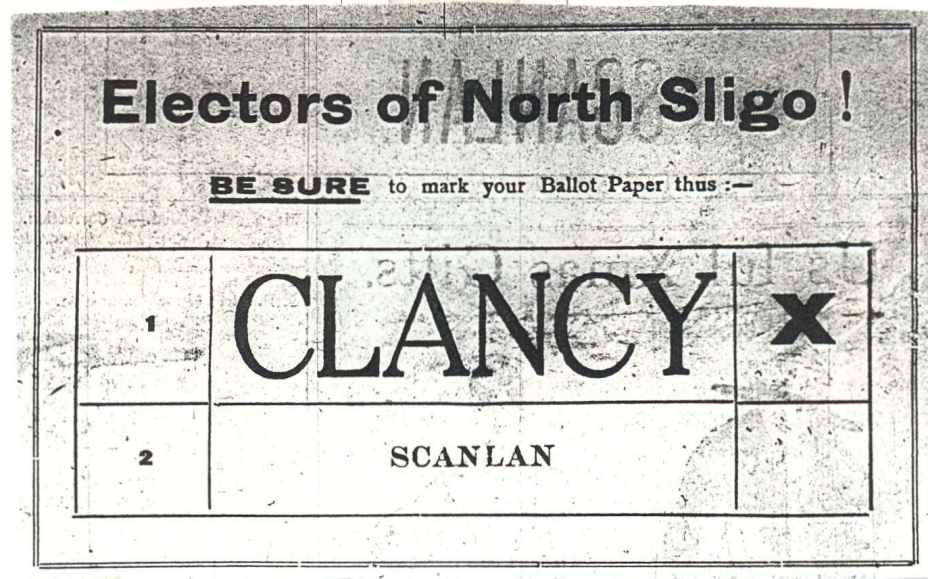
*Owen Tansy*

Owen Tansey had been the election director for Alec McCabe and he was replaced by Thomas O'Donnell who was then a teacher on the staff of St. Nathy's Diocesan College in Ballaghaderreen. Tom O'Donnell had been very active in Sinn Féin in south Sligo. He had previously been on the teaching staff at Rockwell College and was a colleague of Eamon de Valera. There were only two other lay teachers on the staff and so the pair became and remained good friends. He was the godfather of one of de Valera's sons. It is said that he was the first person to call the future leader "Dev".

R. B. Anderson from Calry had been on the run since June when he had addressed a meeting at Colga, County Sligo. He had during that time from time to time had letters published in the local press with the address "Somewhere in County Sligo". He was finally arrested in the Dromore West area on Monday December 9<sup>th</sup>. On Tuesday he was charged in connection with statements he was supposed to have made at the Colga meeting. He refused to recognise the court and said, "As an Irish Volunteer I don't wish to plead." James E. Hayes had also addressed the Colga meeting and he later wrote to the Champion from "Somewhere in Sligo" to give his version of what was said at the Colga meeting. Hayes was at this time also on the run.

On the eve of polling, December 13<sup>th</sup>, while he was canvassing in Ballinacarrow, John O'Dowd was assaulted and had to receive four stitches. Four young men from the area were charged on December 19<sup>th</sup> with assembling, armed with stones, to disturb the peace. District Inspector Russell of the RIC conducted the prosecution's case and Sam Tarrant from Sligo the defence. At the trial evidence was given that O'Dowd and party were in John O'Grady's,

Ballinacarrow. When they left and got into the car something was thrown from behind breaking the windscreen. Seven or eight men were behind the car and another volley of stones was thrown.



*From The Sligo Champion, December 14<sup>th</sup> 1918*

At this stage Mr O'Dowd himself got out of the car went to the back and addressed the men. He reminded them that he had given the best years of his life fighting for his country and that he had been the means of getting the Sinn Féin candidate, McCabe, out of jail. In reply O'Dowd and his party were attacked. "I saw Mr O'Dowd on the ground and three or four kicking him," said one witness. They then took refuge in a house. There was a lot of shouting and booing outside and one witness said that he heard a revolver shot outside. Eventually the party escaped and reported the incident to the police and got medical attention for a wound on O'Dowd's forehead. When the case was concluded the following January all were found guilty, one was sentenced to one month imprisonment, the other three to two months.

The Sligo Nationalist also reported an incident at Ballymoghany near Easkey in which Sgt. James McLoughlin RIC of the local barracks, was shot at and severely wounded on December 11<sup>th</sup>. According to the police the incident occurred when the policeman was returning from patrol and was only a few hundred yards from the barracks. He met three men one of whom shouted for one of the candidates in the General Election. At the same time a shotgun was discharged at the sergeant from a nearby wood hitting him in the back and lower body. He crawled to the barracks and was later removed to the infirmary, Sligo. He recovered fully. Police from Easkey and Ballina under D.I. Harrington were soon at the scene but nobody was

apprehended for the attack. "He [the Sgt.] had incurred hostility of the local Sinn Féiners" said the County Inspector.

Jim Hever of Carrickbanagher was a member of the Volunteers and even though only nineteen years of age had a vote in the election. His name had been entered on the register and no one challenged it. He claims there was quite an amount of impersonation even though they knew they would win easily. "There was nothing to stop McCabe", he says. Michael Burgess, though only twelve years of age at the time, voted at the polling booth at St James' Well school for a namesake of his. Some members of the Volunteers called at his house and asked his father if they could take him to vote.

*(iii) "The young people have triumphed over their elders".*

The General Election was held on December 14<sup>th</sup> and the results were not known for some time. The Sligo Nationalist of December 21<sup>st</sup> said "even though the votes still have not been counted it is generally admitted that Sinn Féin has swept the country and that the Parliamentary Party no longer exists as it was before the election. In South Sligo Mr O'Dowd is in all probability defeated and in North Sligo, Mr Scanlan although confident himself, is scarcely likely to be elected."

In the event the figures for North Sligo were Clancy: 9,030, Scanlan: 4,241. Clancy's share of the valid poll was 68%. The turnout in North Sligo was 72% and in South Sligo just under 62%. The Sligo Champion said that the size of the majority was a "surprise even to the most enthusiastic of his supporters." The same paper said "Alec McCabe had what might be politically termed 'a walkover' in South Sligo. There seemed from the beginning to be no doubt about the outcome of the issue." The result was McCabe: 9,103, O'Dowd: 1,988. McCabe's share of the valid poll was 82%.

The count for both constituencies was conducted in the Courthouse Sligo and even though there was incessant rainfall a large crowd gathered outside from seven o'clock onwards to hear the results. Republican songs were sung by Nancy Connolly and Mr Cosgrove from Tubbercurry. Most of the crowd seemed to be Sinn Féin supporters, order was maintained by Volunteers and there were no reports of any trouble. None of the candidates were in fact present at the count. McCabe was in Lincoln prison. J. J. Clancy was in fact at home, having been



released for some weeks from Usk prison but, Alec McCabe, T.D. South Sligo and J. J. Clancy, T.D. North Sligo under the conditions of his parole he could not attend meetings. It was said that Scanlan was sick and O'Dowd was still recovering from the assault.



*Alec McCabe, TD for South Sligo (left) & J J Clancy, TD for North Sligo*

The results were announced at about 10.30 pm and the Mayor of Sligo, D. M. Hanley, and Mr Bradshaw addressed the crowd. On the conclusion of the count the returning officer was driven to Ballymote to declare the result there. He was preceded by cars containing Sinn Féin supporters and displaying tricolours. There was also great rejoicing in Ballymote.

The Sligo Champion editorial of January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1919 dealt with the Sinn Féin victory, "Their chief reliance must be for the moment on a national appeal to the Peace Conference. Revolutionary methods against British might are eschewed by even the most ardent Sinn Féiners. The mere discussion of such methods is outside the domain of practical politics". "The young people have triumphed over their elders", the County Inspector said, "Moderate politicians and those with any stake in the country await with anxiety the future action of the Sinn Féin party".

On the evening of Sunday December 29<sup>th</sup> a victory meeting was held in the Town Hall under the auspices of the local Sinn Féin club. Before the meeting a procession of Volunteers led by a brass and reed band paraded the principal streets of Sligo. The meeting was chaired by H. Monson in the absence of the Mayor. One of the main speakers was A. Anderson, a native of Wicklow, who had been one of the principal Sinn Féin organisers in Sligo during the election campaign. He reminded his listeners, "You are the victors in this struggle but beware lest you forget that this is merely the beginning". He went on to tell the audience of the plans for Sinn Féin courts to replace the British court system. Magistrates would be appointed and solicitors and lawyers would be paid on a fixed scale of fees.



Fr P. J. O'Grady, Parish Priest of Keash, who played a prominent part in the 1918 election campaign fell ill early in 1919 and had to retire from his duties. He died in May 1920. He had been to the fore in Sligo nationalist circles from his time as curate in Collooney when he was involved in the 1798 centenary commemorations. He was mainly responsible for the erection of the Teeling monument outside Collooney and it is said that the figure is modelled on Fr O'Grady.

The General Election was no sooner over than electoral affairs again occupied the minds of the voters of the Borough of Sligo. The Proportional Representation elections to the Corporation were scheduled for January 15<sup>th</sup>. Proportional representation had been proposed by the Ratepayers' Association as a means of ensuring that the Corporation would be more representative and to avoid a repeat of the financial mess which the Corporation had found itself.

This was the first time P.R. was used in elections in these islands and Sligo was the only place where people went to the polls on that day. The local papers printed long articles showing the voters how to use the new system and there was great interest in the election all over the country. The three main groups which put up candidates in the election were the newly formed Ratepayers Association which included many who were Unionist in sympathy, the Sinn Féin Party and Labour nominees.

One of the Labour candidates was Michael Nevin, a shop assistant, who was also secretary of the Sligo Sinn Féin Alliance. Speaking at a labour meeting he noted that recently "it had gone abroad that Sinn Féin was out against Labour and that Labour was out against Sinn Féin". This was not true, he said.

The novel election saw an unprecedented number of candidates. In an editorial the Sligo Champion said "There are some excellent men in all three groups. There are also some worthless fellows. We would prefer if the sole issue was efficiency or non-efficiency". The Sligo Independent on the other hand was in no doubt where its hand was in no doubt where its sympathies lay. It exhorted its readers to vote for the Ratepayers' Association candidates. The Sligo Nationalist offered its readers no guidance on the matter of voting.

There were 24 seats to be filled and there were 48 candidates: 18 Ratepayers, 13 Sinn Féin, 13 Labour and 4 independent. There were no Irish Party candidates as such: John Jinks went forward as an independent candidate. By all accounts the election was not marked with any

trouble of ill will on the part of candidates or supporters. When the votes were counted it was clear that the people of Sligo had used the system well and there was a small percentage (1.75%) of votes spoiled.

In the West Ward there were 16 candidates for 8 seats, 6 Ratepayers, 5 Sinn Féin, 3 Labour and two independents. First Preferences were as follows: Ratepayers - 506, Sinn Féin - 233; Labour - 165, Independent - 36. The Ratepayers' candidate Harper Campbell Perry headed the poll with 169 and was elected on the first count. His surplus helped his fellow party members Percy Campbell Kerr and Edward John Tighe to election. Henry Depew of Labour was next elected and he was followed by James Connolly (Ratepayers), Patrick J Flanagan (S.F), William Hande (Lab) and William J. Feeney (S.F.). Both Labour victors were identified strongly with Sinn Féin.

In the East Ward 16 candidates also contested the 8 seats, 6 Ratepayers, 4 Sinn Féin, 4 Labour and two independents. First preferences were as follows: Ratepayers: 105, Sinn Féin: 343, Labour: 103, Independents: 124. Not surprisingly the Mayor, Hanley, led the poll for Sinn Féin and was elected on the first count. Two other Sinn Féin candidates followed him home, Fitzpatrick and Gilligan. White, an outgoing independent, was next elected and Michael Nevin was next returned for Labour. Two ratepayers' candidates were next elected, Young Warren and McDonagh. Grey, an independent, was the final successful candidate.

In the North Ward 16 candidates contested the 8 seats, 6 Ratepayers, 4 Sinn Féin, 4 Labour and 2 independents. First preferences were as follows: Ratepayers: 161, Sinn Féin: 98, Labour : 128 and Independents : 154. Of the independents one was John Jinks who headed the poll with 123 votes, two quotas, and the other was James Devins who was associated with Sinn Féin though not an official candidate. John Lynch, Labour, also exceeded the quota on the first count and was elected. Jackson, Ratepayers was next followed by Wood-Martin, Ratepayers, Nally (Sinn Féin), Devins (Independent), Heraghty (Labour) and Costello (Sinn Féin). Sinn Féin got in all 674 first preference vote and got 7 seats, Ratepayers got 823 first preference votes and 8 seats, Labour got 432 first preference votes and 5 seats and Independents won 279 first preference votes and 4 seats.

Most of the Labour councillors were either Sinn Féin members or supporters as was one Independent, so the Corporation was Sinn Féin controlled with a strong opposition. Because of

its success in Sligo, P.R. was chosen as the system of voting in all local elections in Ireland from then on and as the system to be used in the next Parliamentary election.

The first important item on the new Corporation's agenda was the election of the Mayor. This took place on Thursday January 23<sup>rd</sup> in the Town Hall. There were two proposals, the outgoing mayor, Hanley, and Alderman Tighe of the Ratepayers' Association. The only councillor missing was Alderman Lynch who was in jail. Independent member Devins said that he was supporting Hanley because he (Hanley) was a member of the Volunteers. Councillors White and Jinks abstained with the result that Hanley was elected on a vote of 12 to 8. All the Ratepayers' councillors voted for Tighe, the Labour and Sinn Féiners voted for Hanley as well as Devins and another Independent, Grey.

The Sligo Independent was not pleased at Hanley's election "Alderman Hanley is not the people's Mayor. He is only Mayor for a particular section and holds the office for a third term by means of political intrigue. He is largely responsible for basing municipal affairs on 'Ireland a Republic' and creating a political atmosphere in the town." It was particularly scathing in its comments on the Labour councillors among whom it said: "There was not one who had the honesty and courage of his convictions to show his independence."

The election of Hanley as Mayor was celebrated by bonfires in the town and the hoisting of a republican flag on the turret of the Town Hall. Soon afterwards an order for its removal was issued by the British authorities. The Corporation ignored the order. Michael Nevin was taken by a detachment of British soldiers, brought up the tower of the Town Hall and ordered to remove the flag. They feared that the flag was booby trapped. Nevin refused and finally some soldiers went up and removed the flag.

## 10. THE DRIFT TOWARDS VIOLENCE: 1919.

There were at least two distinct strands in Sinn Féin, those who hoped independence could be won by peaceful, political methods and the "physical force" party. As if to illustrate this, on the same day as the Dáil met in Dublin and issued a Declaration of Independence, January 21<sup>st</sup> 1919, a local IRA unit led by Dan Breen and Seán Treacy ambushed and killed two policemen at Soloheadbeg, County Tipperary. A reporter from the Daily News was in Sligo in January and in his report he mentioned the two distinct movements within Sinn Féin: "Here and there I find evidence on all hands of the two existing movements that are proceeding within the Sinn Féin party and threatening to grow farther and farther apart as the crisis grows". The year 1919 was to see which, if any, of these two movements would gain the upper hand.

*(i) "We are no longer a political party. We are the Irish Nation".*

The County Inspector reported at the end of January 1919, "A spirit of disloyalty and distrust in the Government are widespread and although most people smile at the wild ideas and ridiculous performance of the Sinn Féin assembly they could not be depended upon to resist them". He also reported during the early months of 1919 that the Sligo nationalist press was veering from Nationalist Party to Sinn Féin. In his May report he said "The local press has become Sinn Féin and publishes long reports of Sinn Féin club meetings and items of general interest to the organisation". The police estimates of the number of Sinn Féin clubs in the county was 52 at the end of May with 4247 members. The number of clubs remained the same for the rest of 1919 with only small fluctuations in the number of members according to the police.

In early 1919 the whole emphasis of Sinn Féin was on the hope of having Ireland's right to self-determination heard and recognised at the forthcoming Peace Conference. "Their chief reliance must be for the moment on a national appeal to the Peace Conference. Revolutionary methods against British might are eschewed by even the most ardent Sinn Féiners. The mere discussion of such methods is outside the domain of practical politics", said a Sligo Champion editorial in its January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1919 issue. As 1919 progressed it became clear that the appeal to the Peace Conference would achieve nothing. What was to be the next move?

Harry Osborne of the Young Republican Club Sligo wrote to the Sligo Champion in January with reference to the victory of Sinn Féin at the polls: "We must now force the County

Council, Corporation, Poor Law Boards and other public bodies to obey the will of the people. County Councils and all public boards must from now forward be run in the larger interests of the nation. Let us set up our own courts, let us obey and respect our own laws. Let us prove by definite demonstration that in all things concerning the people's weal we are the most law-abiding people in Europe". On the other hand those in the Sinn Féin movement who believed that physical force was the only way to achieve independence were organising the Volunteers and making attempts to arm them.

The Sligo Independent reported on March 15<sup>th</sup> that the Essex regiment had been transferred from Sligo; on April 5<sup>th</sup> it reported that the 21<sup>st</sup> Sussex Yeomanry had just taken up their quarters in Sligo and on April 19<sup>th</sup> mentioned a welcome social for the Norfolk Yeomanry newly arrived in the town. During the second week of June the military left their quarters in the Barracks and the Workhouse in Sligo and moved to summer quarters, at camps at Carton Hill and at Ballincar. Also in June a naval destroyer accompanied by a minesweeper arrived at Rosses Point and about 60 marines were brought ashore, presumably to be stationed in the coastguard station there. At the end of September the Sligo Independent reported that a detachment of the Duke of Cornwallis from Finner Camp had taken up duty in Sligo Barracks.

One of the Resident Magistrates who officiated at Petty Sessions courts in west Sligo was J. C. Milling, a resident of Westport. His diary for early 1919 shows that he adjudicated at Tubbercurry Petty Sessions on January 8<sup>th</sup> and February 13<sup>th</sup>. On both occasions illicit distillation cases were the main items to be dealt with. He attended Enniscrone Petty Sessions from 11am to 1 pm on January 25<sup>th</sup> but did not attend at Enniscrone in February as he had not been notified by the clerk of Petty Sessions, presumably because there were no cases to be heard. He did attend at Enniscrone Petty Sessions on March 29<sup>th</sup> and returned home to Westport that evening. Later that night he was shot dead by local members of the IRA One of his attackers was believed to be Joe Ring who himself later lost his life in County Sligo during the Civil War.

Three Collooney men were arrested and charged with unlawfully collecting money in the public street on February 9<sup>th</sup>. They were Frank O'Beirne, P. J. Hart and John Kelly and they had been collecting for the Sinn Féin club at the Chapel gate. They were ordered to give bail to be of good behaviour for twelve months or serve three months in jail. O'Hart gave bail, the others did not and went to jail.

When the RIC were searching the house of James Moffatt of Gortnaleck on February 17<sup>th</sup> his son, Patrick, was asked if he had any arms. He told the police that if he had any he would die before giving them up. He also said, according to the evidence in court, that the policeman "would not be long in it." He was ordered to give bail of £30 to be of good behaviour or go to jail for three months. He told the court that as a soldier of the Irish Republic he did not recognise the court and would not give bail.

A lecture was arranged under the auspices of the Sligo Sinn Féin Alliance for the Town Hall on March 2<sup>nd</sup>. The speaker was to be Mr Staines MP from Dublin and his subject was to be Robert Emmet. The lecture was to be held at 8 pm and at 3 pm on the Sunday a proclamation was made public and served on the organisers including the Mayor. It stated that in as much as danger was apprehended and that the meeting would put undue demands on the military the meeting was not to be held. At six o'clock about fifty soldiers of the Essex regiment augmented by police took possession of the Town Hall and, according to the Mayor, fixed machine guns at the upper windows.

People who arrived up for the meeting were turned away but the organisers circumvented the proclamation by the simple expedient of holding the meeting on Monday, at 12.15 am on Sunday night to be exact. A large body of Volunteers marched to the Town Hall under the command of Liam Pilkington, met the soldiers who were leaving the Hall, entered and the meeting went ahead. Among those who were with the Volunteers were P. J. Flanagan, James Devins, Harry Osborne, Michael Nevin and D. A. Mulcahy. A large crowd attended the meeting. The County Inspector in his March report to the Inspector General mentioned that the meeting to be held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> was prohibited "and fell through". He omitted to mention that it was held 15 minutes into the next day!

A week later another function was held in the Town Hall, this time a dance for the Essex regiment who were stationed in the town. Everything went well until about midnight when the gas supply to the Hall was cut off and the place was plunged into darkness. Jim Keaveney and another got into the Town Hall by a side window and unscrewed a steel plug from a gas main. A wooden plug was inserted into the gas main and this was gradually pushed out by the gas. The escaping gas caused confusion and near panic among the ladies. Clothes, food and faces were blackened by the gas. After some time lamps and candles were procured and the dance continued. Later Sgt. Lovelock of the Essex wrote to the Corporation demanding a rebate in the

£5 fee paid by the military for the use of the Hall. A similar request by the Young Republican Club for a refund because of the proclamation of the Staines meeting was granted.

The "German Plot" prisoners were being released at the beginning of March and J. J. Clancy arrived in Sligo by train on Sunday night, March 9<sup>th</sup>. He was met at the station by a large crowd from various parts of his constituency and he was escorted to his residence in St. Mary's Terrace. He addressed the crowd from his window as did the Mayor of Sligo.

J. J. Clancy took part in a meeting in Sligo on the following Sunday to protest about the death of Sinn Féin MP Pierce McCann who had died in prison. At this meeting Clancy said, "We are no longer a political party. We are the Irish nation. We stand for the right of Ireland to be mistress of her own destinies and for the flag of a free and independent Irish Republic".

On St. Patrick's Day another protest meeting was held this time about the prisoners especially those from Sligo: John Lynch, Henry Monson, John Hennigan, John Kelly and Frank O'Beirne. The meeting was held in the Market Yard and the speakers included the Mayor, J. R. Tracey, R. G. Bradshaw, Michael Nevin, J. J. Clancy. Members of the Volunteers were there under the command of Liam Pilkington.

Alec McCabe had just been released from prison and had received a great reception at Kilfree Junction where he addressed the crowd from his train carriage window and at Ballymote where he alighted. A torchlight procession with many bands escorted him home. In his speech he referred to the late Owen Tansey and said that the fight for Irish freedom would go on for another 700 years if necessary. He also spoke at a St. Patrick's Day meeting in Ballymote.

The other Sligo prisoner, J. J. O'Connell, did not arrive in Sligo until Wednesday March 19<sup>th</sup>. His arrival was not expected and there was not a large crowd to meet him. However about fifty Volunteers did turn out and escorted him to the Gaelic Club, Teeling Street. J. J. Clancy, J. R. Tracey, president of the club and D. A. Mulcahy were also there. In the course of a short speech O'Connell said that he was a man of action not words. The Sligo Independent reported that O'Connell "is looking remarkably healthy, perhaps better than before his internment".

On the March 21<sup>st</sup> Liam Pilkington of Abbey Street was arrested at his place of work, Wherley's in O'Connell St, and the following day charged with unlawful assembly on the night of the Staines lecture. He was remanded in custody having refused to look for bail. When he appeared again very few of the public were allowed into the court. Pilkington took no interest in the proceedings and read a newspaper. Evidence was given that Pilkington was in command of a group of about seventy Volunteers who marched to the Town Hall after mid-night on the night of the Stains lecture. Pilkington was arrested on a second similar charge in court on that morning. This charge referred to a meeting in the Market Yard on St. Patrick's Day.

Again on April 7<sup>th</sup> Pilkington appeared in court before magistrates Fitzpatrick and Hardy, Derry. During the proceedings a police constable entered the dock and "arrested" the defendant on a third charge. This third case was not proceeded with at that time. Pilkington spoke to the court before being sentenced, "As a Volunteer whose loyalty and fealty are claimed by this country I absolutely refuse to acknowledge the right of this court to try me because England bases her authority on her power to do so". The magistrates asked the defendant to give bail to be of good behaviour for two years or go to jail for six months. He refused to give bail.

At this stage a sensation was caused by the appearance of J. J. Clancy in the custody of a police constable. He was placed in the dock beside Pilkington and it was revealed he had been arrested in his office at the County Committee of Agriculture on a charge of unlawful assembly. The court was then adjourned until 3 pm and both men were removed to the barracks. At 3 pm when the trial reopened a large crowd had gathered at the Courthouse, the majority being refused admission. Both men were charged with unlawful assembly on March 26<sup>th</sup> on the occasion of a meeting when Pilkington commanded a group of Volunteers and Clancy addressed them from a window of the Albert Street Sinn Féin club. The case was adjourned for a week. Pilkington refused bail but Clancy accepted it. He made it clear that he did this only because it suited him and that it did not imply any recognition of the court. The Mayor, D. M. Hanley and D. A. Mulcahy went bail for Clancy.

The case came up again on April 14<sup>th</sup> and both defendants spoke, pointing out that they did not recognise the court. The magistrates, Capt. Fitzpatrick and Mr Byrne, sentenced Pilkington to one month in jail and Clancy to three months.



***(ii) "A fair and full redistribution of the vacant lands and ranches of Ireland among the uneconomic holders and landless men".***

As we have seen, Alec McCabe had been released in March and he attended the sittings of Dáil Éireann in April and May. He took part in various debates. During the private Dáil session of April 4<sup>th</sup> he proposed and Countess Markievicz seconded the following resolution: "That this assembly pledges itself to a fair and full redistribution of the vacant lands and ranches of Ireland among the uneconomic holders and landless men. That no purchase by private individuals of non-residential land in the congested districts or other land essential for the carrying out of any such schemes of land settlement as the Dáil may decide upon which has taken place since Easter Monday 1916 be sanctioned now or subsequently by the Irish Republican Government. That this resolution be taken as conveying a warning to those who have recently availed themselves of the crisis in national affairs to annex large tracts of land against the will and interests of the people".

After some discussion the proposal was withdrawn. A committee was to be set up to assist the Director of Agriculture in considering the whole question of land policy. Both Sligo TDs, McCabe and Clancy, were to be members of the committee.

The question of land again came up at the Dáil sitting of June 18<sup>th</sup> when there was a report from the Director of Agriculture. McCabe stressed that "it was essential for the Dáil to take up a definite stand with a view to securing the land for the people." A loan fund was established by the Dáil for the purpose of land purchase by the landless agricultural population.

There was still some interest in the question of dividing ranches and the Ballymote Food Production Committee called a public meeting for Ballymote on March 9<sup>th</sup>. The secretary was J. S. Hannon. "In Ballymote district there is some agrarian trouble which may develop", the County Inspector said. A meeting was held at Ballymote on February 16<sup>th</sup> organised by Sinn Féin in connection with a local agrarian dispute. The County Inspector reported that two men, Anderson and Gogan, used "very strong language". There was also some unrest at Castlebaldwin and Bunninadden during March 1919. This continued during 1919 and unrest was also reported in the Easkey police district in May. A police protection post of four constables had to be established in one of the places to protect a new owner who had bought a farm in the face of

local opposition and had taken up residence on the farm. During June shots were fired into the houses of two people who had purchased farms to "persuade" them to surrender the lands.

In the Ballymote area great interest was aroused in the "Oldrock Farm" case. Matthew Hannon from Ballymote had bought a farm at Oldrock near Bunninadden. The farm had been the subject of an agitation with the purpose of having it divided up among small holders in the area. In early June six men were charged with unlawful assembly on May 1<sup>st</sup> when the lands were entered and an attempt made to divide them. Judge Wakely arrived on the eve of the Sessions and lodged in Matthew Hannon's Hotel. Batt Keaney, John Albert Farry, Bertie Farry and D. Coen decided to have a suitable "reception" for the Judge and at three o'clock in the morning they opened fire on the windows of the Hotel from the Hibernian Bank opposite the Hotel. They used "Rockingham" shot guns and had 24 rounds of ammunition each. The RIC Barracks was within 100 yards but no policeman ventured out. The next day the Sessions went on as usual and searches were made by the police on usual suspects including Batt Keaney. Nothing incriminating was found in his premises but one of the search party told Batt that he hoped that one day he would "dangle at the end of a rope".

A letter by Matthew Hannon was published in the local papers subsequently accusing the Sinn Féiners of adopting "blackguardly methods" when other methods had failed. He said that after he bought the farm he had met Alec McCabe and discussed the matter with him. He made McCabe an offer which McCabe afterwards rejected saying he would make a counter offer. This offer, said Hannon, was never made.

In the meantime, he said, Sinn Féin carried out a campaign against him consisting of boycotting his business, intimidating his business and printing scurrilous notices which were posted on walls around Ballymote. However, claimed Hannon, the campaign was a failure and his business flourished. This led to the shooting outrage, claimed Hannon. He ended "My principal opponents in this dispute are not uneconomical landholders but are for the most part far and away the most comfortable farmers in the locality". The Sligo Champion of July 5<sup>th</sup> reported that the dispute about the Oldrock farm had been settled by the intervention of Fr Quinn P.P. Bunninadden, Alec McCabe and J. P. McDermott. Hannon agreed to give up the farm for the price he had paid for it plus interest and to withdraw a claim for malicious injury in connection with the shooting.

Another long running land saga in County Sligo was that of the Dunmoran ranch where a farm owned by Robert Hillas Williams was the subject of a campaign to have it divided among small holders in the vicinity. A large meeting was held there on Sunday May 29<sup>th</sup>. A crowd of about 200 marched past the farm and held a meeting nearby. Six of those who were involved in that meeting were arrested and charged with unlawful assembly on Thursday June 26<sup>th</sup>. One of the accused told the court that he had been out for a stroll and got caught up in the meeting. He was discharged. The others were ordered to give bail to be of good behaviour.

On the night of June 26<sup>th</sup> the home of a farmer at Cambs, near Ballymote was shot at and windows broken. It was suggested that this was in connection with a land dispute in the area. Early in July another such shooting took place at Mananagh, near Gurteen. Cattle were also injured in this incident which was also connected with an agrarian dispute.

Pádhraig O'Hegarty, Dáil Loan organiser in County Sligo, tells of another agrarian dispute in the Ballygawley area around May 1919. Martin Clancy was the Captain of the Volunteer company there and he told O'Hegarty about the case. A farm which had been taken off a farmer had been the subject of agitation and for a long time no one would take it. Finally a farmer did and no persuasion by the local Sinn Féin club would move him. "I'll take care of that", said O'Hegarty and he sent Clancy to Jimmy Keaveney, Sligo Brigade O/C at the time, for a .45 revolver with orders to say nothing as to its possible use. This was done. "Go home Martin", said O'Hegarty "and be sure to be in bed tonight." O'Hegarty went to his Hotel that night and at about one o'clock he left and cycled out to Ballygawley. He fired a number of shots through the windows and door of the house of the offending farmer. One shot ricocheted and slightly wounded the farmer's wife. The farmer asked the military if they could provide protection for him and they said that they were unable. The farmer then surrendered the farm.

In his July report D. I. Dobbyn, for the County Inspector on leave, mentioned the "wave of agrarian agitation and intimidation which has recently swept over the southern portion" of the county. Because these attacks had achieved their aim, he said, it was likely that they would be used again. Two persons were receiving personal protection in the Easkey area as a result of the agitation. Two others were under protection by patrols in the Ballymote area. There were 14 agrarian indictable offences during July including three cases of firing into dwelling houses, two of cattle maiming, seven of masked and armed men breaking into dwelling houses and two of malicious injury. He had no doubt but that Sinn Féin was behind the intimidation. In the police

report for August the Inspector said that the agrarian unrest was settling down but remarked "unfortunately the settlements in prospect are in reality surrender to the pressure exerted by the Sinn Féin clubs".

Agrarian trouble continued later in 1919. At Lillybrook near Castlebaldwin a large farm was sold. This farm had been earmarked for division among smallholders by the locals and an agitation ensued. On November 1<sup>st</sup> a large meeting and parade was held at the place about 100 people taking part according to the police. Seven local men were later charged with unlawful assembly and found guilty. They were asked to give bail for their future good behaviour or serve three months. One gave bail at once, the others refused. The Champion said that it was expected that they would all subsequently give bail.

*(iii) "He is now a fugitive, on the run somewhere in Connacht".*

James Hayes, a native of Thurles and a former railway employee in Sligo town, was still on the run and seems to have spent quite some time in the Tireragh area. He was reported as having given a lecture there on February 15<sup>th</sup>. The republicans in that area at the end of April started a collection with the intention of making a presentation to him. "He is now a fugitive . . . on the run somewhere in Connacht" the Champion reported.

On May 22<sup>nd</sup> a large force of police and military converged on Templeboy and carried out an exhaustive search for Hayes. The search proved fruitless and the searchers were booed by a unfriendly crowd as they collected to depart. In the following week's Champion the Templeboy Sinn Féin Club congratulated Hayes on escaping. A torchlight parade was held in the district after the departure of the search party. The elusive Hayes remained at large and was the recipient of a presentation at the residence of P. Howley, Templeboy, on Sunday July 6<sup>th</sup>. In the course of a speech Hayes said "Templeboy has been a haven of rest to me during my short stay here . . . at times it seemed to me that I was back in my native Tipperary". The presentation was followed by a dance. The event got widespread publicity in the local press. On Sunday July 20<sup>th</sup> Hayes delivered a lecture at a meeting of the Killoran Sinn Féin Club.

More arrests at the end of March meant more jailed Sinn Féiners. This time the charge was collecting money without a permit and those arrested in an early morning raid in the Monasteredan area were Jim Hunt, Anthony Giblin, James Touhy and John Golden. They were

brought to Sligo under strong police escort. They were brought before Captain Fitzpatrick and Argue led the prosecution. The four men ignored the proceedings except for Hunt telling the magistrate "The whole thing is a farce. We don't recognise the jurisdiction of this court at all". They were bound over to be of good behaviour on bail or to serve three months in jail. Their silence was interpreted as refusing bail and they were taken to Cranmore jail.

The Sligo labour leader, Alderman John Lynch, arrived back in Sligo after his release from Belfast jail on Wednesday April 9<sup>th</sup> and was met by an enormous crowd at the railway station. Members of the Transport Union paraded the town with a red flag and were joined by a large number of Volunteers. Lynch was taken in procession behind a band to the Town Hall where a meeting was held. In the course of a speech Lynch said that he was disappointed with the number of Labour councillors elected at the recent Municipal elections. "The workers should realise that they had to fight their own battles", he was reported as having said.

Labour Day on May 1<sup>st</sup> was marked in Sligo with a huge parade and procession of up to 1,000 workers from the Market Yard to the Town Hall where a meeting was held. The principal speaker was Alderman Lynch. Others to speak included Bradshaw, Nevin and Colr. William Hande. Nearly all the shops and places of business in the town were closed. Red flags were carried in the procession but according to the County Inspector it was carefully explained from the platform that these were symbols of labour not revolution. "The Transport Union is a growing and menacing organisation. So far it works with Sinn Féin but I think the partnership will not last", said the County Inspector in his May report.

*On April 31<sup>st</sup> Countess Markievicz visited Sligo and gave a lecture under the auspices of Cumann na mBan. She was met by a large body of Volunteers and was taken first to the Sinn Féin Hall where she gave a speech. A large crowd attended the lecture in the Town Hall. "She made violent [verbal] attacks on the police" said the County Inspector "and it is said, boasted that she had killed some".*

According to police reports there were seven branches of Cumann na mBan in County Sligo by the end of June with almost 200 members. This number remained the same in the reports for the rest of 1919.

Dramatic activities continued. Mullinabreena Dramatic Club staged "The West's Awake" and a farce in the Market House, Collooney on April 27<sup>th</sup>, 1919. Members of the "Éire Óg" Dramatic Society planned to stage a three act play "The Memory of the Dead" in the Loftus Hall, Ballymote on Sunday May 4<sup>th</sup>. At six o'clock that evening police and military occupied the hall. The promoters of the play were told that the play could not be staged because "of its being likely to cause disaffection among his Majesties' subjects". The ban was to be in force until ten o'clock the following morning thus avoiding a similar outcome as the Stains lecture affair in Sligo town. D. I. Russell was in charge of the police force and Alec McCabe was there on behalf of the organisers who had no option but to abandon the play on the Sunday night.

On the following Tuesday at about six o'clock a decorated donkey cart driven by a man dressed as a clown went around Ballymote carrying a notice that the banned play was to be staged that night in the Loftus Hall. Not surprisingly, in the light of the publicity obtained by the organisers, the hall was filled to capacity. There was no interference by the police. The same means of advertising was used the following Sunday in Tubbercurry to announce that the play was to be staged that night in the Town Hall by the Ballymote Dramatic Club. "An exceedingly large crowd" was present according to the local press. On June 1<sup>st</sup> Tubbercurry's own players presented a 5-act drama "The Flag" in the Technical Hall, Mullinabreena.

On Thursday May 29<sup>th</sup> Michael Hanley of Culleens was charged with unlawful assembly at Dromore West on April 6<sup>th</sup>. He had made a "seditious speech" at a meeting attended by 5-600 people. He was remanded until the following day and this time he was accompanied in the dock by MP J. J. Clancy who had been arrested on the same charge in prison that morning. Both were remanded in custody. On June 8<sup>th</sup> both men were found guilty and Hanley sentenced to one month with hard labour, Clancy to a further three months with hard labour. When Hanley was released in late July/early August he thanked Dromore West D.C. for electing him their chairman in his absence. He hoped moreover that members would attend the meetings more regularly and punctually than they had in the past year.

*(iv) "There is a growing feeling of hostility towards the police".*

The annual Statutory Meetings of the County Sligo public bodies took place early in June. In Tubbercurry Sinn Féin lost the chairmanship of both the Board of Guardians and the District Council. P. J. Kilcoyne was elected chairman of the D. C. in place of Joseph Brennan

(outgoing) on a vote of 8 - 5. On the Board of Guardians P. J. McDermott was selected in place of outgoing Kennedy on a vote of 7-6. A member of Sligo Board of Guardians, Foley, had died and a member had to be co-opted. There were two nominations, Seamus MacGowan a Sinn Féin nominee, nominated by Alderman Lynch and seconded by Hughes, and Mr Hamilton proposed by Alderman Jinks. There were 48 Guardians present and there was great interest in the outcome as a test of the strength of Sinn Féin. In the event Mr Hamilton was co-opted winning the division on a vote of 30 to 18.

On June 22<sup>nd</sup> an aeriocht was planned for Dromard under the auspices of the Skreen and Dromard Sinn Féin Club. During that morning a proclamation signed by Brigadier General Burnett was handed to the organisers forbidding the holding of the aeriocht. A platform had been erected at Kelly's Cross and at 2 pm military lorries arrived from Sligo and cordoned off the road there. Meanwhile scouts were sent to meet contingents arriving for the aeriocht from Sligo and Collooney and from Easkey, Templeboy and Dromore West. These were diverted away from the main Sligo-Ballina road to Ross where the aeriocht was held without any interference from the military or police. Among the speakers was Sean Milroy who said that in the twelve months since he had last been in County Sligo there had been great changes.

Another aeriocht was held in Collooney on June 29<sup>th</sup>. Frank O'Beirne was complimented on the excellent arrangements. The authorities made no effort to ban the meeting. Among the speakers were Alec McCabe, D. A. Mulcahy and R. G. Bradshaw. Another aeriocht was held in Ballymote under the auspices of the Sinn Féin Club beside the Castle in Ballymote on Sunday, July 6<sup>th</sup>. The principal speaker was Sean McEntee and the Sinn Féin organiser for County Sligo Pádhraig O'Hegarty also spoke. A new Sinn Féin club had been formed at Enniscrone about this time according to the Sligo Nationalist, due to the work of O'Hegarty.

District Inspector Michael Hunt, a native of the Killaville area, was shot dead in Thurles on the evening of June 23<sup>rd</sup>. He had represented the Crown at the inquest on the policeman shot at Knocklong station when Sean Treacy was being rescued. Hunt had joined the RIC in 1893 and had served in Kerry, King's County and Longford before going to Tipperary. Prayers were said in Gurteen church for the repose of his soul at the request of the Parish Priest Very Rev Canon O'Connor who described the shooting as "diabolical in the extreme".

A Sligo man, Private Martin Moffatt, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Leinster Regiment, son of Mr and Mrs Martin Moffatt of Knappagh Road, Sligo, had been awarded the Victoria Cross for his action in the Great War. He arrived in Sligo on June 14<sup>th</sup> and was accorded a public reception. A military guard of honour led by a brass band escorted him from the railway station to the Sligo courthouse where a presentation was made by Major O'Hara.

On Wednesday July 16<sup>th</sup> at the Corporation meeting, Alderman Kerr mentioned that Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> had been proclaimed a day for celebrating peace and he proposed that it be a general holiday in Sligo. Alderman Lynch hoped that this would mean that the workers would get a paid holiday on that day and Colr. Devins said that he would have to object. "They would never see peace in Ireland until the Union Jack was burned and the army of occupation cleared out." The Mayor said that Saturday was market day in the town and there would not be enough time to notify people. The matter was then let drop without any action being taken. The unionist Sligo Independent reported however that an effort on behalf of the business community was made to mark the day many of the shops remaining shut on the Saturday. Soldiers of the Essex Regiment, then camped at Carton, drove through the town in military lorries, singing "favourite ditties" and cheering and shouting themselves hoarse.

Sinn Féin clubs continued to hold aeriochts, Drumcliff club held theirs on August 3<sup>d</sup> and Ballisodare on the 10<sup>th</sup>. On August 17<sup>th</sup> Sligo Sinn Féin Alliance held an aeriocht in the Showgrounds, Sligo. The weather was not favourable there being numerous hail showers. Speeches were delivered by Alec McCabe, the Mayor and P. O'Hegarty. Two hurling matches were then played neither of which seemed to be a great success. Maugherow played Sligo but the game was not completed owing to Maugherow leaving the field after a disputed goal. In a ladies hurling match Ballina defeated a Sligo team 12-3 to 0-0. The reason given for the heavy defeat was that "The Sligo ladies rarely practised together". An aeriocht was held at Strandhill on August 31<sup>st</sup> under the auspices of the Coolera Sinn Féin club.

In his report at the end of September 1919, D. I. Dobbyn, for the County Inspector who was on leave, gave as his opinion that while Sinn Féin dominated everything "its influence is declining".

