

# THE LIFE & DEATH OF THE LOUGHNANE BROTHERS

BEAGH, COUNTY GALWAY



CONOR McNAMARA



THE LIFE & DEATH  
OF THE LOUGHNANE  
BROTHERS

BEAGH, COUNTY GALWAY

CONOR McNAMARA

**Author:** Dr Conor McNamara

**Project Manager:** Marie Mannion,  
Heritage Officer, Galway County Council

**Administrative Support:** Gráinne Smyth, Caroline Hannon  
and Martina Creaven

**Project Support:** Beagh Rural Development Association, Martina  
Blackwell, Tony Diviney, Paddy Rosengrave and Neil Carron,  
Commemorations Unit, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts,  
Gaeltacht, Sport and Media

**Proofreading:** Gráinne Smyth, Marianne ten Cate, Caroline Hannon  
and Marie Mannion

**Graphic Design:** Damien Goodfellow

**Print:** KPW Print Management, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway

**Funded by:** Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and  
Media (Decade of Centenaries Local Authority Funding)  
and Galway County Council



**ISBN:** 978-1-913449-07-0

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the author, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review. Whilst every care has been taken to ensure accuracy in the compilation of this publication, neither the editors or publisher can accept responsibility for errors, omissions, or inaccuracies.

All information is received and published in good faith. All rights reserved.

**Cover background image:** R.I.C. military and armoured cars leaving Limerick on a scouting expedition ca.1920 from the Hogan-Wilson Collection

Dr Conor McNamara

Twitter: @ConorMacHistory

## Recent Publications

*Liam Mellows: Soldier of the Irish Republic, Collected Writings, 1914~1922*  
(Irish Academic Press, 2019).

*War & Revolution in the West of Ireland: Galway 1913~22*  
(Irish Academic Press, 2018).

Conor McNamara, Pádraig Yeates (eds),  
*Dublin Lockout 1913: New Perspectives on Class War and its Legacy*  
(Irish Academic Press, 2017).

‘The War of Independence in Connacht’ in John Crowley,  
Michael Murphy, Donal Ó Drisceoil (eds),  
*Atlas of the Irish Revolution* (Cork University Press, 2017).

‘In the Shadow of Altnaveigh: Political Upheaval and Sectarian Violence in  
Co. Louth, 1920–22’, in Martin Maguire, Donal Hall (eds),  
*County Louth and the Irish Revolution*  
(Irish Academic Press, 2017).

*The Easter Rebellion 1916, A New Illustrated History*  
(Collins Press, 2015).

Carla King, Conor McNamara (eds),  
*The West of Ireland, New Perspectives on the Nineteenth Century*  
(The History Press, 2011).



The Loughnane's forge in the village of Shanaglish has been extensively renovated by the Beagh Rural Development Association.

# PREFACE

The Beagh Rural Development Association was established in 1989 with the objective of facilitating employment, social inclusion and with a focus on enabling the local community to explore their own resources and potential. It sees itself as a facilitator of a holistic process of local development. In recent years, the Beagh RDA has undertaken a special heritage project in restoring the Loughnane Family Forge at Shanaglish village and erecting a monument in memory of the Loughnane Brothers, Michael Kelly and Captain Seán O'Halloran in 2016. The brutal killings of Patrick and Harry Loughnane represented one of the most horrific examples of the atrocities of the War of Independence. To this end, Beagh RDA organise an annual commemoration at the Loughnane forge on the anniversary of their deaths. The Beagh RDA wish to thank the Galway County Council and the Heritage Officer, Marie Mannion, for sponsorship and advice around this project. We are most grateful to Dr Conor McNamara for his comprehensive research into the murders of Patrick and Harry Loughnane. This publication will be a valuable resource for future generations in Beagh, and will leave a legacy of significant historical value.

*Tony Diviney, Beagh RDA*

*Frances Neilan, Beagh RDA*

*Martina Neilan-Blackwell, Beagh RDA*

*Paddy J Roseingrave, Beagh RDA*

*Michael Slattery, Beagh RDA*

*November 2020*



The former home of the Loughmane family in Shanaglish.

# THE LOUGHNANE BROTHERS, BEAGH & TERROR IN GALWAY, 1920~21

**T**his short publication examines the killing of brothers Patrick and Harry Loughnane from the village of Shanaglish in the parish of Beagh, located on the Galway border with Clare on 26 November 1920. The brothers were members of the local Volunteer Company and were killed by the Auxiliaries following their arrest by the RIC. The brutality of the killings caused shock waves around Ireland at a time when communities were becoming accustomed to the violence of the Crown Forces. When their bodies were discovered ten days later, parts of their skulls were missing and they had been mutilated and severely burned to such an extent that they could barely be identified by family members.



