

The Civil War in Galway

Part 12 of Nollaig O'Gadhra's series to mark the 75th anniversary

IN THIS final post-script to the Civil War in Galway series, I want to briefly react to some of the many communications I have had about the series, and to thank all those who wrote or rang with additional information or comments.

Because the aim of the exercise, after all, was to try and set the record, as compiled by the late Mr. Waldron, straight, and to add whatever national or historical context that would make the series a useful resource for students in the future. Thanks are due in particular to the Editor of the Tuam Herald for allowing a mere outsider. (who was not even born in Connacht!) so much space and latitude to print the full story or as full a story as we could lay our hands on, in the circumstances. It is typical of the record of fair and balanced service to the entire Galway community, for which provincial papers like *The Tuam Herald* have been famous for generations, and in the most trying of circumstances. They have set, and indeed continue to set, an example for our so-called national media, and even for our as yet young local electronic media, which, for some reason, do not seem to reflect the same sort of authentic local community value-systems that are the bed-rock of the provincial press.

But to return to the business in hand. I was somewhat disappointed that further information was not forthcoming about the later political life of Padraic O'Maille, T.D. for Conamara and Co. Galway, who was elected Leas-Cheann Comhairle in the first Free State Dail, but who resigned from Cumann na nGaedheal in 1924, and who is alleged to have been involved in Fianna Fail in the 1930s. Perhaps O'Maille was Dublin based by the 1930s, and not active in his native county? In any case, further information about his later career can be forwarded to 091-592454. Beidh mile failte roimhe.

I am grateful to the retired teacher in Tuam who filled me in on the activities of the Special Branch in Galway in the years after the Civil War was over, and indeed into the 1930s, when the De Valera Government inherited the political control of the elaborate state machine, already under the control of the late Peter Berry, who served in the Department of Justice from Kevin O'Higgins in 1927 to Desmond O'Malley in the early '70s. Berry made anti-Republican "subversion" his speciality, be it under Kevin O'Higgins, Gerry Boland, Charles Haughey or Des O'Malley. His role was as crucial in the late 1920's, before Fianna Fail gained office in 1932, as it was at the time of the Arms Crisis of 1969-70. And given the pugnacious attitude of the young O'Malley towards Berry in his final days, when he was effectively "persuaded" by the Limerick solicitor to take early retirement, it was not a nice end to the career of a man who, whatever his faults, sought to serve the interests of the state so diligently over 45 years. Berry, the classical "Sir Humphrey", believed state security was far too important to be left to fickle politicians. But the legacy of the man and the system he operated in the interests of the Free State legacy, is another matter which our more resourceful national media should fully investigate - if they really want to tell the full truth of the legacy of the Civil War.

I also want to thank the nice woman who rang about the whereabouts of the original letter written by Commdt. Frank Cunnane, the night before his execution in Tuam Workhouse on April 11th, 1923. I had only a typed photocopy from the Waldron notes at the time, and realise that because of copying difficulties, one sentence was omitted. It reads: "And perhaps when I am no better prepared than now. I hope God will accept my sacrifice for any faults I have committed during my life on earth", then continuing, "My death is a glorious one, and I am unworthy of it."

I am quoting, on this occasion, from the letter as published in the 1985 Republican Booklet *Eleven Galway Martyrs*, which was published in connection with the unveiling of the Memorial Wall at the site of the executions in the old Tuam Workhouse on Sunday April 21st, 1985, and which is a mine of information on the entire Republican struggle in Co. Galway. It also contains some other letters from the 11 men executed in Tuam and Athlone, which were not available to use in the Waldron collection.