However at the end of the following month he had changed his tune and reported that the Sinn Féin leaders had been very active during the month promoting the Dáil Loan. He



particularly mentioned that the hostility of the Sinn Féiners towards the police was increasing owing to prosecutions and seizures of literature. "The law is utterly disregarded by Sinn Féiners", he said. At the end of November the County Inspector continued the same theme: "There is a growing feeling of hostility towards the police" and at the end of December he mentioned "a growing spirit of hostility to the police". He also mentioned that several small police stations had been closed "in order to augment the remaining stations with a view to resisting any sudden attack".

At this time the authorities began the policy of abandoning small rural police barracks and consolidating barracks in larger towns and villages. Strandhill and Rosses Point Barracks had been evacuated at the end of September and their police taken into Sligo. Grange Barracks was abandoned in the third week of November as were Ross, Clogher, Templehouse and Keash barracks. Mullaghroe was strengthened. Farmers attending the fair of Ballisodare in the second week of November found that the Barracks had been sandbagged.

The number of AOH divisions in County Sligo had dropped almost to nil by this time but one place which still retained a reasonably strong group was the remote area of Highwood near Geevagh. As in many other places the Hibernians had erected a hall which functioned as a meeting place for the Division in its heyday and also as a parish hall. In many places when the AOH died its hall automatically passed on to its successor, Sinn Féin. Because the Hibernians remained strong in Highwood this did not happen. Some of the trustees of the hall did become Sinn Féiners and as a result that party claimed control of the hall.

Matters came to a head on Sunday July 27<sup>th</sup>. The Highwood Hibernians announced that they were holding a dance in the hall on that night but Sinn Féin said that they were not giving permission for the function. At 7 pm a group of Sinn Féiners armed with sticks took possession of the hall and held a "men only" dance. When the Hibernians arrived they could not gain entry. They determined to storm the hall and started to throw stones at it. Windows were broken and the Sinn Féiners left the hall and a fracas ensued outside each side later claiming victory. It was reported that the local curate Fr Keaney helped to end the fighting. In a subsequent court case a charge of assault was brought against an AOH member from Highwood, the principal witness being an injured Sinn Féiner. The accused was found not guilty. When the Roscommon Herald reporter visited Highwood the following Wednesday he reported that the hall looked like a "war scarred house" from "one of the devastated villages of Flanders."

R. B. Anderson was in Derry jail as a result of his speech at Colga and it was reported early in August that he had gone on hunger strike. It was alleged that he had been sick and that the authorities had ordered him back on hard labour before he was fully recovered. A protest meeting was held in O'Connell Street Sligo on August 9<sup>th</sup> chaired by J. R. Tracey. On September 11<sup>th</sup> word was received that the strike was over and that Anderson was in good health.

During the second week of September there were numerous police raids including in the Ballinacarrow, Collooney, Cloonacool and Tubbercurry areas. No arrests were reported. In Collooney the Sinn Féin clubrooms were raided as well as the house of Seamus Marren one of the club's officials. A minute book, some receipt books and copies of the Sinn Féin newspaper, Nationality, were taken away by the police.

John Hennigan, whose two year sentence had been mitigated to one year, was released from prison and returned to Sligo on September 24<sup>th</sup> receiving a great reception. Representatives of all the local Sinn Féin clubs were present as was a fife and drum band. He was escorted to the Sinn Féin club, Albert Street, where a meeting was held speakers including Treacy and Bradshaw. Hennigan in reply said that during his stay in jail he had become more ardent than ever in the cause of Irish freedom.

The Sligo Nationalist newspaper had changed hands and the new team headed by R. G. Bradshaw and Seamus MacGowan adopted a more republican tone. This soon brought them into conflict with the authorities. On September 12<sup>th</sup> military and police visited the offices of the newspaper. On the same day the Sligo Municipal Technical School was also raided. "The whole of the Technical School was republican", Tom Scanlan told Ernie O'Malley. J. R. Treacy and Pádhraic Ó Domhnalláin have already been mentioned for example. Dominick McHugh, a manual instructor at the school, gave lectures on munitions and rifles. A science and mathematics teacher at the Vocational School, Joseph Gaffney who was a native of Kilmallock, County Limerick, became Divisional chemist making explosives for the IRA. The son of a Fenian, he had been active with the Volunteers in County Galway during the rising of 1916 and had been interned in Frongoch.

The houses of Treacy and MacGowan were also raided. It was said that the police took away a number of documents but there were no arrests. At the same time the houses of other

activists in Sligo were raided including those of J. J. O'Connell and D. A. Mulcahy. Copies of old newspapers were taken according to the Sligo Nationalist.

*(iv) "Volley after volley was discharged at the car but it kept on boldly".*

The Dáil Minister for Finance announced the raising of loans through the issue of "Republican Bonds" to the value of £250,000. The public were invited to subscribe by purchasing bonds valued from £1 to £1,000. Advertisements were placed in newspapers to announce the loan and action was taken by the authorities against these newspapers.

The Sligo Nationalist offices in Stephen's Street were visited again by police and military again on Wednesday October 1<sup>st</sup> with orders to dismantle the machinery by removing vital parts. The District Inspector of the RIC, Dobbyn was in charge and he asked if any of the staff would do the dismantling. Bradshaw said not and they had to wait until a competent engineer came and dismantled important parts which were taken away in a police lorry. The immediate cause of the action was supposed to be the publication by the newspaper of a prospectus for the Republican National Loan. The September 20<sup>th</sup> issue of the Nationalist had carried a full front page advertisement for the Irish National Loan. The Nationalist was again published in November this time in a smaller page format but still with a strong republican tone.

In the late hours of Sunday October 12<sup>th</sup> advertisements for the Dáil Loan were posted at various spots around the town of Sligo. "Buy Dáil Éireann Bonds" was painted in large letters at the Courthouse. The police were busy on the Monday obliterating the painting and tearing down the posters. At the corporation meeting on Wednesday, Colr. Devins asked by whose authority the notices were being torn down. When Alderman Kerr said that Devins was entitled to his little joke, Devins retorted "The industrial development of Ireland is not much of a joke". The post office in Ballymote displayed a large advertisement for the Dáil loan at this time also but the military in town soon obliterated it. It was now a crime to solicit contributions for the Dáil Éireann Loan and many were arrested on the charge.

On October 11<sup>th</sup> Alec McCabe was once again arrested, this time in Sligo in the vicinity of the Victoria Line. He had been wanted for some time in connection with alleged unlawful assembly at an aeriocht at Carrowhubbock on September 28<sup>th</sup>. When he was seen by two police constables they gave chase and caught him. He was charged with unlawful assembly that evening

and remanded in custody for a week. When the case came up again he was charged on a second charge of soliciting contributions for the Dáil Éireann loan. He was found guilty. In the course of an address McCabe said that if what he was charged with was unlawful assembly then everyone who attended that meeting was guilty of unlawful assembly. He suggested that when they had him safely lodged in jail they should arrest the other 399 who attended. He was sentenced to three months hard labour at the end of which he would have to give bail to be of good behaviour or serve another three months.

Another man who was wanted on a charge of soliciting contributions for the Dáil Loan was Sinn Féin organiser for Sligo, Pádhraig O'Hegarty. He had been very busy attending meetings all over the county since his appointment in April 1919. When it became known that he was wanted he went on the run. On October 26<sup>th</sup> he was caught up with at Newtown, Ballymote outside the house of the Hannonns. A struggle took place on the street. Susan Hannon used a sod of turf to attack the police and her two brothers, Stephen and John, used pokers. Hegarty was caught by the coat but managed to get free. He ran up the street and managed to outdistance the pursuing police. He met John Albert Farry on the outskirts of the town as was previously arranged and they went to Riverstown where a very successful meeting was held. The meeting had the dual aim of collecting for the Dáil Loan and organising the Volunteers on a firm footing. There were a number of police present but they were prevented by the crowd from making any arrests. Later two men from the area, Mathew Leonard and Thomas J. Conlon were charged with soliciting contributions for the Loan at the meeting. They refused to give bail to be of good behaviour and were imprisoned for three months.

After the meeting at Riverstown O'Hegarty moved on to Geevagh, holding a meeting there after 12 o'clock Mass. He was met at Geevagh by the other "Wanted Man" James Hayes. The meeting was held in the Hall and as they came out a Sergeant accompanied by three policemen attempted to arrest Farry from Ballymote. O'Hegarty pulled his revolver and the policemen let them go. The following morning a force of 10 to 12 policeman surrounded the Hannon's home and demanded entry. Susan sang "The Soldier's Song" and then let them in. John was arrested and brought to Sligo jail but no trace could be found of Stephen. Early in December John Hannon was sentenced to three months imprisonment for his part in the affair.

On the morning of November 16<sup>th</sup> O'Hegarty, who had been staying in the vicinity of Gurteen, left to attend a series of meetings in south Sligo. He was driven by Dominick O'Grady

and was accompanied by Dr. Samuel Doyle, Gurteen. They addressed a meeting at Cloonloo after nine o'clock Mass, the only police present were two who had cycled from Mullaghroe. The party next drove to Kilaraght on the Sligo Roscommon border where another meeting was held. In Kilaraght they were joined by local Battalion commandant Jim Hunt. Fr Roddy was among the speakers at this meeting.

On the return journey as they approached Cloonloo, at a place called Lissarlough, they found a number of policemen, up to a dozen under Head Constable Sullivan of Boyle, waiting to stop the car and arrest O'Hegarty. The constables blocked the road but O'Grady instead of halting increased his speed and burst through the police barrier, knocking down some of the constables. The police opened fire on the escaping fugitives with revolver and shotgun fire. O'Hegarty and Doyle were in the back of the car, Hunt was beside the driver in front. O'Hegarty says that he had only about fourteen bullets in all and he opened fire at a policeman who tried to stop him. Doyle received a wound at this stage. "Volley after volley was discharged at the car but it kept on boldly . . . . Bullets were whistling overhead and smashing through the car, still it went on and took the corner to safety at a pace of 50 mph", the Champion reported. They were not safe yet. Up the road were four more policemen, they pushed their bicycles across the road but the car drove straight through and away to safety. Minutes later it reached Gurteen. Hunt and O'Hegarty had left the car in the meantime and had been given a good dinner of bacon and cabbage in a friendly house. Later they "commandeered" two bicycles and later in the day rowed across Lough Gara to the Monasteredan area. O'Hegarty says he attended a house dance there that night.

Jim Hunt says that he was wet and returned home early on Monday morning for a change of clothes but was arrested by policemen waiting outside his house. He was brought to Sligo in handcuffs. The village of Gurteen was searched but no trace of O'Grady or O'Hegarty was found. Dr. Doyle was the only member of the group to suffer any injury as a result of the shooting. He received a wound to the leg and a graze to his forehead. O'Grady was uninjured but his clothes were torn in many places from bullets. His car was a hackney car and the Sligo Champion reported that after a short stop in Gurteen he went for Edmondstown to bring the Bishop of Achonry to Ballymote! Local tradition has it that O'Grady papered over the bulletholes in the car so that the Bishop, who was not an admirer of the IRA would not notice them. Rain later in the day caused the paper to come off and it is said that the Bishop refused to journey home in a car used by the IRA.

Later that evening when O'Grady was back in Gurteen he went to see Dr. Doyle. While there the shout went up that six police were on their way on bicycles. O'Grady rushed out, started the car and drove off. The police opened fire and O'Grady's cap was seen to be shot off his head. He made good his escape in spite of a wound to his ear. Dr. Doyle was arrested but later released. He subsequently had to go to Dublin for treatment for his leg wound.

After the excitement of the week-end relations between the people and police in the Gurteen area became very strained. The police barracks at Mullaghroe was sandbagged. A notice was posted in various prominent places: "Any person found talking to or in any way helping the police will in future be severely dealt with. By Order - Irish Republican Army." The wife of one of the policemen involved was a teacher in a local school and it was reported that the school was being boycotted. Three of the police who took part in the attempt to arrest O'Hegarty were transferred to "distant stations" the local press reported two weeks later.

"The Elusive O'Hegarty" was the headline used by the Sligo Nationalist newspaper to head its story of the attempts on the part of the police to capture the Mayo-man. Tom O'Donnell composed a song "O'Grady drove the car" in honour of the incident. When Hunt was brought up for trial in early December he refused to recognise the court or as he said to recognise the authority of the police to shoot him either. He was sentenced to one month without hard labour.

On November 4<sup>th</sup>, Thomas O'Donnell, who had been McCabe's election agent in the General Election, was arrested on a charge of soliciting for the Dáil Loan at a meeting in Gurteen. He made a dash for freedom but was caught and brought in handcuffs to Sligo jail to await trial. He was jailed for one month and ordered to give bail for his good behaviour at the end of his sentence or serve a further three months more.

*Miss B O'Mullane was arrested in Sligo on October 27<sup>th</sup> when on her way from visiting her father then in Sligo jail. She was taken to Enniskillen and charged in connection a speech at a meeting in Lisnaskea. She was sentenced to two months imprisonment and was lodged in Sligo jail.*

In his December report the County Inspector said that the many prosecutions taken against people who advocated the Dáil Loan had had a good effect and that no reference was then made to the Load by speech or newspaper. He mentioned in particular the Ballymote area

where there was a great improvement because "the prominent and dangerous Sinn Féiners of that area are now in jail".

*(v) "If he can manage to light on the right men and give them adequate training it will be all right."*

In June 1919 Dáil Éireann decreed the establishment of National Arbitration Courts which it was hoped would replace the British Petty Sessions Courts. With the closure of small rural police stations these Petty Sessions were unable to enforce their decrees. These arbitration courts were at first not illegal. In August Dáil Éireann was told that the system of courts was complete and a decree was passed establishing Supreme Court, District Courts and Petty Courts. The Sligo Champion reported in its issue of November 22<sup>nd</sup> that Sinn Féin courts were operating with such success in the Grange area that there were few if any cases to be dealt with by the Petty Sessions courts in the area. At the November meeting of the North Sligo Comhairle Ceantair of Sinn Féin there was an application from a former member of the Collooney Sinn Féin club for reinstatement. He had been expelled for applying to the police for assistance in a dispute in which he was involved instead of applying to Sinn Féin courts. He was reinstated and warned as to his future conduct.

At the end of May 1919 the County Inspector estimated that there were nine companies of Irish Volunteers in County Sligo with a total of 629 members. This was the estimate given with each monthly report for the rest of the year. By the autumn of 1919 Sligo Brigade of the Volunteers, or the IRA as they increasingly were being called, had been organised into battalions.

In August-September 1919 an organiser from GHQ was in Sligo County helping with the forming of companies and Battalions particularly in south Sligo. This was Sean Mahon (or MacMahon) from Offaly. While in Sligo he used the name O'Kelly. He was attached to the Irish National Assurance Company in Sligo as a cover. A letter from J. J. O'Connell dated August 7<sup>th</sup> said that the writer was "very glad that an organiser was being sent to the south" and that he would do all he could to assist him. A letter from Michael Collins to J. J. O'Connell dated August 19<sup>th</sup> 1919 introduced Mahon.

In a letter dated September 25<sup>th</sup> 1919 to HQRS O'Connell says "He (O'Kelly) is working hard but finding it uphill. There (South Sligo?) their instincts are agrarian rather than military. If he can manage to light on the right men and give them adequate training it will be all right."

Listing battalions, companies and their officers is notoriously difficult. Battalion areas were changed as the IRA was re-organised at various times to respond to the changing situation. Officers were jailed and replaced, companies collapsed or merged and were even known by different names.

By the end of 1919 the following appear to have been the battalions in the Sligo Brigade: Tubbercurry, Collooney, Ballymote, Gurteen, Sligo and Riverstown.

Tubbercurry was the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion and the Commandant was Frank Carty who had been elected Commandant early in 1918. Classes were held for Company Captains in Pádhraic Ó Domhnalláin's barn in Tubbercurry. Companies were Tubbercurry, Mullinabreena: Captain: Hugh Keirns, Cully: Captain: James Duffy, later Johnny Haran, Curry: Captain: Peadar Brennan, Aclare: Captain: Mick O'Hara, Cashill, Cloonaughill, Moylough: Captain: Charlie Gildea, Achonry, Cloonacool: Captain: Jack Brennan, Tourlestrane, Kilmactigue.

There was some problem with the position of Commandant of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion at the very end of 1919 and a letter from the Adjutant General to the acting Commandant Sligo Brigade, Jim Keaveney, suggested appointing an acting Commandant and then carrying out an election after a month or so. In a letter to Headquarters in January 1920 the Brigade Commandant, Liam Pilkington reported that there had been no new elections for officers of No. 1 Battalion staff and that as a result some officers held dual positions. He asked that Headquarters allow this for the present "as it is difficult getting suitable men".

Collooney was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion and the O/C was Frank O'Beirne. Harry Brehony was Vice-Commandant and Jim Lee was the Adjutant. Companies attached to this battalion were Carrickbanagher: Captain: Bertie Flynn, Templeboy: Owen Healy. Collooney: Captain: Dinny Rooney, Coolaney: Captain: Mike Coleman, Ballinacarrow: Captain: Richard McBrien and later Tom Anderson, Ballisodare: Captain: Dominick Benson, Skreen and Dromard: Captain: Mick Clarke, Sooeey: Captain: "Bull" Kelly, Ballintogher: Harold McBrien, Deroon: Captain: Michael



McGettrick. Later in July 1920 there is however a mention of a Skreen Battalion with O'Connor given as the O/C.

In September, 1919, a reorganisation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion area (Ballymote) was carried out. Michael J. Marren was appointed Battalion O/C. Alec McCabe had been previously O/C but had been replaced by Marren when jailed. Thady MacGowan was Adjutant and Josie Hannon Quartermaster. Josie Hannon had served for two years in the Royal Navy and his military training was a great asset. There were nine companies attached to this Battalion, Ballymote: Captain - Tom Cawley later Jim Molloy, Keash: Captain: Tom Brehony, Culfadda: Captain: Thady McGowan, Killaville: Captain: Pat Hunt, Bunninadden: Captain Denis Coen or John Farrell, Emlaghmaghtan, Captain: Patrick O'Brien, Kilcreevin: Captain: Bernard Brady and Ballinafad.

According to Thady McGowan at this time "the Irish Republican Brotherhood took control of the Battalion and Company staffs were also members of the IRB, this idea being part of McCabe's plan for the reorganisation of the Volunteers."

The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was Gurteen and the Commandant was Jim Hunt who succeeded Owen Tansey on the latter's death in December 1918. Jim Hunt, a native of Moygara aged 27 in 1918, had been a member of the RIC as were two of his brothers. He had joined in 1911 and was stationed in Laois when the Easter Rising occurred. He deserted the force on May 31<sup>st</sup> 1916 and returned to the Gurteen area where he joined the Volunteers. Hunt was instrumental in having the Battalion properly organised into companies during early 1919. The Battalion staff at the time was Vice O/C James Dwyer, Adjutant Thomas O'Donnell and Quartermaster Joe Finnegan. Companies were Gurteen, Cloonloo: Captain: Thomas McDonagh, Kilaraght and Monasteredan.

The Sligo Battalion had five companies, two in Sligo Town, Calry: Captain: Michael Hargadon, Carraroe and Coolera. Michael Nevin was at first Sligo Company Information Officer and later was promoted to Battalion Information Officer. The strength of Sligo Company was about 70 at this period. According to Tom Scanlon there were two Sligo Town companies, A and B. He was the captain of A Company, Jim Kirby of B Company. Jim Keaveney was the O/C of the Sligo Battalion.

Cliffony and other north Sligo companies were part of Bundoran Battalion, 1st South Donegal Brigade until December 1920 when they were transferred to the Sligo Brigade. It appears that at this time they formed a Grange Battalion with Seamus Devins as O/C. William Gilmartin was captain of Cliffony company and Eugene Gilbride captain of Grange company at this time. Part of north-west Sligo, from Dromore West to Ballina was part of the North Mayo Brigade. Companies in this area included Culleens, Enniscrone, Corbally and Dromore West.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion was in the Riverstown area and the Commandant was Tom Deignan lately returned from the United States. Companies in this area were Geevagh: Captain: John Fallon, Highwood, St. James' Well, Ballyrush, Ballintogher, Conway's Cross, Gleann. Tom Deignan had been originally attached to Gleann company but was promoted to battalion O/C in the 1919 reorganisation.

Another Battalion possibly attached to Sligo Brigade, contained areas of County Leitrim and its O/C was Charles Timoney until his arrest at the end of 1919. His place was taken by Ballintogherman Harold McBrien. The companies in this Battalion with their captains were: Ballintogher: Michael Mulligan, Dromahair: Charles Canning, Newtown Manor: Charles Timoney, Ballingar: Thomas O'Connor, Glenn: John Owens, Kilavoggy: Patrick Hannon and Greaghnafarne: Patrick O'Rourke.

Jim Keaveney was Commandant of the Sligo Brigade early in 1919. When J. J. (Ginger) O'Connell was released from prison in March 1919 he at once resumed military work. He was appointed O/C of the Sligo Brigade and again held weekly classes for officers in Sligo town. These continued until early winter of 1919 when O'Connell was transferred to G.H.Q., Dublin as Director of Training. After his departure Liam Pilkington of Sligo town was appointed Brigade O/C with the following staff: Frank Carty Vice O/C, Seamus MacGowan Adjutant, Harry Conroy Quarter Master.

On June 6<sup>th</sup> 1919, a Brigade order was issued from Sligo Brigade to all County Battalion Commandants to the effect that no officer or NCO of the IRA was to make a public speech. This was to prevent such officers being brought to the notice of the authorities or being arrested. "The expression and spread of political doctrine belongs to the civil power. Soldiers have no politics", the statement, presumably drafted by J. J. O'Connell, said.

In October 1919 Frank Carty commenced a weekly class for Company and Battalion officers in the Ballymote Battalion area. Most if not all the officers attended these classes which were held on one or two nights a week. They continued until Carty's arrest in February 1920. As a cover for the classes a dramatic club was formed called "The South Sligo Young Ireland Players". They produced "The West's Awake" which was performed in Keash, Ballymote, Gurteen and Ballinacarrow. All monies collected went towards army expenses. During March Volunteers in Sligo town practised drill without arms on 3<sup>rd</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> and reports were sent to the Competent Military Authority with a view to prosecution.



*Martin Savage*

Martin Savage from Streamstown, Ballisodare, was shot dead while taking part in the Ashtown ambush at the Phoenix Park, Dublin. This was an attempt to kill the Lord Deputy, Lord French, organised by among others the famous Tipperary-man Dan Breen. Martin Savage had been working in Dublin for some time and he had taken part in the Easter Rising. His remains arrived at Collooney on December 23<sup>rd</sup> and a large number of Republicans took part in the funeral. No train ran from Sligo because of flooding on the line but a large Sligo contingent walked to Ballisodare. The coffin was covered with the tricolour. The graveyard at Corhoughnagh was surrounded by armed policemen but everything went off peacefully.

Sean MacEoin was imprisoned in Sligo jail for two months, November and December 1919. While there he met and became friendly with some Sligo prisoners including Alec McCabe, Tom O'Donnell and Jim Hunt.

By the end of 1919 the IRA seemed to be in complete control. All public bodies were controlled by Sinn Féin with IRA members prominent. The RIC had begun the evacuation of smaller police stations and the Sinn Féin courts were replacing the British counterparts. It appeared as if control of the country was slipping from the British government.

## 11. RAIDS, ARRESTS AND BOYCOTTS: 1920.

"There is a growing spirit of disloyalty and the people are becoming more hostile towards the police", reported the County Inspector at the end of January and at the end of the following month he repeated the same message adding "People not in sympathy with Sinn Féin are living in a state of terror".

### (i) *"What she saw with one eye"*.

The elusive Tipperary-man, James K. Hayes, was still on the run and leading the authorities a merry dance. What was described as "a determined search by military and police" was made in a number of areas in the county. In January a large group visited Emlaghmaghton near Ballymote and drawing a blank there went on the Moylough and Chaffpool areas. Hayes was asleep in a house in this area and was alerted. Scantily dressed, he made a dash for freedom and got away. Hayes had been very prominent in County Sligo during the conscription threat and the 1918 general election. He was also an organiser and superintendent of the Irish National Assurance Company. He had returned to Sligo in November 1919 on the arrest of Alec McCabe to take his place. The Sligo Champion noted with glee, "This is the 100th search for Hayes". The same paper at the end of the month reported that Hayes was still on the run and had a couple of "narrow escapes" during the previous few weeks. He had addressed a public meeting at Killaville on Sunday January 25<sup>th</sup>.

In mid-January members of Tubbercurry R.D.C. and Board of Guardians were arrested in a large scale search of south Sligo. Among those arrested were the clerk, W. V. Donohoe and eleven members. More arrests took place in Sligo on the night of Friday 21<sup>st</sup> January. Among those Volunteers arrested were Dominick McHugh, manual training instructor in Sligo Technical School, John McSharrey, lino type operator with The Connachtman newspaper, Fred Pilkington brother of Liam, and Bertie Glynn. On the same morning a number of persons were arrested in the Geevagh area and brought to Sligo jail. On the following Monday morning it was reported that Fr Scott of Ballyrush had been arrested and brought to Sligo.

A large scale search by troops and police was carried out in the north Sligo areas of Grange and Castlegarron in January. The Sligo Independent reported that "a few guns" were seized but there were no reports of any arrests.

Towards the end of January a large scale search was carried out in the Gurteen area. The homes of Thomas O'Donnell and Jim Hunt were visited but neither man was "at home". Two days later searches were carried out in the Keash area and two men, Dominick McMenamy and Paddy Ballentyne, were arrested and taken to Ballymote.

Raids for arms by the Volunteers continued. Houses of Unionist sympathisers - this usually meant Protestants - were visited and whatever arms they had, generally shotguns and sporting guns, were taken. At the end of February the County Inspector reported that the county was in a disturbed condition. On January 16<sup>th</sup> the house of Major Eccles, Moneygold near Sligo, was visited and one shotgun taken away. The owner was reportedly absent attending a funeral at the time. Two nights later another house in the vicinity of Sligo was visited and another shotgun taken.

The Cliffony Volunteer Company raided for arms in the Maugherow, Tullaghan and Mullaghmore areas as well as further a field. Patrick McCannon recalls a cold and dreary night when along with twenty members of the company he cycled to Belleek to raid a building which they believed to contain an arms dump of the Ulster Volunteers. They surrounded the building but their call to surrender was answered with a hail of bullets. A lengthy exchange of shots followed and finally the place was taken but only a few guns were captured the rifles previously stored there had been moved before the attack.

On the night of January 26<sup>th</sup> the battalion officers attending the classes given by Frank Carty along with Carty raided the residence of Charles Graham, Knockalassa. They held the occupants of the house under armed guard in a room while they searched for arms. They got one Lee Enfield service rifle, one Martini .45 rifle, three revolvers, three shotguns, one pair field glasses, 300 rounds .303 ammunition and 100 rounds 12 bore ammunition. Michael J. Marren, Thady McGowan, Tom Brehony and Pat Hunt were among the raiders. Pat Hunt recalled that he was almost late for the raid as he did not tell his parents and had to sneak out late that night to join the others. He was twenty years old at the time. The next day as he went out to hide the stolen field glasses, he used them to watch the military and police activity at Graham's.

According to Frank Carty, because of the success of the raid on Graham's he got special permission from Headquarters for another raid, this time on the residence of Colonel Alexander Perceval at Templehouse. Carty was in charge of this raid and among the raiding party of about twenty were practically all the officers of the Ballymote and Gurteen Battalions. Jim Hunt, M. J.

Marren, Thady McGowan and Pat Hunt were among these. It appears that Perceval was expecting a raid around this time and had made preparations to defend the house. However he apparently thought that the raid would only take place during the hours of darkness.

During the night of February 21<sup>st</sup> the party moved into position around the house and lay in wait in the shelter of trees and shrubs in the grounds. About 10.30 am the Colonel and a gamekeeper, Hugh Bracken, left the house by motor car and the raiders approached the house. They intended to smash down the door and Pat Coleman from Ballymote had a sledge. Mrs Eleanora Perceval in her evidence to the subsequent trial said that at about 11 o'clock she was on the south terrace with her two children and their governess. She heard shouting and saw twenty to thirty masked and armed men run from the rockery. She ran inside by a side door and locked the front door.

"Coleman hit the door at 11 o'clock but the sledge bounced off it", Thady McGowan told Ernie O'Malley. The men tried to smash in the door and when they failed they broke the hall window. One man told Mrs Perceval to put up her hands and when she refused he fired a shot in her direction which hit the ceiling. One report mentions that she was holding a spear. About six men then came in through the window most carrying revolvers. Mrs Perceval was tied up but in the struggle she tore the mask off one of the men. She was gagged and blindfolded though she was partially able to see. "What she saw with one eye", the Sligo Champion entitled its report of the subsequent trial. They asked for the gun room and ransacked it. They then went through the house searching most rooms. It was claimed at the trial that eleven doors had been damaged. An attempt was made to break open the door of the strong-room with the sledge but this failed.

At the trial Mrs Perceval said, "Above all the men I saw in the house that day my attention was particularly attracted by Carty. The reason of that was because he was much better dressed than the other men. He struck me as being a leader". Her evidence was responsible for Carty being found guilty though it has been claimed, by Carty among others, that she was mistaken and that Jim Hunt was the figure who attracted her attention.

The raiders spent some time searching for arms and they got, according to Col. Perceval, a number of small arms including a Mauser "Peter the Painter" pistol, one Webley Richards pistol, one old duelling pistol, one old six-barrel pistol, two shotguns and a large amount of assorted ammunition, seven swords, various items of military equipment and a number

of military books. Much of this haul was taken to the Gurteen Battalion area and hidden there. The raiders brought all the items they had collected to the hall and asked Mrs Perceval to open the locked front door for them. She refused. She together with her two children and the staff, twenty two in all, were then taken to the kitchen and locked in a small dark room off the kitchen. One of the boys was eventually raised up to a window and was able to get out and release the others. Mrs Perceval was pregnant at this time and was found to be in a serious condition because of the ill-treatment. A gynaecologist was summoned from Dublin to treat her. Her life was in danger for some time and she had a miscarriage. She eventually recovered.



*Templehouse Mansion*

In the early hours of the Monday following the raid a large force of police and military went to the Tubbercurry area under County Inspector Sullivan and District Inspector Russell, Ballymote. They arrested fourteen men none of whom in fact had taken part in the raid. The men arrested were Patrick Brown, Frank Gannon, Charles Gormley, Peter Hunt, five brothers, Patrick, John, James, George and Luke Armstrong, Thomas and James McDonnell, Patrick Muldoon, John Doddy and Michael Gardiner. All were taken to Sligo under heavy escort and charged at a special court that evening with having taken part in the raid. Three other men were arrested early on Tuesday morning, February 24<sup>th</sup>, Frank Carty, Michael Mullen and Richard MacBrien. Carty was arrested in his father's house.

On the following Saturday morning an additional two were arrested, Martin Foy and John Brehony, bringing the total to nineteen. Frank Carty was the only one of those to have actually taken part in the raid. On April 1<sup>st</sup> four men from the Bunninadden area were arrested and charged with having taken part in the raid. These were however discharged the following week.



The County Inspector reported to the Inspector General at the end of February that they had already in custody the man "fully identified as leader of the gang", obviously referring to Carty. After a series of remands in custody at which all the defendants except Carty were represented by Mr Howley, Sligo, who claimed that most of his clients had alibis for the day in question, all were released except Carty. Carty in turn was remanded in custody on a number of occasions because the principal witness, Mrs Perceval, was unable to attend court due to illness. Finally early in April she was well enough to give evidence and Carty was returned for trial to the Assizes.

***(ii) "As a Republican I deny the right of this court to try me".***

On March 17<sup>th</sup> 1920, large bodies of British troops raided the Rosses Point area. One of the IRA leaders in the district, Ned Bofin was almost caught but managed to hide under an upturned boat with some others. A number of the raiding party sat on the boat and discussed the raid and the "wanted men".

A notice dated December 29<sup>th</sup> 1919 had been served on several members closing the Young Republican Hall, Bridge Street, Sligo. The notice was signed by Capt. Fitzpatrick based on information given him by D.I. Alexander Dobbyn. The club was said to be suspected "of attempting to cause sedition and disaffection among the civil population". The club was closed by order of the British authorities in the first week of February. The police boarded it up but club members later re-opened the premises only to have it closed by police again. On Sunday February 14<sup>th</sup> after another re-occupation of the premises by members, Seamus MacGowan, editor of the Sligo Nationalist, was arrested while leaving the club. He was one of five who were chased by police and he was the only one caught. At a court on March 5<sup>th</sup> he was sentenced to three months in prison for disobeying the military order which forbade him enter the hall.

On Tuesday, January 20<sup>th</sup>, a hunger strike for political treatment was started by some of the prisoners in Sligo jail. Among those on hunger strike were the Ballymote prisoners Hannon, Farry, Keaney, Patrick Rogers, Alec McCabe, Thomas Cawley, Bernard Brady; J. J. Conlon, Geevagh, McDonagh and Cassidy, Enniskillen, and Murphy, Thomas Ruane and John Corcoran, Mayo. The Corporation held a meeting on Wednesday at which the strike was discussed. The Mayor, who had visited the men that morning, presided. A resolution of sympathy with the prisoners' demands was passed. Three ratepayers' councillors dissented from the resolution. On

Thursday of the same week J. J. Clancy visited the strikers and as a result the strike was called off for a day. Fr Mulligan, Assistant Chaplain, had a lengthy meeting with the strikers also on Thursday. As a result the strikers took breakfast on the Friday morning, some Bovril and some milk. The Governor of the jail asked the General Prisons Board if special concessions had been granted in Mountjoy. He was told that no concessions had been given. Presumably some concessions were given in Sligo as the strike was not resumed.

A large scale search for arms by armed and masked Volunteers in the Tubbercurry area was reported at the end of February. Among the houses visited was Wellmount Lodge, the property of Wood Martin, where the caretaker was relieved of his arms. In one house, that of Mr Thomas Gallagher, the woman of the house appealed to the raiders not to take the shotgun as it belonged to her deceased brother. The raiders left the gun. In another house the raiders met stiff resistance. The householder, having heard the raiders approach, barricaded the door and armed himself with his loaded shotgun. When the door was broken in he let off a shot which apparently wounded one of the Volunteers. The Volunteers left without the weapon. Around this time the local press reported that the Sligo RIC had been very busy visiting houses in their areas and collecting weapons before they were collected by Volunteers raiding for arms.

A government proclamation towards the end of February listed seven counties which it officially declared "in a state of disturbance" and said that these required additional police. Among these counties was Sligo.

Jim Hunt was released from jail in early 1920 and got the usual "hero's reception" attended by large crowds and three bands. He was said to be in the best of spirits after his month in jail. Alec McCabe was released for a short period in January on parole because of his wife's illness. He returned to Sligo jail when his time was up. Thomas O'Donnell, a native of the Gurteen area and a professor in St. Nathy's College, was released from Sligo jail and welcomed home on Monday February 15<sup>th</sup>. He was president of South Sligo Comhairle Ceantair of Sinn Féin. The train he was travelling on was met at Kilfree Junction by an enthusiastic crowd of up to 4,000 people who escorted him home. They passed Mullaghroe police barracks on the way and found a large number of military in full war kit with fixed bayonets drawn up outside. There were no incidents and after some speeches the crowd dispersed. At the end of February Jim Hunt was again arrested and sentenced to three months in jail, a term he served in Sligo. The charge was collecting money without a military permit. According to Hunt, the Volunteers had struck a rate

of 6d in the pound for an arms fund and he had been collecting it. Also arrested with him were Anthony Giblin, Sean Goulding and Jim Towey.

On March 18<sup>th</sup>, Alec McCabe's term of imprisonment ended and he was duly released from Sligo jail only to be rearrested at the gate. He was subsequently charged before Captain Fitzpatrick with unlawful assembly and soliciting contributions for the Dáil Loan. Both charges referred to a sports day at Templehouse on November 5<sup>th</sup> 1919 when McCabe addressed the crowd asking for contributions for the loan. Hegarty also spoke at the meeting, the court was told. "As a republican I deny the right of this court to try me", McCabe told the justices. He was found guilty and Fitzpatrick said that he didn't want to send McCabe to prison again and so he gave him an opportunity to enter into bail to be of good behaviour. McCabe said that it was about five years since he had come into contact with Mr Fitzpatrick and he, McCabe, had spent most of those five years in jail. It was rather late in the day to surrender now, he said, refusing bail. He was sentenced to six months imprisonment. He was removed to Cranmore Jail, Sligo and later removed to Mountjoy jail, Dublin.

A general strike was called for Tuesday April 13<sup>th</sup> as a protest against the treatment of prisoners in Mountjoy. News of the strike was received in Sligo on Monday evening and arrangements were at once made to have the town at a standstill the following day. "Not a business place in Sligo was open on Tuesday, not a train came in or left Sligo and business and industry was at a standstill", reported the Sligo Champion. A strike committee sat in the Town Hall from 11 am issuing permits to those whose business was considered essential, for example bread delivery. Shops opened for one hour in the morning. Some ex-soldiers including Sligo's V.C. hero Private Martin Moffatt held a meeting at which they protested at the Government's actions in Mountjoy. Word was received late on Tuesday night from Labour leader, Tom Johnston, that the strike was called off.

Alec McCabe was one of those on hunger strike in Mountjoy. On April 8<sup>th</sup> the medical officer's report shows McCabe in the prison hospital with his condition described as "weak". His condition remained poor and on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> was described as "bad". He was released on April 14<sup>th</sup> after his ten day hunger strike and sent to St. Vincent's Hospital, Dublin. He feared that he would be rearrested on his discharge from hospital so he discharged himself and was driven to Sligo by Nurse Linda Kearns. He is said to have spent some time concealed in Summerhill College. In Mid-May the Champion reported that McCabe was progressing as

favourably as could be expected after the rigours of the hunger strike and that it was hoped that he would be able to return home soon.

In mid-April a change was made in the Inspectorate of the RIC District Inspector Alexander Dobbyn was transferred from Sligo to Kerry as acting County Inspector. John Russell, who had been District Inspector in the Ballymote district, replaced him in Sligo.

On the night of Saturday April 3<sup>rd</sup>, Sligo Custom House/Income Tax Office was raided as were similar offices all over the country. Some time after 11 pm on that night the office of the Superintendent was raided by at least three armed and masked men who took away some of the records. The men included Liam Pilkington and Jim Keaveney who were armed with .45 revolvers. The records were subsequently destroyed, some of them, according to the Sligo Champion, were to be seen floating in the river on Sunday morning. A motor car had been taken from its garage and used in the raid. It was found beside the Cathedral the following morning. In his report to Headquarters Pilkington said that two tons of material were taken and burned outside the town. The houses of the three collectors in the area, at Carraroe, Riverstown and Bunninadden were also raided and documents taken.

In a search by the police following the Tax Office raid the offices of the National Insurance Company at Bridge Street were raided as were the rooms of the company's superintendent. Some Sinn Féin literature was reported to have been taken away. Later, in May, the Income Tax superintendent wrote to the Corporation asking for a certified copy of their accounts as some files were destroyed in the raid. Many of the councillors including the Mayor objected to this who said they should not give them any documents.

*(iii) "There is a state of panic among law-abiding people now left unprotected in this large district".*

As we have seen the more remote RIC barracks were being abandoned because of the difficulty in defending them from expected attacks. Strandhill, Rosses Point, Ross, Clogher, Beltra, Templehouse and Keash had been closed in late 1919.

On March 15<sup>th</sup> the barracks at Coolaney was closed "at almost a minute's notice" according to the Sligo Independent. The same paper reported that there was now no police

barracks in operation in the Coolaney Petty Sessions area, Beltra and Templehouse Barracks having been already closed. "There is a state of panic among law abiding people now left unprotected in this large district," it said. Keash and Templehouse RIC barracks were abandoned in March and were burned by the Volunteers on Saturday April 3<sup>d</sup>. In the same month Mullaghroe Police Barracks was vacated and the police transferred to Ballymote. Mullaghroe was demolished on April 14<sup>th</sup>. It was intended that it be burned but fear of destroying private property beside it resulted in it being knocked with sledges instead. Grange barracks, vacated for some time, was rendered uninhabitable on April 15<sup>th</sup>. At the end of April Ballinafad Barracks was destroyed having been vacated a week previously.

Early in April the Sligo Brigade Commandant wrote to Headquarters reporting on the destruction of police barracks. He reported that four of the five vacated ones were destroyed, Templehouse, Ballymacherry, Keash and Clogher. The remaining one, Strandhill, he said, was not demolished owing to a misunderstanding. He also reported that there were seven other barracks evacuated by police but still occupied by their families and asked for advice as to what to do with them. Another report from the Sligo Brigade Commandant dated April 24<sup>th</sup> gave the total number of vacated barracks in the area by then as thirteen. Of these seven were unoccupied and six of these had been demolished by that date the other, presumably Strandhill, not having been done "owing to a miscarriage of arrangements". One of the occupied barracks was lived in by two ladies who were favourable and another about to be evacuated, presumably Cloonacool, was owned by a Volunteer who had given the police notice to quit. The commandant asked for advice on both cases asking particularly that the Cloonacool barracks not be demolished as the owner would hardly be able to seek compensation in the courts being a Volunteer officer.

Three barracks in north Sligo, Rosses Point, Drumcliff and Strandhill, which had been abandoned by the police were visited on the night of May 12<sup>th</sup> and were rendered uninhabitable. Rosses Point and Drumcliff were occupied by wives of policemen in caretaker capacities and the women were ordered out, their furniture thrown out and the barracks partly demolished. Strandhill had been locked up and it was set on fire and destroyed. The furniture left outside the barracks was collected by the police the next day. On that same day, May 13<sup>th</sup>, the vacated barracks at Curry was destroyed.

On May 23<sup>rd</sup> the vacated police barracks at Coolaney was burned by local Volunteers. The roof was cut to avoid burning an adjoining house. The landlord of the property was Major

O'Hara, Annaghmore. In a letter in September O'Hara told how he had heard that a party of men had broken into the store at Leyney station and taken some tools and oil and had used these to completely destroy the police barracks. He lodged a claim for £2,000 compensation.