The Crown Forces were notorious for their wanton violence in County Galway.

# SOUTH GALWAY IN TIME OF CHANGE

**S**outh Galway was a rural community at the turn of the century with Gort being the only market town. The power of landlords had not been completely broken by the opening decades of the Twentieth Century, however, successive Land Acts had divided up most of the great estates for division among their tenants. For older generations the memories of landlordism were still fresh and the idea of Irish freedom was indelibly linked to the break-up of the large grazing estates that dominated South and East Galway. Before the operations of the land acts that commenced in the late 1870s, landlords that had their vast estates in South Galway divided included Lord Dunsandle (Daly) of Loughrea, who owned a staggering 33,542 acres; Lord Gough at Lough Cutra, who owned 6,628 acres; Sir Thomas Burke of Marble Hill, who owned 25,258 acres; and Lord Clanmorris (John Bingham), Cregclare, Ardrahan, who owned 5,295 acres.

Life for many ordinary people in South Galway was dominated by the seasonal labours of farming and the local rivalries played out on the hurling field. The Loughnane brothers were keen hurlers with Beagh during a period when South Galway clubs dominated the Galway hurling championship. Remarkably the Beagh Club, formed in 1870, was one of

## THE LIFE & DEATH OF THE LOUGHNANE BROTHERS

the few clubs in Ireland founded before the Gaelic Athletic Association in 1884. For the ten years between 1898 and 1907, Beagh's near neighbours, Peterswell and Ardrahan, dominated the Galway championship with Peterswell winning on six occasions (1898-1900; 1904-1905; 1907) and Ardrahan, winning three times (1901-1903). Tynagh was the strongest club in the county during the War of Independence period, winning the Galway Championship in 1920, 1922 and 1923, with no championship played in 1921 due to British restrictions. Patrick Loughnane captained the Beagh Club during this period and his size and strength helped him to dominate the full back line while his brother Harry was goalkeeper. They were positions that demanded courage and steel due to the physical nature of the game and the fractious rivalries between local clubs during the era.

# SHANAGLISH

**T**he rural parish of Beagh lies on the Clare border, and is the most southerly parish in County Galway. The small village of Shanaglish forms the centre of the parish containing the Shanaglish Church and three local graveyards. The parish includes relatively good grassland for farming and includes Lough Cutra, a one and half mile square lake, now an area of conservation renowned for fishing and scenery. The Lough Cutra Castle and estate located on the banks of the lake was originally O'Shaughnessy land but was transferred to Thomas Prendergast at the end of the 17th Century and became the property of the Vereker family, of Roxboro Limerick, otherwise Lord Gort, by the early 1800s. The Vereker's still owned land in Beagh parish during the 1800s until much of their estate was sold in the Encumbered Estates Court in the early 1850s. The Gough family purchased Lough Cutra Castle in the 1840s and owned thousands of acres in Tipperary, Galway and Offaly.



Patrick Loughnane  
Shanaglish  
1871 - 1920



Harry Loughnane  
Shanaglish  
1899 - 1920



Michael Kelly  
Killean  
11/1800 - 23/1922  
Resting where no shadows fall



Seán O'Halloran  
Crusheen, Co. Clare  
1891 - 1922

Photos from memorial cards of the Loughnane brothers and local Volunteers Michael Kelly and Seán Ó Halloran which hang in the restored Loughnane Forge, Shanaglish.

# THE LOUGHNANE FAMILY

**T**he Loughnane family owned a good farm of land at Shanaglish with their farmyard and home situated close to the village. The 1901 census lists Michael (44) and Catherine, Loughnane, known as Katie, *nee* Grealish (38) as the parents of nine children, ranging in age from nineteen to three. The family consisted of six brothers: Thomas (19), Martin (17), Michael (12), Patrick (10), Hugh (8) and Henry (3); and three sisters: Maria (15), Katie (14) and Nora (5). By the time of the next census in 1911, however, the family was greatly reduced, with their father, Michael dying from pneumonia in 1901, aged 63, and only four children still at home: Patrick, Hugh, Nora and Henry.