Waldron did contain a copy of the letter from Martin J. Burke to his sister Kathleen, but the copy was so bad that we were unable to re-print it. However I am sure if the whereabouts of the originals or good copies are available, that his paper as always will be glad to, once again, act as a journal of record for Galway historians. It may be of interest to note that in the version of the Cunnane letter printed in *Eleven Galway Martyrs* in 1985 the address is given as "in the Reception Ward, Galway Gaol, 1923" rather than Tuam Workhouse. Which adds to the significance of the *Connacht Tribune* report of the following Saturday 14.4.1923, quoted in the 1985 account, which also stated: "On Monday morning (9.4.23), the Bishop of Galway, Dr. O'Dea died and so followed a period of mourning which lasted until his funeral on Thursday, April 12th. On Tuesday, John Higgins was buried in Kilbannon Cemetery after Mass in Tuam. The same day, six men were taken aside in Galway Jail and told they would be executed at 8.00 a.m. the next day, not in Galway, but in Tuam Workhouse". It then lists the six Volunteers and continues "They were brought from Galway to Tuam Workhouse that evening. They wrote their final letters, got Mass and in two groups of three, lined by the Oratory Wall and were executed early on April 11th, 1923." The *Connacht Tribune* of the following Saturday, April 14th, along with details of the Bishop's funeral, in Galway, describes the events in Tuam as follows: "The condemned men, it is stated, went to their doom firmly and with brave hearts. They had been attended during the night by two of the town priests and in the morning heard Mass, at which two of them served. The priests were with them to the last."

"The news of the executions cast a gloom over the people who could hardly realise what awful happening had taken place in their midst that morning. About 8.00 a.m. two volleys were fired and it is stated that the condemned men were taken out in parties of three each, and blindfolded and their hands joined as in prayer. They had prayed fervently during the night before and in the morning and were fully consoled, prepared to meet their Creator. The six bodies, enclosed in six coffins were interred in the ground within the Barracks and it is stated that the ground was consecrated. No official information of the executions would be issued to the press."

Unfortunately, in the account from the Waldron notes quoted in Part 9 of this series (11.4.98), were published the final resting place of each of the six, as it had been penned in at a later date, and obviously, contradicted the later reference to the fact that "the bodies were interred in the garden nearby." In fact, when the Free State Army vacated the Tuam Workhouse towards the end of 1923, they exhumed the bodies of the six and brought them with them to Athlone, headquarters of the Western Command of the new triumphant Free State "National Army." This was greatly resented, but all requests to return the bodies to the relatives were ignored by the Cosgrave Government until the autumn of 1924 when, faced with a number of by-elections, throughout the state, it was decided to hand back the remains of all 77 who had been shot in such extra-legal circumstances by the Free State Military Council, independent of all judicial or even political control, during the Civil War. Those who seek to vilify Liam

Lynch and other I.R.A. leaders who suggested that shooting on sight was the only answer to those who engaged in such highly irregular conduct, even by the normal rules of warfare, should recall that those "democrats" who handed over the powers to the Army at that time - and before the Irish Free State was even founded - were effectively washing their hands of the responsibility they themselves said they had as a Provisional Government and Parliament, and handing over to a three-man junta, and two members of which could sanction on the execution of anybody they did not like. Erskine Childers is the saddest example of this, not only because of the shameful way he was put to death before his appeal to the High Court was even considered, but also because the vicious black propaganda against the "damned Englishman" who had converted to the Republican cause, was so blind and prejudiced as to give us an insight into the real outlook of the pro-Free State mind at the time.

We get another insight into that mind, in fact, when the return of the bodies was finally brought to the attention of the Cosgrave Government in June 1924, on the 27th of that month, in a confidential letter to the Free State President, the Commander of the Free State Army, General Eoin O'Duffy wrote:

"The re-interment of an executed irregular would, almost to a certainty, be made the occasion for a demonstration for the purposes of attracting the sympathies of the general public towards the bereavement of the relatives, at a time when the necessity (sic) for the executions has, to a certain extent, been faxed from the minds of the people."

Since many of the posts occupied by the Free State during the Civil War had been abandoned again, General O'Duffy suggested that: "It is necessary that the remains of executed irregulars interred therein, should be exhumed and re-interred at the nearest permanent post." He added "With reference to the two bodies interred in Waterford Prison, and the one in Cork Prison, it is necessary that these should be raised and coffined." O'Duffy's suggestions were accepted by the Free State cabinet, but the prospect of defeat in by-elections later on that year, prompted the Secretary of Cumann na nGaedheal to write to Cosgrave on September 16th, 1924, not only about economic and administrative factors, but also about the Civil War legacy. He wrote: "In these circumstances the Coiste Gnótha believed that the Ministry Defence must surely have had good and sufficient reasons for their action in digging up the remains of recently executed men at Tuam and elsewhere and unceremoniously disposing of them in some fashion which can only have been unsatisfactory to the official who gave the order, but which has certainly produced violent indignation amongst even our own members and is regarded throughout the country, as nothing short of an atrocity."