On the morning of June 2<sup>nd</sup> an attack was made on the police barracks at Fivemilebourne, County Leitrim by groups of Sligo town and north Sligo Volunteers. The group from the town brought home made grenades and petrol bombs which they had prepared the previous week. They had gone out to view the barracks twice before the actual attack. The group led by Liam Pilkington left the Republican Club at Teeling Street about 10.30 pm. One of their number carried a black bag with the grenades. They went to Carns where a boat was waiting to take them to Hazelwood. From there they walked to Fivemilebourne by back roads.

The group from Grange led by Seamus Devins were armed with rifles and shotguns and covered the front of the building. Communications with the barracks were cut off and roads were blocked. Liam went up on the roof and made an attempt to break a hole in the roof but according to one account he fell off "and that ended that". Another account says that he managed to make a hole in the roof but that the grenades thrown in failed to go off. Rifle fire was then opened at the barracks and kept up for some time but to no avail. It was defended by a sergeant and five constables. Some windows were smashed by the fire but others had steel shutters. The attack was then called off and the Sligo group returned to base again crossing the lake in the boat. Some time later the RIC abandoned the building at Fivemilebourne and the IRA again went out and this time burned it down.

On the night of June 26<sup>th</sup> the coastguard station at Mullaghmore was set on fire. The occupants were ordered out at gunpoint and their furniture and belongings were taken out. Paraffin which had been commandeered at the local Hotel used to fire it. The attempt was not completely successful and a second attempt was necessary on the following Sunday night. This resulted in the destruction of the building. According to Patrick McCannon, who took part in the operation, the Volunteers had heard that soldiers were to be stationed in the coastguard station and they destroyed it as a precaution. On the same Sunday the coastguard station at Pullendeva near Templeboy, was burned to the ground in broad daylight. The station had been vacated the previous day. On the June 17<sup>th</sup> a naval destroyer accompanied by a minesweeper arrived at Rosses Point and put ashore about 60 marines who took up duty guarding the coastguard station.

The barracks at Bunninadden was still occupied in early June and indeed was reported to have been strengthened and fortified in case of attack. The barracks at Geevagh which had been previously vacated by the RIC was burned on July 3<sup>rd</sup>. The barracks at Cloonacool was vacated by the police on Thursday July 1<sup>st</sup> and the police were sent to Bunninadden, Aclare and to Tubbercurry. The Champion reported that "war materials" were removed from Cloonacool by lorry. The barracks at Cloonacool was "dismantled" rather than destroyed. Presumably this was because the landlord was a member of the local Volunteers and it was reported that he helped in the work of destruction.

On Friday July 2<sup>nd</sup> Skreen barracks was evacuated and on the following Monday night it was burned by the Volunteers. On the same night the coastguard station at Derk, Skreen, was also burned. The Lord Lieutenant had been there the previous week on a tour of the area. Breagwy barracks was evacuated on Tuesday July 13<sup>th</sup> and burned to the ground the following night. The vacated barracks at Riverstown was burned on the night of July 17<sup>th</sup>. Aclare barracks which had received some of the police from Cloonacool in early July, itself was abandoned on Saturday July 24<sup>th</sup>. The Volunteers burned the barracks a few hours later. Enniscrone barracks was vacated on the Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> and was burned that same night. Ballinafad barracks suffered the same fate around this time. *It faced the country residence of Lord French, the Lord Lieutenant, at Drumdoe, beside Lough Key, which was guarded night and day.*

On the night of August 13<sup>th</sup> an attack was planned on Castlebaldwin police barracks. The plan was to disarm some constables who were in the habit of visiting a pub in the village. With the help of the captured arms the men would rush the barracks and take it. The police were overpowered in the pub but they were unarmed. Without the aid of the police arms the men knew they had little chance of taking the barracks but they opened fire all the same with their shotguns. An exchange of fire lasted a considerable time and it was reported that one policeman was injured. The attackers then withdrew having suffered no injuries. Among those who took part in this action were Thomas Brehony, Thady McGowan, Harry Sheerin, Patrick Ballantyne from Keash and Bertie Hart.

The Chief Inspector in his report for August noted this attack saying, "attacks on police barracks during this month extended to this county which had hitherto being immune from such". He also reported an attack on Tubbercurry RIC barracks on August 28<sup>th</sup> which, he said, was beaten off.

Harold McBrien tells of a plan to capture Ballintogher police barracks. Thomas Deignan, O/C Riverstown Battalion dressed as a British army sergeant and Ned Bofin of Rosses Point dressed as a British officer. They planned to drive up to the barracks and gain entry. A party of IRA were to be concealed near the barracks and were to rush it as the door was opened to admit the pair. However as the Volunteers arrived in Ballintogher they were met by the police in lorries. The barracks had just been evacuated. The Volunteers did not burn down the barracks as the owner moved in himself and lived in it.

On the evening of Monday September 6<sup>th</sup>, Bunninadden barracks was evacuated and the police moved to Tubbercurry. It was reported that the police fired some shots as they left the village but no-one was injured. The barracks was destroyed soon after the evacuation. On the night of the 20<sup>th</sup> September Castlebaldwin Police Barracks was burned to the ground hours after it had been vacated by the police. Ballisodare barracks was vacated on Monday September 13<sup>th</sup> and was burned the same night. Its landlord was Bryan Cooper.

By this time the process of evacuating vulnerable barracks in the county was complete. Eight barracks remained occupied, two in Sligo town as well as Cliffony, Collooney, Ballymote, Tubbercurry, Easkey and Dromore West.

*(iv) "I was respected when I joined, but after a while I wasn't".*

The Sligo Independent reported that the Protestant graveyard in Tubbercurry had been vandalised in mid-January. A large number of headstones had been damaged, it said, and it reported that it was the opinion of many in the district that the motive was to terrorise the minority in the area.

A notice was posted in the Easkey district on May 18<sup>th</sup> warning people against communicating with the police. A similar notice was posted in Tubbercurry on May 23<sup>rd</sup>. On May 28<sup>th</sup> threatening letters were sent to three persons in the Tubbercurry district warning them to cease supplying the police. The warnings "had the desired effect", said the police report. The house of a barracks servant at Tubbercurry was entered on May 23<sup>rd</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> and the woman was forced to go on her feet and swear that she would discontinue working for the police. On September 28<sup>th</sup> a similar attack was made on a servant to the police at Castlebaldwin. The Roscommon Herald reported in early July that the police in both Ballymote and Bunninadden



were being boycotted and that merchants and traders in both places had been visited and told not to sell them anything. Because of this the RIC had to commandeer supplies. The RIC in Collooney were also the subject of a boycott. "Terrified shopkeepers obeyed obsequiously", said Cecil King whose father was a policeman in Collooney. The police were ordered to seize the goods required and offer payment and this they did. "The traders began to have second thoughts", King says, "gradually the boycott lost strength and collapsed".

On July 15<sup>th</sup> three men visited traders in Tubbercurry and warned them against supplying the police with goods. It was reported that the police got around this by commandeering what they wanted and leaving the money. In early July a man who had been cutting turf for the police in the Cliffony area was apprehended by a number of masked men and immersed in the river until he promised not to continue such work. In autumn of the same year Patrick McCannon recalls being part of a group which arrested and detained some people from the Bundoran area whom they considered a danger to the Republican cause. They were taken to a lonely house surrounded by bog and kept there for some days. They were court-martialled, cautioned and released.

A Ballymote man, Patrick Begley, who owned a hackney car had been warned by Volunteers against conveying police in his car. He ignored the warning and a group of local Volunteers decided to make an example of him. Batt Keaney, who had been in Belfast, had returned for the duration of the "Twelfth" holiday, heard of the escapade and joined the group. Six were involved, all of whom were on the run at the time. One acted as scout and stood on the Oldrock bridge. As the car passed him by he lit a match as a signal. The others had taken two donkey carts and used them to block the Tubbercurry road at the five crossroads. The car was halted and the driver was taken out. The car was sprinkled with paraffin and set alight. His jacket, shoes and socks were removed and thrown on the blaze. He had to walk the three and a half miles back to Ballymote. Batt Keaney returned to Belfast soon after this incident. A donkey cart was taken in Ballymote and burned because it had been loaned to a policeman to draw home his turf.

On the evening of Sunday July 18<sup>th</sup> a house in Teeling St, Ballymote owned by the Congested Districts Board was badly damaged by a bomb. Arrangements were being completed to have the house sold to a policeman. The bomb had been made by Pat Hunt and other Gurteen Battalion members who placed the bomb in position and lit the time fuse.

In his August report the County Inspector said that feeling against the police was very bitter and reported "a rigid boycott of them". Peter Gallagher, an RIC constable stationed in Tubbercurry, said "I was respected when I joined but after a while I wasn't. People were friendly until the troubles. Then you wouldn't have one to talk to you". He especially mentioned the attitude of the Protestants. "They'd have less to do with us than some of the Republicans, because they were afraid to be accused of giving us news, so they kept away from us altogether to keep safe".

A house in the Sligo area, which had been inspected by the District Inspector with a view to purchase, was destroyed by fire in mid-July. On July 4<sup>th</sup> a labourer was taken from his home near Sligo and was taken in the Cliffony direction. He was blindfolded and a shotgun was discharged at him wounding him in the leg. He had previously been warned not to speak to the police. On June 26<sup>th</sup> a shopkeeper in Ballymote received a threatening letter signed by order of the Irish Republican Army, warning him not to serve policemen. A similar letter was received by a Tubbercurry shopkeeper in early July. On June 21<sup>st</sup> a notice was posted in Ballisodare warning people to have nothing to do with a policeman, a native of the area, who was home on leave. On the night of June 19/20<sup>th</sup> notices were posted at the chapel gates at Kilglass and Enniscrone warning any person who "does any work or associates with the RIC will be sorry". A similar notice was posted in the Easkey area a few days later and the police report said "These notices are beginning to have the desired effect".

On the night of June 20<sup>th</sup> three labourers from the Sligo district who had cut turf for policemen a few days earlier were taken from their homes and made swear that they would not work for the police again. The manager of Gleniff Barytes Company, Sligo was visited by six armed and masked men who accused him of delivering manure to the local police barracks. He denied this and the men left. This occurred on July 10<sup>th</sup>. Also in July two masked and armed men visited a woman who worked as a servant at Cliffony police barracks and forced her to go on her knees and swear that she would cease working there. She swore and she did not work there again. On the same night, July 21<sup>st</sup>, notices were posted at Creevykeel warning traders and others to cease supplying goods to the RIC.

On the night of September 29<sup>th</sup> another notice was posted in Tubbercurry warning that "certain ill disposed persons in this town have been found in communication and supplying goods to the members of the enemy army of occupation" and threatening that if they continued they

would be "dealt with accordingly". On the night of October 7<sup>th</sup> a motor car was stolen in Tubbercurry and its owner received a letter from the IRA stating that the car had been commandeered because of the owners "close alliance with the Anglo-Saxon army of occupation". The windows in the premises of a publican described as being "friendly towards the police" were broken by rifle or revolver shots on the night of October 24<sup>th</sup>. In Tubbercurry at the end of August it was reported that a girl had her hair cropped because she had associated with British soldiers.

Not all policemen were boycotted. Paddy Dwyer was a member of the IRA who lived in Ballymote. Three policemen lived in the same street. Paddy usually gave manure to one of these for his garden and when the police were being boycotted Paddy went to the policeman and told him to continue taking the manure. One member of the RIC in Ballymote, Pat Madden, helped the IRA by carrying out information to them especially to the Information Officer John Joe Dockry. "Anything that went in, he had it out again" said Jim Hever of Madden.

## 12. LOCAL GOVERNMENT: JAN. 1920 - MARCH 1921

By this time there was no challenge to the pre-eminent position of Sinn Féin. "Sinn Féin is the only political organisation in the county and it dominates everything" said the County Inspector at the end of February. According to him, the organisation had over 4,000 members in 52 "thoroughly organised" clubs distributed all over the county. The decline of the UIL continued in 1920. Police reports mentioned 32 clubs with a nominal membership of 3924 in March but by the end of June their estimate was six clubs with a membership of only 535. This is the last mention of UIL clubs in County Sligo, "All branches of this league collapsed" the next report says.

### (i) *"There is only one policy before the country".*

The new Mayor of Sligo was Councillor Thomas Fitzpatrick, a Sinn Féin nominee. A chemist carrying on a business at Knox Street, he was elected at the Corporation meeting on Friday January 30<sup>th</sup>. The outgoing Sinn Féin Mayor, Dudley Hanley, had indicated some months previously that he would not be seeking a second term. The only absentee among the councillors was the independent member Young Warren. Alderman Hanley proposed Thomas Fitzpatrick for Mayor, mentioning that he was a native of the town, a successful business man and a member of the Harbour Board and the Board of Guardians. "Colr. Fitzpatrick stands for the great principle for which de Valera stands and for which the majority of Irish people stand" he said. Colr. Harry Depew seconded the proposal. In spite of the Ratepayers Association councillors protesting that they had not been given a chance to occupy the Mayoralty. Colr. Fitzpatrick was elected Mayor. "One position I want to make clear" he said, "I, as Mayor, will never receive or entertain a British delegation because I am convinced that the Irish people, if given the opportunity, are capable of managing their own affairs without interference from outside". He also made it clear that he would not take any oath of allegiance to the British crown or sit as a magistrate in the British courts in the town.

A tricolour was flown from the Town Hall to mark his selection as Mayor. The Sligo Independent noted that "if Ireland was a Republic tomorrow it would not make Sligo any more prosperous" and appealed to the newly elected Mayor to see "that the Council confines itself solely to the improvement of the town and leave politics outside the Council chamber altogether.

We assure him and the Council of our wholehearted support in everything promoted for the welfare of Sligo".



*Thomas H Fitzpatrick, Mayor of Sligo 1920*

A meeting of the North Sligo Comhairle Cheantair of Sinn Féin was fixed for the Town Hall on Sunday February 8<sup>th</sup> to elect officers for the year. However only five clubs sent delegates: Sligo town, Grange, Drumcliff, Collooney and Coolera. It was decided to call a special meeting to elect officers and a sub committee was appointed to discuss the matter of the forthcoming local elections. Those on the committee included R. G. Bradshaw, J. J. Clancy, J. R. Tracey, H. Monson, Seamus MacGowan and T. Conlon.

The special meeting was held on Sunday March 29<sup>th</sup> and this time the attendance was much better. In all eleven clubs attended- Grange, Collooney, Dromore West, Skreen & Dromard, Coolera, Sligo, Maugherow, Templeboy, Kilglass, Enniscrone and Drumcliff. These were the officers appointed: President, J. J. Clancy; Vice-Presidents, J. Hennigan, D. M. Hanley, J. R. Treacy; Secretaries, Michael Nevin and Seamus MacGowan; Treasurers, H. Monson and R. G. Bradshaw; Delegate to Ard-Comhairle, D. A. Mulcahy.

The question of selecting candidates for the elections also was discussed at the February meeting. The Comhairle Cheantair ruled that an equal number of delegates from clubs who shared an electoral area would meet and choose a candidate for that area. At the March meeting Easter Sunday, April 4<sup>th</sup>, was fixed as the date of a selection convention at which all clubs were asked to attend with the names of those nominated to be ratified by the Comhairle Cheantair. Clubs were asked to meet the Sunday before the selection meeting to choose their candidates.

The object was, it appears, to select as many candidates as there were seats so that there would be no inter-Sinn Féin contests.

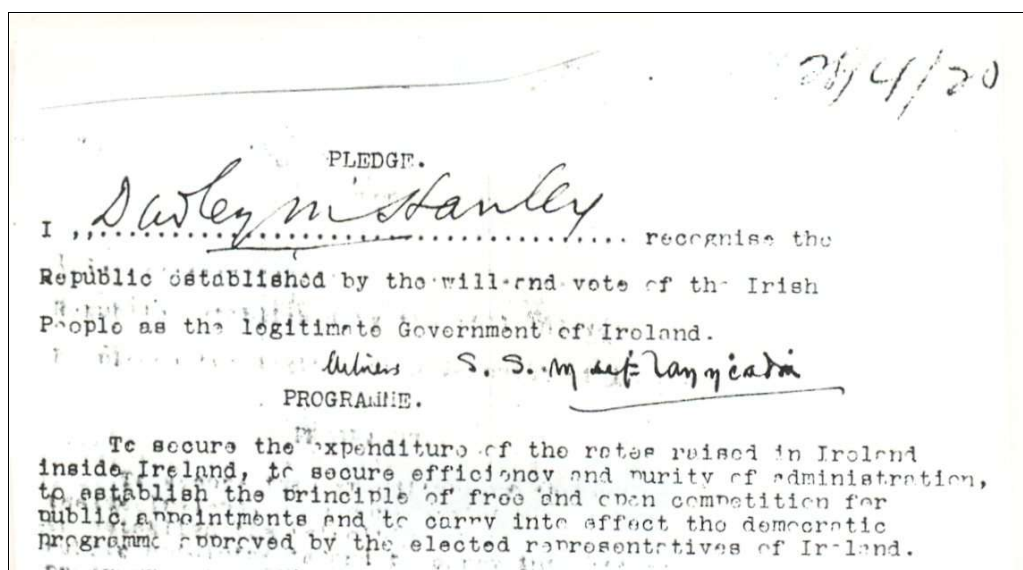
Seventeen clubs were represented at the Easter meeting. They were: Enniscrone, Grange, Castleconnor, Cliffony, Rosses Point, Collooney, Calry, Skreen, Dromore West, Carraroe, Coolera, Maugherow, Drumcliff, Templeboy, Ballintrillick and Sligo. It was clear that not all clubs had heeded the Comhairle Cheantair's direction to hold joint meetings to select agreed candidates. Carrowroe, St. John's and Coolera were told to hold a joint meeting to pick their County Council candidate. Selected for the Sligo electoral area were John Lynch and Seamus MacGowan (Sligo), John Hennigan (Calry, Drumcliff and Rosses Point), P. J. Rooney and Denis Leonard (Cliffony and Grange).

In the Rural District Election areas six candidates were nominated from the Carney area for five vacancies and the clubs concerned were told to hold a joint meeting to choose five. In the Cliffony area four candidates were nominated for three positions and the same decision was made. Similarly in the Collooney area and the Knocknarea areas joint meetings were ordered to be held. These meetings were held and candidates selected. In the case of Cliffony the Comhairle Cheantair was asked to decide between E. Conway and T. McCann for the position in Cliffony South and they chose Conway "on the basis of voting power". The Comhairle Cheantair objected to the selection made by Carraroe and Coolera saying that the man selected had refused to collect for the Dáil Éireann loan and as an outgoing councillor he had not given much assistance to Sinn Féin. The clubs were asked to reconsider their selection.

All the Sinn Féin candidates were required to sign a pledge affirming that they recognised "the Republic established by the will and vote of the Irish People as the legitimate Government of Ireland".

Local government elections, County Council, Rural District Councils and Boards of Guardians, were held in May 1920. The Champion reported that "stage-fright grips old councillors . . . the big fight that was talked so much about some time ago has reduced almost to vanishing point", most of the outgoing County Council members did not go forward for re-election, only six being re-nominated. In an editorial the Sligo Champion said "the present is no time for giving any encouragement to disunion or dissention in the ranks of nationalists. There is

only one policy before the country". Similar words were often used previously by nationalist leader writers and politicians to discourage any opposition to the Nationalist party.



*Pledge signed by Dudley M. Hanley for local elections 1920*

Polling took place on May 28<sup>th</sup> and the Sligo Independent reported an absence of "the familiar excitement" associated with such occasions. No police were to be seen carrying out election duties and these were carried out instead by Volunteers. The Independent reported "it is alleged that there was wholesale personation" but in view of the lack of any real opposition there would have been no real need for personation. The system of election used was Proportional Representation. For the County Council elections the County was divided into four County Electoral areas. Ballymote area elected six councillors, Sligo area six councillors and Tubbercurry and Dromore areas four each.

In the Ballymote area there were nine nominations all except two of which were new. The two outgoing councillors seeking re-election were Michael Gray, Ballinafad, now going forward under the Sinn Féin banner and Patrick McManamy, calling himself Independent Sinn Féin. Another candidate styling himself "Independent" Sinn Féin withdrew before the election. James Wynne who had opposed MP John O'Dowd at the last election also stood but got only 26 votes. Gray was elected on the last count but McManamy failed, getting only 189 first preference votes. Alec McCabe headed the poll in this area with 1056 votes followed closely by Bernard Conlon, John McMorrogh, and Tom O'Donnell, Michael Finn, was also elected.

In the Sligo electoral area there were ten candidates for the six seats, six Sinn Féin, three Ratepayers and one independent. John Jinks independent and John Hennigan Sinn Féin, were the only outgoing councillors seeking re-election. The six seats were won by the Sinn Féiners with a remarkably even distribution of the votes. John Hennigan (1256) headed the poll followed by P. J. Rooney and John Lynch (957 each), Denis Leonard (876), Laurence McHugh (707) and Seamus MacGowan (705). John Lynch was the well-known Labour leader. The three non-Sinn Féin candidates did not between them poll a quota, Jinks doing the best with 302 votes.

Four councillors were to be elected from the Tubbercurry area and there were originally six nominations, five Sinn Féin and P. J. Henry independent, who was the only outgoing member seeking re-election. He, Henry, was visited by armed and masked men on the May 3<sup>d</sup> and told that he must withdraw his nomination as the position was needed for the Irish Republic. Mr. Henry withdrew his name. One of the five remaining Sinn Féin nominees then withdrew and there was no contest. John P. (Jack) Brennan, Cloonacool, James Gilligan, Lavagh, John F. Mullarkey, Banada and Thomas Murrice, Rathscanlon were the new councillors.

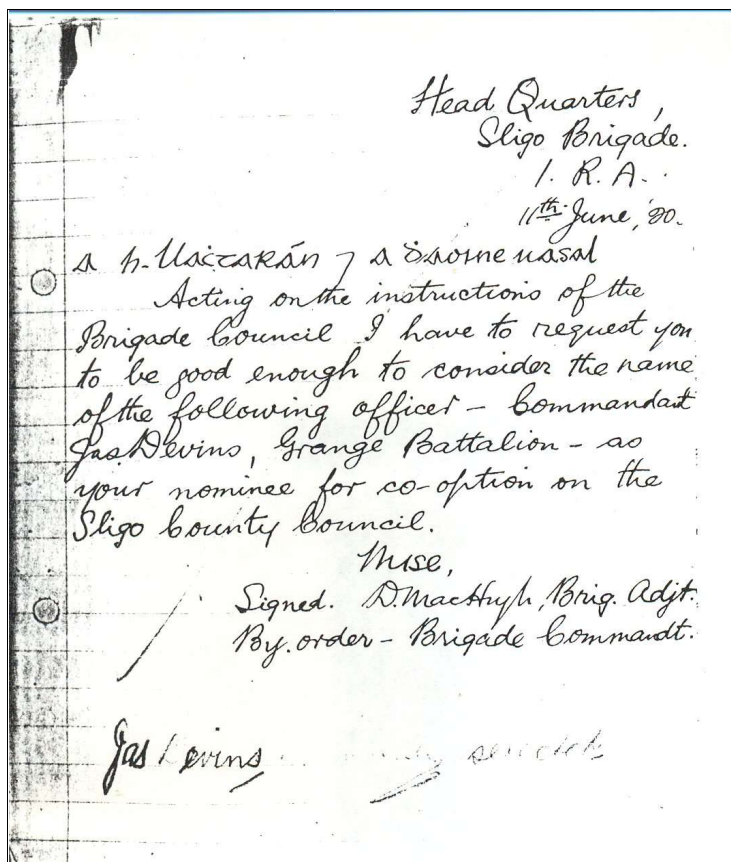
There were also four vacancies in the Dromore area. There were six nominations, four Sinn Féin and two independents. One of the independents was the long time Nationalist councillor from Coolaney, Peter Cawley. In the event Cawley finished an ignominious last with a mere 129 votes out of total poll of almost 4,000. The four Sinn Féiners elected were Michael J. Hanley, Culleens, (1194), J. J. Clancy, Sligo, (914), Dudley M. Hanley, Sligo, (818) and Daniel Kilcullen, Beltra (687).

It is interesting to note that none of the newly elected councillors occupied, then or later, high office in the Volunteers with the exception of Jack Brennan and Alec McCabe. They were generally of the political wing of the republican movement and as we have seen were mainly chosen by the Sinn Féin club members in the county. However it was a different matter with the co-options to the County Council and the ex-officio members. The ex-officio members were the chairmen of the Rural District Councils and these were Frank O'Beirne, Sligo R.D.C., Frank Carty, Tubbercurry R.D.C., Jim Hunt, Boyle No. 2 R.D.C. and Henry Cavanagh, Dromore West R.D.C. With the exception of Cavanagh these were Volunteer leaders.

Two co-options were also made to the County Council, Seamus Devins for North Sligo and Michael J. Marren, for South Sligo. Again these were prominent Volunteer leaders. The



minutes of the June 13<sup>th</sup> meeting of the North Sligo Comhairle Cheantair of Sinn Féin explain how at least one of the nominations was made.



Head Quarters,  
Sligo Brigade.  
I. R. A.  
11<sup>th</sup> June, '20.  
A h-Uachtarán 7 a Shonemnasal  
Acting on the instructions of the  
Brigade Council I have to request you  
to be good enough to consider the name  
of the following officer - Commandant  
Jas. Devins, Grange Battalion - as  
your nominee for co-option on the  
Sligo County Council.  
Yours,  
Signed. D. MacHugh, Brig. Adjt.  
By order - Brigade Commandt.  
Jas Devins

*Letter from the IRA to North Sligo Sinn Féin asking them to nominate Seamus Devins  
to the County Council*

The meeting had before it a letter from D. McHugh, Brigade Adjutant, Headquarters, Sligo Brigade, IRA asking the following "Acting on the instructions of the Brigade Council, I have to request you to be good enough to consider the name of the following officer Commandant James (Seamus) Devins, Grange Battalion, as your nominee for co-option on the Sligo County Council". The meeting duly agreed and Devins, as we have seen, was co-opted.

***(ii) "We are here for the purpose of furthering the establishment of a Republic".***

At the statutory meeting of Sligo County Council on Monday June 21<sup>st</sup>, John Hennigan was proposed as chairman but he declined to accept and J. J. Clancy was elected instead. John McMorro was chosen as vice-chairman. Members present at this first meeting of the "Republican" County Council were: Alec McCabe, Bernard Conlon, John McMorro, Tom O'Donnell, Michael Finn, Michael Gray, J. J. Clancy, M. J. Hanley, Daniel Kilcullen, John

Hennigan, Patrick J. Rooney, John Lynch, Denis Leonard, Laurence McHugh, Seamus MacGowan, John P. Brennan, James Gilligan, John F. Mullarkey, Thomas Murrigan, Jim Hunt, Henry Cavanagh, and Frank O'Beirne.



*Sligo County Council. June 1920.*

**From Left. Back Row:** Seamus Devins, J J Mullarkey, Jim Hunt, Tom O'Donnell, Bernard Conlon, M Gray, P J Rooney, D Leonard, Laurence McHugh, James Gilligan.

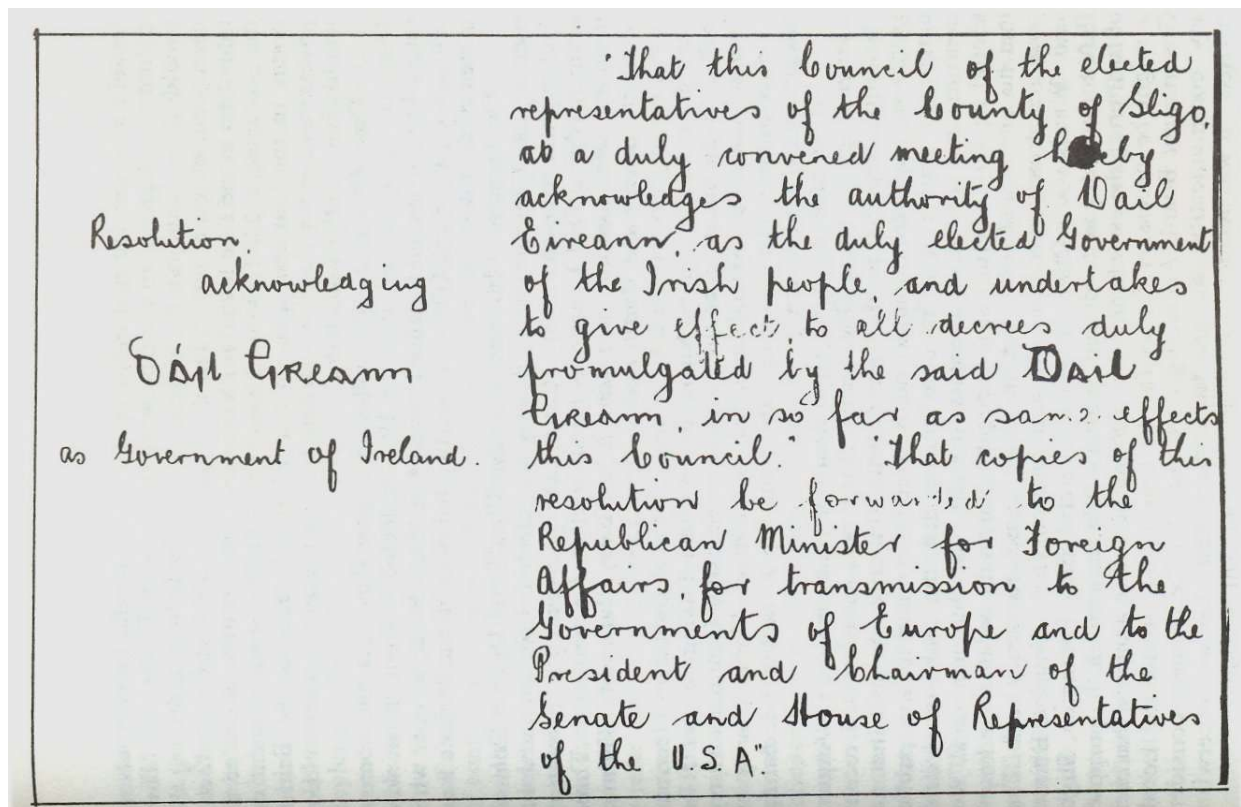
**Middle Row:** John Lynch, T H Murrigan, Alec McCabe, J J Clancy, Sean McMorrough, John Hennigan, D M Hanley.

**Front Row:** Dan Kilcullen, Seamus MacGowan, Harry Cavanagh, Jack Brennan, Frank O'Beirne, Michael J Marren, Michael Finn. The vacant chair represented Frank Carty then in Sligo jail.

The secretary was instructed to look up the minutes to see if any resolution had been passed condemning the 1916 rising with a view to having such a resolution expunged from the minutes. John Hennigan proposed and Jim Hunt seconded that the County Council acknowledge the authority of Dáil Éireann. James McMorrough proposed and Seamus MacGowan seconded a resolution stating the Council's support for the revival of the Gaelic Language as the spoken language of the Irish people.

The Sligo County Council meeting of Saturday July 17<sup>th</sup> passed a number of resolutions including one of congratulations to Frank Carty on his escape from jail. They also called on all

able bodied men between the ages of 18 and 40 to join the Irish Republican Army. A call was made to those who held the Commission of the Peace to resign same at once.



*The Sligo County Council minute recording the motion of allegiance to Dáil Éireann*

In Boyle No. 2 District Council which covered the Gurteen area of South Sligo Jim Hunt was elected chairman and in early July he said at a meeting that in his opinion there should be compulsory military service for all men between the ages of 17 and 40. "They should all be made join the Volunteers in order to help in driving the enemy out of the country". He also suggested, more seriously, that a rate of 6d in the £ be levied for Volunteer expenses to be collected by the Volunteers. Mr O'Donnell said "Over £100 a week is spent on porter in the Gurteen area. Of that £100, £70 goes to the British government in taxation. They would be long looking at it before they would give it to the Volunteers."

This "IRA rate" was collected in many parts of the county. Michael Coleman said that the IRA collected it from those who refused to pay and he instanced the case of Major Bryan Cooper who refused to pay. Frank O'Beirne took two bullocks off the Major's land in lieu of the rates.

On Monday, June 14<sup>th</sup>, the new Sligo Rural District Council met. Frank O'Beirne from Collooney was elected chairman and John McLoughlin vice-chairman. Martin Clancy proposed a resolution acknowledging Dáil Éireann as the duly elected government. Three members were then co-opted, John Albert Farry, Ballymote, Thomas McCann, Grange and Martin Roddy, Breeogue.

Among those elected at the Sligo Board of Guardians elections there were John Lynch, James Keaveney, Liam Pilkington and John Jinks. At the meeting of the newly elected Sligo Guardians Harry Depew was proposed and seconded as chairman, Martin Clancy as vice-chairman. The meeting also passed a motion declaring allegiance to Dáil Éireann.

At the meeting of the Sligo Board of Guardians on August 1<sup>st</sup> a letter from the Local Government Board was read. It noted recent resolutions repudiating the Department's authority and said that no grants or loans from public funds would be made to any public authority without a definite assurance that the authority would conform and submit its accounts to audit. The chairman said "We should be very careful not to precipitate anything because we know that no one would suffer but the poor". James Keaveney said "The poor are already suffering and will always suffer". Frank O'Beirne said "War is war". Others were more careful. Liam Pilkington, Sligo IRA commandant, advised caution: "We are here for the purpose of furthering the establishment of a Republic and in attaining that end it might be necessary for us for the time being to use the Local Government Board. Accordingly we must for the moment consider any communication we get from them until we are otherwise advised." It was decided to await advice from Dáil Éireann.

When the newly elected Tubbercurry Board of Guardians held their first meeting a similar motion of allegiance to An Dáil was carried unanimously. Robert Nicholson, then on the run, was elected chairman. At the Tubbercurry District Council meeting Frank Carty, then in Sligo jail, was elected chairman. J O'Grady was selected vice-chairman. This body also expressed their allegiance to Dáil Éireann. The newly elected councillors marched to the meeting behind a tricolour, "a group of mainly young boys with a look of determination stamped on their faces", said the local press. Three well-known Volunteers were co-opted to the council, Charles Gildea, Moylough, Hugh Kearns, Achonry and John Feely, Bunninadden. Charles Gildea, who was involved with the Transport Union branch in Tubbercurry, was described as Labour/Sinn Féin,

the others Sinn Féin. In Dromore West, M. J. Hanley, the outgoing Republican chairman was re-elected.

In spite of the fact that Sligo had a Republican Mayor and that the Corporation had a Republican majority that body did not break off contact with the British Local Government Board until mid-1920. On Wednesday April 28<sup>th</sup> Sligo Corporation discussed claims for compensation for malicious injuries which the corporation had received. Colrs Nevin and Devins opposed having anything to do with these claims which were generally as the result of Volunteer activities. The other councillors, including some Sinn Féiners, voted to refer them to the Corporation's solicitors for advice. On May 8<sup>th</sup> the matter was again discussed. This time the councillors decided that the burned and destroyed police barracks which were the subject of many of the claims should be inspected with a view to having the claims defended. Hennigan was one of the few who opposed this. A week later the corporation got a letter from the Crown Solicitor in Sligo, Mr. Argue, saying that the malicious injury claims were to be adjourned for the present.

At their meeting on June 30<sup>th</sup> the Sligo Corporation formally acknowledged the authority of Dáil Éireann "as the duly authorised government of the Irish people and formally undertake to give effect to all decrees duly promulgated by the said Dáil Éireann." The clerk was directed that copies of their minutes in future be sent to the Department of Local Government, Dáil Éireann. This was proposed by Michael Nevin and seconded by William Hande. Alderman Kerr was the only councillor present to express opposition to the motion which was duly carried. Letters from Dublin Castle to the Corporation of July and August informing them that grants would be withheld because of the recognition of the Dáil were marked "Read" by the Corporation.

*(iii) "Sick on brink of starvation!"*

At the meeting of the Sligo County Council on Saturday August 28<sup>th</sup> two letters were read, one from the Local Government Board and one from the Undersecretary, Dublin Castle both to the effect that no grants, loans or subsidies would be given to any public body which did not recognise the authority of the Board. The chairman, J. J. Clancy, said that it should be explained that the Council had broken finally from the Local Government Board in accordance with instructions issued by Dáil Éireann. He estimated that the total of the loans etc. stopped was about £26,000.

In retaliation, the Council had decided not to repay loans totalling about £2,000 already got from the Board. In order to safeguard the finances of the Council, Clancy said, money had been withdrawn from the bank and lodged with trustees. A resolution was passed removing the Hibernian Bank from the position of treasurer to the Council. A committee was appointed, consisting of J. J. Clancy, Seamus MacGowan, Sean McMorrow and Denis Leonard, with full powers to take whatever steps they thought necessary to safeguard the finances of the Council. A motion was passed to the effect that no new work be entertained unless three quarters of the cost be raised locally.

Another special meeting of the County Council on October 16<sup>th</sup> again considered the financial situation. The different county institutions were asked to cut down expenditure as much as possible. The list of County Council officials and their salaries was next looked at and the services of many officials were dispensed with and many salaries reduced. Among those who lost their jobs were the two assistant County Surveyors and the County Solicitor.

A circular was issued by the Dáil early in September to local bodies to sever connections with the British Local Government Board. The clerk of the Sligo Board of Guardians wrote to the Dáil asking if this circular applied to the Boards of Guardians. The reply was in the affirmative. As a result at a special meeting of Sligo Board of Guardians on October 9<sup>th</sup> Liam Pilkington proposed that that body sever its connection with the English Local Government Board and send all minutes etc. to the Local Government Board of the Dáil. This was agreed.

At the November monthly meeting of the Sligo Leitrim Asylum Committee on Tuesday November 9<sup>th</sup> under the chairmanship of John Hennigan it was stated that owing to non-recognition of the Local Government Board a large amount of money in the form of Government grants had been lost to the Board. A special committee had been set up and it reported back. Some salary reductions were made including that of the Superintendent, some staff were pensioned off, some cows were sold off the Asylum farm and tillage was to be increased. The salaries of the subordinate staff were reduced by 10%. More salary reductions were to be considered if necessary. At the outset of the meeting a deputation from the Asylum Workers Union asked to be allowed to attend to safeguard their interests. This was agreed and six members attended. The chairman said that there was no money to pay workers and no work for



them to do. Mr. Kelly of the Union said that at the present time there were far too many unemployed and it was too bad to find the representatives of the Irish Republic or Sinn Féin treating the workers in such a manner.

A meeting of Sligo Board of Guardians was called on Saturday October 23<sup>d</sup> to discuss recommendations of a special committee. The reports contained many drastic cost cutting proposals including: all able bodied persons were to be discharged from the workhouse and casuals were not to be admitted in future. All patients who were in a position to pay were to be asked to do so. All vaccination fees were to be paid by the parents instead of by the Guardians. A number of dispensaries were to be closed and removed to the doctor's residence in each case. The dispensaries so affected were Carney, Cliffony, Ballymote, Riverstown and Collooney. The office of dispensary porter in each case was to be abolished. After a long discussion the report was adopted and details were sent to Dáil Éireann for approval.

Dáil Éireann Local Government Board has suggested a scheme of amalgamation which would result in all the workhouses in the county being closed except Sligo which would then serve the whole county. The scheme was discussed in late 1920 and early 1921 and it seemed that the Board of Guardians of Tubbercurry and Dromore West, both of which would face closure if the scheme went ahead, were opposed to it. The imprisonment of members of the Board of Guardians meant that no decision had been reached by July 1921.

Around mid-November offices of Sligo public bodies were raided by British troops and/or police and minutes and documents were seized. Similar action was taken in many places in the country as a reprisal for recognition of the Dáil. At the County Council meeting on Saturday December 11<sup>th</sup> the secretary reported that the police had taken the Council minute books and some account books and these had not been returned. Michael Nevin wrote to the Dáil Dept of Local Government asking for copies of minutes sent there by the Corporation to replace those taken by the enemy but was told in a reply by the Minister, W. T. Cosgrave, that the Corporation had not sent any minutes to the Department. "It is due to negligence on the part of the clerk that your minute book was seized by the enemy police as he should have been sufficiently aware that all such documents were being seized all over the country and that it could hardly be expected that documents of the Sligo Corporation would be left untouched", the reply went on.

At a Corporation meeting on Wednesday December 1<sup>st</sup> Colr. Perry proposed that a letter from the British Local Government Board be answered which was tantamount to recognising that body. The vote on the motion was tied at three each, the attendance being very poor. The motion was adjourned until the next meeting. At the next meeting on Wednesday December 15<sup>th</sup> the motion was again put and this time was carried by a vote of 5 - 4 owing to the poor attendance on the Labour/Sinn Féin side. Those who voted for were: Perry, Wood-Martin, Kerr, Jackson and McDonagh; Against: Nevin, Fitzpatrick (Mayor), Lynch and Costello. Another motion by Perry that claims for malicious injury should be defended in the British courts was similarly carried. Colr. Nevin put down a motion that these two decisions be rescinded at the next meeting and Colr. Perry put down a motion that the Corporation's accounts be submitted for audit to the L.G.B.

The next meeting was held during the first week in January. Alderman Perry's resolution was seconded by Wood-Martin. While proposing the motion Perry sarcastically welcomed some Corporation members whose faces, he said, they had almost forgotten since their election. Obviously the question to be voted on ensured a good attendance. Colr. Michael Nevin and the Mayor, Fitzpatrick led the opposition to the motion on the basis that the Corporation had in June declared its allegiance to Dáil Éireann and so further consideration of the issue was illegal. The motion to recognise the L.G.B. was lost on a vote of ten against seven. Those in favour were, Perry, Wood-Martin, Jinks, Kerr, Tighe, Connolly, McDonagh. Against were Lynch, Gilligan, Nally, Costello, Nevin, Feeney, Flanagan, Hande, Depew, Fitzpatrick (Mayor). D. M. Hanley did not vote claiming that with a motion declaring allegiance to Dáil Éireann on the books Perry's motion was illegal. Before the motion was taken the Town Clerk said that he considered it his duty to inform the members that if they decided to sever their connection with the British Local Government Board they would be doing an illegal act and he asked that they give the matter their serious consideration.