At the time of their capture in 1920, Patrick and Henry – known to all as Harry – were running the family farm and supported their mother, Katie, their siblings having emigrated to England and the United States. Their sisters Norah and Katie were still in Galway, however, and were both teachers; Norah, teaching at Corrandulla National School and Katie teaching in Corofin. There was almost eight years between Patrick and Harry, the youngest of the family, and Henry O'Mara, commander of the 6th Battalion of the East Clare Brigade recalled that Pat 'was tall, handsome

## THE LIFE & DEATH OF THE LOUGHNANE BROTHERS

and powerfully built, as fine a hurler as could be found in Galway or Clare'. Harry on the other hand was 'of a gentle, quiet and retiring disposition, studious and fond of reading.' (BMH/WS, Henry O'Mara; 1,652). Following their deaths, the *Connacht Tribune* noted:

Harry, who was about 22 years of age, had been studying for about twelve months at De la Salle College, Waterford, preparing for the teaching profession. He had to abandon his studies owing to failing health. He worked on the farm with his brother for some time. He was a prominent member of the Beagh Hurling Club, of which he was goal keeper. Patrick who was about 30 years of age, worked on the farm for his mother. He was also a prominent wielder of the caman, being the full back of the parish team. (*Connacht Tribune*, 11 Dec. 1920, p. 5)

Patrick and Harry were both involved in the local Sinn Féin cumann and local IRA organiser, Pádraig Ó Fathaigh, recalled that Patrick had deep regrets about not having been involved in the 1916 Rebellion. He was a member of the United Irish League at the time, the local organisation of the Irish Parliamentary Party and Ó Fathaigh recalled Patrick telling him 'It grieves me to think that we stood by whilst others suffered, but if I only got the least inkling of the Rising and what Sinn Féin stood for, I too would do my part'. With the commencement of the War of Independence, however, the brothers threw themselves whole heartedly into local republican organisations, taking a leading role in both Sinn Féin and the local Beagh Company of the IRA.

# THE BLACK & TANS

**D**uring the Independence Struggle, the British administration insisted that the IRA and Cumann na mBan were not 'legitimate' military opponents, therefore, the police and not the military were to be primarily responsible for defeating the rebels. From early 1920 until the truce with the Crown Forces in July 1921, almost 14,000 men were recruited to bolster the 10,000 strong Royal Irish Constabulary. While the majority of the recruits came from London, Glasgow and Liverpool, as many as 20 per cent may have been Irish.

The Black and Tans, so-called due to their mixed khaki uniforms, were recruited in early 1920 and sworn in as police constables to reinforce the local police. The vast majority of recruits were veterans of World War One with extensive military experience. The upsurge in the republican campaign led to a second wave of police recruitment in July 1920 that saw the creation of an Auxiliary Division which operated independently of the police. While the Auxiliaries were a distinct force and generally viewed themselves as superior to the Black and Tans, the public usually lumped both groups together, making little distinction between them.

The Auxiliary detachment based in Galway was D Company and their headquarters was at Lenaboy House, near Salthill in Galway. From August 1920, D Company was commanded by Major Arthur Patrick Nichol. Nichol had served in France with the Royal Field Artillery during the war

## THE LIFE & DEATH OF THE LOUGHNANE BROTHERS

before coming to Ireland. He was dismissed from his post in October 1920 for 'excess drinking' and replaced by Lieutenant-Colonel F.H.W. Guard. (Guard would go on to give evidence at the inquest into the Loughnane's murder.) Nichol was posted to Cork following his demotion in Galway and resigned from the force in February 1921.

The activities of the Black and Tans in Galway became notorious almost as soon as their arrival. Wanton violence, drunkenness and indiscipline would contribute to the dismissal of their commander in October and included the burning of Tuam on the night of 19 July 1920 following an IRA ambush. The killings of the Loughnanes was part of a wider pattern of the killing of prominent republicans in police custody across Galway during the period. Michael Moran, leader of the Tuam Brigade, John O'Hanlon, a senior Volunteer at Turloughmore, Commander Louis Darcy of Headford, Sinn Féin Councillor Mícheál Breathnach of Galway Town and Captain Joseph Howley of Oranmore would all meet the same fate in late 1920 alone.

# THE SOUTH GALWAY VOLUNTEERS

**J**oseph Stanford of Gort and Thomas McInerney of Ardrahan were the most senior Volunteer officers in South Galway during the Independence Struggle. The War of Independence commenced in earnest in Galway in early 1920 with attacks by the North Galway Brigade of the IRA on police barracks at Castlehacket on 10 January and Castlegrove on 26 March, followed by an attack by the East Galway IRA on the RIC barracks at Loughgeorge on 25 May and Bookeen Barracks, Kilconieron on 4 July.

The Volunteers in the south of the county launched their first major engagement on 29 June 1920, when a small IRA unit led by Dan Ryan of Gortacarrane, Gort, shot Sergeant Elliot at Ardrahan, seriously wounding him. In September, a large force of Volunteers from Ardrahan, Kinvara and Kilcolgan engaged the police at Drumharsna and a unit of the Gort Volunteers attacked the police at Blackwater, Gort.