"The Coiste Gnótha feel the political effect of this measure all the more keenly, that when the same Department disinterred the bodies of certain British soldiers in Cork, about the same time, the public, on whom we and the government depend, were able to read in the papers a full account of the very proper treatment meted out to the remains on this occasion. The contrast has been bitterly commented on throughout the country, but nowhere more than in Cork, where we are saddled with the task of winning two important by-elections." Clearly, the significance of by-elections as a pressure-point on government was already becoming clear in the Irish Free State, where under the multi-seat P.R. system, constituencies do not lose their entire Dail voice on the death of a T.D., and where it was argued at length at the foundation of the state, the habit of holding by-elections, as in Britain, (because a dead M.P. means no voice in Parliament for a certain constituency) was unsuitable mainly because such campaigns in multi-seat areas, only lead to distraction for an elected government. In order to counter the damage already done, the Cumann na nGaedheal Government, finally decided, in October 1924, to release the bodies of the executed Republicans to their families but took "special precautions to ensure that arms would not be carried by body-guards at the funerals and no firing parties were to be allowed."

Thus, on October 28th, 1924, the Free State released some 20 bodies - those executed at Tuam, Athlone, Drumboe, Co. Donegal and Birr, through the back gate of Costume Barracks in Athlone at ten minute intervals. Seamus O'Maille was taken to Uachtar Ard and was buried later in Cill Choimín Cemetery. Thomas Hughes was buried in Cornamagh Cemetery near Athlone. The *Connacht Tribune* (1.11.1924) described the funerals in North Galway as follows: "it was nearly 12 o'clock (midnight) on Tuesday night when the procession arrived in Tuam. It was the saddest funeral procession ever seen or ever likely to be seen in the country. Over 20 motor cars were in the procession - the first nine containing the remains of the deceased and the relatives followed in cars. The coffins were draped with the Republican Tricolour. There was a shell coffin in each case, covering the coffin in which the remains were placed at the time of the execution."

"In Tuam a large crowd remained on the streets awaiting the arrival of the funeral and though there was a heavy downpour of rain, and the remains did not arrive until 11.30 p.m. the people stood waiting. As the funeral cars drove slowly through the town head were uncovered and soldiers and Civic Guards saluted. Spanning some of the principal streets were streamers with mourning crosses in Republican colours."

"There was no delay in Tuam and all the cars proceeded on to Headford where they arrived at 1.30 a.m. On passing Belclare church the bell tolled thus lending a solemn sadness to the countryside around, at the late hour of night. The remains were left in Headford Church where the rosary was recited."

A North Galway I.R.A. Brigade stood guard throughout the night. The report states however that "the remains of John McGuire, brother of T. McGuire, T.D. were conveyed to Cross, Cong from where they were taken, after High Mass on Thursday, and interred with the other coffins in the Republican plot at Donoghpatrick Burial Ground. The interment took place after 11.00 a.m. Mass on Thursday, October 30th, 1924. Arrangements were made to hold a general day of mourning in Tuam and surrounding towns by having all business suspended during the day."

The above is of particular interest perhaps, given that it sets the record straight on the way in which final burial of the Tuam Martyrs came about, under the pressure of by-elections in the new Free State. It should be recalled, perhaps, that in the five by-elections then held in November, 1924, Cumann na nGaedheal won three, in Donegal, Cork East and Cork Borough. But they lost North Mayo, where Republican John A. Madden defeated Michael Tierney (the Cumann na nGaedheal native of East Galway who later became President of U.C.D. and was married to Eoin MacNeill's daughter) by 14,628 votes to 13,758, while in Dublin South, Sean F. Lemass, 1916 veteran, and brother of the murdered Noel Lemass, took the seat for Sinn Féin with 17,297 votes to 16,340 for Seamus Hughes of Cumann na nGaedheal. One of those who actively worked for Lemass in that election was Jimmy O'Dea who like the future Taoiseach also gained an international reputation, later on. O'Dea was always close to Lemass and, in fact, best man at his wedding.