A meeting of Sligo Board of Guardians in the first week of January revealed that the situation at the workhouse had reached crisis point because of the lack of funds. The Guardians had applied to the Sligo branch of the Hibernian Bank for an overdraft or loan of £3,000 to avert the crisis but the manager had refused. A letter was also received from the meat contractor to the workhouse saying that he could supply no more meat until his account was settled. The milk contractors were also threatening to stop supplies. The Master of the workhouse reported to the meeting that some of the inmates were without sufficient food. Alderman John Jinks suggested



that they should go back under the wing of the English Local Government Board and get the grants they were denied. He received no support from the other members.

Various suggestions were put forward to avert the crisis. J. J. Clancy suggested asking the National Bank for an overdraft but there was little enthusiasm for this. Frank O'Beirne suggested meeting the sub-contractors with a view to waiting a little longer for payment and at the same time approaching the County Council to strike a special rate to meet the deficit. The chairman, Harry Depew, read a letter from Dáil Éireann suggesting that the "principal men" of the town be asked to guarantee £50 each. A deputation was appointed to meet the County Council to discuss the situation and to meet the contractors to discuss supplies and payment.

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Part of the problem, it was pointed out, was that rates were not being collected because of the disturbed state of the county. A suggestion was made that the Volunteers would be asked to collect the outstanding rates. Whether and when this was agreed to is unclear but the IRA did help in the collection of the rates. For this they demanded the sum of £1,000 from the County Council as payment. The chairman, J. J. Clancy, was approached and he, on his own responsibility, offered £500. This was refused and he was ordered to have the full amount ready at a certain time or face the consequences. In the presence of a Council official Clancy handed over the money.

At another meeting on Saturday January 15<sup>th</sup>, the situation was further discussed. The Master reported that there was no meat on Tuesday or Friday of that week. The clerk said that there was "nothing ringing in my ears from week to week but appeals from the contractors as to when they are going to get their money". It was also stated that many officials had not been paid for almost four months. The deputation appointed at the previous meeting had met the meat contractor and paid £50 off the outstanding bill. However about £177 was still owed. In all contractors were owed in the region of £4,000. There was dissatisfaction that a special meeting

called by the County Council for the previous Saturday to consider the poor state of the rate collection had fallen through for the want of a quorum.

A further meeting of the Board of Guardians on the following Saturday, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, was attended by a reputation from the milk suppliers to the Workhouse. They were owed about £36 each and they sought an assurance that they would be paid. They received such an assurance and were sufficiently reassured to promise to continue to supply milk.

At the end of February it was reported that no money was available for outdoor relief. The total owed by the Board of Guardians amounted at the end of January to £5,107. At a meeting at this time, the Mayor Jinks, said that he had been discussing the situation with some of the larger ratepayers and they were of the opinion that the Board made a mistake in breaking with the Local Government Board. He agreed with their view. The clerk kept urging them to come to a definite decision but in the end it was decided to send a deputation to meet with the County Council.

The Connachtman in its issue of March 5<sup>th</sup> praised the action of two Sligo traders who had agreed to help Sligo Workhouse. Michael O'Hara, Grattan Street had agreed to supply the Workhouse with whatever meat was necessary and Thomas Flanagan offered to keep the Union supplied with coal. Presumably both were to be paid when the situation improved. The Sligo Independent issue of the same date put a different emphasis on the affair. It ran large headlines: "Shocking State of Affairs at Sligo Union" and "Sick on Brink of Starvation".

The Connachtman reported in its January 22<sup>nd</sup> issue that the Hibernian Bank, Sligo had allowed Sligo Asylum an overdraft of £4,000 and that all outstanding bills had been paid. The Asylum had also suffered as a result of the non-recognition of the English Local Government Board.

Dromore West Guardians had also to enforce economies because of a shortage of funds. There had been a general reduction in the amount of eggs, meat and fuel in the workhouse. The inmates suffered from want of fire during the winter of 1920/21 and cases on outdoor relief received nothing after the weekend of January 15<sup>th</sup> 1921. It was reported that Dromore West Guardians were involved in negotiations with the bank for an overdraft of £1,700 to cover debts to that amount. After prolonged negotiations the attempt fell through as the bank

wanted up to twenty Guardians to sign guarantees for the overdraft and this number did not sign. It was reported that none of the officers got any salary since the previous October. The Guardians blamed the non-collection of rates for part of the problem. The Quarterly meeting of Dromore West Board of Guardians fixed for Wednesday April 27<sup>th</sup>, fell through for lack of a quorum.

The Sligo Champion of January 22<sup>nd</sup> reported that D. M. Hanley had resigned his membership of Sligo County Council and all its committees of which he was a member. Hanley represented Dromore West on the Council. In early February J. J. Clancy and Sean McMorrow also resigned from the Council. Clancy was of course chairman and McMorrow vice-chairman of the County Council. No explanation for these resignations was offered in the local press or elsewhere. The resignations may have been connected with the refusal of Clancy to comply willingly and promptly with the IRA demand for payment for collecting the rates. In November 1921 a Local Government Inspector in Sligo said of J. J. Clancy that he would be "a good competent worker in any position but is under a cloud from which he is not able to clear himself". The resignations may also be a reflection of the tension between the physical force and the political wings of the republican movement at the time.

### **13. REPUBLICAN LAW AND ORDER: JANUARY - SEPTEMBER 1920.**

Because of the abandonment of small police barracks there was a danger of a complete drift into lawlessness. Sinn Féin courts were established to deal with petty crime and local IRA members acted as Republican Police. As always agrarian restlessness was one of the principal sources of crime. The absence of police meant that the Volunteers had almost a free hand in the countryside and could raid the post and trains almost at will.

#### ***(i) "Censored by the IRA".***

The Roscommon Herald reported at the end of January that the Sligo-Ballyshannon mail car had ceased running on a regular basis owing to the number of times it had been raided. It was then only operated at irregular intervals. As a result daily mail deliveries to some north Sligo areas had been suspended. At the same time and for the same reason the mail car service between Ballymote and Aclare was suspended.

Sometime in March 1920 the mail car between Ballymote and Bunninadden was held up and some hundreds of pounds taken. The Sligo Brigade Commandant, Liam Pilkington, wrote to Headquarters on April 4<sup>th</sup> saying that the mail car raid had been carried out without the knowledge or sanction of the Volunteers. "The Battalion Commandant [Michael J. Marren] in whose area this raid has taken place believes there are forces at work that are not working for the greater efficiency of the Volunteers", he stated. It was clear that the forces he referred to was the IRB which had been well organised in the Ballymote/Gurteen area by Alec McCabe. Pilkington also asked the Adjutant General, Michael Collins, to whom his letter was addressed, what the attitude of the Volunteers should be to the IRB. Collins at this time was of course President of the Supreme Council of the IRB. The reply from the Adjutant General was dated May 7<sup>th</sup>. It stated simply that there were no differences in the aims and methods of the Volunteers and the IRB. With reference to the mail raids it told the Commandant to place the men under arrest, collect as much of the stolen money as possible and have a court of enquiry. Nothing more was heard of the matter.

On April 29<sup>th</sup> the mail car between Ballymote and Aclare was held up by armed and masked men. Letters for the RIC in Tubbercurry, registered items and a sum of money described variously as £150 or £300 was taken. On Friday May 7<sup>th</sup> armed and masked men held up the mail

train from Kilfree to Ballaghaderreen at Island Bridge Railway station and searched the mail bags. It was reported that mail for the police at Ballaghaderreen was taken. This may have been the occasion when a large sum of money being sent from the Ulster Bank, Ballymote to Headquarters, Belfast was taken by the Volunteers. The Volunteers asked Liam Pilkington if they could keep the money and he agreed. It was used for expenses in connection with army work.

In the second week in June 1920, while a train was slowing at Carrowmore station on the Sligo-Claremorris line, a masked Volunteer entered the guard's van and held the guard at gunpoint. He searched the mail bags. Items addressed to the District Inspector, Tubbercurry were taken. The man got off the train and disappeared into a nearby wood. On Thursday, June 24<sup>th</sup>, the 7.10 pm train from Sligo was held up at Kilfree Junction and mailbags taken by armed and masked men. Later mails were left outside Gurteen Post Office with the letters marked "Censored by the IRA". On July 5<sup>th</sup> the mail car from Sligo to Ballyshannon was held up a few miles outside Sligo and the mail bags seized and searched. On August 8<sup>th</sup> the same mail car suffered the same fate. On August 22<sup>nd</sup> the Tubbercurry to Ballymote mail car was held up near Mullinabreena and all official correspondence taken. During the last week in July the Banada to Aclare mail car was held up and mail for police was taken away. The mail car between Tubbercurry and Ballymote was also held up the same week.

In May Gurteen Battalion got information that military huts were being transported by train from Finner Camp, County Donegal, to Mullingar. Lieut Patrick McManamy with ten men from his company held up the train at Culfadda and took the huts off. They piled the huts up in a nearby bog and set them alight. They remained in the vicinity to ensure their destruction and during this time two lorries of military came on the scene. Fire was exchanged but the IRA group made good their escape without any casualties. On July 30<sup>th</sup> the mail train from Sligo was held up between Ballymote and Kilfree for twenty minutes while the mails were searched. The following night the goods train was held up in the same area and two cans of petrol removed.

On August 25<sup>th</sup> there was a raid on a railway wagon at Kilfree Station which contained steel shutters for the police at Ballaghaderreen. The fifteen shutters were taken away in motor cars. On September 21<sup>st</sup> the train was again held up at Kilfree Junction by armed men and all official correspondence taken.

What was described as "the fourth raid of this kind in two months" took place at Kilfree Junction on October 1<sup>st</sup>. All official correspondence was taken. A goods store was raided at Sligo Station on October 8<sup>th</sup> and goods consigned to the military stolen. The mail train was again held up between Kilfree and Ballymote and mail bags taken on the night of December 15<sup>th</sup> 1920.

*A raid was made on a train at Kilfree Junction by the Ballymote and Gurteen Battalions under Marren and Hunt. Captain Tom McDonagh from Cloonloo got on the train at Boyle to see if there were policemen on the train. There were some police and a District Inspector Matthews on the train and as it pulled into Kilfree McDonagh signalled to the others where the police were on the train. They were disarmed by the IRA who numbered about 20. On the September 9<sup>th</sup> two mail raids were reported near Sligo. A postman on his way from Cliffony to Raughley was held up and the mail taken. Later the same day the same fate befell a postman on his way from Sligo to Rosses Point. On Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> the night mail from Dublin to Sligo was held up at Collooney and official documents were taken. In late September mail raids were reported from Castleconnor and Cliffony where the Sligo to Ballyshannon mail car was held up. There were raids on the Ballymote to Tubbercurry mail car on November 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>. The Aclare to Ballymote mail car was held up at Mullinabreena on December 3<sup>rd</sup>.*

The local press was generally described during 1920 by the police inspector as "Sinn Féin but moderate". The Sligo Nationalist, under R. G. Bradshaw and Seamus MacGowan, had adopted a militant republican position which had caused its premises to be raided by the British. In the issue of April 24<sup>th</sup> it announced "This is the last issue of the Sligo Nationalist. Next week we will place before the public the paper for which we expressly took over the business of the former proprietors of this weekly. We desire that An Connachtach (The Connachtman), our new publication, shall be the peoples' paper and therefore in connection with its production we have invited and received the co-operation of those who strive for the independence of Ireland".

***(ii) "On the whole Sinn Féin is trying to prevent anarchy and maintain order".***

The activities of the IRA police helped prevent criminals taking advantage of the absence of police for their own ends and in fact some unionists were only too glad to turn to them. Bryan Cooper said "slowly realisation is coming, and side by side with the realisation that the government is either unwilling or unable to protect is coming the yet more startling discovery that on the whole Sinn Féin is trying to prevent anarchy and maintain order. . . Thieves have been

apprehended, welshers punished, persons endeavouring to use intimidation for their own private ends dealt with as 'bringing discredit on the Irish Republic' and this has made a considerable impression on the unionist mind". Later he wrote, "There is a growing tendency among those whose main desire is a quiet life to say: 'The government can't protect us or govern the country. Sinn Féin is doing the latter and seems disposed to do the former. Won't it suit my book to make friends with Sinn Féin?'"

At the beginning of June, republican Volunteers in Ballymote arrested two persons on a charge of having robbed the mail car at Bunninadden. The men were taken to "an unknown destination" where they were "court martialled". Another man was arrested in Ballymote on a charge of stealing a bicycle. The Irish Bulletin reported in mid-May that Irish Republican police were investigating robberies of Post Offices and private houses in the Ballymote area and in early June it reported that Republican police had arrested two men for extorting money by threats.

A Sinn Féin Court was functioning in Riverstown in March 1920. A case was heard involving possession of a house in the Riverstown area. A caretaker who had lived in the house, the property of a person from Dromahair, brought an action for possession of the house. Those who presided at the court included Fr Scott, C.C., Gleann and John McLoughlin. The Registrar of the court was Martin Clancy, Ballygrania, Collooney who was a leading member of Sinn Féin and the IRA in the district. The case was successful but the decree of the court was never put into effect.

On Sunday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, a proclamation was posted on the chapel gates at Gurteen announcing the establishment of a Sinn Féin Court for the area and warning the public not to take any part in the British courts from then on. A Sinn Féin Arbitration Court was held at Mullaghroe on May 13<sup>th</sup>. The Arbitrators included delegates from Sinn Féin clubs at Cloonloo, Gurteen, Monasteredan, Killaville and Culfadda. The Irish Bulletin reported that the Republican court at Mullaghroe heard many appeals from farmers for protection by Republican police against violent land agitation. Directions were given by the court that this protection be given by the Republican police.

*On May 23<sup>rd</sup> similar notices were placed outside the chapel at Cloonacool. The notices, signed by the Adjutant Republican Army, said that since a local court had been set up*

*no person would be allowed to bring any dispute into an English court. Tom O'Donnell played a big part in the establishing of these courts all over south Sligo.*

The campaign against the English courts was extended when, at about 2 am on the morning of Monday May 24<sup>th</sup>, the courthouse at Tubbercurry was burned to the ground. The courthouse was situated close to the Police Barracks where a large force of police was stationed. The Sligo Champion reported a Tubbercurry resident as saying that he saw at least 100 men every one armed with a rifle pointed at the police barracks during the burning. Another resident said that he was asked by the leader of the burners to cut the roof so that adjoining houses would not be burned. This he did with a band of willing workers. The Sligo Independent reported that the police in the barracks feared that the barracks itself was about to be attacked and that a large force stood to arms until daybreak.

The news reached Judge Wakely in Sligo on Monday morning as he was about to leave for Tubbercurry to hold a court there. The local papers reported that many of the cases which were to have been heard at the Tubbercurry Quarter Sessions had been heard instead at the Sinn Féin courts at Aclare and Curry.

In his June report the County Inspector reported the existence of these Sinn Féin courts and said that the people were boycotting Petty Sessions courts. He also said that many loyalists had gone before the Sinn Féin courts and had agrarian disputes settled there.

R. W. Glass was the Resident Magistrate whose responsibility Tubbercurry Petty Sessions were. On February 12<sup>th</sup> he had attended Tubbercurry Petty Sessions and had written in his diary afterwards: "The most unsatisfactory bench of my experience. The magistrates of Tubbercurry have little or no respect for their oaths". He visited Tubbercurry on July 8<sup>th</sup> to hold the Petty Sessions. His diary entry reads "Courthouse burned, no one present. Adjourned court until August 12<sup>th</sup> at 11 am and posted notice to that effect on remains of courthouse door". On the date of the August Tubbercurry Petty Sessions he was advised by the police and the clerk that there were no cases entered for hearing. He however did attend special courts in Tubbercurry, presumably at the barracks, in October and November, the first for a case of forgery and the second for a case of assault. Apart from these there does not seem to have been any ordinary Petty Sessions courts held in Tubbercurry for the remainder of 1920.



Glass also attended courts at Dromore West, Easkey and Enniscrone and these appear to have been regularly held during 1920. In July he noted that the summons server at Enniscrone had resigned and many cases had to be adjourned. His diary for October 30<sup>th</sup> reads "Enniscrone - Attended for Petty Sessions, found courthouse destroyed". No petty sessions courts appear to have been held there in November or December. The December sitting of Dromore West court was not held: "no cases for hearing" was the reason. Major T. W. Dickie, R.M. attended courts in the eastern half of County Sligo and his diary shows Petty Sessions courts at Ballinafad were not held in February or July because no cases were entered. Grange court was not held in July for the same reason. Ballinafad Petty Sessions court was held in September. Riverstown similarly was cancelled in November. The Irish Bulletin claimed in July 1920 that in County Sligo "no cases are now brought to any but the Republican courts".

Dáil Éireann at the end of June 1920 resolved to establish courts of justice and equity to replace the arbitration courts already in operation. The decrees of these courts would be enforced by Republican Police. This meant that these new courts would be illegal. It was decided that there should be Parish Courts based on the Catholic parishes and District Courts based on the parliamentary constituencies. These courts began to operate by August/September 1920.

At the Tubbercurry fair on Wednesday June 9<sup>th</sup>, Volunteers wearing armbands took charge of street traffic. It was reported that twelve men were on duty and that they kept perfect order. Similarly at Grange fair at the end of the month eight Volunteers kept order and according to the newspapers "people under the influence of drink were taken into custody". In July it was reported that Volunteers patrolled Strandhill on Sundays. Also in July, Skreen Volunteers were said to have arrested a man and found him guilty of stealing a bicycle at Ballisodare fair. His sentence was 99 hours imprisonment and to be publicly paraded after Mass by Volunteers.

Volunteers were active in many areas in the suppression of poteen making. As part of this campaign a consignment of twenty two barrels of treacle was destroyed at Tubbercurry station on July 30<sup>th</sup>. Seven holes were bored in each barrel and the contents spilled on to the platform. Seventeen of the barrels were on their way to Bonnieconlon, the others to Carrowmore. Treacle was commonly used in poteen making. Also in the Tubbercurry area raids were made on poteen makers and confiscated stills were put on show outside Mass. In August Castleconnor Volunteers confiscated poteen stills and also exhibited them outside the chapel on Sunday.

*Cloonacool court was reported to have been held on Wednesday June 16<sup>h</sup>. On July 11<sup>th</sup> what was described as a meeting of Keash Sinn Féin Club was held in the White Hall and "several local disputes were settled".*

Nine appeals listed for hearing at the Sligo Summer Assizes were reported to have been withdrawn and some of them at least were subsequently heard before Sinn Féin courts. An arbitration court sat at Sooeey Creamery on July 3<sup>d</sup> and heard at least six cases. The officials were well known Sinn Féiners D. A. Mulcahy, John Hennigan and Frank O'Beirne. An arbitration court sat in Sligo Courthouse itself on Saturday July 10<sup>h</sup>. This was the first such court to sit in the town of Sligo and it had to adjudicate on a dispute referred to it from the Sooeey area. D. A. Mulcahy chaired the court and the adjudicators were John Hennigan Co.C. and Frank O'Beirne D.C. Solicitors appeared for both parties in the dispute, Howley and Tarrant for one side and W. J. Reilly for the other.

Sligo Summer Assizes were opened on July 7<sup>th</sup> by Lord Justice Rowland. With him was Justice Benn. In his address he referred to the "deplorable" state of the county. He said that there was an increase of 500% in the number of specially reported cases since the same period the previous year. The Connachtman in its comments on the Judge's remarks said: "Goodbye Judge Rowland, you and your class had your day but like the law you represent it has passed". The Irish Bulletin reported that only three trifling cases were up for hearing at the Assizes. The Roscommon Herald commented on the fact that "as compared with other Irish counties there was a big attendance of Grand and petty jurors". Thirty four out of seventy three petty jurors attended.

Also on July 7<sup>th</sup> a conference was held at the Town Hall, Sligo to organise the Sinn Féin courts in the North Sligo constituency. The delegates included all the County Councillors and public representatives of the area, one member from each Sinn Féin club, one clergyman of each denomination in each parish, one member of each Volunteer company and one member of Dáil Éireann. J. J. Clancy T.D. chaired the meeting and Michael Nevin acted as secretary. Arbitrators were appointed for each parish. The following list of arbitrators was published in the Sligo Champion:

**Ballintrillick** - Fr McGibney, T. F. Hunt and P. J. Rooney Co.C. Clerk - Mr Ferguson.

**Drumcliff** - D. Leonard Co.C. Fr B. Currid, P.P., B. Meehan. Clerk - M. Kilfeather.

**Cliffony** - Rev Fr Crehan, Andrew Conway, Tom McCann. Clerk - William Gilmartin.

**Skreen & Dromard** - James Leonard, James Mahon. Clerk - Tom Clarke.

**Templeboy**- Rev Fr Davis, P.P. Michael Dunne, Owen Healy. Clerk - Tom Scott.

**Dromore West** - Tom Culkin, Anthony Burke, Phil Connolly. Clerk - William McDonagh.

**Castleconnor** - M. J. Hanley, P. Boylan, Anthony Kilcullen. Clerk - James Herbert.

**Easkey** - Pat Taylor, Thomas Stewart, James Moloney. Clerk - John T. Taylor.

**Kilglass** - M. M. Tolan, M. E. Hannon, James Farris. Clerk - Tom Cawley.

**Killoran** - Patrick McGuinness, Peter Henry, Joe Hunt. Clerk - Michael McDermott.

**Sligo Borough**- Ald. D. M. Hanley, Ald. John Lynch, Wm. Pilkington.

**Calry** - Patrick Feeney, Michael J. Hargadon, P. McGauran D.C.

**St. John's** - P. McGowan D.C., James Gilmartin, Rev Fr O'Dowd.

**Grange** - This court already in existence.

An appeal court was also appointed at this meeting. Its members were to be the following: Rev Fr Browne, Dromore West, D. A. Mulcahy, Sligo, John Hennigan, Co.C., Drumcliff, R. G. Bradshaw, Sligo and Harry Cavanagh, Farniharpy.

In mid-August it was reported that Volunteers had arrested three men in Sligo on suspicion of being involved in break-in the previous week. Two were said to be ex-soldiers. Late in June an incident involving a revolver occurred in a public house in Coolaney. A man who was toying with a revolver belonging to the barman accidentally shot and wounded an egg dealer. A police case was taken against the man but when the case came up at Sligo Rural Sessions in early July neither the defendant nor witnesses turned up. It was said that all had been taken from their homes the previous night and a Sinn Féin "military tribunal" was held. Later the case came before the South Sligo District Court and the decision of the tribunal was upheld.

In mid-July Mullaghroe Petty Sessions court was held before Dickie R.M. and Major Johnson R.M. Only two cases, both licensing cases, were heard. Two motor lorries of fully armed military from Ballymote arrived with mounted machine guns to protect the court. On July 19<sup>th</sup> what was described as "Mullaghroe Dáil Éireann Court" was held and according to newspaper reports "dealt with an extensive list of cases". The arbitrators were newly elected County Councillors and D.Cs, and two delegates from each Sinn Féin Club in the area.

*At the Corporation meeting of July 21<sup>st</sup> the Mayor reported that there had been a problem caused by vagrants causing annoyance to residents in certain areas shouting and*

*singing all hours of the night. He said that the matter had been reported to the Volunteers who soon took care of the problem. He suggested that it might be a good idea to form a civic guard in the general interest. Colr. M. Nevin said that they had no authority to form such a body and that there was the danger that this would interfere with the authority of the Volunteers. It was decided to hold a conference of the citizens to discuss the matter.*

A Sinn Féin arbitration court was held in Tubbercurry on Tuesday August 14<sup>th</sup>. Dr J. Flannery took the chair and the arbitrators were T. H. Murrice, J. P. Durcan, P. Henry and J. Marren. The Sligo Champion reported a severe fall in the business of the Sligo Borough Court at the end of August with very few cases being brought before it.

On August 29<sup>th</sup> local Volunteers paraded a couple before the congregation at Sunday Mass at Gleann, near Riverstown and branded them as "spies". According to the Sligo Champion the cause was as follows: The couple owed money locally and the man was kidnapped or "arrested" by the Volunteers until the debt was paid and then released. His wife then wrote a full account of the affair, naming the captors, to Dublin Castle. The letter was intercepted in one of the many mail raids and as a result the pair were branded as "spies".

The Sligo to Enniskillen train was robbed early in September and the Volunteers investigated and found those responsible and returned the money. In the early hours of Monday August 22<sup>nd</sup> the courthouse at Collooney was raided and all the official books were taken outside along with the furniture and set alight.

On September 11<sup>th</sup> 1920 Charles O'Hara wrote to RIC District Inspector Russell saying that he had been told that it was intended by the police to have a poteen case tried at the next Coolaney Petty Sessions. O'Hara claimed to have been privately warned that if the case was held the courthouse would be burned. O'Hara himself owned the courthouse premises and he was concerned about the possibility of it being destroyed as the Coolaney RIC barracks was also owned by him. "I know it is useless to look to the Government to protect it", he said adding "Surely we have trouble enough without the Government going out of their way to excite the people to these burnings" He suggested that the courthouse be closed altogether "until the country is in a more peaceful state as there are no police living in the Petty Sessions district."

Whether the poteen case was the immediate cause or not, the Petty Sessions courthouse in Coolaney was burned on September 14<sup>th</sup> as well as a disused laundry next door. The landlord of both buildings was Charles O'Hara H.M.L. for Sligo and he submitted a claim for £4,000 for the destruction of the buildings to Tubbercurry R.D.C. The claim itself was ordered to be burned. On the night of September 21<sup>st</sup> Riverstown Courthouse was completely wrecked and the furniture and court books taken out and burned.

An arbitration court was held in the new hall at Knocknarea on Sunday September 5<sup>h</sup>. Among the cases heard was one in which a publican was charged with ignoring the closing time orders issued by the Volunteers. An apology was given. Assault cases and cases involving property disputes were also heard. The arbitrators were Martin Roddy D.C. and Robert Milne D.C. Coolera arbitration court sat on Wednesday September 15<sup>h</sup> and was presided over by Martin Roddy D.C. and Robert Milne D.C. An arbitration court for the parish was held in Riverstown Hall on the September 9<sup>h</sup>. The arbitrators were Rev Fr Scott, John McLoughlin and Matt Leonard. A similar court was held in Skreen on the same date. Arbitrators were J. Mahon, D.C. and James Leonard D.C. and the chair was taken by Dan Kilcullen, Co.C.

The North Sligo District Court opened in the Town Hall on September 16<sup>h</sup>. Its jurisdiction included appeals from Parish Courts and cases involving claims of over £10. The adjudicators were D. A. Mulcahy, Rev Fr Brown C.C., Harry Kavanagh Co.C. and R. G. Bradshaw. The registrar was G. A. (Bertie) Glynn. The first sitting of the South Sligo Sinn Féin District Court took place at Ballinacarrow on Thursday September 30<sup>h</sup> at which it was stated all the business due to be held at the Quarter Sessions in Ballymote under Judge Wakely was disposed of. The adjudicators were Dr. J. A. Flannery, presiding, Dr. P O'Harte, Tom O'Donnell, James Gilligan Co.C. and the registrar was P. J. O'Brien.

Ballymote Quarter Sessions were opened on Tuesday September 28<sup>h</sup> under County Court Judge Wakely K.C. The courthouse was heavily protected for the occasion with a double fence of barbed wire entanglements surrounding the building. All windows were sandbagged. The court opened at 11 am and all business was concluded at 3.30 pm according to the Roscommon Herald which said that normally the court would have taken three days. Practically all of the business consisted of malicious injury cases, the majority of which dealt with the destruction of police barracks, none of which were defended. There were a few undefended civil bills and a few licensing applications. One malicious injury case concerned the killing of an

Anglo-Nubian goat, the property of Canon Ost, Church of Ireland clergyman, Achonry. The canon told the court that he had been told by a neighbour that "he had been living under John Bull's law but now he would get a taste of Paddy's law".

According to the Roscommon Herald the Sligo Borough Court held on Monday September 27<sup>th</sup> lasted only "about two minutes". Early in October an arbitration court was held in Tubbercurry. A Sinn Féin court was held in the Workhouse, Sligo instead of in the Town Hall early in October because of the likelihood of its being broken up in the latter place. At Mullaghroe Petty Sessions court in mid-October according to the Roscommon Herald there was nothing for the magistrates Fitzpatrick and Glass to do except sign publican's licenses. In his December report the County Inspector reported that no arbitration courts had been held during the month.

*(iii) 'Many loyalists have had agrarian disputes settled by those 'courts''*

Land agitation continued, especially in the Ballymote area. It was reported that a strong movement existed in mid-1920 to have some large farms in the district owned by the C.D.B. and large farmers divided up among deserving smaller farmers. Towards the end of May many cattle drives took place off those farms and in the last week of May it was reported that two houses, those of Pat Coen and James White had been fired into. Coen was a herdsman for White whose land was wanted for division. Coen was also taken out and made swear he would cease working for White. He had been granted compensation for cattle drives at a previous petty sessions. Another case of firing into a house in the Ballymote area was reported for May 18<sup>th</sup>. Early in May the Roscommon Herald reported a land agitation in the region of Ardcumber, Riverstown. No cattle were allowed on the lands which presumably were wanted by the locals for division among small holders.

It was reported that around the same time armed men raided a house in the Ballymote area and made the householder give an undertaking on his knees not to go near the lands of Mrs Duke in Branchfield or Kilmorgan. The householder had been manager of these lands. A herdsman for Mrs Duke got a letter warning him against working for the landlord. In the last week in May shots were fired into two houses on the Duke farms at Killaraght. The houses were those of two herds on the farm who it was stated had said that they were giving up their herds. However according to the Roscommon Herald, they had recently been seen taking

sheep to the river. Police reports say that Mrs Duke decided to sell this farm to the agitators. More agitation was reported on the Duke estate at Kilcreevin in April 1921 when a dwelling house belonging to an estate manager was damaged.

*In the Ballymote area shots were fired into the house of a man who had sold a farm privately. There had been an agitation to have the farm divided among smallholders. At Ross, near Ballymote, another house was fired into on April 27<sup>th</sup>. The owner, previously a Sinn Féiner, had purchased land which other Sinn Féiners had hoped to divide.*

On February 13<sup>th</sup> shots were fired into five houses in the Tubbercurry area. All the householders involved had taken conacre on land wanted for dividing. In the early hours of the morning of Sunday May 23<sup>rd</sup> armed and masked men visited the houses of men who worked for Charles Graham near Bunninadden and made them promise not to work for him until he sold some of his grazing farms.

The farm of John Lougheed which included Rockbrook was wanted for division and two workers on the farm were threatened by armed and masked men on June 9<sup>h</sup> and ordered to leave the place within 24 hours.

Lougheed was reported as having decided to sell two farms to the Irish Republic by November 1920. However in June 1921 another incident was reported on Lougheed property at Rockbrook. Hay, out-offices, farm implements etc were destroyed by fire. The report mentions an agitation over a grazing farm.

At a private session of Dáil Éireann on June 29<sup>th</sup> a decree was issued against the wave of agrarian unrest which had broken out. "The present time when the Irish people are locked in a life and death struggle with their traditional enemy is ill chosen for the stirring up of strife among our fellow countrymen" and it ordered that "the forces of the Republic be used to protect the citizens against the adoption of high-handed methods by any such person or persons".

In his June report the County Inspector reported that the agrarian agitation against the grazier system had almost died out. He also said that many loyalists had gone before the Sinn Féin courts and had agrarian disputes settled there. The Irish Bulletin reported that the Republican court at Mullaghroe heard many appeals from farmers for protection by Republican

police against violent land agitation. Directions were given by the court that this protection be given by the Republican police.

This seems to have had the desired effect and agrarian agitation for the rest of 1920 was sporadic. In September hay was burned on a farm near Ballymote which was wanted for division. In October in the Tubbercurry area a dwelling-house was destroyed by fire with the aim, according to the police, of forcing the owner to sell the farm for division. Also in the Tubbercurry area, gates and fences were damaged and cattle driven on a farm wanted for division. Two incidents were reported in the Easkey district in December. At Soodry cattle were driven off the land of Essex Williams, land which the subject of an agitation. At Gerril Little hay was destroyed and cattle were driven. Another incident involving the property of Essex Williams occurred in March 1921 at Ballinaphull. A farm-house, stables and their contents including two horses were destroyed by fire.

Very few other agrarian incidents were reported for the first half of 1921, a reflection of the fact that such agitation was discouraged by the IRA and also of the fact that the increased activities of the Black and Tans were a strong deterrent.



#### **14. EARLY IRA ACTIONS: JUNE - SEPT 1920.**

By June the condition of the county was very disturbed. "By intimidation and terror Sinn Féin put the whole county in a state of terror and men of loyal or moderate opinions had no chance but to submit", the County Inspector reported at the end of the month. The number of indictable offences rose to over fifty including thirty cases of raiding for arms. "It seems as if nothing will check the growing disorder save strong military measures. The county is full of arms held by the Sinn Féiners", the Inspector said.

*(i) "We could have carried the gaol away stone by stone".*

During May-June 1920 what was to become known as the "Railway Strike" began to take shape. This took the form of a refusal by railwaymen to transport British soldiers or munitions. This action continued until December 1920 but seems to have been uneven in its application and effect. There were some few mentions of such action in County Sligo over the period.

On Monday June 28<sup>th</sup> there was considerable excitement at Sligo station when a party of armed soldiers marched from their quarters in Barracks Street to the station on their way to new quarters at Enniskillen. They boarded the 4 o'clock train of the Sligo and Northern Railways but the engine driver and fireman left the train and refused to go back until the soldiers got off. Eventually the soldiers left the train which then proceeded without them. On the following day another party of the Cornwallis boarded the train for Enniskillen. The railway men only agreed to move the train after ensuring that the soldiers had no arms or ammunition with them.

In an editorial on July 10<sup>th</sup> the Sligo Champion mentioned the "great disorganisation" caused by the railwaymen's action and said that Mayo and Galway were practically isolated. "Nobody can tell how soon the same may be the fate of Sligo" the article concluded. Collections had been held in some areas in County Sligo in aid of the "Railway workers strike fund".

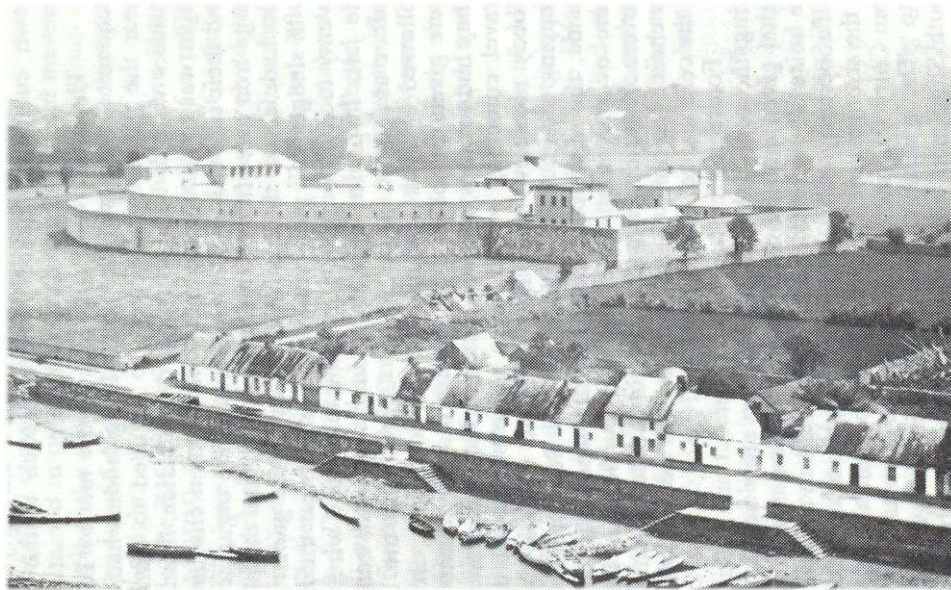
At the end of June others of the Cornwallis Regiment who had been in Sligo were moved to Tubbercurry, according to the Sligo Independent, and were replaced by a contingent from Ballyshannon. In Tubbercurry the military commandeered the Town Hall as living quarters and remained there until mid-August.

In late May or early June an ambush was planned to capture arms and gelignite by the Ballymote/Gurteen Volunteers. A patrol of RIC regularly used the same route when escorting a consignment of gelignite used by the County Engineer for blasting work in a quarry near Ballymote. The Battalion O/C M. J. Marren was a carpenter as was Thady McGowan and they made a coffin which was to be used in the ambush. The plan called for a group of about thirty Volunteers to act as mourners and march behind the coffin carried by other Volunteers. This funeral cortege would meet the police escort at a sharp bend in the road and another group of Volunteers would be in ambush position under cover. When the RIC would dismount and stand respectfully to let the funeral pass they would be called upon to surrender. Everything was set in place and the Volunteers waited a considerable time but no police turned up.

Eventually a car containing the County Engineer himself, Mr Kirwin, came on the scene and was stopped. It was discovered that the Engineer was carrying gelignite and this convinced the ambushers that no police escort would come that way on this day. They allowed the Engineer to go on his way and abandoned their positions. The Sligo Independent reported the incident saying that the men occupied an impregnable position "in battle position" and were armed with rifles and revolvers.

A Gurteen Volunteer, 23 year old John McDermott of Lisbally, died on Thursday May 13<sup>th</sup>. He had been imprisoned in Derry jail for six months after having been found guilty of taking part in the raid on Shaw's. His health began to fail some months after his release. He was buried with full republican honours, the coffin was draped with the tricolour. Another Gurteen Volunteer died soon afterwards, Patrick Doohil of Cloonloo. He died on May 28<sup>th</sup> after an illness lasting three months. He was described as QuarterMaster of the Gurteen Battalion, Irish Volunteers. Volleys were fired over his grave.

On the night of June 26<sup>th</sup>, Frank Carty was rescued from Sligo jail by a group of Volunteers. According to Carty he had heard that his trial was to be moved to Derry and held out no hope of being acquitted there. He communicated plans for his escape to Liam Pilkington and he and Seamus Devins were in charge of the rescue. According to Michael Nevin, Stephen O'Connor, a warder in Sligo jail, carried messages between Carty and Liam Pilkington who with Seamus Devins, planned the rescue. O'Connor had been a member of the Volunteers in Dublin while he worked in Mountjoy Jail before being transferred to Sligo.



*Sligo Jail*

Two cars carried ten men from south Sligo to assist in the rescue. Among those from Tubbercurry area were Mick O'Hara, who had been selected as Commandant of Tubbercurry Battalion after Carty's arrest, and Jack Brennan; from Collooney came Frank O'Beirne and Harry Brehony while from Ballymote came Thady McGowan. They stopped south of the cemetery and made their way on foot through the fields towards the jail. At a pre-arranged spot they met their comrades from Sligo town and from north Sligo. Not half a mile from the jail stood the military barracks and there were two police barracks in the town so there was a danger of forces coming from the town. To meet this eventuality, outposts of the Sligo town companies guarded the approach to the jail with orders to prevent interference from that quarter.

The men from south Sligo were met by Liam Pilkington who acquainted them with the plans. Long ladders had earlier been hidden near the jail and these were to be used to climb the walls. Rope ladders were to be used to get down inside. Tom Scanlon's job that night was to ensure the safety of the men climbing in by the ladder and their safe exit by the same route. He organised the taking of the large iron gates from Kilgallen's nearby and the placing of them as a blockade across the road leading up to the gaol. About twenty men with sledges and picks took up position near the main gate. Another twenty took up outpost duty. The telephone wire was cut leading to the jail. Thirteen men climbed the ladder and went inside while two men held the ladder. Harry Conroy was the first over the wall followed by Jack Brennan and Mick O'Hara. Brennan and O'Hara were given the job of making sure that the alarm bell was not rung. They had to cross a gravel path and Jack Brennan was afraid that the gravel crunching would make

noise so he put down his hat - "A bloody nice new one", he told Ernie O'Malley - to make a silent stepping stone. Liam Pilkington and Seamus Devins also went in. Inside, the night patrolman and the warder in charge of the alarm were overpowered. Five men led by Seamus Devins went to the Governors residence and woke him up demanding the keys. He had no choice but hand them over. He was tied up while the others went to the cells and released Carty.

Fourteen men had now to get out and Pilkington decided that using the rope ladder would be too slow so he had a prearranged signal given and the main doors were smashed in. "You could hear the noise all over the town", Jack Brennan said. In the dispatch sent to Tubbercurry, Liam Pilkington had particularly asked that five or six of the strongest men they could get be sent along. Michael Hargadon from Calry was one of those involved in smashing down the door.

The rescuers made good their escape. Liam had asked the south Sligo men where they thought Carty should be taken after the rescue and they advised the Cloonacool area as it was remote and had not been much used by people on the run up to then. He went with the Tubbercurry group and he stayed in the Cloonacool area for some time.

Tom Scanlon's Sligo Company was in charge of returning the ladders and sledges and this they did. The rescue was completed by one o'clock and there was no military activity for some time. "We could have carried the gaol away then stone by stone", said Tom Scanlon. Some hours later the alarm was raised and a lorry load of soldiers dashed to the jail crashing into the heavy iron gates across the avenue. Some soldiers were injured in the crash and these were the only injuries sustained in connection with the rescue. A rumour went about the town that the rescue had been the responsibility of a group of IRA from Cork, it was said that Cork accents were heard in some pubs in the town that night.

Jeremiah Mee, the RIC man who had been transferred to Kerry from Grange in July 1919, found himself in the middle of a police mutiny in Listowel in June 1920 when members of the RIC refused to take orders from Black and Tans. Another RIC man involved was Limerick man John Donovan who had served in County Sligo from 1914 to 1919 in Skreen, Keash, Mullaghroe and Ballymote. After the mutiny Mee and Donovan deserted and after some time in County Galway decided to make for Keash in County Sligo where both had been previously stationed. They arrived by train at Ballymote station and as they alighted they saw a sergeant and five constables on the platform all former colleagues who knew them well. However the RIC had

been ordered not to arrest the pair but to follow their movements carefully. The pair went into Ballymote and made contact with the local Volunteers.

They were entertained that night at Dawson's, in-laws of Alec McCabe. The following night they were guests of honour at a social in the White Hall, Keash. After spending some time in the Keash area the ex-RIC men moved to Ballintogher where Mee had also been stationed. There they made contact with two teacher members of the IRA Charlie MacMorrow and Con O'Rourke. The four men then travelled to Dublin to meet IRA leaders and report fully on the Listowel mutiny.

A Sligo born policeman, Thomas Doherty from Carrowmacbrine, Rathlee, was stationed in Listowel at the time of the police mutiny and resigned from the force soon afterwards. Two of his brothers Bartly and Patrick, who were serving in Mayo and Offaly also resigned within ten days.

***(ii) "Twas a bright evening in the long days at the beginning of July".***

The work of organising the Volunteers was going on. Liam Pilkington's report to Headquarters on May 11<sup>th</sup> says "work of forming new companies and outposts being pushed forward". In the police report for June the County Inspector said that the Irish Volunteers and Sinn Féin had been very busy during the month. "Owing to the large area without police supervision they have full scope for drilling and organising and they are taking full advantage of the opportunity". At the end of the following month he said: "They have now got possession of large areas of the county which cannot be patrolled owing to the lack of police and military transport".

*In Sligo town two IRA companies now existed. Tom Scanlon was the captain of "A" company. He went on the run towards the end of 1919 and remained on the run until the truce. Jim Vesey was Scanlon's Adjutant. A meeting was held of the officers of the Battalions of Sligo Brigade on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1920, Commandant Liam Pilkington presiding. The following were present: Brigade Adjutant Dominick McHugh, Brigade Quartermaster Harry Conry, Commandant Seamus Devins, Grange Battalion, Commandant O'Connor, Skreen Battalion, Commandant Deignan, Riverstown Battalion, Commandant Jack Brennan, Tubbercurry Battalion, Vice Commandant M. J. Marren, Ballymote Battalion, Vice Commandant S.*

*MacGowan, Sligo Battalion. There was no officer present from Gurteen Battalion. There is no mention of Collooney Battalion. If M. J. Marren was vice-commandant then Alec McCabe must have still been commandant of the Ballymote Battalion at this time. Jack Brennan told Ernie O'Malley that he was not appointed commandant of Tubbercurry Battalion until much later. The meeting dealt with organising Republican police and it was ordered that each company should appoint a policeman. The suppression of poteen making was also ordered. The Commandant asked Battalion Commandants to ensure that their monthly reports were sent in in time so that the Brigade returns could be compiled and sent in on time.*

In his July report to the Inspector General of the RIC Sligo County Inspector Neylon said that information had been recently obtained that National Sinn Féin leaders considered that Sligo was not doing enough for the cause and the Inspector said that he was concerned that this meant that "the campaign of murder against police is about to be put into active operation in this county". Whether this was true or mere scaremongering to obtain more military aid we do not know but IRA activity slowly increased in intensity for the rest of 1920 in County Sligo.

On July 26<sup>th</sup> an attack was made on an RIC cycling patrol at Ballyrush. This was the first action by the Riverstown Battalion. They knew the RIC regularly cycled from Castlebaldwin and eight IRA members armed with two revolvers and six shotguns took up position. "Twas a bright evening in the long days at the beginning of July at five o'clock in the evening" said Tom Deignan who was in charge. Some of the ambushers were concealed in the ruins of a house at the side of the road. When the five policemen reached the position they were called on to surrender and they did very quickly though not before one policeman, Rushe, received a wound to the head which caused the loss of an eye. The ambushers took the arms from the policemen and let them go. John Fallon, Captain of Geevagh Company, also took part in this action.

North Mayo Brigade of the IRA, which included some west Sligo companies, decided to attack and destroy the coastguard station at Enniscrone on the night of August 26<sup>th</sup>. It had been reported that military were about to take over the building as a barracks. There were six coastguards and four marines in the building at the time. Tom Ruane from Ballina was the Brigade O/C and he had planned the operation but he was ill on the night and was unable to be present. The Brigade Adjutant, a native of Westmeath, was in charge. Eamonn Hannon from Enniscrone was the Brigade Vice O/C but he was considered too well known to take part in a daylight job. Matt Kilcawley was the local Enniscrone Company Adjutant and he and most of the

fifty company members played some part in the evening's events. Telegraph wires were cut, poles were knocked down and scouts were posted. The nearest RIC barracks was Easkey, Enniscrone Barracks had been evacuated about six months previously.

The operation was timed for eight thirty and the men gathered at seven o'clock. It was towards the end of the holiday season and there were quite a number of visitors about. The Coastguard station was in the vicinity of the pier, a favourite place for bathing. The attackers moved in twos and threes mingling with the visitors. As the group made their way to the station they encountered two members of the garrison returning from the town and took them into custody. Four men armed with revolvers jumped the front wall and held up two armed coastguards in the watch-house. Other members of the rushing party then entered the main door and went to get control of the arms room which was on the first floor. They met two Marines in the corridor and one of the attackers "got panicky" and opened fire. One of the Marines then "blazed all round him with a revolver" but no one was hit and the two were overpowered. Another group of men were at the back to cover the rear doors. They took cover behind cocks of hay in the garden behind the station.

The wives of the coastguards were also in the building and some of these created quite a fuss and were difficult to restrain. The furniture and the prisoners' property was taken out and stored in the boathouse. All the arms and ammunition etc were collected and taken away. Among the items captured were six rifles, six revolvers, telescopes and binoculars, Verey pistols and a large quantity of gelignite which had been stored there for County Council work after the closure of police barracks. The material was taken away by one group and buried about a mile and a half away near the shore. Later the material was sent on to the Active Service units in the North Mayo Brigade. Another group stayed and burned the station with petrol and paraffin. The building was completely destroyed and the attackers left about 12 midnight. The captured Marines and Coastguards were released.

On the following Saturday morning at about 3 am three motor lorries of military and police raided Enniscrone and four men were arrested and taken to Sligo jail, M. J. Tolan, W. O'Neill, J. Dowd and J. Kelly. None of these were actually at the taking or burning of the Station though the last three were on outpost duty. They also raided other houses in the area but the people they sought were "not at home". Three of those arrested were later charged in Belfast with having taken part in the attack. O'Dowd and Kelly were sentenced to one year with hard

labour and O'Neill got six months. At the court case it was claimed that one hundred men had taken part in the attack.

*(iii) "God help us if this is what we are to get under an Irish Republic".*

Early in July a very interesting discussion took place at Sligo Board of Guardians reported only in the Sligo Independent. A communication from the Local Government Board stated that ambulance drivers' wages had been increased from 25/- to 39/- per week. A resolution was put by Mr Costello, seconded by John Lynch that the award be paid to the Sligo drivers. An amendment by Mr McGauran seconded by James Devins that no increase be paid was carried. The voting was as follows: For the increase: John Lynch, Hughes, W. Pilkington, William Silke, Costello and Henry Depew, Chairman. Against: James Devins, Eugene Gilbride, P. Gillen, E. Haran, Frank O'Beirne, M. Carroll, B. Kilfeather, P. McGauran, P. McGowan, Martin Roddy, M. Leonard and T. McCannon. B. Flynn abstained.

A similar increase for the night nurse in the Workhouse was proposed and rejected. Mr Devins said that if any of the officials didn't like the salary they could walk out. Alderman Lynch responded "God help us if this is what we are to get under an Irish Republic. Labour today is fighting Ireland's battles and I stand here and protest against the treatment of the workers by some people here who were supposed to be the friends of the workers when the elections were on". Frank O'Beirne said that they were all friends of the workers whom they wanted to see fairly treated but they had to safeguard the ratepayers as well.

The local press regularly printed the names of Justices of the Peace who resigned their commissions as a protest against the British. James Durcan and J. C. Burke, Tubbercurry resigned theirs in late July. So did B. J. Conlon, Geevagh, John McLoughlin, Knocknageela, A. de Cogan, Heapstown and M. J. McManus, Tubbercurry. In early August it was reported that Roger Davey, Ballisodare, James Keane, Ballymote, Edward Moran, Ballintogher, William Henry, Achonry, John J. Gallagher, Curry, James A. Quinn, Templeboy had resigned. In September the secretary of Sligo County Council, Mr. Michael Keane, said that he had resigned his commission some months previously.



Three RIC men from Kilmovee, County Mayo, who had been witnesses at a court case in Sligo town, were taken from the train at Curry and held prisoner for some time in a local creamery. When freed their uniforms were removed and they had to walk back to Tubbercurry.

On the evening of Sunday July 18<sup>th</sup> a number of members of Tubbercurry District Council were arrested by military while cycling near Cloonacool. These included Robert Nicholson, Chairman of the Board of Guardians who was found to have an unloaded revolver in his pocket. He was taken by military lorry to Sligo jail. The others, including M. J. O'Hara D.C., J. Brennan Co.C. and J. Gallagher D.C., were later released. On Monday 26<sup>th</sup> at a meeting of Tubbercurry Board of Guardians, a strong protest was entered against the arrests and it was proposed that neither police nor military "doing England's dirty work in this country" would be admitted to the Infirmary or Workhouse during their stay in Tubbercurry. Robert Nicholson was later removed to Belfast jail. He was court-martialled at Victoria Barracks, Belfast on August 3<sup>d</sup> and refused to recognise the court. He was sentenced to two years hard labour one of which was remitted. Once there he was treated as a common criminal and he and two others went on hunger strike for political prisoner status on August 16<sup>th</sup>. Soon afterwards he was deported to England and was lodged in Wormwood Scrubs prison. He was ordered off the hunger strike by the prison commandant after seventeen days.

On Tuesday, July 20<sup>th</sup>, the Courthouse, Sligo, was taken over by the military. In the afternoon a dozen or more army lorries carrying men and equipment drew up in Albert Street, and the courthouse was entered. The gate was locked and entrance was refused to many of the Council officials who worked there. On Thursday morning Mr Keane secretary of the Council and the County Surveyor Mr Kirwan, were refused permission to go to their offices. "The entire administration of the public affairs of the County have been suspended", reported the Sligo Champion which speculated that the public documents, minute books etc. kept in the building were being examined. The Courthouse was evacuated by the military on Friday July 23<sup>d</sup> and it was stated that the military left for Belfast.

*The priest who had had the row with Alec McCabe when McCabe was teaching at Drumnagranchy N.S. again made the news in June 1920. A group of Republicans were holding a church gate collection at a church where Fr Bourke was stationed and according to the Volunteers he assaulted them on June 30<sup>th</sup>. One of the Volunteers, James Gildea, was reported as having been absent from work because of his being assaulted. A letter from Sligo Brigade*

*Commandant, Pilkington, also mentioned other cases of harassment of Volunteers by Fr Bourke and asked Headquarters what should be done. There is no record of the reply.*

*(iv) 'Sligo was in a lawless condition during August and appears to be going from bad to worse'.*

The County Inspector reported at the end of August: "There is no respect for law and order and the handful of police and military in the county are so inadequate that not only Sinn Féiners but law abiding people look upon them with contempt".

A large force of military and police raided the Gurteen district in the early hours of Friday August 20<sup>th</sup>. The house of Volunteer leader Michael J. Marren was one of the targets of the raiders. As it happened Marren and Jim Hunt had spent the night there. The pair had been in the Tubbercurry area the previous day organising companies there and had "chanced" staying in Marren's house on their return. They were sleeping upstairs and were fully armed and had grenades also. When the alarm was raised they dressed and came downstairs, guns at the ready.

The raiders were hammering at the kitchen door. The pair got into a workshop off the kitchen. From there they got out to the barn through a hidden escape door which Marren had constructed. On looking out the front and back doors of the barn they found that each escape was blocked by police. As they discussed their next move the front barn door was opened and a policeman stood there. Marren opened fire and wounded him, the police took cover and the pair, seeing the way clear, sprinted out the back door and made for a field wall about 50 yards away. They were fired on by the police but were not injured. They returned fire from the shelter of the wall and then made good their escape.

Una, Michael Marren's sister, had left the house at the arrival of the Crown forces and summoned the help of local Volunteers including Pat Hunt and Johnnie Cawley but when they arrived the forces had gone. Hunt and Marren realised that they would probably be back with reinforcements so with the aid of the local Volunteers, they removed a dump of weapons, mostly shotguns, and ammunition from near the house. As they were finishing three lorry-loads of military approached and the Volunteers opened fire on them from the cover of a hill. "The military took cover and made no serious effort after our fire to intercept us or even to fire as we retreated", said Hunt.

Many other houses in the Gurteen area were searched on that day and three men were arrested, Matthew McManus, John Finn and Frank McDonagh. It seems that these arrests were the result of a bizarre episode where some British soldiers appeared in Gurteen claiming to have deserted and asked for work. They got work with Matthew McManus and it was said got to know a lot about Volunteer activity in the area. They then returned to barracks and one of them was said to have led the searchers.

In Victoria Barracks Belfast on Monday September 6<sup>th</sup> one of those arrested at Gurteen in August was charged before a court-martial with aiding and abetting two privates of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, East Yorks Regiment stationed at Drumdoe, County Roscommon to conceal themselves. The man, John Finn, replied that as a soldier of the Irish Republic he would not recognise the court. The soldiers gave evidence that they left their regiment on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, went to Keash where they were given the names of some people in Gurteen who might help them. In Gurteen Post Office they asked for John Finn and met him. He took them for dinner to the Hotel and subsequently to Kelly's Hotel where they were to work. Finn, they said, asked questions about the number of soldiers stationed at Drumdoe and their morale. A few days afterwards they gave themselves up at Ballymote police barracks. John Finn was sentenced to two years hard labour of which eighteen months were remitted.

Around this time the IRA in the Conway's Cross/Geevagh area were contacted by a British soldier who also claimed that he had deserted. The IRA were sceptical and the man was court martialled in Gleann Hall. Among the officers involved in the court martial were Alec McCabe, Tom Duignan, Tom O'Donnell and M. J. Marren. The soldier, a lieutenant from the forces at Drumdoe near Ballinafad whose name is given as John Watt, was found guilty of being a spy and was executed. He was buried in a bog and his body was accidentally uncovered by turf cutters in May 1962. It was re-interred in Carrick an Teampall graveyard, Conway's Cross.

Sometime early in August the military evacuated Ballymote and the Sligo Independent reported that a large group of Volunteers assembled with the intention of attacking the RIC barracks in Ballymote on the weekend of August 21<sup>st</sup>. For some reason, the paper reported, the attack was called off. "Perhaps the commander-in-chief did not turn up", it said. This may be the same intended attack mentioned by Paddy Dwyer. According to him a party of IRA were gathered for an attack in Ballymote when word came that the attack was cancelled. On enquiring

the reason they were told: "cancelled from Headquarters". Among Ballymote Volunteers this phrase became a catch cry.

A Sligo native was in the news away from home in August 1920. This was John (Jack) Leonard from Tourlestrane, an active member of the IRA, who was working in Belfast as a taxi driver. Following the murder of the Lord Mayor of Cork, Thomas MacCurtain, an inquest brought in a verdict of wilful murder against the British Prime Minister and others including a District Inspector Swanzy who was believed to have been implicated in the killing. Swanzy was immediately transferred to a safer place of duty in Lisburn in Ulster but the IRA soon found out his whereabouts. In July 1920 four men travelled from Cork to Belfast, commandeered a taxi and got Jack Leonard to drive it to Lisburn. The taxi however broke down on the way, the pin of the accelerator having sheared off, and the attempt to "get" Swanzy had to be abandoned.

A month later two of the original four again travelled to Belfast, met two others there and got Jack to drive them to Lisburn in his employer's taxi. When Swanzy was spotted Jack kept the motor running while the other left and killed their victim. Jack then drove the killers back to Belfast and they all got away. However a doctor's wife had seen the car with the motor running and becoming suspicious noted the number. Jack was taken in for questioning and some papers relating to the Volunteers were found in his room. He was arrested and was twice brought up before the civil court before being handed over to a military court and put on trial. He was defended by the famous Tim Healy but was found guilty and sentenced to death. This was later commuted to life imprisonment. He was released during the Truce.

On October 17<sup>th</sup> Thomas Kelly, aged 27, from Ballygawley, County Sligo, was shot dead when military raided the Banba Hall, Dublin. He was stated to have taken part in Easter Week and to have been an employee of Grogan's Pub at the North Wall. His remains were brought to Collooney station on the 19<sup>th</sup> and there was a large funeral procession to Ballygawley. District Inspector Fallon of the RIC, a native of Geevagh, was wounded in an ambush at Dingle County Kerry in the summer of 1920.

A Sligo born member of the RIC, Constable Harte, was killed in an ambush at Rineen, County Clare on September 20<sup>th</sup>. He had been a member of the force for about two years. On August 13<sup>th</sup>, a Sligo born member of the RIC, Constable Brennan, was shot dead in Dundalk and

his remains were interred in Tubbercurry. He was stated to have had 21 years' service in the force.

Bernard Conway, a member of the RIC and brother of Andrew Conway of Cliffony, County Sligo a leading member of the IRA in north Sligo, was stationed in Cookstown RIC Barracks in early 1920. With him were three others from the west of Ireland Thomas Hargaden, Denis A. Leonard and John O'Boyle all of whom were pro-Sinn Féin. Most of their comrades in Cookstown were North of Ireland Protestants and loyalists. The four made up their minds that they would help the IRA raid the barracks. They made contact with local units of the IRA and eventually a raid was planned for 2 am on June 17<sup>th</sup>. Constables Conway and O'Boyle were sent on temporary duty to nearby stations by the time the raid was to take place but the raid went ahead. Constable Leonard came downstairs about 1 am and unlocked a door at the rear of the premises as arranged with the IRA. Constable Hargaden had arranged that he was on duty that night and when the IRA arrived they tied him up. The raiders then started to collect all the arms and ammunition in the place helped by Leonard. Some of the raiders tried to enter the Head Constable's bedroom but it was locked. He awoke and shots were fired. This woke all the other policemen and a gun battle took place. One of the raiders received a severe wound from which he later died. As a result of the raid Constable Leonard was dismissed and warned to leave the country at once. The other three constables including Conway resigned within the following three months.

The local papers at this time carried the names of members of the RIC who resigned from the force because of their opposition to the government policy in Ireland. In September these included Constable Charles Mulligan, Ballintogher, Sgt. James Henry a native of Highwood resigned in Galway and Sgt. Michael McNulty, Tubbercurry. In early August the Irish Bulletin reported the resignation of Head Constable Davis, RIC, Tubbercurry who was stated to have had 36 years service. Also said to have resigned was Constable Carey of Enniscrone who had thirteen years service. In September the Roscommon Herald reported that Martin McDermott Roe, who had spent twenty years in the RIC, had resigned and had returned home to his native Kilshalvey, County Sligo. Likewise, Constable D. Gurhy of Ross, Riverstown, stationed at Mohill, resigned after 27 years service. Constable Martin Walsh of the RIC, a native of Sligo, who fought with the Irish Guards in France during the Great War, resigned during October.

Pogroms in Belfast were causing concern early in August and moves were made to boycott Belfast goods. At a private meeting of the Dáil on August 6<sup>th</sup> attended by both Sligo deputies a motion was passed imposing an embargo on goods from Belfast. Countess Markievicz opposed the motion as "playing into the hands of the enemy and giving them a good excuse for partition". Alec McCabe proposed that a Dáil committee be set up to consider the whole "Ulster Question" including in its terms of reference the intimidation of nationalists, the unionists demand for local self-government and the possibility of a scheme of federal government with "a liberal scheme of devolution". The resolution was passed only after it was agreed that the terms of reference be left to the Ministry and that reference to the "Ulster Question" be deleted.

A resolution was passed at Tubbercurry District Council on August 9<sup>th</sup> asking traders in the town to sever trading connections with Belfast firms. On August 31<sup>st</sup> at a meeting of Sligo Trades Council the Belfast boycott was discussed and a public meeting called for the following Friday. On the Wednesday night the same matter was discussed at the Corporation meeting and it was pointed out that Councillors were free to attend the Friday night meeting if they wished. A meeting of Sligo County Council at the same time heard a resolution from Dáil Éireann on the same subject and Seamus MacGowan and James Devins were appointed to represent the Council at the Friday meeting. At the meeting the chair was taken by the Mayor, Mr Fitzpatrick and other speakers included D. A. Mulcahy, J. J. Clancy, Alderman Lynch, P. Fahy, National Union of Railwaymen and R. G. Bradshaw. A resolution was passed breaking off all relations with the city of Belfast and affected areas until the pogrom had ceased and all the victims were reinstated in their positions and fully compensated for loss of time and property.

In Ballymote on August 27<sup>th</sup> a meeting was held in the Loftus Hall to consider steps to enforce the Belfast boycott. Delegates were present from local Sinn Féin, Transport Union and traders. It was decided to ask every trader in the town to sign a pledge to cease trading with the merchants of the north east. It was stated in the Roscommon Herald that the Ballymote creamery withdrew its account from the Ulster Bank, Ballymote as part of the Boycott. In some areas shops were visited and if Belfast goods were found on sale the shopkeeper was fined by the Volunteers. Michael Marren visited a shop in Chaffpool and fined the shopkeeper £10 for having Belfast goods. Jack Brennan complained that Marren had encroached on his territory by this action.

Michael Coleman, captain of Coolaney company, said with reference to the Belfast Boycott: "We used to hold up a goods train three times a week". Harold McBrien says that in the Ballintogher area they frequently raided the trains from Enniskillen and removed Belfast goods. They also raided shops which were selling similar goods. "The goods collected were usually destroyed, but in some cases they were sold and the monies put into our funds. We of course made good use of cigarettes when we found them", he says.

## 15. AMBUSHES AND REPRISALS: AUG - NOV 1920.

"No part of Ireland was free from violence and bloodshed during the late summer and autumn months" says Dorothy Macardle in "The Irish Republic". Ambushes and reprisals were common everywhere. "Police stations are too few and the force too small to cope with the state of affairs" the Sligo County Inspector reported at the end of June. There was only one solution, he said, "Nothing save strong military measures, and increase of troops would be likely to check the disorder". "The forces of the Crown in the county were utterly inadequate", he said in August.

### *(i) "Five armed police approaching in single file!"*

With the situation deteriorating weekly the government decided on action. Recruiting for the RIC was started in England and by the late summer of 1920 there were just over 1,000 of these new recruits among the RIC in Ireland. They became known as "Black and Tans" and by the Truce there were over 7,000 strong. A further measure was the recruiting of a special Auxiliary division of the RIC which began at the end of July 1920. Robert Kee (in The Green Flag) describes the Auxiliaries thus: "Their role was envisaged from the start as more mobile than that of the regular RIC and Black and Tans. Divided into companies of about a hundred men each they were distributed as independent units to different bases in particularly disturbed areas, and from these they emerged periodically in their Crossley tenders or motor lorries, asserting their presence by a liberal discharge of ammunition in a search for trouble". There were only 500 Auxiliaries in Ireland by September but they soon made their presence felt even in County Sligo.

There were extensive raids for arms in the Sligo area at the beginning of September. The Rosses Point and Knocknarea areas were especially visited by armed men. Houses raided included those of Captain Fitzpatrick R.M. and H. L'Estrange, Lisnalgur. Arms and ammunition were taken in many houses. In connection with these raids a letter appeared in the Sligo Champion on September 11<sup>th</sup> from H. Herbert Lambert of Cloverhill. He said that his house had been raided for arms on the previous Tuesday at 2am. "Whoever the leader may be, he behaved as a gentleman and the conduct of the raiders throughout was most exemplary and certainly impressed me favourably. I shall not now waste time and space discussing my own feeling and the humiliation of the position brought about in my humble opinion through the obstinacy, ignorance and incompetence of a government I wholly distrust". `



What was described by the Roscommon Herald as "a race between Volunteers and police to secure arms" took place in the Ballymote district towards the end of September. The Volunteers carried out widespread raids for arms in the district on September 20<sup>th</sup> while on the following night, Tuesday, the police called to houses where guns were kept to find that in most cases the Volunteers had preceded them. "The action of both parties in taking up all arms will be appreciated nowhere except among the vermin which can now prey on the farmers' crops without any danger of being disturbed", said the Herald.

Around this time there was a raid for arms on Cultibar House near Coolaney, the residence of Fred O'Hara. As a result the police raided the Coolaney area on September 24<sup>th</sup> and Michael Coleman, merchant, Coolaney, and his son, also Michael, were arrested. Some rifle stocks were said to have been found in Coleman's barn. Pat Gallagher and his son Martin Dan of Creevaun were also arrested on suspicion of involvement in the raid. The Gallaghers were released some days later but Michael Coleman senior was charged in Derry with having shotguns without a permit. After a soldier stated that he found the barrels of two single barrelled shot guns in an open shed the defendant, aged 61, was released. On Tuesday October 19<sup>th</sup> a raid for arms took place near Riverstown. The householder refused to give up his gun and was wounded when the raiders opened fire. He was removed to the County Infirmary where his wounds were treated.

Some time in the last week of August 1920 Commandants M. J. Marren and Jim Hunt were in Ballaghaderreen where they learned that some Ballaghaderreen policeman would travel to Frenchpark Petty Sessions to give evidence in some licensing cases on September 1<sup>st</sup>. This seemed an excellent chance to get some much needed arms and the two made plans to ambush the police. The plan was that a party of about thirty would ambush the police who were expected to number about twelve. The attackers were armed with four or five rifles, shotguns and revolvers. A whistle was to be the signal and it was expected that with superior numbers and the element of surprise the ambush could be successful without any bloodshed.

The men selected were from Gurteen, Cloonloo, Monasteredan and Killaraght and they met in a sympathiser's house in Killaraght on the night of August 31<sup>st</sup>. They had some "refreshments" and sang patriotic songs until the early hours of the morning when they made their way to the ambush position at Ratra. They were in position by 7am. The main body of attackers was on the south side of the main Ballaghaderreen - Frenchpark road, hidden from

view by a whitethorn hedge. About 300 yards on the Ballaghaderreen side was a bye road and here Captain Thomas McDonagh and Joseph Finnegan were in position. Finnegan had field-glasses and he was to report as soon as possible the strength of the enemy patrol to the main group. McDonagh was to cycle up the bye-road on the approach of the police and to return when they had passed to prevent the escape of any of them back to Ballaghaderreen. Jimmy Dwyer was about 50 yards on the Frenchpark side of the main body with orders to let no police through. Jim Hunt himself was on the north side of the road opposite the main body of attackers with a good view of the whole area.

At about 10 am Finnegan came cycling up to the main body and reported "five armed police approaching in single file; about fifty yards separating the first three; two cycling together one hundred yards to the rear". Sergeant Bourke led the way followed by Constables McCarthy and Cooke. Bringing up the rear cycling almost side by side came Constables Murphy and Hopely. Finnegan then joined Dwyer at the Frenchpark end of the ambush.

The police formation was unexpected and caused major problems, covering as it did over 200 yards from front to rear. The main body of ambushers covered only 50 yards. Hunt decided to let them pass through and attack on their return journey. No signal whistle sounded. In spite of this however Dwyer and Finnegan kept to their orders of not allowing any police through and so when the leading cyclist reached their position they opened fire and the first policeman fell and lay prone on the ground. The second policeman, McCarthy, was called upon twice by Finnegan to surrender but instead he raised his rifle. Both Finnegan and Hunt fired and the policeman fell, badly wounded. He died later. The third RIC man, Cooke, was opposite the main group and he shouted for mercy. Hunt ordered that he be disarmed and not shot.

The two policemen bringing up the rear, Murphy and Hopely, heard the firing and took cover at the roadside about 200 yards back from the main ambush group. They were out of range of the shotguns and pistols and were themselves armed with service rifles. They opened fire on the ambushers. Thomas McDonagh was now on his way up the road towards the main group. He stopped and engaged the two policemen in fire. Murphy, aged 24, fell dead. McDonagh and Hopely continued to fire. McDonagh fell to the ground, the policeman headed back towards Ballaghaderreen. Marren and some others gave chase but the policeman made good his escape by commandeering a lorry and they returned to the ambush scene. When his comrades reached McDonagh he was dead and when his revolver was examined it was found

that only one shot had gone off all the others had failed to go off, faulty ammunition had caused his death. Aware of the danger of police and military from Ballaghaderreen arriving very quickly the ambush party left leaving the body of their dead comrade behind. They took with them the captured arms, two rifles, two revolvers and a shotgun.

The following men from Ballymote Battalion took part in the Ratra ambush: M. J. Marren, Thady McGowan, Jim Molloy, John McManamy, Tom Connolly and Paddy Connor. Later when the RIC arrived from Ballaghaderreen they took McDonagh's body with them, dragged it through the streets of the town and dumped it outside the barracks. It was later handed over to relatives for burial. Scenes of destruction occurred in Ballaghaderreen that night when the bodies of the policemen were brought back.

At a Sligo County Council meeting at the end of September a vote of sympathy was passed to the relatives of Thomas McDonagh "who died fighting for Ireland". McDonagh had been born in America but had been brought to Cloonloo as a child and had been raised by his Grandmother. "He would have been a great man", says Jim Hunt, "He was intelligent and he was a fine cut of a man."

*(ii) "Oh Nora, the soldiers that night were like so many devils let loose from Hell".*

After his escape from Sligo jail Frank Carty stayed on the run in the south Sligo area, spending a lot of time on the Ox Mountains in the Tubbercurry/Cloonacool area. There were a number of secret dug outs in this area and he and others on the run spent some time in these. They also were able to stay in safe houses in the area. On Sunday July 25<sup>th</sup> Frank Carty was reported to have attended a Volunteer review at Curry. He got a great reception and left afterwards "for an unknown destination". He chaired a meeting of Tubbercurry District Council on August 15<sup>th</sup> and was accorded a great ovation.

According to John Cowell, son of Dr. Cowell of Skreen, Carty was a frequent and welcome visitor to the doctor's house. After one visit the house was surrounded at dawn by "Tans" obviously having been "tipped off" about Carty's visit. "Some peered through the windows at us, as others bashed on the doors, back and front. They dashed all over the house, turning everything upside down." Carty had left during the night and the police had to leave empty handed. Mrs Cowell verbally attacked them, saying that as an Englishwoman herself she

was ashamed of them. "The officer asked her why the hell she didn't go home before the Irish made a 'Shinner' of her."

A cycling party of four RIC carrying despatches was held up near Chaffpool on the Tubbercurry - Bunninadden road on Tuesday August 10<sup>th</sup>. It was a very hot day. About twenty men under Frank Carty had taken up positions on both sides of the road before dawn to await the cycling party from Bunninadden. When the police reached the position they dismounted to walk up the steep hill. Mick O'Hara stood up and said "Hello there!" They turned his way and the ambushers on the other side rose and covered them. The police had no option but to surrender. Their weapons, two revolvers, one rifle, a shotgun, one Mills bomb, some ammunition, their uniforms and their bicycles were taken. They were tied up and left in an outhouse under guard. They were later released and made their way back to Bunninadden. Among those who took part with Carty were Michael J. Marren, Pat Hunt, John Cawley and Paddy Gallagher from Gurteen, Thady McGowan and Pat Coleman, Ballymote, Frank Higgins, Culfadda, M. J. O'Hara, Charlie Gildea, Rev Michael Henry, Jack Walker, Joe Durkin and Jack Brennan.

Rev. Michael Henry, a native of Ballymote, was at this time a curate in Curry. Fr. Henry had studied for the priesthood at Salamanca, Spain and was a Doctor of Theology and a Doctor of Philosophy and was often referred to as "The Doc Henry". He could speak seven languages. He had been on the teaching staff of St. Nathy's Ballaghaderreen but was moved from there to Kiltimagh where he was chaplain to a nursing home. This he saw as a demotion by the Bishop, Dr. Morrisroe, with whom he did not often see eye to eye especially on matter of politics. He became a chaplain to the British army during the Great War and saw action in France and elsewhere. When he returned he was appointed curate at Curry. At Nathy's he had met Martin Brennan who was a student there and was very friendly with him again when Brennan was on the run, giving both spiritual and military assistance. "He gave military advice to me for I consulted him whenever I was planning anything" Martin Brennan told Ernie O'Malley.

*An RIC man had come home on leave to Mass Hill near Cloonacool. The morning he was to return off leave he was kidnapped by local Volunteers and his bicycle left where it would be soon found. The IRA thought that his wife would rush into the Barracks in Tubbercurry and tell the police. The IRA had an ambush prepared for the police who would come out searching for him. Jack Brennan was sent into Tubbercurry to watch the barracks and tell the others when the police were informed. Nobody went in to the barracks and Brennan returned to where Carty*

*and twelve others were waiting. On his way he met a sister of the kidnapped policeman. "Why don't you go in to the Barracks and tell the police?" he said. "My father was a Fenian", she replied, "and I'm never going to go to them". The policeman was released and he did not go back to his barracks.*

Frank Carty organised a number of sniping attacks on the barracks at Tubbercurry. Just after midnight on the night of Thursday August 26<sup>th</sup> Carty and three others took up positions near the barracks. Carty and Joseph Durcan were behind walls on both sides armed with service rifles while Thomas S. McCarrick and M. J. O'Hara were at the rear armed with revolvers. Fire was opened and continued for about half an hour. The garrison replied and according to Carty continued firing until dawn by which time the attackers had long gone.

A similar attack took place at Tubbercurry police barracks on the night of Tuesday, August 31<sup>st</sup>. Frank Carty, Thomas S. McCarrick and M. J. O'Hara opened fire on a patrol of six police who were entering the barracks about midnight. McCarrick had a Colt revolver and the others had service rifles. Two police were injured, Walsh in the knee and Kenny in the thigh. Kenny was able to make his way back to the barracks but Walsh had to get drag himself to shelter in a gateway until the firing stopped. The attackers fired about sixteen rounds. "A moment later the air in the vicinity of the barracks was alive with bullets crashing from every window of the barrack into the darkness of the night" according to the press report. None of the attackers were hit. Both injured policemen were removed to hospital in Dublin where they recovered.

On August 15<sup>th</sup> soldiers conveying a field kitchen by mule and cart to Tubbercurry from Finner Camp were held up by armed and masked Volunteers near Carineara. The cart and kitchen were broken up and the mules taken. A large scale raid was carried out by military in the Aclare area on the night of Sunday, September 19<sup>th</sup>. Four lorries of military drove into Tubbercurry and stopped at the Barracks before heading on to Aclare. There a well-known businessman Hugh O'Hara was arrested. The Champion speculated that this was a case of mistaken identity. Presumably the target was M. J. O'Hara. It was reported that a number of shots was fired by the military as they drove through Tubbercurry. After the two sniping incidents at Tubbercurry police barracks there was considerable police activity in the Tubbercurry area.



*Frank Carty*

The following incident was recounted in the Sligo Champion after Carty's untimely death in 1942. Among letters captured by men under Carty's command were demands from a prominent men's outfitting establishment in Dublin asking the District Inspector in Tubbercurry to pay a long overdue bill for an amount in the region of £60. A few days later in another mail raid they captured a salary cheque of close to £100 being sent to the D.I. They forged the D.I. signature on the cheque and sent it on to the outfitters' with a covering note expressing regret at the delay and asking that the balance be held to the District Inspector's credit. For weeks after the mails captured by the IRA contained letters from the District Inspector asking why his cheque had not been sent and letters from the Paymaster saying that it had been sent. These letters the IRA passed on after reading and enjoying their contents!

A new District Inspector, James Joseph Brady, was appointed temporarily to the Tubbercurry area and intensive activity resulted. Brady, then aged 32, had served in the Great War and had previously been stationed in Ballymena. He was a native of Ballymoney, County Antrim. The IRA up to this had only four or five rifles in the Tubbercurry area. They had got two Martini rifles from the Redmondite Volunteers and other weapons from police in the hold up at Chaffpool on August 10<sup>th</sup>. In early September having collected some money from merchants they sent Mick O'Hara with £180 to Headquarters in Dublin and he purchased six Lee Enfield rifles, 1,000 rounds of .303 ammunition, some hand grenades and gelignite. The arms and

ammunition was sent a week later packed in straw sent as goods from merchants in Dublin to merchants in Tubbercurry.

Carty himself was laid up at this time. He had been at a function in a hall in the area early in September when the alarm was raised, enemy troops were approaching. In his rush to escape Carty cut his leg on wire and the wound became badly infected. When he recovered, he says, he made plans to "get" D. I. Brady. It was known that Brady regularly travelled to Sligo and back via Ballymote and an ambush position was selected at Chaffpool about three miles from Tubbercurry.

On the morning of Thursday, September 30<sup>th</sup> Carty, together with nine to fourteen men occupied the chosen position. The men included M. J. O'Hara, James Killoran, T. S. McCarrick, Martin Brennan, Jack Brennan, Jack Walker, Charles Gildea and Pat Hunt. They were armed with eight service rifles, a Martini rifle and a large Colt revolver. Instructions were issued that fire was to be concentrated on the cab. D. I. Brady had accompanied a sergeant and six constables to Sligo that morning for a supply of coal, Tubbercurry being cut off by rail for some time. It was evening before the police returned. D. I. Brady sat in the front beside the driver, all the others were in the back. As the tender entered the ambush position fire was opened particularly at the driver in order to halt the tender. However the driver was not hit but Brady seems to have received much of the fire intended for the driver. He was hit at least five times. Head Constable O'Hara was also seriously wounded and Constable Brown was slightly wounded in the head. Fire was returned by the police but none of the attackers were hit. The tender did not stop and drove at speed to Tubbercurry police barracks where the injured were treated by Dr Flannery. D. I. Brady died of his wounds in the barracks about three hours later.

Frank Carty says that in anticipation of reprisals he sent a group of men under the charge of Charles Gildea to take up position in the vicinity of Rathscanlon creamery near Tubbercurry. Their instructions were to defend the place if it was attacked by military or police. M. J. O'Hara, T. S. McCarrick, Jack Brennan and Carty himself went into Tubbercurry after dark and took up positions in the grounds of the old church which had a good view of the square and of Cooke's which they expected to be a prime target of any reprisals because the shop assistants there were well known to be republicans.

When news reached Sligo of the ambush a large force of police and military drove to the scene accompanied by District Inspector Russell. They arrived in Tubbercurry sometime before 11 pm. At about 11 a large force of police and Black and Tans came out from the Barracks shooting off a few hundred rounds in the square. Some broke into the business premises of E. J. Cooke and set fire to it. Carty's group opened fire on those in the square and they retreated to the barracks. They soon came out again in greater numbers firing as they came. Carty says that he realised their position was untenable and they retreated. Jack Brennan says that they had only four rifles and no more than six rounds each.

According to Jack Brennan, Carty had positioned a group of five lads at the Sligo end of Tubbercurry armed with hand grenades which they were to use against lorries of police or military if they came from Sligo. This group was completely ineffective and according to Brennan took no action when the lorries of Auxiliaries arrived.

Reports say that District Inspector Russell did his best to restrain the police and military but they were almost impossible to control. They attacked particularly shops and business premises believed to be owned by republican sympathisers. E. J. Cooke was a strong nationalist but had never been associated with the Sinn Féin movement although many of his workers were. His premises were an early target and were set on fire. Mr Cooke himself and some ten or twelve assistants who lived on the premises had to flee and spend the night in an old quarry. Mullarkey's hardware establishment also suffered considerably. Doors and windows were smashed, inflammable material was soaked in petrol and set alight. Luke Armstrong was another long associated with nationalism and his premises were also set on fire. When some people tried to fight the fire police levelled rifles at them and ordered them not to interfere.

One of the police was said to have walked up and down the street playing an accordion plundered from one of the wrecked shop. Other houses fired were John Coleman's, Michael Gallagher's and Durkan's. Also damaged were the houses of Cryan Bros., Mrs Marren, J. Henehan, B. Madden, J. Dunleavy, Mrs Hunt, M. Cunnane, John Mullarkey and Philip Durcan. Some people tried to save burning buildings. When Durcan's was set on fire a daughter, Cissy, ran out and screamed that her mother was a widow and quenched the flames with buckets of water.

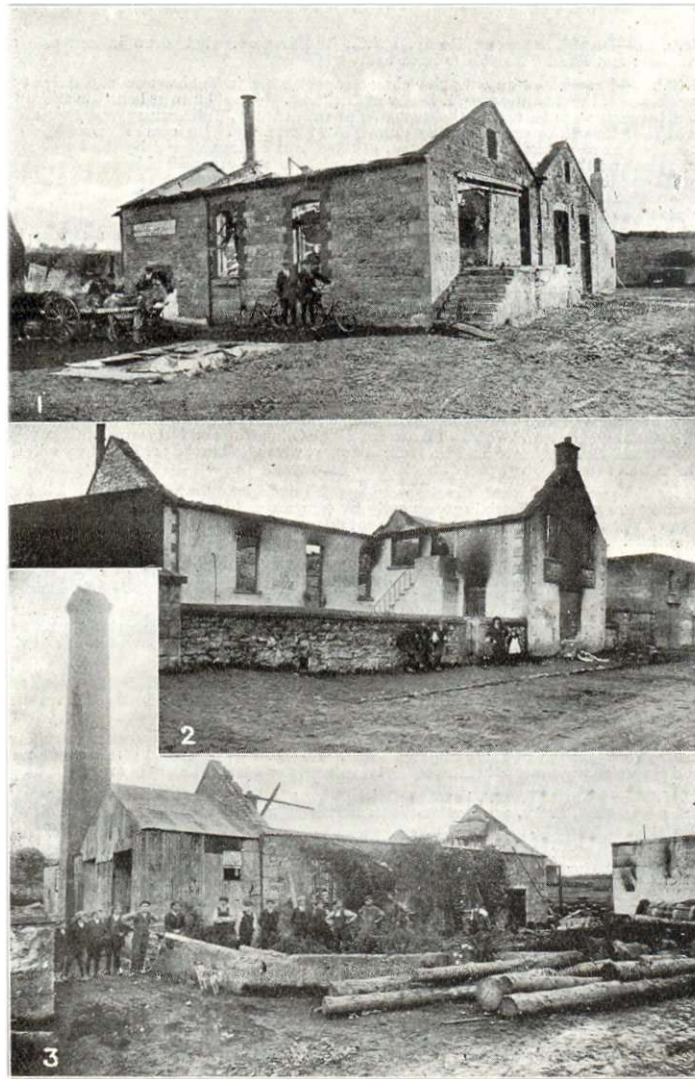


In a letter written on October 5<sup>th</sup> by Mrs Brigid Gilmartin of Tubbercurry to her daughter in New York she gives a graphic account of the terrible night. "Oh, Nora, the soldiers that night were like so many devils let loose from Hell. As they broke the fine plate glass windows, fanlights and doors, they were calling out the Sinn Féiners and saying 'Where are they? The bloody swine.' Some of them took a melodeon from Mullarkey's window and were playing the air of the Minstrel Boy, and laughing and jeering at the destruction of the town."