We should also mention, perhaps, that the Cumann na nGaedheal party, was in fact founded 75 years ago, at the end of the Civil War. We have shown, I hope, how the Civil War victory was achieved, not by politics, but

by the more aggressive Free State Army policies acting without political restrictions. Cumann na nGaedheal, the party, back to which Fine Gael traces its roots, was not founded until April 27th, 1923 - that is the day after General Frank Aiken, the new Chief of Staff of the I.R.A. ordered the "dump arms" order which came into effect at mid-day on April 30th, 1923. In spite of the ceasefire, however, the Free State Army proceeded with the execution of the final two Republicans of the famous "Seventy Seven", Chris Quinn and William Shaughnessy in Ennis on May 2nd, 1923. Patrick Mahoney had already been executed in Ennis on April 26th, 1923, the day the ceasefire was announced, but going ahead with the other executions a few days after the conflict had been ended, is only one other reason why Clare has had such a bitter Civil War legacy ever since. It also probably secured Mr. De Valera's support in Clare for the rest of his life, and is indirectly part of the reason why the Minister for the Gaeltacht, his grand-daughter, Síle, represents a non-Gaeltacht constituency like Clare, unlike grandson Eamonn O'Cuiv who is currently King of Cornamona and Conamara.

When Cumann na nGaedheal came together as a party at the end of the Civil War, there was little doubt about who the leader would be. William T. Cosgrave, the humble Dubliner who stood in for both Collins and Griffith, after both died within ten days of each other in August, 1922, and forced the Free State through the bloody Civil War months that followed, was the unanimous choice as party leader. But the first President of Cumann na nGaedheal, however was Eoin Mac Neill, son of the Glens of Antrim, the man who helped found both Conradh na Gaeilge in 1893, and the Irish Volunteers in 1913, the man who tried to call off the 1916 Rising, who was a T.D. for Derry city in the first 32 county Dail, and who shared Clare multi-seat constituency with De Valera and Brian O'Higgins in the new Free State set up whose son Brian was killed on the Republican side of the Civil War, and whose final demise as a politician came about after the failure of the Boundary Commission in 1925. What an amazingly complex life he led. And what a pity that Fine Gael have done so little to remember the complex legacy of their founding fathers on this 75th anniversary occasion. For our part, the best we could do was to re-run the Gael Linn film *Saoirse?* in Na Forbacha last week unlike the R.T.E. film. Because it still stands the test of time! And fairness.

My last request in this Postscript is for Mr. Michael J. Donlon of Staten Island, New York who was kind enough to E-mail the Herald with information about interest in the series in the U.S., and other most welcome news. Michael says his home base is Dunmore and we look forward to meeting him when he brings those vital documents home with him in May. Failte agus buíochas. Please ring 091-592454, in advance, or when you arrive.

Finally, I have been asked to spell out the results of the 1932 General Election in Galway when the popular opposition to the Free State "solution", already clear in this nine-seat constituency in the 1927 General Elections, was reflected throughout the country, and Fianna Fail took power with the help of the Labour Party.

GALWAY (9 seats) Electorate 91,746. Quota 6,614. (Numbers indicate order of election). (3) Frank Fahy, Fianna Fail 6,132; (1) Thomas P. Powell, Fianna Fail 6,068; (2) Patrick J. Hogan, Cumann na nGaedheal 5,551; (9) Mark Killilea, Fianna Fail 5,454; (5) Patrick Beegan, Fianna Fail 5,230; (9) Stephen Jordan, Fianna Fail 5,142; Frederick McDonogh, Cumann na nGaedheal, 4,926; (6) Joseph W. Mongan, Cumann na nGaedheal, 4,658; (7) Sean Broderick Cumann na nGaedheal, 4,397; (4) Gerald Bartley, Fianna Fail 4,357; Sean Tubridy, Fianna Fail 4,020; (8) Martin McDonogh, Cumann na nGaedheal 3,384; Patrick Lambert, Cumann na nGaedheal 3,261; Frank Kelly, Labour 1,533; Edward Meehan, Labour 1,036; Martin J. Cooke, Independent 987.