Tubbercurry creamery at Rathscanlon was next a target for the rioters. The group sent by Carty did not wait there the whole night and were gone when the police arrived. The creamery manager was Thomas Murrice who was strongly associated with Sinn Féin almost from the beginning and was a Sinn Féin councillor. When he heard the noise from the town he and another employee went to the creamery to take the account books to safe keeping. As they were going away from the creamery a lorry drove up and fire was opened on the building. The door was smashed in and the place was set on fire. The police stayed about an hour and after they left it was impossible to save anything and the creamery, including an attached shop, was destroyed.

Another local creamery manager, Mr P. J. Condon of Achonry also was forewarned by the explosions in Tubbercurry. He also removed the books from his creamery. At about 3.20 am a lorry pulled up at the creamery and rifle fire was directed at the building, the doors smashed and fires started inside. The attackers stayed no more than ten minutes and after their departure Mr Condon and others rushed to the creamery to find only the office ablaze. They brought this fire under control. However the creamery was again visited by the police in two lorries at about 4.15 am and this time they did a better job of the burning. When they departed this time about thirty locals came to the scene and spent two hours trying to bring the flames under control. They managed to save much of the machinery and a bacon factory was saved.

Carty says that when his small group left Tubbercurry they headed for Achonry fearing an attack on the creamery but arrived too late to do anything. McCarrick, O'Hara and Carty spent the night in the vicinity of Achonry and at about one o'clock the following day when they were travelling along the Muckelty road they saw a Crossley tender full of police with a private car travelling towards Tubbercurry on the main road. Carty and his men opened fire on the two vehicles, letting off about twenty rounds. Afterwards they learned that the new District Inspector for Tubbercurry was in the private car and that two police in the tender were slightly wounded.



*Sligo creameries destroyed by Crown forces.*  
**Top: Rathscanlon, Centre: Ballymote, Bottom: Achonry**

The attempts by Carty and his men to protect Tubbercurry from the expected reprisals were a complete fiasco and Jack Brennan told Ernie O'Malley, "This wasn't good for our reputation."

An official statement from Dublin Castle said "When the men saw D. I. Brady lying dead on the floor and the sergeant with the calf of his leg blown away moaning, and the constable with pellets lodged in his face, they broke out of hand and rushed out into the streets calling on the Sinn Féiners to come out and fight them like men. Reprisals continued until early in the morning despite the efforts of the officers. They eventually got into police lorries and when final instructions were being given by the officers the lorries moved off and a creamery in the district was burned. The senior officer said he never saw men so angry. When the body of the

D. I. was being conveyed through the village no indication of sympathy was shown by the inhabitants". In the House of Commons, Hamar Greenwood defended the reprisals saying that he was convinced that every one of the persons who suffered in the reprisals connived at or condoned the murder of D. I. Brady.

Press reports from Tubbercurry say that on Saturday not a soul was to be seen at the Square, two thirds of the population had fled to the countryside, ruined shops were still smouldering, the paths were strewn with broken glass, brandy and whiskey bottles and numerous bullet marks were visible on the walls. Shops and houses which had not been attacked were barricaded up with whatever was available.

At Mass in Chaffpool and Tubbercurry on October 10<sup>th</sup> Canon Gunning P.P. Tubbercurry read extracts from a letter from District Inspector Brady's father, Louis, in which he said, "Writing on his mother's behalf and my own I want to tell you that neither of us entertains the least feeling of ill will towards anyone in connection with the tragedy . . . We forgive from our hearts whoever was responsible for this deed wherever they came from. My wife and I were deeply grieved to learn of the reprisals which have taken place in your parish. No useful purpose is served by such conduct and if anything could now make my poor boy unhappy it would be to know that he was the innocent cause of injury to anyone". Canon Gunning asked for prayers from the congregation for the dead policeman.

Early in October the Bishop of Achonry, Dr. Morrisroe, wrote to the P.P. at Tubbercurry expressing his sympathy with the people of Tubbercurry after the burnings in the town. "What is the cause of all this wanton destruction and where is it all going to end?" he asked in the letter which was read at all Masses in the parish. "Bad government is primarily responsible" the Bishop stated but he went on "There can be no excuse for the commission of crimes which are against all the laws of God and man." The Bishop went on to wonder how young men "so stainless and pure in most ways" could become involved in such killing. He blamed the "secret organisation" with which they were involved. He also blamed "the fostering during the latter years of ideals clearly impossible of attainment", a clear reference to Republicanism. "We must not look for miracles", he said, the world was not ruled by justice and wisdom but by political expediency. "The big powers will give the smaller only just and no more as may be convenient for their own comfort", and because of this Ireland should not strive for the unattainable. He concluded this letter thus: "I appeal therefore to my people not to be led

astray into wrong courses certain to provoke reprisals that the government appear to connive at and that will surely follow perhaps in a more terrible form on the slightest excuse".

*The Bishop's letter got wide publicity in the national newspapers and Count Plunkett, the TD for Roscommon, spent some time drafting a reply to the Bishop. Two versions of his reply together with a cutting of the Bishop's letter from the Irish Times are extant. The Count in his reply called the letter "a sorry document". "I wonder when will some of you Irish Bishops understand that your denunciation of the acts of war carried on by your own people against the English murderer and robber who hold our country down by force is an offence against humanity, against justice, against the rights given us by God."*

The Sligo Independent said: "We pray to God that peace may come soon and we appeal to the RIC to maintain their self-control and to the people of Sligo to see that this will be the first and last murder committed in our midst". An t-Óglach, the official organ of the Irish Volunteers, said in its issue dated October 1<sup>st</sup>, "It is significant that it is in those parts of the country where the warfare on the armed spies of the RIC was in the past most feeble and insufficient that the worst reign of terror is now being instituted. In the West the guerilla warfare was not so energetic to greatly relax the grips of the old RIC on the countryside and they are now striving desperately to regain their role with the aid of foreign reinforcements by wholesale terrorism. The Volunteers of those parts of the West where this reign of terrorism is being carried on have only themselves to thank for it". The same periodical repeated the message in its issue of October 15<sup>th</sup>: "The terrorism resorted to (by the British) seems to be employed with concentrated malice on portions of Connacht. This is explained by the fact that the parts in question have not been playing much part in the guerilla warfare until recently and the enemy believes he will be able to cow the people in these districts rapidly and reassume control."

Raids in the Tubbercurry area following the Chaffpool ambush included a large scale operation in Cloonacool on October 28<sup>th</sup>. The houses of Jack Brennan and Frank Scanlon were visited but neither man was at home. On the following Monday the village was again searched. No-one involved in the Chaffpool ambush was arrested.

Claims for compensation were lodged with Tubbercurry R.D.C as a result of the reprisals. They included a claim from Tubbercurry Creamery for £25,000, Cooke's for £10,000

and P. J. Gallagher's for £9,000. The councillors decided to send the claims to Lloyd George, to Commandant Kennworthy and to the relevant military authority.

P. J. McCooey, a policeman stationed at Tubbercurry, resigned from the force the morning after the reprisals and he said in a letter to the Sligo Champion that he was told that unless he cleared out within 48 hours he would be shot. He remained in the area and at midnight one Sunday night his house was fired on and almost wrecked. He left the Tubbercurry area soon after.

Sometime late in September an ambush was set on the Coolaney - Collooney road near the Brickyard at Tullaghan. Its purpose was to disarm a police patrol of six to eight on their way to Coolaney fair. About seventeen men took up positions including Frank Carty and Mick O'Hara at 2am. They waited until noon the next day but by then it was clear they the patrol would not come. It was suspected that a Unionist sympathiser had sent word to the police in Collooney about the ambush and they had decided not to come.

In October or early November 1920 a large scale ambush was prepared at Carrignagat, near Collooney close to the scene of the famous Battle of Collooney in 1798. Frank Carty was in charge, and about thirty members of the IRA from Ballymote, Collooney and Tubbercurry were there. They had eleven rifles. Among those who were there were Jack Brennan, the "Doc" Henry, Seamus Devins, Eugene Gilbride, Pat Hunt, Alec McCabe, Harry Benson, Tom Deignan, Tom Scanlon and Peadar Glynn. Two groups were on each side of the road and a smaller group on the railway bridge. The signal to start firing was to be when Carty fired. They stayed in the area the previous night and took up positions at 8am. They stayed until 5 pm but instead of the expected police lorries four lorries of military came along and they were let go through. Michael Coleman says that Carty was unwilling to engage such a large number of soldiers. According to Tom Deignan they asked Carty "Why didn't you give the order? You have the best men in the brigade with you." "That's why", he replied, "You have the cream of the county here", meaning one presumes that if anything went wrong the best men in the county would be captured or killed.

Liam Pilkington was not present at the Carrignagat ambush because he had broken his ankle in a fall in the ruins of Sligo Abbey. It appears that he has gone into the Abbey to escape a raiding party when he fell and injured himself.

In early November Frank Carty was laid up with an attack of pleurisy and was confined to bed for about two weeks. On the morning of Thursday November 25<sup>th</sup> the house in which he was staying, Vesey's in Moylough, was surrounded by a large force consisting of police, military cadets and Black and Tans. There were only three in the house, Carty who was in bed, Mrs Vesey and her son. Mrs Vesey opened the door and Carty was stopped by a head constable and three others at the back door. He made a dash for freedom and got clear of the house. Another group of crown forces who had been with the lorries on the Moylough road cut off his escape route and he had to surrender. His left forearm was broken by a rifle bullet and he was losing a lot of blood.

One of the military cadets rendered first aid and Carty was taken to Tubbercurry. Dr. Flannery dressed his wounds there and he was then taken to Sligo Barracks. The following day Carty was taken to Enniskillen and the next day he was transferred to Derry. It was widely believed the Carty's presence in Vesey's house had been communicated to the police by an informer.

*(iii) "There was nothing but pools of blood and caps and bicycles thrown around".*

The IRA in north Sligo had set an ambush at the end of July or beginning of August near Ahamlish churchyard. Seamus Devins was in charge of twenty men and a patrol of six policemen was expected. The men stayed in position until mid-day but no patrol came by. An hour after they left the patrol passed the spot. Eight members of the Cliffony Company went to Bundoran on a Sunday evening in August to take part in the ambush and disarming of a British patrol. The group had a meeting in St. Patrick's Hall, Bundoran first and the officer in charge cancelled the operation to wait for a more opportune time. However soon afterwards the British presence in Bundoran was strengthened and no attempt occurred. The Cliffony group lay in wait for a RIC patrol at Mullaghmore soon afterwards but this too was abortive as the patrol took another route.

The next affair the company took part in was an attack on Kinlough RIC barracks in Leitrim. There was strong resistance to the attack and the Volunteers soon withdrew fearing the arrival of reinforcements from nearby Finner Camp. Members of the IRA from the Cliffony and north Sligo area took part in a raid for arms on the RIC station at Tempo, County Fermanagh in

September 1920. They were let in by a sympathetic policeman named O'Donnell. Previously they had taken part in a raid on a barracks at Belleek, County Fermanagh where they got into the barracks and took all the guns etc. They were taken away in an ambulance. Some of the police were locked into the chapel while they were at prayer.

One August afternoon as the McCannon family from Cliffony were relaxing after their mid-day meal the house was surrounded by British soldiers and searched. The father and three brothers including Patrick were taken into custody. They were charged under D.O.R.A. and tried by courtmartial. They refused to answer any questions or recognise the court. They were imprisoned and released after two months. Patrick had continued his studies in Sligo Vocational School. He cycled in and out from Sligo every day and used this cover as scout, dispatch rider and information officer.

One night in late October he was approached by Andrew Conway and told that an ambush was planned for the next day. McCannon, who lived near Cliffony Barracks, was told not to depart for Sligo until the police were ready to set out on patrol. He was then to cycle some distance in front of them and inform the ambushers of the strength of the patrol.

This ambush took place on Monday, October 25<sup>th</sup> at Moneygold, near Cliffony. The Maugherow Company of the IRA were told to take action against a man who was considered pro-British. They cut the shafts off his cart at night knowing that he would inform the police in the morning. This he did. The police realised that the incident could be the bait to lure them into an ambush and there was some unwillingness to respond. However Sergeant Perry said that they were members of His Majesty's forces and were not afraid to go on patrol and a patrol of six men led by Perry set off.

A scout was positioned on a nearby hill and the main group of about thirty Volunteers, under the command of Liam Pilkington and Seamus Devins, were on another hill two mile away. Martin MacGowan from Ballintrillick was also in the ambush as was Eugene Gilbride. The group was drawn from Drumcliff, Rosses Point, Ballintrillick, Cliffony but members of the Grange Company were in the majority. They had already marked out ambush positions on both sides of the road at Moneygold. When they got the signal that the patrol was on its way they took up their positions. Five or six had rifles and the others had shotguns. Some of the rifles had been lent

from Sligo. The ambush took place on the main Sligo - Donegal road and the ambushers were aware that troops could have been sent quickly from Finner Camp, Donegal.

The cycling patrol under Sergeant Perry left the barracks some time after 11 am to investigate the shaft cutting report. The ambush happened at the top of a small hill about three miles from the Barracks. The RIC came in formation two by two and after the last man had passed by, Liam and Seamus jumped out and called on the police to surrender. The police jumped off their bicycles and made for whatever cover they could get. "The fight was short but terrific", said the County Inspector. A volley of rifle fire rang out and three policemen were killed. These were Sergeant Perry, who was in charge and constables Keown and Laffey. Constables Lynch, Clarke and O'Rourke were wounded. It was said that Clarke, though badly wounded cycled down the hill before he fell from his bicycle. Some of the police returned fire having tried to find cover at the side of the road but they soon surrendered to the superior firepower and better position of the ambushers.



*Sergeant Patrick Perry, RIC*

The three uninjured constables were deprived of their weapons and the weapons of the dead and wounded were collected. The ambushers then left the scene as the Angelus bell was ringing. One of the ambushers in fact had the job of ringing the bell and the ambush was over just in time to allow him to race across the fields to ring the bell at Grange church.



Two of the uninjured policemen then went for a doctor and a priest. Dr Martin was soon at the scene and rendered what assistance he could. The policeman who went for the priest had to enquire for the parochial house and according to the Sligo Independent, was asked at one house what he wanted the priest for. When he told the reason the person said "That's the stuff to give them". Eventually the priest, Fr Brian Crehan, who was a well known republican sympathiser, arrived at the scene. Mrs Lynch, who lived nearby, was soon at the scene and was kneeling beside her dying husband trying to comfort him. He did not speak. Fr Crehan later told a reporter that it was all so horrible that the sight which he witnessed on the roadway would never leave his memory.

A neighbour described the scene to a Sligo Champion reporter: "The scene was terrible. There was nothing but pools of blood and caps and bicycles thrown around." Constable Lynch was removed to Sligo Infirmary but he died of his wounds soon afterwards. Constable Clarke was later removed to a Dublin hospital for treatment. The remains of Constable Lynch were taken to Bailieboro, those of Sgt. Perry to Boyle, Const. Laffey to Galway and Const. Keown to Beleek.

The lorry carrying some of the remains as well as relatives passed through Sligo and was draped with a banner carrying the following message: "Sinn Féin Victory - 3 Widows, 19 Orphans". The dead policemen were all Catholics. Sergeant Patrick Perry had been transferred from Bunninadden to Cliffony in May 1913 having been appointed sergeant in 1909.

*(iv) "Splendid discipline was maintained by the forces but notwithstanding this some reprisals followed".*

When the news of the ambush reached Sligo a large force of police and military set out for the scene and in fact Patrick McCannon saw the lorries as he was turning for O'Connell St off the bridge. The lorries returned to town with the dead and wounded. Forces came from Sligo and Clogher according to the County Inspector. Meanwhile the ambushing column had stayed in the area, having been fed, and waited on a hill three miles south of Grange on the Sligo road. They expected reprisals and were prepared to defend the area. No crown forces arrived the first night after the ambush and the column then moved to the remote Glenade area in County Leitrim.

However Auxiliaries, who were stationed at the residence of The McDermott in Coolavin, travelled to north Sligo some time after the ambush and searched the countryside for the ambushers. The people were in dread of reprisals and their dread was well founded. "For miles around the scene the male population fled in terror and have not since returned", the County Inspector wrote on October 31<sup>st</sup>. "Splendid discipline was maintained by the forces but notwithstanding this some reprisals followed", the Inspector reported. "The houses of some leading suspects were burned as well as the Father O'Flanagan Sinn Féin Hall at Cliffony". The Crown forces, mixed military and police with some in civilian dress and some with covered faces, threw a cordon around the Grange area and spent two nights searching and terrorising the inhabitants. It was said and believed that a police constable named Kelly from Sligo Barracks led the Crown forces and pointed out which houses were to be burned.

Practically every house was searched but all the persons sought were not "at home". Many houses were burned. The house of Seamus Devins, Co.C. was burned to the ground as were stacks of hay and turf at the rear of the building. Devins' mother was thrown out of the house. On the evening of the ambush the house of the McCannon's at Cliffony was raided by military and Peter McCannon and his son Charles were arrested. They were brought in a lorry to Finner camp from there to Derry. Later in December they were charged at a court martial in Derry with possession of seditious documents. They refused to plead declaring they owed allegiance only to Dáil Éireann.

During the night the McCannon's home was again raided this time by police and the sole occupant, Mrs McCannon was roughly interrogated for a considerable period of time. She was threatened and when the men left she hid in an out house until day dawned. That night, according to Patrick McCannon, "the village was in an indescribable state of terror with squads of drunken British forces patrolling the roads, discharging shots and using every form of intimidation imaginable, the people were all confined to their homes, afraid even to have a look around." As morning dawned and Mrs McCannon returned to her home the place was visited a third time by Crown forces. This time they searched the place minutely and then sprinkled it with petrol and set it alight. The Sinn Féin Hall in Cliffony was also burned that day and the following message painted on it: "The Vacated Home of the Murder Gang".

It was anticipated that the home of Willie Gilmartin, Creevykeel, O/C of the Cliffony Company of the Volunteers would also be burned so all available Volunteers were mustered and

that evening a large group assembled in ambush positions near Gilmartin's. The night passed without any Crown forces appearing. The Volunteers left the vicinity in the morning as the position was untenable in daylight. About mid day the following day British forces arrived, threw the only occupant, an aged woman, out of the house, and set it on fire. The house of Eugene Gilbride's parents was visited on Friday night by the Crown forces but they found that Eugene's father had just died. The officer from the Sligo military "A decent enough fellow", said Gilbride, wouldn't let them burn the house.



*The remains of Cliffony Hall bearing the inscription painted on by the Crown forces:  
"The Vacated Home of the Murder Gang".*

Grange Temperance Hall was completely wrecked and Ballintrillick creamery was destroyed. As late as Thursday of the week of the ambush burnings were still taking place. Andrew Conway's, Currid's, Edward Harkin's and McKenna's houses were also burned as was Charles Gilmartin's, Carnduff. At Conway's the only occupant was Mrs Mary Conway, mother of Andrew and Bernard. She was taken across the road, put sitting on a wall and had to watch while the house, out offices and hay was burned.

A man named Torsney was seen running in a field and was shot at and wounded in the leg. The home of Francis Higgins, Carns, a cousin of Eugene Gilbride, was visited. Higgins was sick in the house but an effort was made to burn the house. This was foiled by Higgins' sister who put out the fire. However hay was destroyed near the house. A tailor's shop in Cliffony

belonging to Edward Gillespie was raided and all clothing found in the premises were taken out and burned. Gillespie was a friend of the McCannons and it was believed that this was the reason for this attack. Lang's pub and provision store in Grange was raided and looted.

An editorial in the Sligo Independent said, "Oh what a sorrowful and distressful country we are living in. Is there not sufficient Christianity or moral courage among the Irish people themselves to put an end to such a state of affairs in our distracted land?"

In his report for the end of October C. I. Neylon said, "At present there is a life and death struggle in the county between the Crown forces and the forces of disorder and murder. The police are slowly but surely becoming masters of the situation. Their morale is improving every day and although they fully realise that the fight will be a bitter one for some time to come, they are absolutely confident that the battle will end in the complete rout of the revolutionary forces". He mentioned the tone of the newspapers, local and national as "fostering the Sinn Féin revolutionary movement" and strongly recommended stronger censorship or suppression.

*When the Auxiliaries were in Sligo town after the Cliffony ambush they put up a Union Jack on the Town Hall. The IRA were anxious to remove it but were careful because they feared it might be booby trapped. Jim Keaveney and Tom Scanlon climbed to the tower and found a notice left by the Auxiliaries with a skull and crossbones warning against removing the flag. The pair replaced it with a Tricolour. The RIC District Inspector, Russell negotiated with the Mayor Fitzpatrick and TD, J. J. Clancy to have the flag removed as he feared disturbances when the Auxiliaries next visited Sligo. They refused and the military acted. They took Michael Nevin, a member of the Corporation up with them into the tower as they also feared booby-traps. They had the Town Hall surrounded with machine guns at the ready. Two soldiers went up to the top and cut down the flag. They then broke part of the stairs to prevent the flag being put up again. They did not however put up a Union Jack.*

**(v) "Are we afraid of anyone? We will go this way".**

According to Eugene Gilbride, Liam Pilkington had been in Dublin early in November in contact with Headquarters and he was told that pressure should be taken off north Sligo by having a major engagement in the south of the county. Accordingly it was decided that arms and ammunition including the material taken in the Cliffony ambush should be moved to the southern

part of the county and that some members of the column should also go. Linda Kearns says that she was told to drive to a crossroads on the road to Lough Gill. There she met Seamus Devins, Andrew Conway and Eugene Gilbride. They were waiting for a car to take them to Frenchpark, County Roscommon for an ambush. They had arms and ammunition which were to be carried by Linda.

After waiting for an hour they decided that the other car was not going to turn up and that Linda should bring the men as well as the weapons. Linda Kearns tells what happened next: "Jim Devins then took me down a little way along the road by the shore of Lough Gill and he said to me: 'Have you taken the oath?' I said 'No'. 'You had better take it now, not that it will make any difference. If you wanted to give us away you could have done it so long ago. But these are my orders'. I repeated the oath after him. It was a thrilling and unforgettable moment in the dark of the night at the side of the road". They loaded the car with the six rifles, some revolvers and about 100 rounds of ammunition.

The plan was, according to Tom Scanlon, that Linda Kearns would drive the men and weapons by side routes through the town as far as Summerhill College where Collooney-man Harry Brehony would join them. From there he would guide the car by the back road to the railway bridge at Belladrohid near Ballysadare and on to south Sligo. Linda Kearns however insisted on taking the direct route and did not go near the College. "Are we afraid of anyone? We will go this way, It's straighter", Eugene Gilbride quotes her as saying.

According to police evidence at the subsequent trial in Derry a lorry containing 20 policemen, RIC and Auxiliaries, and two lorries of military left Sligo about 9.30 pm and searched some houses in the Dunally area. As they returned towards Sligo they met a car at Carraroe which they halted. The car was driven by John Farrell and contained Dr P. Conlon, a native of Geevagh, Professor McDevitt of Dublin, described as having been on the run for two years, P. Cawley, Pound Street and Martin Flynn, County Council clerical staff, who was stated to have taken a lift in the car. While this car was being searched another car was stopped behind it. This car was the car driven by Linda Kearns. Seamus Devins who sat in the front drew his revolver but Linda pushed it down. When the car was searched the military found three rifles and a quantity of ammunition as well as items of police equipment such as haversacks and bandoliers. In a canvas bag five more rifles were found.



*Linda Kearns*



*Joseph McDevitt*

According to Linda Kearns the Auxiliaries were not in a good mood. "They were wild with drink and started firing all round, shouting 'shoot them'. Orders and counter orders were issued; shoot them; line them up; put them in the lorry". Two Auxiliaries accompanied Linda as she drove back to the police station in Sligo, the others were taken back in a lorry.

The captured men were badly beaten as they were being arrested, Gilbride was unconscious in the lorry as they were being taken in to Sligo. In the Barracks they were again badly beaten, Seamus Devins getting the worst beating. Local RIC immediately connected the rifles with the Cliffony ambush. "It was then they saw red" says Linda, "They beat us up calling us murderers". Linda told the police that she took full responsibility for the arms and ammunition claiming that she had given a lift to the three others and that they knew nothing of the weapons.

It was believed that the Crown forces were actually waiting for the first car, that containing Joe McDevitt, and that it was by chance that the second car was stopped. It was said that McDevitt's group had been overheard while drinking in a hotel bar in Sligo saying that they were on their way to Geevagh and that they had guns.

The scout who had just left the car heard the arrest and went to the College and informed the men waiting there what had occurred. A scout was sent to the Barracks to which the men were taken but it was surrounded by military and nothing could be found out. The next day they sent in a doctor to treat the men who had been very badly beaten by the Crown forces. The men were held for two days in Sligo and then sent by car to Raughley pier and in cutters from there to Buncrana. From there they went by road to Derry where they spent three days before finally being sent to Belfast. They were treated well in Belfast and according to Gilbride the food was very good.

At the trial in Belfast the men were charged with being in possession of stolen police property. Linda Kearns recognised the court and repeated her story of having given the three a lift. If the men could have been identified as having actually taken part in the Clifffony ambush their fate would have been much more serious but no witnesses could be found to identify them. Eugene Gilbride said that Constable Joyce, who had escaped death and injury in the Clifffony ambush had been "pressed very hard" to identify Gilbride but had refused. Gilbride said that on the last day of the trial in Belfast, during the lunch break he was approached by Joyce who said "I could identify you if I liked but I'm a damn sight better Irishman than you."

The arrest of such senior members of the IRA all from the same area together with much of the arms of that area was a serious blow. "These events paralysed the IRA in north Sligo for a time", said Daniel Waters who was a member of Clifffony company.

## **16. THE CROWN FORCES FIGHT BACK: OCT 1920 - JAN 1921.**

The Roscommon Herald reported that during the week ending Saturday 23rd October lorries carrying the "new RIC cadet corps"- the Auxiliaries - were arriving and departing from Boyle. Some of the Auxiliaries remained stationed in the town. A Company of Auxiliaries, E Company, was stationed at the residence of The MacDermott at Coolavin. At the end of 1920 they were under the command of Colonel Sharpe. There were about 120 of them, well equipped and they had a number of Crossley tenders. Early in 1921 they moved to the workhouse in Boyle and later in 1921 the company was transferred to Westport.

### ***(i) "For a few hours it was like Hell".***

A party of Auxiliaries or Black and Tans visited Sligo town on Friday October 15<sup>th</sup> and spent some hours parading the streets. On Friday October 22<sup>nd</sup> the Auxiliaries who were quartered at Coolavin visited the Ballymote area and carried out large-scale searches. Some arrests were reported. They came from Galway and left again in the evening.

Enniscrone was visited on the night of October 27<sup>th</sup> by a large force of Auxiliaries who arrived in six Crossley tenders. They raided many houses, painted many with slogans and skull and crossbones. They raided the house of the Kilcawleys and found Matt Kilcawley there. He was a member of Dromore West District Council and Brigade Quartermaster. They searched the house and found a copy of "An tÓglach", the organ of the IRA. They beat him up and threatened to hang him if he did not give information. Eamonn Hannon was also badly beaten up by the Auxiliaries on this occasion.

Friday, October 29<sup>th</sup>, was observed as a day of mourning for the former Lord Mayor of Cork, Terence MacSwiney, who had died on hunger strike. Practically all the business houses in Sligo were closed on that day and a special Requiem Mass was celebrated in the Cathedral. There was a good deal of military activity in the town during the day, the houses of J. J. Clancy and J. R. Treacy being searched. In Ballymote mourning flags were widely displayed and in Collooney police arrived about eleven o'clock and ordered the shops which had remained closed to open. This they did. The monument outside Collooney to the memory of Teeling's exploits at the 1798 battle of Carrignagat had held a tricolour flag for some time and on this Friday a party



of police stopped and decided to remove it. They fired shots and broke off the figure's arm which held the flag.

On Monday, November 22<sup>nd</sup>, Sligo town was visited by a group of Auxiliaries who caused wild scenes in the streets. They arrived around nine o'clock in the morning and announced their presence by daubing the walls of the Courthouse with anti-Sinn Féin slogans, "Shinners Beware", "Remember Balbriggan", "Up Lloyd George". Slogans were also painted on houses and premises in the town. After spending some time in Sligo town they left for north Sligo returning about five o'clock. From about eight o'clock that night they patrolled the streets stopping everyone and questioning them. Many were treated very roughly.

The Champion said that there were many cases of personal assault including, the paper added, of some Protestant gentlemen. "For a few hours it was like Hell", it reported, "There has never been any friction between the police and people here, the relations are all right, one party understanding and respecting the positions of the other. It is incidents such as those which occurred on Monday night which lead to trouble." The Sligo Independent said, "The law was certainly not one-sided, Roman Catholics, Protestants, Sinn Féiners, Nationalists, Unionists, Loyalists all got the same sauce." On Tuesday morning the group left for another part of Sligo.

On the November 23<sup>rd</sup> Enniscrone was visited by what was probably the same group of Auxiliaries and walls were painted with slogans such as "Up Cromwell" and "Up Lloyd George". The Town Hall was burned down. In a reply in the House of Commons the Chief Secretary said "The police have no knowledge of the persons by whom these outrages were committed but are making enquiries."

John Cowell whose father was a doctor in the Skreen area remembered visits by the Black and Tans or Auxiliaries: "Coming from school we'd hear them in the distance, letting off pot-shots as they came. Terrified, we'd get behind a wall or hedge, until someone warned us: that was quite the wrong thing to do. These wretches would shoot at anything that moved, so it was better to remain in the open."

Roads in many areas were trenched or blocked with trees and Michael Burgess from the Conways Cross area remembers the Crown forces, Tans or soldiers, coming with saws and planks to clear the road or erect makeshift bridges over trenches. On one occasion Michael went

up to the top of a nearby hill to get a better view of proceedings when he was surprised by some soldiers who had encircled the hill. "I didn't know a word they were saying", he said of the soldiers, "their English language was like Irish or German to me". Michael was sent to where some locals were pressed into service to help clear the road. When he was halfway there he jumped into the side of the road and hid there. Meanwhile some of the local IRA had arrived on the hills and "fired a few shots" probably with shotguns which at that range had no effect. When the way was clear the lorries and their occupants continued in their way towards Geevagh.

R. G. Bradshaw, managing editor of The Connachtman, was arrested at the office of the paper on the morning of Saturday October 23<sup>rd</sup> by military who took him to the military barracks. He was held until November 29<sup>th</sup> when he was released without having been charged. Another Connachtman official, Seamus MacGowan, had been arrested on the previous Wednesday in an Auxiliary raid on the Sinn Féin Hall, Albert Street. It was said that some incriminating documents were found on his possession. MacGowan was removed from Sligo to Derry at the end of November without any charge having been preferred against him. He was court-martialled in Derry late in February on a charge of having a document, a notebook, relating to the Irish Volunteers on the occasion of a raid by the military on the Sinn Féin Hall, Sligo on October 27<sup>th</sup>. MacGowan refused to recognise the court. He was sentenced to one year's hard labour.

At the end of January a court martial was held in Victoria Barracks in Belfast to hear a case against the West of Ireland Printing and Publishing Company, the proprietors of The Connachtman, on three counts including "spreading reports and making statements intended and likely to cause disaffection to his Majesty". Robert George Bradshaw was stated to be the editor of the newspaper and secretary to the company and was said to be "unlikely to put in an appearance" at the trial. The company was found guilty on two of the three charges and was fined £250 for each. Evidence was given of the circulation of the newspaper, one source put it at no more than 400, another put it at 2,000.

***(ii) "Inform all available Auxiliary forces proceed at once to Ballymote where a constable has been shot".***

At a Battalion meeting in an outhouse in Keash on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1920 it was proposed by Jim Molloy and Pat Coleman that Sgt. Patrick Fallon of Ballymote RIC be shot because he was harassing the IRA. A discussion followed during which Commandant Marren said he was

against any action. However the pair went ahead and planned the killing for the following day. For some reason it was not carried out on the Tuesday. The next day, November 3<sup>d</sup>, was a fair day in Ballymote. At 2 pm the Sergeant was on his way back to the Barracks from his own residence when he was killed. It was stated that he was surrounded by a number of men and that he died instantly. Another account states that he was ordered to raise his hands and was shot when he attempted to draw his gun. His attackers escaped.

Sgt. Fallon, a native of Tuam County Galway, had nearly thirty years service and was a widower with three children, the youngest being thirteen. He had been stationed in Ballymote for four years having been in Mullaghroe before that. Some claimed that Sgt. Fallon was a "very dangerous enemy of the IRA" at the time and he certainly took part in some raids including that on Marren's home when Marren was lucky to escape. It was said that as Marren and Hunt ran up the hill from Marren's house Fallon said to the soldiers, "Whoever is the best shot fire at them". It was also claimed that one of Fallon's daughters was engaged in intelligence work for the British.

When news of the killing reached Sligo the D. I. John J. Russell sent a telegram to the Head Constable, Ballaghaderreen: "Inform all available Auxiliary forces proceed at once to Ballymote where a constable has been shot".

As news of the killing spread there was widespread fear that reprisals on the scale experienced at Tubbercurry or Cliffony would ensue and shops were soon closed and many townspeople fled to the country. The town had been filled with cattle, farmers and dealers and the roads out of Ballymote soon became crowded with people fleeing the expected reprisals. Some took refuge in the Convent.

About 9 pm that evening, six lorries of Auxiliaries arrived from Ballaghaderreen and reprisals did take place. Local police were confined to Barracks and took no part in the destruction. A hay barn belonging to Patrick Meehan was set alight about nine o'clock and soon afterwards the creamery was burned. The premises of veteran nationalist W. J. Lipsett who had recently resigned as Justice of the Peace were attacked though Lipsett was not a Sinn Féin supporter and was in fact a former member of the RIC.

Premises belonging to Dominick Hannon in O'Connell Street were also set alight but were partly saved by the efforts of local Volunteers and some members of the local RIC. A

bakery belonging to J. A. Dockery was destroyed and houses belonging to McKenna, Bohan, Mrs Margaret Farry and Duffy were badly damaged. The bar of Farry's Public House in Wolfe Tone Street was wrecked and it was believed that the fact that a policeman shared the same roof as the Farry's prevented the house being burned. An attempt to burn the house of Mary Dawson, the mother-in-law of Sinn Féin T.D. Alec McCabe, was also made but local police under District Inspector Russell prevented any destruction of the house. Mrs Dawson and Mrs McCabe had gone to stay with a friend in the country.

The Sligo Champion reported that were it not for the exertions of the District Inspector not a house in Ballymote would have survived. The Roscommon Herald praised especially District Inspector Russell, District Inspector MacBrien, Head Constable Cahill and Ballymote constables Needham, Madden and Moran. By the end of the month two men from the Ballymote area, neither of whom had anything to do with it, were under arrest in connection with Sgt. Fallon's killing. They were Michael Gray and Malachy Doddy. In his November report the County Inspector said that Gray had confessed and that a man answering the description of Doddy was seen running from the murder scene.

On the night of the Fallon killing, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, the police barracks at Dromore West was attacked by Volunteers. This was in all probability designed to draw the "heat" from Ballymote and was not a serious attack. The Sligo Independent said that "the garrison put up a strong defence and the attackers were beaten off without any loss of life".

Sometime in January 1921 Michael Grey from Ballymote was put on trial in Belfast for the murder of Constable Patrick Fallon. Among those who gave evidence against him was Constable Gilmartin from Ballymote. While the constable was in Belfast he received some injuries which necessitated him being hospitalised for some time. Afterwards two sisters of the constable approached Charles O'Hara and said that as their brother was not in Ballymote the day of Fallon's shooting he could not give evidence. O'Hara passed on the information in a letter dated 28/2/21 to Colonel J. Price in Dublin Castle.

Michael Grey's trial for murder eventually went ahead at a court-martial in Belfast early in June. One witness gave evidence of having seen Sgt. Fallon running towards the barracks then falling on his face. A man in a greyish brown overcoat ran away. A young lady gave evidence that she saw Grey running after the shooting "as white as paper". He was wearing a greyish

overcoat according to the witness. A statement was produced allegedly made by Grey in Boyle barracks in which he admitted shooting the policeman. The alleged statement read: "I was with -- in Ballymote on the 3rd inst. and I did fire a shot at Sgt. Fallon. -- and I ran down Jail Street and we parted and I have not seen him since. I cannot say who ordered us to do this as my brother and sister would be shot". The statement was printed thus in the papers.

At the trial Grey said that he had repeatedly stated his innocence while in Boyle and he had signed a statement there which he believed was a statement of innocence. He never confessed to having shot Fallon. Witnesses came forward to say that they were with Grey at the time of the shooting but in spite of this Grey was convicted.

*(iii) "These successes on the part of the police have, for the present at all events, upset all the calculations of the murder gangs".*

The tactics of the Auxiliaries reversed to a large extent the situation which had obtained in early 1920. While a permanent police presence was still missing from large areas of the county raids by the highly mobile Auxiliaries meant that the IRA were now more exposed to capture. To counter this "flying columns" were formed. These consisted of small groups of men who were on the run living in remote areas from which they occasionally made attacks on the Crown forces. When large scale attacks were planned these men could call on other part-time IRA members who lived at home. These columns were loosely organised, membership varied as IRA men were arrested, rested in safe houses, or moved to a different area. Up to the time of his arrest Frank Carty led a column which was usually based in the Ox Mountains north of Cloonacool. They sometimes stayed in the Lodge west of Coolaney and Michael Coleman told Ernie O'Malley that Carty and Frank O'Beirne sometimes stayed with Major Heather of Knockadoo House, near Coolaney. Other members of this column were Martin Brennan, Harry Brehony, Hughie Nealon, Mick O'Hara, Joe Durcan, Sean Ginty, Michael Coleman, Charlie Gildea and Jack Brennan.

Another area where a column operated was in the mountains south of Easkey. About twenty-five men, with twelve rifles were members under the command of Seamus Kilcullen, with Matt Kilcawley Vice O/C and Adjutant Tom Loftus.

In remote area of east Sligo Tom Duignan led a column of about fifteen men with which Frank O'Beirne sometimes operated and in south Sligo Marren and Hunt led a group made up of

men from the Ballymote and Gurteen Battalions. In Sligo town area there was a group on the run led by Liam Pilkington.

Shortage of arms was a continuous problem. Linda Kearns and her motor car were used to move arms from column to column as they were needed. "It seemed as if a couple of flying columns were using the same material. I would bring them to Chaffpool one day and perhaps the next day back to Grange" she wrote.

Raids by police and military continued in the last week of November and the first week in December. On December 2<sup>nd</sup> two members of the Benson family, Harry and Dominick, were arrested at Ballisodare. It was reported at the end of November that Harry Benson has lost his job in a shop in Sligo because of his Sinn Féin activities. On the night of November 20<sup>h</sup> the shopkeeper involved was visited by two armed men who "fined" him £100 for dismissing Benson. Benson was wanted by the police according to the Inspector. The Bensons were arrested as "a result of secret information" according to the County Inspector. On December 21<sup>st</sup>, Mrs May Benson and her son Dominick were charged at a court-martial with possession of arms and ammunition. Police gave evidence of having searched the Benson home near Ballisodare on September 21<sup>st</sup> and having found two revolvers and two cartridges rolled up in a mask in a cowshed. Dominick Benson had not been arrested until 2<sup>nd</sup> December. Mrs Benson did not travel to the court martial and a doctor's certificate to the effect that she was too delicate to travel was produced. It was stated that another son of Mrs Benson was in Sligo jail. Dominick Benson was found guilty and sentenced to two years hard labour but his mother was found not guilty.

Sinn Féin halls at Geevagh, Gleann and Riverstown were burned during November. Skreen and Dromard area was visited and the Sinn Féin Hall there burned. Ballymote was subject to a large scale search on Sunday November 28<sup>h</sup>. No arrests were reported. The fair of Ballymote on the following Tuesday was proclaimed and was not held. On Tuesday night December 7<sup>th</sup> the Wanderers Gaelic Club in Sligo was entered by masked men and all the members searched and ordered to leave. No one was arrested. In the early hours of the following morning Auxiliaries raided the house of Councillor James Devins in Holborn Street and made him accompany them to the Wanderers Gaelic Club. The premises were carefully searched and Devins, the caretaker Mr. Gunning and his son were removed to the police barracks. An order

was served on the landlord and on a member of the Gaelic Club to have the Club closed immediately.

On the night of August 27<sup>th</sup> an attempt was made to burn the Church of Ireland church in Tubbercurry. Petrol was sprinkled inside and set alight. The blaze however soon died down and the damage was slight. The local Volunteers investigated the affair and three men were arrested. They pleaded guilty and were made pay compensation after which they were released.

A series of robberies in the Tubbercurry area was investigated by the local Volunteers and two men were arrested by them. Some of the stolen goods were recovered but relations of the arrested men went to the RIC and reported the matter to them. As a result some of the Republican police were themselves arrested by the RIC including James Durkan, Jack Brennan and Thomas McCarrick. A revolver was found on McCarrick and a cartridge on Durkan and they were detained. McCarrick from Tubbercurry was court-martialled in Derry at the end of February 1921 for having been in possession of a revolver and ammunition and documents relating to the IRA. It was stated that he was arrested in Tubbercurry while lying in bed and that on the bed was an overcoat in the pocket of which the gun was found. McCarrick said that as a soldier of the Irish Republic he refused to recognise the court.

Early in November the houses of Very Rev Canon Daly, DD, PP, Mullinabreena and James Gilligan, Co.C., Lavagh were raided by crown forces. On November 13<sup>th</sup> the premises of Mr. Collery, Teeling Street Sligo were visited by the military, a detachment of the Bedfords. In a suitcase belonging to an employee, Patrick Brehony, was found a fully loaded Webley revolver, and 60 rounds of ammunition. He was arrested as was the manager, Alderman Gilgan. The Champion stated that Gilgan knew nothing of the revolver and was expected to be released very soon afterwards. Early in December the two were charged before a court-martial in Derry. Brehony said "I have committed no crime against the duly elected government of my country, Dáil Éireann". Gilgan pleaded not guilty and was released. Gilgan was found not guilty and Brehony was sentenced to nine years imprisonment.

Fr Roddy of Gleann, Riverstown was arrested in November and kept in jail for nine weeks without any charge. He was then released. It was believed that his arrest was a result of his activity as a judge in the Republican courts. On December 22<sup>nd</sup> military carried out many raids in the Sligo area. Many houses were visited but many of the men sought were "not at

home". Those arrested were John R. Treacy, J. Scanlan, John Pilkington brother of Liam, and Charles Hargadon from Calry. At Scanlons, Tom Scanlon was the person sought but in his absence his brother was taken. The same happened at Pilkington's. Other people sought but absent were Dominick McHugh, J. Carroll and Jim Keaveney.

On the evening of Thursday December 23<sup>rd</sup> James (Seamus) Marren of Collooney was arrested by Crown forces. He was manager of the Collooney Co-Operative Creamery. One of the main supporters of the creamery was Charles O'Hara and the arrest distressed him. The creamery was just in the process of recovering from damage done by a previous manager who had been charged with embezzlement. So upset was O'Hara that after having been in contact with the Sligo police District Inspector and the O/C troops Sligo, he sat down and wrote a letter on Christmas Day 1920 to General Allgood, Derry, on behalf of Marren who he said "practically runs the business and the district will suffer much naturally if he has to be interned". He asked, since as far as he knew Marren did not belong to "the extreme party", that he be released to return to his duties under the supervision of the local authorities General Allgood replied that the case was not in his hands and O'Hara replied asking the General to forward the letter to "the highest authority".

During the first four months of 1921 O'Hara continued to use his influence to try to have Seamus Marren released, writing on January 17<sup>th</sup> to Sir Hamar Greenwood, the Chief Secretary in Dublin Castle: "Will you kindly have enquiries made as soon as possible and see if anything can be done to save the situation. If you had an opportunity of consulting General Macready on the subject it might help to expedite the matter." In the first week in April O'Hara visited Dublin and spoke with Sir John Ross about the matter. He was told that if Marren applied for parole his case would be looked into with a view to allowing him back to his employment. Marren was in Ballykinlar Camp by this time and O'Hara wrote to him asking him to apply to have his case investigated. "I hope you will see your way to do this in the interests of the Society as well as yourself as your supervision is very much missed". Marren however wrote back refusing to have his case investigated and O'Hara had to write to Sir John apologising for the trouble he had put him to. He also wrote to Marren expressing his disappointment saying, "I went to a good deal of trouble on your behalf".

Other arrests at the end of 1920 included M. J. Gallagher, a native of Bunninadden, who was superintendent in Sligo for the Irish National Assurance Company, Seamus Doocey of Sligo



and Thomas Nash of Hunter's Coal yard, Sligo. Nash was later court-martialled in Derry on the charge of possession of an Irish Volunteer's uniform and sentenced to three years penal servitude. He was however released in May from Wormwood Scrubs. During a search of the Gurteen area on December 24<sup>th</sup> by Auxiliaries from Boyle ammunition was found in the rafters of a house belonging to John Flynn and he was arrested and later court-martialled. He was imprisoned in Derry and moved to Belfast in May of 1921. Joe Tansy of Gurteen was also arrested during the same searches and lodged in Sligo prison.

The County Inspector in his reports for November and December 1920 boasted about the number of arrests of prominent Sinn Féiners. In November there were the Carraroe arrests and the arrest of Frank Carty. "Their effects on the IRA are staggering and are already noticeable", he said. During December eighteen prominent members of the IRA had been arrested, he claimed. "These activities and successes on the part of the police have, for the present at all events, upset all the calculations of the murder gangs", he said.

While a dance was in progress in a hall at Kilmacoen near Collooney on St. Stephen's night, 1920, the hall was raided by a force of military who held up and searched all the males. One person was arrested but later released. The Champion report stated that "the raiding party acted courteously". Raids were also carried out in the Coolera area at this time. A large scale search by military and police took place in the Ballintrillick- Glenade area on Tuesday January 4<sup>th</sup>. It was reported that the whole countryside was in possession of the Crown forces and a large number of shots were fired. There were no arrests in spite of the intensive search.

*On January 19<sup>th</sup> large-scale searches were carried in the Skreen and Dromard areas but no arrests were reported. Eamonn Hannon, O/C, Enniscrone Battalion, IRA was captured by the Crown forces and severely beaten up. He was put up against a wall and told he would be shot if he did not reveal the identity of IRA members. Shots were discharged which narrowly missed him. He was left lying almost unconscious on the ground.*

On the morning of Monday January 24<sup>th</sup> 1921 Fr Scott, C.C. Ballyrush, was arrested at his home. "Black and Tans" arrived at his house at 1 am and searched the premises minutely, destroying furniture and fittings in the process. He was taken to Sligo where he was detained until Monday January 31<sup>st</sup>.

On January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1921 there was great activity on the part of Crown forces in Sligo town. Arrests included Dominick McHugh a teacher in Sligo Vocational School, Bertie Glynn, Fred Pilkington, brother of Liam, Charles McDermott, described as superintendent of the Irish Peoples' Assurance Company, Abbey St, John McSharrey, linotype operator at the Connachtman office, Patrick Kinahan and Daniel Kelly. At a subsequent court-martial in Derry these were charged in connection with arms finds at the Wanderers Gaelic Club, Sligo on December 10<sup>h</sup> 1920. Kelly said that he had broken with the club two years before and he was released. So was Pilkington. The others, Kinahan, Glynn and McHugh were all sentenced to five years at a court-martial in Derry in March.



*Sligo-men who were imprisoned in Dartmoor.*

*Front Row- Dominic McHugh, Seamas Devins, T.D., James Devins, T.C.*

*Back Row- P. Brehany, Bertie Glynn, Eugene Gilbride, Andrew Conway, P. Hanrahan.*

Further searches during the last week in January in the Geevagh and Conway's Cross areas resulted in more arrests and it was reported that Sligo Jail at Cranmore was full and that those arrested had to be kept in the police barracks in Sligo. More large scale searches were carried out in the north Sligo area and at least thirteen arrests were made. All these arrests put further pressure on detention space in Sligo and at the end of January some prisoners were moved to Derry. These included John R. Treacy, James Devins, James Doocey and Harry Benson. Also those arrested on January 22<sup>nd</sup> were moved on February 28<sup>th</sup>. John R. Tracey of Sligo was moved from Derry jail to Ballykinlar around this time.

On Saturday January 15<sup>th</sup>, Thomas Cawley of Kilglass, Enniscrone was put on trial at Derry. He was charged with being in possession of explosive substances and documents likely to

cause disaffection to his Majesty. His house had been searched on November 25<sup>th</sup> and a detonator and official Sinn Féin receipts were found in the rafters. The accused alleged that he had been ill treated when he was been arrested, that he had been thumped and a string had been tied around his neck. An officer admitted the ill-treatment but said he had stopped it as soon as it had come to his attention. The defendant was found guilty.

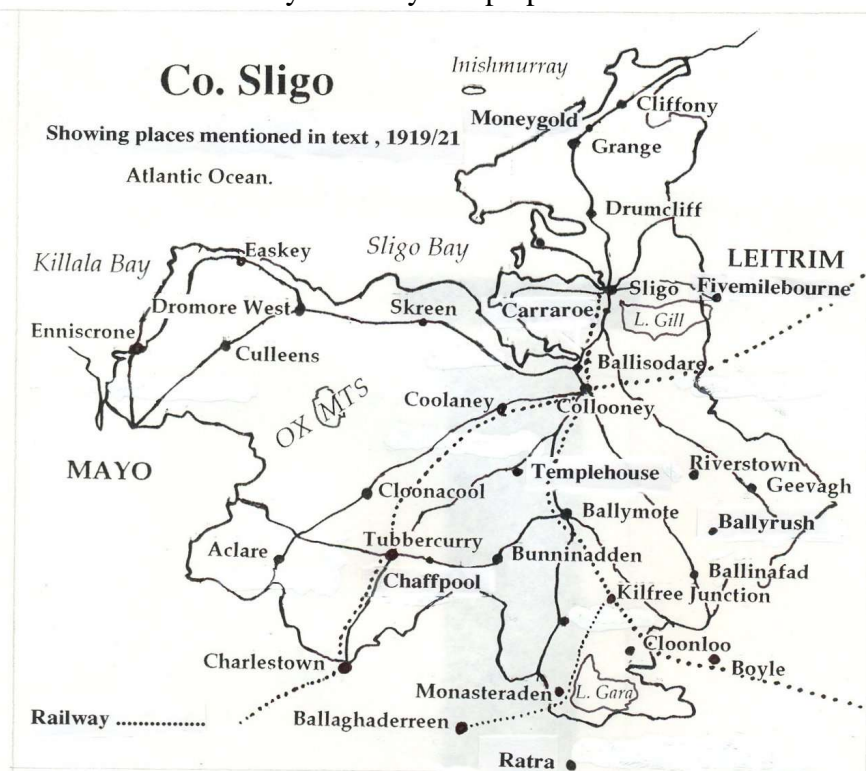
According to the County Inspector the District Inspector Sligo received secret information regarding a cache of arms and ammunition hidden in the O'Connor tomb in Sligo Graveyard. A search revealed 10 revolvers, 157 rounds of miscellaneous ammunition, 15 sticks of gelignite, a box of detonators and 1,000 yards of fuse. The Inspector also claimed that thirteen arrests carried out at the end of January in connection with the Cliffony ambush were as a result of "private information from a useful friend".

Liam Pilkington was in Dublin the weekend of "Bloody Sunday", November 21<sup>st</sup>, and was arrested at Vaughan's Hotel a well-known meeting place for Volunteers from the country. He is reported under arrest in Dublin Castle having been brought in Saturday night under the alias Liam Scanlon. Clancy, McKee and Clune were with him for a while and when they were being taken out Clune threw his hat to Pilkington saying "There is a souvenir for you if you ever get out from here." The three were shortly afterward murdered "trying to escape". Pilkington, along with other prisoners, was transferred to Beggars Bush barracks on Sunday evening and while there he led prayers for the repose of the souls of three men left behind in the Castle. Pilkington escaped from the barracks, one version says that he went out dressed in female clothes brought in to him while another report says he just walked out! Tom Scanlon said that Liam was released as a result of a sentry misunderstanding an order from a superior officer.

On December 4<sup>th</sup>, while workmen were carried out alterations to a disused school attached to St. John's Protestant Church in Sligo, a cache of arms and ammunition was discovered. Various theories were put forward as to its source and it was widely believed that it belonged to the Sligo branch of the Ulster Volunteers. According to Eugene Gilbride the IRA were aware that the Ulster Volunteer branch in Sligo had arms and they had searched the Masonic Lodge and St. John's Church in Sligo for these arms without success.

In its December 25<sup>th</sup> issue the Champion published a letter from Sligo T.D. Alec McCabe which had first appeared in the Irish Independent, in which he stated that the time was not yet opportune for a serious attempt at a truce.

In spite of the concentration on the "national struggle" the fight by the unions for better working conditions and pay went on. "The Watchword of Labour" reported successes in County Sligo during 1920. In March two disputes one involving carters on the quay and the other stokers at the gas works were settled after arbitration. In April there was a short stoppage at a dressmaking concern in Sligo which resulted in a favourable result for the workers including the acceptance of the 30/- minimum wage. In Tubbercurry another short strike in June appears to have resulted in an increase for labourers though in Easkey in the same month it was decided to defer action for a month in order to "armourplate the branch." The Maugherow branch of the I.T.G.W.U. organised a four week strike of the 120 workers on the estate of Sir Josselyn Gore-Booth. W. J. Reilly was prominent in this strike which resulted in an wage increase for the men. According to "The Watchword of Labour" the local Dáil representatives acted as arbitrators in the dispute though surrender did not come until the strikers occupied some of the houses on the estate and announced their intention to take over the entire estate "a cut and dried scheme for the working of which under the Soviet system they had prepared".



*County Sligo*

*Showing places mentioned in text 1919/21*

Extracts from the October 1920 report of the Sligo County Inspector RIC, Thomas Neylon,  
to Dublin Castle

*Secret - Crime Special.*



Confidential Report for month of October 1920

Part I

I beg to state this County has been in a very disturbed state for some months past. There is no sign of improvement. On the contrary it is becoming more lawless day by day. The police are straining every possible effort to cope with the situation. Although their numbers are small and their task difficult I have no doubt but they will succeed eventually in restoring decent order.

There were 58 outrages reported during the month. There were probably many others which have not come to the knowledge of the police. The most serious occurred on 25. & 26 when about 100 Irish Volunteers ambushed a patrol of nine policemen.



Four police were murdered, and two seriously wounded. at moneygold near the village of Grange. The fight was short but terrific. The police opened fire on the attackers. When six were killed and wounded the remainder were overpowered and all disarmed. Forces of police and military from Sligo and Bologhen were quickly on the scene, and have been scouring the country day and night since. For miles around the scene the male population fled in terror and have not since returned. Splendid discipline was maintained by the forces but notwithstanding this, some reprisals followed. The houses of some leading suspects were burned, as well as "the Father O'Flanagan" Sinn Fein Hall at Clifboney. The walls of the latter now bears the motto "The vacated home of the murder gang". arising out of the searches some arrests have been made in connection with the possession of seditious documents and ammunition.

J. Weylon C.I.

## 17. MOVE AND COUNTER MOVE: JAN - JUNE 1921.

The RIC County Inspector, T. Neylon, writing his report for December 1920 on New Year's Day, 1921 admitted that "lawlessness prevails everywhere" but sounded a note of optimism, "many more robberies of mails would have taken place, and probably ambushes and murders of police, were it not for activities displayed by the police and the manner in which the IRA leaders have been harassed".

*(i) "This has been recognised by Sinn Féin and IRA as a crushing defeat".*

On Monday January 31<sup>st</sup> the Sligo Corporation meeting was held to elect the Mayor for the coming year. Michael Nevin was proposed by Costello and seconded by William Hande. Grey proposed Jinks and a sensation was caused when he was seconded by Peter Heraghty. Heraghty had been elected a Labour member and he was bitterly attacked by The Connachtman for his volte-face. Both persons proposed decided not to vote. Jinks was elected on a vote of 9 - 8. For Jinks were Peter Heraghty, P. C. Kerr, H. Campbell Perry, Arthur Jackson, Wood-Martin, Michael McDonagh, James Grey, Tighe and John Connolly. Grey had been elected as an independent but he had voted for Hanley in the Mayoral election of 1919. For Nevin were John Lynch, D. M. Hanley, Costello, Henry Depew, Flanagan, William Hande, Feeney and T. H. Fitzpatrick. Colr. James Devins had been arrested, Colr. Nally of Sinn Féin was stated to be "unavoidably absent" and Alderman Luke Gilligan, also Sinn Féin, had resigned.

Nevin congratulated Jinks on his election but said that what had happened there that day had nothing to do with "the present state of Sligo". An editorial in The Connachtman entitled "The Minority Mayor" said "It is now proven beyond and shadow of a doubt that they (the Ratepayers Association) are and were purely a political party bitterly opposed to the Republic". On the other hand the Sligo Independent called Jinks' election "very significant in many ways in the history of local municipal affairs". It also praised Colr. James Devins for his energy in looking after the improvement and well being of the town and the interests of the ratepayers and suggested that he would have been a better Sinn Féin candidate for the Mayoralty than Michael Nevin. This may have been mere mischief making as James Devins was well known as an opponent of Labour. The County Inspector, writing his January report on the day of the Mayoral election, reported the result to his superiors - "This has been recognised by Sinn Féin and IRA as a crushing defeat". How he was able to gauge the reaction so quickly he does not say.

*Before the Corporation meeting of January 26<sup>th</sup> the Town Clerk's office was entered by two men who demanded to be given the correspondence which was due to come before that day's meeting. The Town Clerk declined to hand it over but it was taken by the pair who said that they would return it "after a bit". Alderman Kerr called the incident "a monstrous proceeding surely". About a week later it was reported that the documents taken from the clerk's office had been returned marked "Censored by the IRA."*

Following the election of the Mayor on January 31<sup>st</sup> five armed and masked men entered the Town Clerk's office and listed a number of books they wanted. These included minute books and receipt books. The Town Clerk asked by what authority the books were demanded and one of the raiders, taking a revolver from his pocket, replied "this is my authority, I want those books". The books were taken and the Town Clerk told not to leave the office for a half an hour.

On the morning of Thursday January 20<sup>th</sup>, there was considerable military and police activity in the Tubbercurry area resulting in the arrests of a large number of persons, most of whom were members of local authorities in the area. It was speculated that the arrests were in connection with a previous meeting of the Board.

On the afternoon of March 19<sup>th</sup> police and military searched the offices of Sligo County Council and Sligo Corporation. On the following Monday the offices of the Board of Guardians were searched and some documents taken. The residence of the clerk of the union was also searched.

Early in February the County Council met to consider the estimates and set the rates. The total amount of the demand for the year was £143,878 a large increase on the previous year's £82,800. This increase was accounted for by the lack of government grants. This resulted in an increase of 6/- in the £ in the rates. The Council refused to strike any rate to cover the large number of malicious injuries claims.

A meeting of Sligo County Council was held on March 1<sup>st</sup> with Alec McCabe, then on the run, in the chair. Presumably this was one of the meetings held in the Coolaney Mountains, probably in the remote Cabragh Lodge. Others to attend this meeting were James Hennigan, John Gilligan, Jim Hunt, M. J. Marren, Tom O'Donnell, Jack Brennan, Frank O'Beirne, B. Conlon, L. McHugh. A letter from Frank Carty regretted his inability to attend. Among the



business transacted were some co-options. Michael Nevin, Sligo, John McLoughlin, Ballintogher, and Seamus Cavanagh, Castleconnor were all co-opted to the Council.

*(ii) "We were disgusted. There was general depression all round."*

Sniping took place in the square in Tubbercurry on the night of Friday, January 14<sup>th</sup>. Constables Maloney and Gallagher who were on patrol were wounded, the former in the knee and the latter in the back. Constable Peter Gallagher was a Catholic from Fermanagh and Maloney was from Clare. "I got it fair in the spine of the back . . . and the report was in the papers the next day - 'saved by a button'. I wasn't saved by a button . . . but the bullet was defective, that's all the excuse for it. There were seven bullet holes in it [the coat] and only one of them hit me", Peter Gallagher told John Brewer. The shooting and wounding caused near panic among the townspeople fearing reprisals and most stayed indoors with their windows shuttered. Some, according to the local newspapers, went to the Convent for sanctuary. Happily there were no reprisals.

An attempt was made to destroy the courthouse in Ballymote on the night of Wednesday February 2<sup>nd</sup>. Bombs were thrown into the building wrecking part of it. Some shots were also fired at the Police Barracks the same night and fire was returned. Roads leading to Ballymote had been blocked by fallen trees and by trenching. According to an account by Thady MacGowan the attack on the Courthouse was a tactic to draw some police from Ballymote Barracks into an ambush. Alec McCabe was in charge and although the IRA waited for some time no police or Tans left the barracks. The Volunteers fired some shots at the Barracks and then withdrew. The police inspector claimed in his report that the police knew in advance of plans to attack the barracks that night and were prepared. He said that when the attackers found the barracks well defended they turned their attention to the Courthouse instead. Very little damage was done.

When police were travelling from Bunninadden to Ballymote on Sunday afternoon February 13<sup>th</sup> they came under fire from a disused house at Oldrock. The exchange of fire lasted only a few minutes and the attackers quickly withdrew. A Dublin Castle report said that a revolver and some empty rifle cartridges were found at the scene. In his monthly report the County Inspector claimed that one of the attackers had been arrested with a Webley revolver though this is not mentioned in the local newspapers.

On the night of Friday February 11<sup>th</sup> an attempt was made to blow up the police barracks in Ballaghaderreen with a mine concealed in a cart of hay. The mine was to be placed at a specific spot against the outside wall where it was calculated it would do most damage by bringing down the top storey. The mine consisted of a can of gelignite in the centre of a half beer barrel. There were two fuses, an electric one and a match lit one. All the roads leading into the town had been made impassable from early on Friday night by felled trees and stone walls. The railway line was likewise blocked by removing two rails and telegraph wires were cut. IRA members from south Sligo including Jim Hunt, M. J. Marren, Alec McCabe and Tom Deignan and members of the East Mayo Brigade under Sean Corcoran were to be involved in the attack. The mine was made by M. J. Marren at Keash in south Sligo and was brought to the town in a cart of hay.

Volunteers entered the town on the night of the attack and proceeded to the area of the barracks. The cart had been left in the vicinity of the Barracks during the day and later it was to be moved by members of the East Mayo Brigade to the barbed wire entanglement and heeled over at the prearranged spot. By this time it was dark and curfew was in force. When the three men who were to bring it to the Barracks door approached it a patrol of six RIC men enforcing the curfew happened to be in the vicinity. One account says that the men were challenged and fire was opened on them. Other members of the IRA party returned fire but the cart and bomb had to be abandoned. Another account says that the curfew enforcing patrol let off some volleys of shots to remind townspeople of the curfew and the bomb party, thinking that they had been discovered, fled. The bomb was taken into the barracks yard. The would-be attackers held a hurried consultation on the advisability of trying to get into the yard and set the bomb off but this was decided against and the IRA men withdrew.

The bomb was a very powerful one. Some days later the police took it out to a bog outside Ballaghaderreen and detonated it. Jim Hever heard the explosion at home in Carrickbanagher and Jim Hunt says that the explosion shook windows in Gurteen.

In Ballymote at about 12.30 am on the early morning of St. Patrick's Day a policeman, possibly a Black and Tan, named James O'Brien was shot. It appears that he with another was on patrol in plain clothes on the Keash Road when they ran into a group of IRA members which included Frank and Josie Hannon and Jim Molloy. One of these opened fire and shot the constable who died soon afterwards in the barracks. One of the IRA party, Jim Molloy, was

captured at the scene and taken to the barracks where he was badly beaten up. He was then moved to Boyle Barracks. Canon Quinn, P.P. Ballymote called in to the police barracks to express his sympathy with the police on the death of their comrade. O'Brien's remains were taken to Mornington, County Meath, where they were interred. The special police patrol had been sent out, according to the County Inspector, to detect persons who often sniped at the Barracks after the regular police patrols returned.

On the night of Sunday March 20<sup>th</sup> an attack took place on Collooney RIC barracks by a group drawn from the different County battalions. Among those taking part were Liam Pilkington and Tom Scanlon from Sligo town, Harold McBrien from Ballintogher, Josie Hannon, M. J. Marren, Pat Hunt and Thady McGowan from Ballymote, Harry Brehony and Mick O'Beirne from Collooney, Jim Hunt from Gurteen. Tom Deignan said that Liam Pilkington had been in Dublin the previous week to see Michael Collins and that Collins had complained that the Sligo area had done very little. So Liam decided that Collooney Barracks should be taken.

Deignan also says that Jim Hunt and Liam had a disagreement before the attack about Liam's plan of detonating the bomb at the door and then rushing the door. Hunt thought this was not practical because of the amount of dust which would be raised and the number of police on duty inside. Frank O'Beirne, in whose area the attack took place, was sick at the time and was unable to take part.

A local policeman, King, lived near the station and near mid-night his home was visited by "a man of diminutive stature brandishing a revolver". He told the policeman that an attack was planned on the barracks for that night. "King, can you promise me there will be no resistance; all we want is surrender and the guns and ammunition" he said, according to Cecil A. King, son of the policeman. According to the same source King, who was over six feet tall, took the intruder by the scruff of the neck and threw him out saying "tell your friends to expect a hot reception". As policeman King left his house to go to the station a "friendly" IRA man met him and advised him to stay put. This he did and watched the attack from his window.

The attack took place about one o'clock in the morning. The plan was to blow in the door and a rushing party of nine men led by Liam Pilkington was to go in at once. A party of riflemen were positioned at the fair green to respond to fire from the barracks or to cover the attackers retreat. The attackers, thirty to thirty five men, met on the main road at the entrance to

Cloonamahon and the bomb was carried in from there. The Barracks was surrounded by barbed wire. There was a narrow passage from the gate to the front door through the barbed wire. When everyone had got into position around the barracks Harry Brehony in his stocking feet carried the bomb from the main road to the Barracks door in a sack on his back. He placed it against the barrack door and took the cable leads back to the exploder.

"When the mine was fired there was a terrific explosion and stones and glass were thrown into the air", said Harold McBrien, who was number six in the rushing party, "We had to wait a few seconds until the debris had fallen and the dust and smoke had partly cleared off. Pilkington then gave the order for us to advance and we followed him in single file. I was sixth in the line and just got inside the outer entrance gate when I was brought to a halt against the back of the man in front of me. Someone said 'Get back' and back we went for some distance. Pilkington now shouted "Come on" and we moved forward again, but again we got jammed in the same way. Again someone said "Get back" and back we moved again." The party again moved forward, this time firing began, first a shot from inside the barracks and then firing from the barracks and from the riflemen in the fair green. The rushing party retreated to cover under fire from both the barracks and their own men in the green.

According to Cecil King, a Black and Tan called Everett, who was on duty, threw himself on the rubble and using the front door as a shield held the attackers at bay until the other police could join him. An exchange of fire ensued after which the attackers withdrew. Very lights were sent up by the defenders and the IRA withdrew in case of the arrival of reinforcements from Sligo. No roads were blocked to prevent the arrival of reinforcements. The police report of the attack stresses the rapid response of the police, first those on guard and then the others who according to the County Inspector "took up their posts quickly without waiting to dress".

The attackers withdrew to the crossroads nearby. "Here everyone started to ask everyone else what the so and so happened" said Harold McBrien, "Pilkington, after saying a few angry words to us made off in the direction of Sligo." "We were disgusted. Liam ordered all back to the corner and told them to go home", says Tom Scanlon, "there was general depression all round". At a subsequent inquiry into King's failure to return to the barracks he was cleared from blame. He was later told by an IRA man that if he had tried to go into the barracks that night he would have been shot.

On Friday February 4<sup>th</sup>, there were a number of searches by the military in Sligo town including a search of all the patrons at the Picture Theatre. On the following Sunday a large force of Crown forces in three lorries arrived in the Tireragh area and carried out searches of the houses of Clarke, Leonard, Kiely, Kelly, Mannion, Kilcullen and Kilcawley. The searchers were described as "courteous" and there were no reported arrests. During the week ending February 12<sup>th</sup> the Catholic Cathedral in Sligo town and its grounds were also searched with no finds being reported. Alderman John Lynch's house was twice visited by police and searched during the week and seven civilians were taken by the military around the town on their lorry during the searches presumably as hostages. On Thursday morning, February 19<sup>th</sup>, military searched some houses in Sligo town including that of Sinn Féin T.D. J. J. Clancy who was arrested. The same day the Harp and Shamrock Hotel was thoroughly searched but no arrests were made there.

Around this time, on Tuesday February 15<sup>th</sup>, Frank Carty made another of his famous jail breaks, this time escaping from Derry jail with the assistance of Derry native Charlie McGuinness. McGuinness smuggled in a hacksaw blade to Carty with the order that he get himself into the hospital wing. Carty, feigning a back pain, did this and sawed through his cell bars. McGuinness waited for Carty on the outside providing a rope ladder which Carty pulled up with twine and helped him find a place of concealment in the city.

At this time Carty's health was not in a good state. He had had pleurisy and this, with the effects of the wound received at the time of his capture, left him weak. He was advised to get some rest and open air for a few months before returning to his unit. He remained in Derry for eight to ten days and then travelled by coal boat to Workington. He went from there to Glasgow where he got in touch with the local IRA. He was looked after by a friendly doctor and after about six weeks was in perfect health again. He was making arrangements to return to Ireland when he was arrested. While he was being brought to the court from the jail an attempt was made to rescue him. The police van in which he was held was stopped by the IRA and fire was opened on it. An attempt was made to open the doors at the rear which failed. Police Inspector Johnson sitting in the back of the van was shot dead. Carty was sent back to Dublin and lodged in Mountjoy. He was later court-martialled on charges of having escaped from Sligo and Derry jails and of having been in possession of a revolver and five rounds of ammunition when captured at Moylough. He refused to recognise the court and was convicted. He was sentenced to ten years penal servitude.

On February 27<sup>th</sup> the IRA in south Sligo suffered another loss when Charlie Gildea of Moylough, who had succeeded Frank Carty as O/C of Tubbercurry battalion, was arrested in Tubbercurry. The County Inspector described Gildea as "Frank Carty's most active lieutenant and next to him one of the most dangerous men at large in County Sligo". He said that Gildea had been involved in the Chaffpool ambush and the Cliffony ambush. He had, in fact, taken part in the former but not the latter. In his report at the end of February the County Inspector boasted to Dublin Castle that 243 members of the IRA were arrested during the month.

Early in March another important arrest was made, that of Alec McCabe T.D., at Carrick on Shannon railway station with M. McLoughlin. Both men it was said were disguised as cattle dealers and were on their way to Dublin. On the morning of the March 16<sup>th</sup> the premises of Mr J. Connolly where Michael Nevin, Information Officer of Sligo Brigade, worked as manager were searched and Nevin was arrested. He was held without charge in Cranmore jail until May 8<sup>th</sup> when he was released. He states that a little while earlier his home had been searched and a cheque book found which had stubs showing payments of affiliation fees to Sinn Féin clubs. His release came as a surprise to Nevin and he afterwards believed that it occurred as a result of representations made by the then bishop of Raphoe, O'Donnell, who was friendly with Connollys for whom Nevin had worked in Sligo. The Bishop, according to Nevin, "had some influence with the British authorities".



*Michael Nevin*

Curfews were imposed in some places in County Sligo in February. Tubbercurry was to have a curfew beginning on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup>. All public houses were to be closed by 6 pm and the curfew was to extend from 9 pm to 5 am. Sligo itself was to have a curfew beginning on the 13<sup>th</sup> but at the last moment the order was cancelled and the curfew ordered to begin a fortnight later.

The Unionist Sligo Independent wondered why the authorities found it necessary to introduce the curfew: "We always held the opinion that there was no necessity for the curfew". It also reported that there was not the "slightest difficulty" in enforcing the curfew. On March 20<sup>h</sup> the curfew was removed in Sligo town.

**(iii) *"The Crown forces are of course succeeding and must in the long run prove victorious".***

*In the third week in January the Quarter Sessions were held in Sligo town including those for Ballymote and Tubbercurry before Judge Wakely. It was estimated that the list of malicious injuries claims would total between £250,000 and £300,000. These included claims arising out of the deaths at the Cliffony ambush and the shooting of D. I. Brady, the destruction of property at Achonry creamery. There were so many cases to be heard that the judge had to return to Sligo in early February to hear the remainder of the cases. At Ballymote Quarter Sessions, held in Sligo, at the end of March a man from the Riverstown area was awarded £1,000 and his wife £500 as a result of raids on his house by armed and masked men. The case referred to incidents which occurred that previous August. The trouble began, he claimed, with a dispute between him and a neighbour about land. The case was brought before a Sinn Féin court which decided for the other man and he was fined. He said that he would appeal the case but he was kidnapped and held for three days during which time his wife paid the fine. At the end of the month he was again taken away and this time charged with writing letters about the incidents to Dublin Castle. He alleged that he was beaten and that while blindfolded a revolver was discharged close to his head. He and his wife were also paraded before the congregation at Mass at Gleann.*

The Sligo Assizes opened on Friday March 4<sup>th</sup>, and there were reports that jurors were kidnapped by armed and masked men to prevent their attendance. At the opening of the Assizes the judge deplored the deteriorating position in the county. He particularly deplored the raids on trains and on "His Majesty's mails".

County Inspector Neylon, reported at the end of March that he had heard of "some murmurings regarding the grazing system" and he said that he would not be surprised if there was an outbreak of agrarian agitation "unless the I. V. [Irish Volunteers] may think their hands are full enough already and that an agitation against the grazing system may weaken their

position". Three cattle drives were reported during April, none in March and one in May so it would appear that the Inspector's hunch proved correct.

In the same March report he said that the IRA were endeavouring to prevent the collection of dog tax and were threatening to shoot dogs for which tax had been taken out. A campaign was under way by the Volunteers against British dog licenses and at times searches were made and dogs found to be so licensed were shot by the IRA. Such shooting was reported in the Culfadda district in May 1921. During the month of April the police were busy checking on dog licenses and about four hundred cases of non payment were detected and some summonses were served. Dog owners felt they couldn't win - either their dogs would be shot by the IRA or they would be fined by the British. In north Sligo some dog owners sought to solve the problem by not paying the licence and sending their dogs "for the duration" to the island of Innismurray where there was no police presence. It is reported that many dogs sent there were then forgotten about and that the dog population of the island remained very high for years afterwards!

The County Inspector also reported at the end of March that Volunteers in the Tubbercurry Rural District were collecting a rate of 6d in the £ for the upkeep of the IRA. He reported that the police had arrested one of their collectors. He also reported that the Irish Volunteers had been reorganised in County Sligo. He reported that there were then 34 companies with a membership of 1172. He stressed that this figure consisted of active members only. Previous figures given in the monthly reports were 10 branches with a membership of 1727. This previous figure seems to have included inactive members. He also said that a flying column or "murder gang" of 24 of the most prominent and dangerous officers and men had been formed. At the same time he reported 8 branches of Cumann na mBan with 277 members.

The Sligo Independent of March 12<sup>th</sup> under the headline "Irish Republican or English Law ?" printed a comment on the state of the county: "During the past number of years affairs in Ireland had reached such a pass that we were living under what one might describe as a dual authority- an independent sovereign Irish Republic and the British Empire. At times, the citizens of Sligo irrespective of their religious or political views had great difficulty in knowing whether to obey the laws of the Irish Republican Volunteers or the laws of England owing to the way law and order had been allowed to drift in Ireland by the British government. In consequence a fight for supremacy has gone on between the forces of the Crown and the Republicans with general



destruction to the country and innocent citizens". Going on, the Independent gave its judgement on the probable outcome of the struggle - "The Crown forces are of course succeeding and in the long run must prove victorious. How silly it is for some Irishmen to try and battle against the British Empire whose soldiers won the greatest war against the Germans and are now 'top dog' in that great country today".

On February 3<sup>rd</sup> a Sligo born member of the RIC was shot dead in Pallasgreen, County Limerick. He was Constable Patrick Foody, of the Carns area.

At the end of March it was reported that armed men in civilian clothing burned the residence of T. H. Murrice who was a well-known Sinn Féin member of Sligo County Council and manager of Tubbercurry creamery. The occupants were first ordered to leave.

A company of Auxiliaries came to Tubbercurry during April 1921. According to Martin Brennan, "they were a damn decent crowd". "A lot of the Auxiliaries were decent men", according to Michael Walsh who recounted the story of the Auxiliary officer who at the fair of Tubbercurry saw a fine horse for sale. "Would you let me ride him?" he asked the vendor. "Why wouldn't I?" replied the farmer and the Auxiliary took the horse for a ride. When he returned he bought the horse on the spot and had it sent back to his home in England.

Captain Johnston was the officer commanding the Auxiliaries in Tubbercurry. They were "P" Company. The Captain was fired on by the IRA on May 15<sup>th</sup> when he was on his way from Easkey to Tubbercurry at Gleneask. His car was hit five times but he escaped injury. Jack Brennan had a very narrow escape around this time. He had slept in a house on the mountain north of Tubbercurry which was surrounded by Auxiliaries at 6.30 am. The alarm was raised and he had time to hide under a bed. The Auxiliaries questioned the occupants of the house but were satisfied and left without realising how close they were to the wanted man!

Howleys, a large business premises in Tubbercurry adjoining the RIC barracks, was commandeered by the Auxiliaries early in April and a full front page advertisement in the April 30<sup>th</sup> and May 7<sup>th</sup> issues of the Sligo Champion announced a "Clearance Sale of Large Drapery Stock" in a hotel in Tubbercurry starting on May 9<sup>th</sup>. The stock was from Howley's - "Commandeered by Crown Forces".

Rev. Michael Henry, "The Doc Henry" as we have mentioned was very friendly with the IRA. His house was raided by the Tubbercurry Auxiliaries on a number of occasions and his life was threatened. However the second in command of the Auxiliaries in Tubbercurry, a man nicknamed "Tiny" because of his great height, had served with "The Doc" in Salonica during the war and had become good friends. As a result Fr Henry was made an honorary member of the Auxiliaries Mess in Tubbercurry and often joined the Auxiliaries there for a drink. After such a night Colonel Johnston often drove him home to Curry.

Monday May 23<sup>rd</sup> was Market Day in Tubbercurry and a large number of people were in the town. About four o'clock a number of Auxiliaries came on the streets and visited the public houses. They ordered out some young men they found there and added to these others from the streets. The group was lined up in front of Howley's premises then occupied by the Auxiliaries. Some of the local RIC then came on the scene with brooms and the "conscripts" were ordered to clean the streets after the market. Owners of donkey and horse carts were forcibly enlisted to load the refuse on their carts and take it away.

Auxiliaries operating in the Curry area often raided the house of John Durcan who was active in the IRA. All the occupants of the house were lined up and questioned but they were not ill treated. Neither was the house wrecked. The Tans took Mr Kennedy, the local teacher and carried him around in their Crossley tender as protection against an IRA attack.

*(iv) "They were your enemies, they are now your friends".*

According to Daniel Waters, 72 year old Thomas Walker, civil bill officer of Sligo County Court, was visited and warned twice about his activities. He refused to co-operate and it was decided that he should be shot dead. The Intelligence Officer for the area, Patrick Farrell strongly opposed this decision, saying that Walker was harmless but was over-ruled.

At about 11 pm on the night of Thursday April 14<sup>th</sup>, Thomas Walker's house in the Ballinafull area was visited by a number of armed and masked men. Thomas Walker was in the kitchen, his wife had retired for the night. When Mrs Walker, hearing the noise, came down she was met by four masked men who told her that her husband had been taken. Two of the men searched the house and then left. The other two stayed for about another hour to prevent Mrs Walker raising the alarm.

In the morning the body of Thomas Walker was found lying dead on the roadway, about 200 yards from his house. The blindfolded body was fully clothed except for boots and the hands were tied behind the back. Medical evidence at the inquest stated that he had been shot three times, in the neck, jaw and stomach. A notice was found near his body with the message "Spies and Informers beware. IRA". A statement from Dublin Castle said that Walker's house had been previously raided on March 11<sup>th</sup> and he was forced to swear that he would serve no more processes. Fifteen persons had been jailed as a result of this raid. It was suggested (wrongly, the County Inspector told the Inspector General) that Walker was shot because he identified the raiders of March 11<sup>th</sup>. Auxiliaries visited the scene on the Friday morning and a number of arrests were made. Two of these were identified as being part of the "murder gang" according to the County Inspector. *According to Tom Kilcoyne of Mullinabreena, William Russell Fenton, Clerk of the Crown in Sligo, supplied information to the police on the IRA and some of this information came from Thomas Walker. Walker lived in a relatively remote area and so was an easy target. On the night after Walker's murder the police guarding the family came under fire which was returned. The entire Walker family then left the County for a place of safety.*

On the evening of Tuesday April 19<sup>th</sup>, two police constables, Kelly and Hedrington, were travelling back to Sligo from Athlone and Dublin. When their train stopped at Ballisodare station at about 8.25 pm it was met by a number of armed men led by Liam Pilkington. Tom Deignan says "We had nine men with revolvers to get these RIC at any cost". One held up the engine driver and two more were on the other side of the train to cover that avenue of escape. The train was searched and ten or twelve men known to be police or soldiers were taken out. They were searched and there were four or five guns between the lot. The two marked men, Kelly and Hedrington, were taken a little way away along a small road by a group of three or four and shot dead. "They said nothing", Tom Deignan told Ernie O'Malley. The executioners reported back to Liam Pilkington "Now get down on your knees", he told them, "They were your enemies, they are now your friends". Six men from Sligo town took part in the action including Liam Pilkington, who was in charge, and Tom Scanlon.

The report from the Sligo Brigade to the Adjutant General in Dublin said that Constable Kelly was "the most aggressive in the district." The County Inspector in his monthly report said "Const. Kelly had been present at many recent arrests about Grange and Cliffony. There was special malice towards him". "It was generally thought that he had acted the blackguard",

Michael Coleman, who also took part in the action, said of Constable Kelly. The Sligo Independent in its report of the shootings said that Kelly had been a "marked man". It also said that there was a report that the train had been stopped at Kilfree, examined and allowed proceed. The carriage in which the two policemen travelled was marked with a chalk mark, it also reported.



*Liam "Billy" Pilkington*

After the killing the men split up in twos and made their way back to their own areas. Constable Kelly, a native of Mayo, was married with two children. He was interred in Drumcliff cemetery after funeral Mass in Sligo Cathedral. Constable Hedrington was a native of Fivemiletown, County Tyrone and was unmarried. Shops and business houses were closed in Sligo on Wednesday by order of the police and the Mayor, Alderman Jinks, called to No.1 barracks to which the remains had been removed, to tender his sympathy.

According to the County Inspector no Sinn Féin courts were held during February 1921 and again at the end of April he stated that none had been held. An editorial in the Sligo

Independent in mid-April expressed the opinion that the British courts were coming back to their own again. The evidence for this, it said, was the attendance and the number of cases at the Sligo Borough Court the previous week. The paper said it was like "an old time sitting before Sinn Féin's onslaught". A case involving possession of lands near Ballymote was heard at Mullaghroe on 15th April. South Sligo Sinn Féin Court sat on June 13<sup>th</sup> and another one on June 30<sup>th</sup>. The Justices at the latter sitting were Thomas O'Donnell and M. J. Marren. The Republican court at Mullaghroe also sat at this time.

An Active Service Unit had been organised in the Dromore West/ Easkey area and it was decided to attack Easkey Barracks on April 20<sup>th</sup>. About 30 men were involved in the planned ambush and 30 others were involved in back up activities. These included a party going to Dromore West RIC Barracks and opening fire on it during the period of the ambush to prevent help going from there to Easkey. The column mobilised at Culleens. They had about 15 rifles in the A.S.U. and men from Bonnieconlon and Ballina were involved as well as local men. A patrol went out from the Barracks in Easkey at 10.30 pm each night and it was planned to ambush this patrol. About nine o'clock the ambush party took up positions in the grounds of the Church of Ireland church and on the other side of the road. Another group were in position nearer the barracks and their task was to prevent reinforcements leaving the barracks to help the ambushed men. In the event the patrol never left the barracks, presumably they were informed of the planned ambush. After waiting some time the ambush party fired some rounds at the barracks and set fire to the courthouse. They then withdrew from the village.