Galway was still clearly split between the five Fianna Fail T.D.s who helped De Valera to power in 1932 (Fahy, Powell, Killilea, Beegan and Jordan, - who remembers them today?) and four Cumann na nGaedheal veterans (Hogan, Mongan, Broderick and Martin McDonogh). Frank Fahy became Ceann Comhairle, and therefore was returned automatically in the January 1933 General Election, when Fianna Fail gained an overall majority for its Republican programme for the first time! It was a long way from the tragic bloodletting ten years previously! This was the last time that Galway city and county voted together as a nine-seat constituency, and with the advantage of Fahy being automatically returned, Fianna Fail gained five of the other eight seats in a result, as follows: Electorate 94,591. Quota 8,105. (1) Mark Killilea, Fianna Fail 8,872; (5) Patrick Beegan, Fianna Fail 7,010; (4) Gerald Bartley, Fianna Fail 6,358; (6) Seamus P. Keely, Fianna Fail 6,197; (8) Stephen Jordan, Fianna Fail 5,770; Thomas P. Powell, Fianna Fail 5,687; Sean Tubridy, Fianna Fail 5,634; (2) Patrick J. Hogan, Cumann na nGaedheal 4,940; (3) Martin McDonogh, Cumann na nGaedheal 4,198; Joseph W. Mongan, Cumann na nGaedheal 4,188; (7) Sean Broderick, Cumann na nGaedheal 4,167; Frederick McDonogh, Cumann na nGaedheal 3,574; Patrick Cawley, Cumann na nGaedheal 3,129; Robert M. Burke, Labour 3,080.

Clearly, the P.R. system was already being operated dramatically within the parties themselves, while the massive swing to Fianna Fail is indicated by the fact that two former T.D.s who did not make it, had over 5,000 first preferences each in preference to Mr. Broderick, C. na nG., the seventh man elected who had only 4,167 first preferences. Who says that Fianna Fail were the only ones who knew how to operate P.R. correctly? Those then contemplating the wearing of Blue Shirts were also good hands at using the ballot box where appropriate! In the years that followed, De Valera's Republican Party won two resounding By-elections in Galway, when, on the death of Martin McDonogh, Fianna Fail's Eamonn Corbett defeated Thomas McDonogh of Cumann na nGaedheal by 37,415 votes to 24,088 in the poll held on June 19th, 1935. In the by-election arising from the death of Patrick Hogan, held on August 13th, 1936, Martin Neilan (Fianna Fail) was elected, but this time there was a Republican/Sinn Féin challenge to Dev, as the Blueshirt threat was receding, and relations between Fianna Fail and the I.R.A. - which played no small part in bringing Dev to power in 1932 - deteriorated rapidly after the first Republican prisoner of the Fianna Fail era, Sean Glynn of Limerick, died in custody.

The full result of the 1936 by-election in Co. Galway was: Martin Neilan, Fianna Fail 39,982; James Hogan, Cumann na nGaedheal 23,264; George Nobel Count Plunkett, Sinn Féin 2,696.

By 1937 there were new constituencies drawn up in 1935 to comply with the new electoral ratios, outlined in the new Bunreacht na hÉireann. Total Dail membership fell from 153 to 138 seats, (Can you imagine any Taoiseach today reducing the current 166 to say 140, as would be perfectly logical under the Constitutional averages provided?). Galway lost 2 seats and was divided into Galway East consisting of 4 seats and Galway West with a mere 3! Frank Fahy the Ceann Comhairle, represented Galway East, thus effectively providing Fianna Fail with 3 out of 4 seats in the East, and 2 out of 3 in Galway West. Ach sin scéal eile do lá eile. Tá mo dhóthain ráite agam anseo. Faoi léitheoirí atá sé anois cur leis an eolas, agus leis an bplé, mas mian leo.

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