Arrests at the end of April included that of D. A. Mulcahy, principal of the Sligo Technical School and A. Doocey of Adelaide Street. At the same time Sinn Féin T.D. J. J. Clancy was released. There were also some releases from Sligo Jail at this time. In mid-April it was reported that Sinn Féin Halls at Kilmacoen and Knocknarea had been destroyed by Crown Forces. The parish hall at Keash was burned to the ground at the end of May. Early in June Curry creamery was destroyed by fire. On Sunday April 24<sup>th</sup> when the congregation which attended 11.30 am Mass at Keash came out they found the place surrounded by a group of Auxiliaries. All the men were forced to kneel on the road and take off their hats. They were then asked to take out their rosary beads and to repeat while going round on their beads "To Hell with de Valera", "God Bless the Black and Tans", "Down with the Republic" and other such invocations. Five men who refused were beaten up. Early in May the congregation at Gurteen Mass were rounded up by the Crown Forces and searched. No arrests were reported. Large-

scale raid by Crown forces in the Easkey and Enniscrone areas took place on the evening and night of Saturday May 14<sup>th</sup> and several men were arrested. Many were released the following Monday and paid tribute to the local police in Easkey Barracks for their kindness during their detention. Crown forces visited Ballinafull creamery on Monday May 23<sup>d</sup> and searched all those at work there and in the vicinity. No arrests were made.

On Friday May 20<sup>th</sup> during a search in the Maugherow area Michael Kilfeather was shot and taken to Sligo Infirmary to have his wounds treated. He remained there under heavy police guard until the following week when he was released into police custody. He was taken under heavy escort to Dublin. The County Inspector mentioned his arrest as a very important one and said he was one of "the murder gang".

Fairs fixed for Riverstown, Collooney and Grange for the last week in May were all abandoned. Coolaney fair was due to be held on Monday May 30<sup>h</sup> but on the Sunday notices were posted by the police prohibiting the holding of the fair.

*(v) "The latter expressed a wish to meet them in an open fight soon".*

Mail raids continued. On January 9<sup>th</sup> the mail car from Dromore West to Ballina was held up at Corbally and some mails were taken. A police search afterwards revealed nothing. Later in the month it was reported that the Sligo to Ballyshannon mail car service had been withdrawn because of the frequent raids. Also on the January 9<sup>h</sup> the Dublin to Sligo train was held up at Kilfree and police constable Daly was taken from the train by Volunteers. Another train hold up occurred at Kilfree junction on January 10<sup>th</sup>. A man was sent to Boyle Station to board the train and check if there were police on board. He was then to signal the thirty Volunteers waiting at Kilfree under the command of Jim Hunt as the train pulled in. A District Inspector of the RIC, Matthews, and two constables were on the train and these were overpowered and disarmed. Later the same evening Volunteers M. J. Marren, Jim Hunt and Joe Finnegan were at Kilfree Station when a train pulled in. It contained a full company of the Bedfords then stationed at Boyle and as the train pulled away the three opened fire on the carriages containing the soldiers. No serious injuries were reported.

For January 1921 the County Inspector reported that the number of indictable offences fell considerably to six, but he explained this in his monthly report as being partly due to the fact

that mail services in the Clifffony and Tubbercurry areas had been suspended "and consequently there are no mails to be robbed as heretofore". The night passenger train from Sligo to Dublin was fired on near Kilfree Junction on March 3<sup>rd</sup>. Four windows of a coach occupied by troops were broken but there were no injuries. The troops detrained at Boyle. The following day the passenger train from Kilfree to Ballaghaderreen was held up and searched by armed men.

On February 25<sup>th</sup> armed and masked men broke into a goods store at Sligo station and destroyed a consignment of bran from Belfast to Belmullet. The County Inspector remarked that this was in connection with the Belfast Boycott "regarding which recent orders appear to have been received by the Sligo Sinn Féiners". A similar incident occurred at Sligo station on March 13<sup>th</sup>. On the March 28<sup>th</sup> armed men stopped a passenger train between Kilfree and Island Road and two tons of potatoes from the North of Ireland were removed. Belfast goods were taken from a train at Carrowmore station on Saturday February 26<sup>th</sup> and destroyed.

A raid on Kilfree Railway Junction early in April resulted in the seizing and destruction of oats and potatoes from Belfast. A similar raid on a train between Collooney and Coolaney resulted in the destruction of more goods including sugar, potatoes, bread and groceries. In mid-June a train was held up at the metal bridge just east of Coolaney and Belfast goods were dumped into the river. Two wagons of the train were set alight. On April 29<sup>h</sup> at about 9 pm a goods train was raided by armed and masked men between Collooney and Ballymote. Bread and other goods from the North of Ireland were destroyed. Earlier the same day another train had been held up between Ballymote and Kilfree and searched. Nothing was interfered with and the train proceeded. On May 17<sup>th</sup> a goods yard at Sligo railway station was raided and two wagons containing Belfast goods were burned. On the following day a goods train was held up at Collooney and Belfast goods destroyed.

On the May 19<sup>th</sup> the passenger train from Ballaghaderreen to Kilfree Junction was boarded by armed and masked men at about 2.15 in the afternoon. They rode the train into Kilfree where they held up the mail train from Sligo for 30 minutes while they searched the mails thoroughly and questioned all the passengers. Two soldiers, unarmed, were taken out onto the platform and questioned but were allowed rejoin the train. On May 26<sup>th</sup> the mail train was held up and boarded by armed men between Ballymote and Kilfree. These men travelled on the train for a distance and dismounted between Kilfree and Boyle.

On Friday May 6<sup>th</sup> the Dublin to Sligo train was held up at Seefin level crossing between Kilfree Junction and Ballymote at 7.30 pm apparently to raid the mails. A man with a red flag stopped the train. Michael J. Marren and Thady McGowan were in charge of about between thirty and forty Volunteers. They had 10/15 rifles and various other firearms. There was a high bank on one side about 125 yards long and half the men were on that side. An IRA scout had boarded the train at Kilfree with orders to see if there were enemy forces aboard and to signal the ambush party if there were. This he did. Marren and McGowan stood on the line and stopped the train. McGowan was armed with a Smith and Wesson revolver he had previously taken from D.I. Mathews while Marren had a Peter the Painter. Frank Higgins, Culfadda and Pa Coleman Ballymote then came out behind the train and both pairs began to go through the carriages. However there were a number of Auxiliary policemen on board and they opened fire on the attackers. After a brisk exchange 11 Auxiliaries and 2 police surrendered and arms, ammunition and despatches were taken. The County Inspector's report says 5 temporary cadets returning to Tubbercurry and one Ballymote constable were deprived of their arms. Passengers were said to have had narrow escapes and a calf grazing in a nearby field was killed. There were however no human casualties! The Sligo Champion report concluded "It is stated that the Auxiliaries thanked the Republicans on parting for the courteous treatment they received and that the latter expressed a wish to meet them in an open fight soon". On June 10<sup>th</sup> , 14<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, and July 6<sup>th</sup> there were raids on or in the vicinity of Kilfree Junction.

The numerous raids on the trains in the south Sligo area were the work of IRA of the Gurteen and Ballymote battalions under Jim Hunt and Michael Marren. They appear to have raided the trains at will with no opposition. Marren was known by the enemy as "The Gentleman" because of his treatment of prisoners.

On one occasion in early 1921 Hunt and Marren were resting at the home of Patrick J. O'Brien near Ballymote when the alarm was raised - The Tans were on their way! The two made a hasty retreat through the fields leaving their bicycles behind. The Crown Forces searched the house and asked about the two bicycles and were told a story about two people having gone into Ballymote. The police took the bicycles leaving a message for their owners to call at the barracks at Ballymote to collect their property. Hunt and Marren did not do this of course but instead called at the houses of two policemen who lived in Ballymote and took their bicycles to replace the confiscated machines!





*A group of IRA from the south Sligo area.*

*In the front row are Jim Hunt, second from left, Joe Finnegan, third from left, and Thady McGowan, fourth from left. Tom Brehony is in the back row third from left. The others are not yet identified.*

An ex-British Naval officer was living at Clogher and he was suspected of giving information to the British. It seems he had been involved with the local Volunteers in a case in the Sinn Féin courts and believed that he had not been treated fairly. He then took some of the locals to court in the English courts and won a sum of money in damages. He was very friendly with the Auxiliaries in Coolavin and it was believed that he was supplying them with information. The IRA met and decided that he should be banished from the country. Jim Hunt went with a party of seven to arrest the spy who had made preparations to defend himself. He was however, overpowered and was later court-martialled and ordered to leave the country. He left the following day. "Somehow I feel the local lads had brought a bit of it on themselves", Hunt told Ernie O'Malley.

A girl in the Gurteen area had been jilted by a member of the IRA and in revenge she sent in information on the movements and personnel of the IRA in the area to the military barracks in Boyle. The letter was sent out to Jim Hunt by a friendly sergeant and it was discussed at a Battalion council meeting. Everyone had their own suspicions as to the informer but in the absence of proof nothing was done.

On May 17<sup>th</sup> Jim Hunt and two others, Mick Harrington and Richard McGeogh, were waiting at Mullaghroe railway crossing for a military car which used to travel from Tubbercurry to Boyle. They held up the train from Ballaghaderreen to Kilfree and got off it at Mullaghroe Station. There they got on to the engine of a train going to Ballaghaderreen. Richard McGeogh, who was from Tuam, claimed to be an engine driver and he took charge of the engine.

He stopped the engine on the railway bridge at Ballaghaderreen which was within range of the RIC barracks. From this position they opened fire on the barracks with three rifles. It was about 3 pm. Fire was returned at first by policemen on the streets and then by policemen from loopholes in the barracks. Harrington was injured to the head. McGeogh then tried to reverse the engine back towards Mullaghroe but failed to get up enough steam. They shovelled more coal into the engine but this failed to have the desired result.

They then abandoned the engine and retreated towards the hills on the Roscommon/Sligo border under police fire. They then made their way towards Mullaghroe and went into a public house at Mullaghroe. Five minutes after their entry the place was surrounded by about twenty Auxiliaries and police. McGeogh, Harrington and Hunt made a run for it. Hunt was fit at the time and kept his distance from his pursuers who were led by an officer called Little. However one of the policemen kept gaining on him and Hunt only kept him at bay by firing at him. When his ammunition had run out Hunt was captured. McGeogh was also captured but Harrington hid among the rushes in a bog and escaped. One Webley revolver, one German automatic and a Lee Metford carbine were recovered by the police. The carbine had been left on the table in the public house. Some of the Auxiliaries made to ill-treat Hunt but Little prevented them. Hunt and McGeogh were taken on foot to Ballaghaderreen and from there to Boyle barracks.

Jim Hunt was court-martialled in June 1921. There was an attempt made to have him identified as having taken part in the Ratra ambush. However no positive identification was made. He had been responsible for saving the life of a policeman at that ambush and the policeman, when produced, refused to recognise him.

Joe Finnegan took Jim Hunt's place as commandant of the Gurteen Battalion after Hunt's arrest and there seems to have been no halt to the frequent raiding of trains in the area. Men from the south Sligo area under M. J. Marren and Pat Hunt held up a train between

Rathmullen and Culfadda on June 29<sup>th</sup>. On board were a officer and three soldiers belonging to the Bedfordshire Regiment then stationed at Boyle. The men were disarmed and allowed to proceed. Marren said to the officer, "You have a prisoner in the Barracks, Jim Hunt. When you go in tell him that we're asking for him and do whatever you can for him." The officer relayed the message to Hunt and asked what he could do for him. Hunt asked for a pane of glass to be taken out of the window for ventilation purposes and for a bucket of whitewash to brighten up the cell.

***(vi) "Four prominent members of the murder gang".***

Jim Molloy, who had been arrested after the shooting of policeman O'Brien in Ballymote, escaped from Boyle Barracks on Monday May 21<sup>st</sup>. He was due to be brought to Dublin for court-martial the following day. He was being held in a low lean-to shed which had been used as a miniature rifle range in the military barracks in Main St which was garrisoned by the Bedfordshire Regiment. Also in Main Street was the police barracks which had a number of Black and Tans and in Elphin Street was the workhouse where a half company of Auxiliaries was quartered. Among the forty or so prisoners in Boyle were Jim Hunt and Dick McGough recently captured on May 17<sup>th</sup> after the Ballaghaderreen train attack. The O/C of the North Roscommon Brigade, Dockery, was also a prisoner.

It was decided that Molloy should escape and a military policeman named Meadlarkin helped. He told the IRA on the outside of the arrangements inside and carried in messages to the prisoners. Every morning some of the prisoners in the Rifle Range were taken under escort to the wash house on the south side of the square overlooking the Boyle river. Twenty-three prisoners were taken to the wash house beside the Boyle river in the early morning of May 21<sup>st</sup> by four soldiers. The soldiers stayed outside. Inside, Molloy was lifted up to a window, got out and crossed the shallow river to meet up with six waiting members of the Boyle IRA on the other side. He was at once taken away and was not missed until roll call that evening.

On May 18<sup>th</sup> the house of two sisters not far from Sligo town was visited by armed and masked men around midnight. The men cut the women's hair with a shears as a punishment for "going with soldiers" and warned them of worse consequences if they did not stop. A notice was posted in Sligo around this time also warning girls of the dangers of associating with British soldiers. In the report from the HQRS, Sligo Brigade, to the Adjutant General for April 1921,

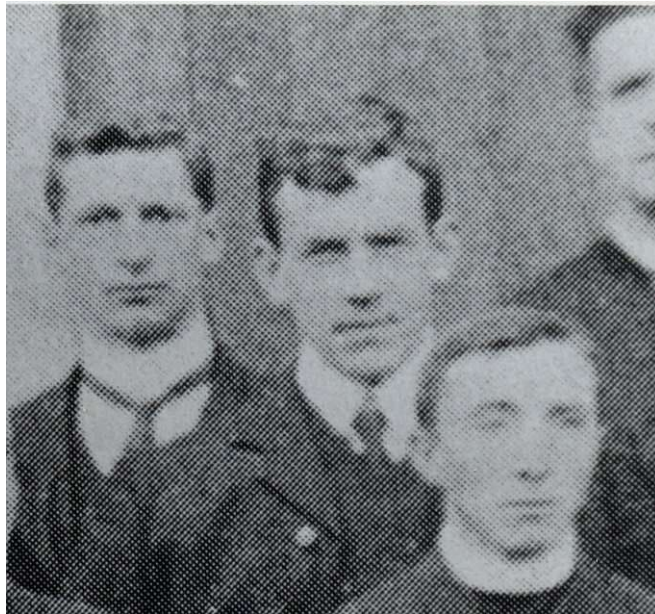
the following is included: "Throughout the area generally extensive road cutting and blockading had been done during the month". In mid-May bridges on the roads from Ballymote to Bunninadden and to Gurteen were demolished. Deep trenches were cut in the road at the railway bridge at Mullaghroe making it impassable for vehicular traffic. In late May the bridges at Drumcliff and Bunduff were demolished.

A General Election was being held at this time for the Southern Parliament under the Government of Ireland Act which set up two Parliaments in the island, a Northern one which became Stormont and a Southern one which never functioned. The Sinn Féin party decided to contest the elections and there was little or no opposition. Changes in electoral boundaries saw the abolition of the old Sligo North and Sligo South constituencies and the establishment of a Sligo and East Mayo constituency. The electoral system was also changed with the introduction of Proportional Representation. There were five seats in the Sligo-East Mayo constituency and a preliminary list of candidates published on May 14<sup>th</sup> contained the following names: Alec McCabe, Liam Pilkington, Thomas O'Donnell, and Seamus Devins all from County Sligo, Dr. Ferran, Foxford and Eamon de Valera. It was said that Pilkington had later indicated that he was unwilling to go forward and that Frank Carty would be selected in his place. Eamon de Valera, selected in many Irish constituencies, did not go forward for the Sligo-Mayo one.

Thomas O'Donnell from south Sligo had been very prominent in Sinn Féin from early days and was president of South Sligo Comhairle Cheantair. He had also played a major part in the formation of Republican courts in the county. He was a teacher in St. Nathy's, the Diocesan College and previously at Rockwell College. He was a good friend of de Valera and this and the fact that he was "educated" helped him to get the nomination. He was put forward by the Commandant in the Gurteen area, Jim Hunt.

One surprising omission from the list was the sitting T.D. for North Sligo, J. J. Clancy. The feeling is that he was not active and "extreme" enough for the men who selected the candidates, the commandants of the IRA. The County Inspector said that Clancy was not selected "because his views were not extreme enough - he did not approve of police murders etc." As we have seen Clancy had been involved in paying the IRA, reluctantly it would appear, for collecting the rates and had resigned his County Council seat earlier in the year. The Sinn Féin candidates - "Four prominent members of the murder gang" the County Inspector called

them - were returned unopposed in the Sligo-East Mayo constituency and there were no election meetings.



*Tom O'Donnell (centre) and Eamon de Valera (left) when both were on the teaching staff of Rockwell College, County Tipperary.*

Marines were stationed at Rosses Point at this period and one of these, Corporal Williams was shot dead at about 2 pm on Tuesday May 17<sup>th</sup>. He had been in Sligo for rations during the day and was returning on a side car when he was stopped by three armed and masked men, members of the local IRA. He was ordered off the car and taken about 100 yards down a side road towards the shore. His dead body was later found on the roadside with three bullet wounds to his head and chest. Considerable police activity followed the killing and the whole area was searched. At the end of the month the County Inspector said in his report that the killers were known to the police.

On May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1921 a small group under Thomas Brehony of Keash took up ambush position in a small wood near the caves of Keash waiting for enemy forces travelling the road. Four men armed with rifles were supported by others who were to signal the approach of the enemy. At around 3.30 pm a Ford car and three Crossley tenders were seen from a distance as they came down the hills raising dust as they came. There were 13 Auxiliaries and 13 RIC in the convoy. As the last lorry passed the ambush position fire was opened on it. Because of the heavy dust the other vehicles went on a considerable distance before realising that their comrades were being attacked. One constable was shot in the leg and another sustained severe wounds

including a broken leg, when thrown from the tender on to the road. The engagement lasted about an hour. When the other police returned the attackers withdrew without any casualties.

On Friday May 27<sup>th</sup> another important capture was made by Crown Forces in the Ballygawley area when Frank O'Beirne, Commandant of the Collooney Battalion, was taken into custody. Arrested with him were James Colleary, Timothy Kelly, and Harry Clancy.



*Frank O'Beirne*

At the end of May the County Inspector summarised the situation thus - "There are bands of I. Volunteers with arms at large in the County who are a menace to Crown Forces and law-abiding people". He also said that "The Crown Forces have shown counter activity and several important arrests of leading IRA men have been made".

On Monday June 4<sup>th</sup> a large scale search took place in south Sligo. Military from Tubbercurry, Sligo and Boyle were involved. "There were oceans of soldiers on foot", said Tom Deignan, Commandant of the Riverstown battalion of the IRA, who got separated from the rest of the column and was among those encircled. The search started at 2 pm and at about 9 pm Deignan and John Kennedy, the Brigade engineer, were in a bog at Culfadda where they pretended to be working. However the military arrested everyone and took them to be checked by some RIC. Deignan was recognised as a wanted man. He tried to make a run for it but was caught and handcuffed. "Bogs, fields and hedges were beaten and searched" said the Champion report and a large number were arrested. Most of these were released subsequently.

Deignan was taken in a convoy with an armoured car to Sligo. On the way an attempt was made to ambush the convoy, shots were fired but no injuries were caused. Deignan thought about attempting to escape in the confusion but was dissuaded by a soldier who told him "I'll blow your blooming head off." He was lodged in Sligo jail.

Thomas Howley of Enniscrone died in military custody in Athlone on May 28<sup>th</sup>. His remains arrived in Enniscrone the following Monday night and, draped in the tricolour, there were met by 200 Volunteers. Two lorry loads of Crown Forces arrived next day while requiem Mass was in progress and followed the funeral to the graveyard. No incidents were reported.

A series of raids was carried out on Post Offices in the Barony of Tireragh on the week-end of June 24/25<sup>th</sup>. The post offices at Dromore West, Easkey, Owenbeg, Culleens, Rathlee, Kilglass, Enniscrone and Castleconnor were visited between 8 am and 9 am by armed and masked men. Another report said that there was an interval of one hour between each raid and the next one.

"About a dozen members of the company and I, all that could be mustered at short notice, held a meeting where it was decided , if sufficient arms could be procured, to have another crack at the British force in our area", says Patrick McCannon, Cliffony. There was a difficulty with arms and these had to be got from adjoining areas. On the evening of June 26<sup>th</sup> they lay in ambush in a disused building about one mile from Cliffony Barracks at Creevykeel. In the event only one policeman came near the position and he was shot dead. He was Constable Patrick Clarke, a native of County Mayo. Patrick McCannon, who took part in the ambush says that in his opinion the site selected was a poor one. The local papers reported that the policeman had left the Barracks to buy cigarettes in a local shop when he was killed.

*(vii) "With a few honourable exceptions personnel of all public bodies here is of a very poor quality".*

Despite the fact that Sligo Corporation had pledged allegiance to Dáil Éireann the Minister for Local Government, W. T. Cosgrave was not happy with the conduct of the Corporation. In a letter of May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1920, he instanced a number of cases where Sligo Corporation did not comply with strict allegiance to An Dáil. For example on March 16<sup>th</sup> they gave instructions to have claims for malicious injuries defended in the courts and on the March 30<sup>th</sup> they applied to the English Local Government Board for sanction for a loan. It was suggested that the Corporation should be brought in line "with the rest of Ireland" and also suggested that the Local Government Inspector be consulted. It was suggested furthermore that some Republican members who were unable to attend resign and be replaced by people who would be able to attend.

A special meeting of Sligo County Council was held on Saturday July 9<sup>th</sup>. A number of councillors sent in letters of resignation. These included Jack Brennan, John Lynch, Seamus MacGowan, M. J. Marren, Tom O'Donnell, Jim Hunt and Frank Carty. It appears that they resigned because of their inability to attend regularly being on the run. Replacements were proposed and seconded for them: James Gildea in place of Jack Brennan, Tom Flynn, Sligo for John Lynch, P. J. Hughes, Sligo for S. MacGowan, Pat Boles, Culfadda for M. J. Marren, Roger Nerney, Gurteen for T. O'Donnell, Thomas Casey, Cloonloo for J. Hunt, P. Connolly, Tubbercurry for F. Carty, E. Hannon, Enniscrone for M. J. Hanley. The last co-option was to be permanent as Hanley had not attended any meeting.

On July 7<sup>th</sup> Cosgrove wrote to the Inspection Department saying that Sligo Corporation, while they had refused to submit their accounts to audit by the English Local Government Board, had at least on two occasions been in communication with the English Board and he asked if the inspector in Sligo could do anything about this. A Dáil Éireann Local Government Inspector, S. McGrath, was in Sligo in early summer of 1921. He stayed at the Harp and Shamrock Hotel, Sligo under the name George Smith. A report to the Dáil's Local Government Department from Sligo in mid-June reported that "the vast majority are in favour of the movement". It went on: "I find that most of the Poor Law Guardians and County Councillors are fully alive to their duties in this respect . . . The Corporation here is dominated by a certain class and not at all in favour of the movement".

Another report in July reported that all local bodies in Sligo were behind the Dáil and that the fact that minutes had not been sent to the Dáil Dept. of Local Government in many cases was due either to the poor quality of the officials or to a heavy workload. The Inspector said that in all cases minutes would be forthcoming in the future.

Following the release of the Tubbercurry Guardians at the end of March a conference was held in the Courthouse, Sligo, on Saturday April 2<sup>nd</sup> to consider the question of amalgamation of the workhouses in the county. This scheme was proposed by Dáil Éireann. John Gilligan, Sligo County Council vice-chairman, presided at the meeting. The proposal was that a hospital/workhouse would only exist in Sligo town and that the other two institutions would be closed. The chairman of Dromore West asked that the scheme not be proceeded with until the financial difficulties of the Unions be resolved. No decision was taken at the conference. An editorial in The Connachtman of April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1921 strongly supported the scheme of amalgamation.



"It is certain that the amalgamation scheme will save many thousands of pounds to the ratepayers . . . at the same time giving an infinitely more effective service," it said.

The Annual General Meeting of Sligo County Council was held on Saturday June 18<sup>h</sup>. There seems to have been no prior agreement as to the chairmanship. Michael Nevin proposed John Hennigan but he declined. John Gilligan was proposed and seconded and he accepted.

A general report from the Dáil Inspector, Sean McGrath, towards the end of July reveals his low opinion of the way Local Government was being run in the County. "With a few honourable exceptions personnel of all public bodies here is of a very poor quality", he said. "I do not know of any adjective in the English language which would sufficiently describe for you the hopeless inability, ignorance and I might almost say superstition of these representative gentlemen". McGrath gave his address as 8 Upper John Street, Sligo at the end of 1921. He was also very critical of the way "the IRA seem to think they can interfere when and where they like in public affairs". He instanced the case of the IRA having helped in the collection of the rates for which they demanded and got the sum of £1,000 from the County Council.

*At a Council meeting on July 9<sup>h</sup> a councillor who was regarded as an IRA spokesman demanded that no rate collector be given power to collect unless he had obtained a permit from the Commandant of the "military authority". This motion was defeated. Raids on rate collectors who had not lodged their collection with the County Council were common in mid-1921. Early in May there were reports of such raids, presumably by the IRA, in the Tubbercurry area and collectors in the Ballymote area were raided a week later. A report in November 1921 on the rates matter by someone signing himself E.C. who appears to have been a previous inspector in Sligo, says that the situation as regards the rates was "so hopeless" that he had agreed that the IRA should be asked to help and he saw no reason why the IRA should not be paid for the service. He however objected to the manner in which the payment was demanded and taken.*

An undated letter from the Commandant 5th Battalion, IRA, Thomas Deignan, to the County Council, was enclosed with the Inspector's report as an example of IRA interference in the Council's affairs. The letter recommended a man for a vacant position as rate collector. "He is a most respectable young man of sterling character, an earnest and enthusiastic worker for Ireland", the reference says, "I strongly recommend his appointment". The letter was signed O/C 5th Battalion, Sligo Brigade, IRA. The matter of the IRA's collection of the rates and the

collection fee taken was not allowed to rest. The Minister for Local Government arranged a meeting for Frank Carty and Seamus Devins with the Chief of Staff, Richard Mulcahy, on November 8<sup>th</sup> 1921 to discuss the matter.

The Local Government Inspector also formed a very poor opinion of the administrators of the workhouses. When he arrived at one Sligo County workhouse "the clerk and master were absent. The matron and day-nurse were basking outside by the riverbank. I was informed that the clerk and master were 'spraying spuds'. The general appearance of the place was dirty. The matron could not tell me how many were in the house. Every officer in \*\*\*\*\* should be censured publicly for the laxity noticed in my visit. Some of these are the people who whine for fair treatment for the poor".

At the General Meeting of Tubbercurry Board of Guardians at the end of June, Robert Nicholson, who had just been released from prison, was unanimously re-elected chairman. The acting clerk reported that the County Council had forwarded a further sum of £1,000 and a discussion followed on how to spend this money. Officials and attendants' salaries were paid to the end of March. Contractors were paid for the month of April though not for March, February or January. Having done all this they found that they had exceeded the £1,000 by £20 and they expected that the bank would be accommodating in this matter. Frank Carty, in his absence, was appointed chairman of Tubbercurry Rural District.

***(viii) "There was a military guard on the prison at the time but the guards were asleep".***

Another daring jailbreak took place from Sligo jail on Tuesday June 28<sup>h</sup>. Three prisoners, Charles Gildea of Tubbercurry, Frank O'Beirne of Collooney and Tom Deignan of Riverstown were taken from the prison. On the previous day over 20 inmates had been transferred from the jail to Derry. O'Beirne and Deignan had been suspected of complicity in the killings of the policemen at Ballisodare. They had been court-martialled and were awaiting sentences. It was feared that they might be executed.

Since the rescue of Frank Carty there had been a military guard in the prison, up to forty men, in order to prevent a recurrence. One outer wall of the prison bounded the Hangman's Yard where the gallows stood. Off this yard on one side was the cell block where the three men were held and on the other side of the Yard was a door which led into the Governor's quarters and

military quarters. Every quarter of an hour the guard came from the military quarters side through the Hangman's Yard and to the cell area. A number of attempts were made to rescue the trio. All involved scaling the wall by a ladder, getting down inside by a rope ladder and opening the cell and passage doors with a key. Denis A. Mulcahy was in Sligo Jail awaiting court martial and he had managed to get the impression of a warder's master key in a bar of soap and send it out to Pilkington. This key would open the four cells, Deignan's, Mulcahy's, Gildea's and O'Beirne's. Tom Burgess, a member of Sligo IRA Company, worked in Gilbrides Garage and he made a copy of the key. It was smuggled in again by Michael Nevin who went in to visit the prisoners and slipped the key to Charles Gildea. It was tested and it worked perfectly.

For the first attempt twenty members of the Sligo town companies were used along with Jack Brennan of Cloonacool who had participated in the Carty rescue. Tom Scanlon suggested to Liam that only two persons go into the jail as it was going to be very difficult to climb back out especially if the soldiers were aroused. Liam disagreed and Peadar Glynn came with them. "There's no hope of getting up there if anything happens on the inside", Scanlon told Pilkington, "in the name of God leave it to the two of us". Liam was not persuaded. As the three inside moved around in the darkness one of them hit a shovel which was left against a wall. It clattered to the ground and the three took whatever cover they could as British soldiers rushed out to see what caused the noise. After a brief search they found nothing and went back to their billets. The three carried on but found that the key they had would not open the door which led into the passage. They could hear the prisoners snoring inside. After spending a half hour trying to open the door they returned, locking doors behind them and got out by the rope ladder. The prison staff never knew of the attempt.

There were at least six other attempts at rescue which were fruitless for various reasons. Finally a successful attempt was made on June 9<sup>th</sup> 1921. This time there was inside help from a warder, J. Henry. "If I'm shot", he told the three escapees, "look after my wife and children". He left the door from the passage into the corridor open. The well rehearsed operation went smoothly. Three rescuers went inside the jail, another three stayed on the wall on watch. Gildea, who was much heavier than the other two was made to climb the rope ladder last in case of accidents. Warder Henry was tied up to cover up his part in the operation and the three prisoners were spirited away.

The three men got bikes at the cemetery and cycled towards the Skreen/Beltra area through Ballisodare. They called into Tom Clarke's in Beltra and spent a long time talking there. They then went on to Farry's on the mountain and had a good sleep there.

The County Inspector in his report blamed the military for the escape saying that "there was a military guard on the prison at the time but the guards were asleep". According to the Irish Bulletin, Volunteers later intercepted and read a severe reprimand from the Central Prisons Board, Ireland to the Governor of Sligo prison because of the escape.

Republican police arrested three young men in Sligo during the first week-end of July on charged of petty crimes and as a punishment chained them to the railings outside the Gilhooly Hall on the Sunday morning. They remained there in full view of Mass goers to the nearby Cathedral until police arrived and broke their chains. A large notice beside the men said: "Tried by the IRA and convicted. All thieves and robbers beware". The County Inspector said that "it was generally believed they broke into a house on Sligo and carried away goods". The "Sligo Champion" said that it was well known that a number of men had set out to take advantage of the disturbed state of the area to "make hay". Sinn Féin, it said, was very concerned about crimes which were ascribed to its members with which it had no connection.

At the end of June the County Inspector reported that the IRA and Sinn Féin were very active during the month but that they were now "being met and pressed hard at every point by Crown Forces". "Practically all leaders of note are in jail and known wanted criminals are being chased day and night", he went on. He mentioned much speculation about the proposed meeting between Sir James Craig and Mr de Valera and added "all men of moderate views are hoping that a settlement will result. The extremists and gunmen say they will accept nothing less than a Republic".

*(ix) "We gave them a few short seconds to say their prayers."*

The IRA Active Service Unit from the Dromore West area had spent five weeks during April and May in the Ox Mountains between Lough Easkey and Lough Talt. About 25 men were in the group and they did some minor sniping during that time. They also did a good deal of training and route marches. They set ambushes on the Tubbercurry - Bonnieconlon road but the enemy forces did not turn up. These mountain roads were infrequently used and it was obvious

that the column would have to try ambushing on the main Ballina – Sligo road if they wished to hit the enemy. The column slept out in the pen during June under car covers and lorry covers.

Seamus Kilcullen was O/C of the unit and Matthew Kilcawley was the Vice O/C. Tom Loftus was the Adjutant and Q.M. "Ranks did not count for very much at that time", Matt Kilcawley told Ernie O'Malley. In all the column had about 12-15 rifles, no hand grenades and their experiments with mines were not a success. It was decided that an ambush should be carried out on the main Sligo-Ballina road. Three IRA men from south Sligo joined the column for this job, Martin Brennan, Jack Brennan and John Durcan.



*Martin Brennan*

It was decided to raid Tuffy's shop in Culleens instead to draw out the Dromore West RIC and to ambush them in Culleens. The column moved in early before dawn on June 1<sup>st</sup> to Culleens and cooked breakfast in an empty house. At eight o'clock Jack Brennan and Tom Loftus disguised themselves as itinerants and went into Tuffy's shop. They "acted the blackguard" and took £60-£70. Mr Tuffy was not there but when he returned with a load of scallops for thatching he immediately set off for Dromore West police station to report the crime. It was then about 8.45 am.

The column had selected their ambush positions before dawn and they now moved into position. The two "thieves" returned the money to Tuffy's. They occupied the house and gardens. The ambush positions were spread out over 400 yards along the road. Martin Brennan says that he had no more than 25-40 rounds for the ambush and that he had only about five rounds left after the ambush. Others had much the same supply he said. Brennan, Durcan and two from Enniscrone occupied a position where they overlooked the road.

The police were expected to arrive after about an hour but it was not until the Angelus bell was ringing at twelve that they came into view. There were seven in all, the first two were followed two hundred yards behind by two others, the next two were 40 yards further back and the last was two hundred yards back. Thus when the first reached the ambush position the last only came under fire at long range.

When the first two policemen reached Tuffy's the firing commenced. At the first volley of shots Constable Carley fell wounded and the two who were in the front dismounted and took cover. A gun battle then commenced. During the shooting another constable was wounded. The two policemen who had been at the front were taken prisoner. While the ambush was going on Tuffy himself came along the road driving his horse and cart and holding a white handkerchief on the top of his whip. He was let through. A motor car came through the ambush position when the firing was at its highest on its way from Ballina to Ballisodare and it was commandeered by some of the police who took it to Easkey RIC barracks to alert the police there. From Easkey word was sent to Sligo and Ballina. Very soon police reinforcements were on their way from the three places.

The ambushers meanwhile had left the scene taking three bottles of brandy from Tuffy's and headed for the safety of the mountains and bog. They took with the two captured constables having bandaged the wounds of the injured policeman. The retreating ambushers were no more than a half a mile from the ambush scene when fire was opened on them from a distance. British forces from Easkey had taken a road to the west parallel to the route taken by the ambushers and had spotted them. However they were too far away to do any damage and the IRA men considered that the fire was only a delaying tactic while stronger reinforcements were awaited.

When the reinforcements arrived they set off on different roads towards the mountain and there was considerable exchange of fire but no casualties were reported. British forces from

Ballina came in by Carns, Auxiliaries from Tubbercurry came in by the Glenreagh road. The IRA group moved on towards Lough Easkey and split up, one group taking the two policemen. At this time the enemy reinforcements were close behind. Four lorries of police and Auxiliaries came up the bog road and were no more than a half mile behind.

A hurried Council of War was held by the IRA group to decide the fate of the two captives. Some argued in favour of leaving them behind but others said that this was too dangerous as they could recognise them in the future. Finally it was decided to kill them. "We gave them a short few seconds in which to say their prayers" one of the IRA members later said, adding that both policemen pleaded for mercy and the younger one, Higgins, cried. They were shot dead and their bodies left. The bodies of the two policemen, Constable Higgins and Constable King, were later recovered in the mountains. The Irish Bulletin claimed wrongly that the two policemen had been killed in the "running fight".

The retreat and pursuit continued until about 6 pm. The IRA group kept close to the mountain side which they knew so well. They were told that six tenders had gone up the Bonnieconlon road and that four had gone up from Corballa. They crossed the Bonnieconlon road and left the military and police behind trying in vain to encircle them. Half the column spent the night within a mile of Ballina and the other half slept in a dug out in the mountains. Only one attacker was taken. He had dropped his weapon and joined the turf cutters on the bog but he was taken by the military from Castlebar.

The IRA feared reprisals in the area because of the ambush and deaths and were mobilised each night for the following week. There were no attempts at reprisals. The Parish Priest was called to the scene of the deaths and he spoke at Mass on the following Sunday of "the gallant young Irishmen who had been brutally murdered." The local doctor, Cowell, was out on a call in his side car with his son and daughter when a touring car with two police caught up with them. All were taken in the car, the children deposited at the police barracks at Dromore West and the doctor taken to treat those wounded and killed.

RIC man James Morrin, a native of Drumfin Collooney, was killed in an ambush at Milltown County Galway on June 27<sup>th</sup>. His remains were brought home and he was interred in Collooney. It was said that he had made all the necessary arrangements for leaving the force. He was 44 years of age.

Sligo Assizes opened on Friday July 8<sup>th</sup> and Judge Wylie the Crown Court in his opening address deplored the state of the county mentioning the list "of crime and outrage committed in your county since last Assizes". Many jurors were not in attendance having been taken from their homes the previous night. Some of those summoned as jurors were only too anxious not to attend. Michael Walsh of the Curry area recalls that his brother-in-law was called to serve as a juror and asked "the lads" to wait for him as he made his way towards Sligo and to "arrest" him so that he could not attend. Of the over 180 jurors on the list only 48 answered to the call. Charles Phibbs, a member of the Grand Jury, was kidnapped on his way to the Assizes that morning.

The Truce came into effect on Monday July 11<sup>th</sup> but Sligo Independent reported that "on Sunday Crown forces seem to have practically left down their arms and roamed about with the civil population and took advantage of a day at Strandhill, Rosses Point or Strandhill". "A large number of local men on the run turned up suddenly in jubilant spirits. The very air held a new lightness and irradiated not only with sunshine but also with hope."

On the day after the truce came into effect four Volunteers from the Ballymote-Gurteen area, Thady McGowan, M. J. Marren, Jim Molloy and Joe Finnegan, cycled to Strandhill to enjoy a carefree day away from the stresses of being "on the run". The day ended in tragedy as Strandhill, notorious for its dangerous currents, claimed the life of M. J. Marren, Commandant of the Gurteen Battalion. It was a glorious day but there was a strong swell in the sea. Marren was said to be an expert swimmer and went out further than his companions. Some people on the shore noticed the body disappear, there were no calls for help.



*Michael J Marren*



When word spread of the tragedy crowds began to collect at Strandhill. A cycling party of Volunteers from Gurteen travelled to the place and members of the Sligo Battalion also arrived. These patrolled the shoreline and kept watch for the body of the dead man. In the evening a group of Auxiliaries arrived and two of these, apparently expert swimmers, searched in the vicinity of the accident, but no trace of the body was found. The Champion remarked: "In all the sadness of the scene one could not fail to contrast the picture which only a few days previous was so different, of police and Volunteers mingling as ordinary citizens, each forgetful for the moment of any differences that might have been".

The body was recovered on Saturday July 24<sup>th</sup> on the strand at Kilaspugrone and was interred in Mount Irwin cemetery on Monday July 26<sup>th</sup>. As the funeral cortege left Sligo it was met by a lorry of British military. The officer in charge had his men dismount and stand to attention along the road with arms reversed. Funeral Mass was celebrated at Ballymote and a huge funeral procession followed the remains to its last resting place only a few hundred yards from his home. Over two thousand Volunteers marched behind the hearse on the final journey and it was said that the procession took three and a half hours to pass a given point.

Among the tributes was a poetic one from local poet Bernard Tansy which included the following:

*"Is he dead? Not while his memory,  
Lingers in the minds of men  
Who have shared his joys and sorrows-  
Outlawed tenants of the glen.  
Not while Keash's caves re-echo  
To loud winter's boom,  
Shall the name of Marren slumber  
In Oblivion's friendless tomb."*

The tragedy cast a shadow over what was otherwise a time of rejoicing. The terror and violence of the previous two years was halted at once and the wanted men returned home. It seemed that those in prison would soon be free and that normality was about to return to the country. It was recognised that negotiations would be difficult but it was expected that Britain would meet Ireland's demands with generosity.

The County Inspector said "the public generally are very hopeful that a settlement of the Irish question will be reached and all classes are glad of it in the interests of peace". In an editorial on the truce the Sligo Independent said: "Sinn Féiners must learn that there is no short cut to the goal of Irish unity. It can only be reached by way of a long avenue of joint effort and mutual consideration". Referring to the unionists of southern Ireland it said that they were anxious to pull together with the Sinn Féiners "so long as they get their rights and freedom and justice". With regard to the Ulster unionists it appealed to them to realise that it was to their advantage to "co-operate with their fellow countrymen". "We hope it will be peace, perfect peace", the editorial concluded. Time would tell.

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## PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS.

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Jack Brennan	Martin Brennan	Eugene Gilbride
Jim Hunt	Tom Duignan	Matthew Kilcawley
Paddy O'Hegarty	Tom Leonard	Tom Scanlon
Thady McGowan.	Bernard Conway	Phelim Collery
James Mulholland	Michael Coleman	Thomas McShea

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Michael O'Beirne	Paddy Dwyer	Agnes Farry
Willie Frizzelle	Jim Hever	Pat Hunt
Thomas Kilcoyne	Mary McGuinn	Andy Marren
Katherine Mullen	Sis O'Brien	Michael Burgess
John Sweeney	Michael Walsh	Bat Keaney
Tom McGetterick	Martin Dan Gallagher	Jackie Conlon

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