The most significant event in the early phase of the Volunteers' campaign in South Galway was the Castledaly ambush that took place at Castledaly crossroads, located between the villages of Kilchreest and

## THE LIFE & DEATH OF THE LOUGHNANE BROTHERS

Peterswell on 31 October 1920. The attack was led by Joseph Stanford and Thomas McInerney and involved over forty men from the Ardrahan, Kilbeacanty, Beagh and Gort Companies, including Patrick Loughnane. The group were armed mostly with shotguns and later complained their ammunition was damp and prevented them from inflicting heavier casualties. The ambush site was originally to have been across from Castledaly Church but was moved to a less advantageous spot as Volunteer Daniel Ryan explained 'it was thought that we should not take advantage of consecrated ground'.

Joseph Stanford left a detailed description of the ambush and stated that the group spotted five RIC men travelling towards Peterswell by bicycle, armed with rifles and decided there and then that they would launch an attack. Knowing the police would return by the same route, the group got into position along the road facing Castledaly Church. The Volunteers 'were placed in sections of seven or eight, stretching from Cross Road to Daly's Gate, covering around ninety or a hundred yards.' The RIC duly returned, cycling in single file, travelling ten or so paces apart and the Volunteers opened fire, fatally wounding one policeman, while his four comrades managed to escape on foot. Constable Timothy Horan (RIC Number 60534) lost his life and was 40 years of age, had three children and was originally from Co. Kerry.

# THE KILLING OF EILEEN QUINN

**F**ollowing the Castledaly attack, the Crown Forces burned a number of homes near the site of the ambush, however, much worse was to follow. Two days later, on 1 November, Eileen Quinn, a twenty-four year old, heavily pregnant mother of three, was shot dead by the Auxiliaries from a passing lorry at Corker, Kiltartan, as she sat on the front wall of her garden with her infant in her arms. She managed to crawl to her kitchen, leaving a trail of blood and lingered for around seven hours, bleeding heavily, before succumbing to her wounds that night. Eileen's husband Malachi was a small farmer and she was awaiting his return from the fair at Gort when she was killed. She was seen by the local priest Fr John Considine who sent word to the RIC at Gort, however, the head constable refused to come and take the dying woman's statement.

At the court of military inquiry into her shooting, it was found that she was shot dead 'by one of a number of shots fired as a precautionary measure and in view of these facts a verdict of death by misadventure must be brought'. The use of a military inquiry to clear the police of wrong doing in cases where civilians were murdered by crown forces was to be a familiar pattern that would be repeated after the killing of the Loughnane

## THE LIFE & DEATH OF THE LOUGHNANE BROTHERS

brothers several weeks later. The Quinn murder prompted W.B. Yeats to compose the poem *Reprisals*, and the incident is also mentioned in his poem *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen*:

A Drunken Soldier,

Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,

To crawl in her own blood and go scot free.

The shooting of Eileen Quinn prompted questions in the House of Commons by several Irish MPs, however, the chief secretary for Ireland, Sir Hamar Greenwood repeatedly defended the actions of the Auxiliaries stating 'in counties like Galway as it is today, the police and military have every right to anticipate ambushes, and to prevent them if possible.'

# ARREST & DISAPPEARANCE OF THE LOUGHNANE BROTHERS

**T**he Loughnane brothers were threshing corn with neighbours in their yard at Shanaglish when crown forces arrived around 3 p.m. on the afternoon of 26 November. Robert Glynn, who was working with the men, fled the scene when the RIC arrived and later recalled 'I am sure Pat Loughnane would have stood his ground, for he had refused often before to leave home at night and go on the run.'

The police fired several shots in the yard and seized the Loughnane brothers, reportedly telling Patrick 'Bring with you the rifle you had at Castledaly'. While on the road to Gort, another prisoner, Michael Carroll, was also seized and later recalled: 'I was then beaten about the body and knocked down on the floor of the lorry and in this position I got several kicks. The other two prisoners were also beaten. In fact, all the time we were going they kept beating us and prodding us with their rifles.'

At Gort Barracks, the three prisoners were again beaten by a group of police, as Carroll recalled: 'Fourteen stalwarts stripped to singlets, trousers

## THE LIFE & DEATH OF THE LOUGHNANE BROTHERS

and rubber shoes beat the Loughnanes for over an hour. We were dragged to our feet and searched and knocked down again. They were beating me for at least fifteen minutes. The blood from the cuts on my ear and head was all about my face and was going into my eyes. I was dragged into the lock up and thrown on the floor with the Loughnanes.' The prisoners were then separated, with Carroll taken to Galway, and the brothers handed over to the local Auxiliaries who took them to their headquarters at Drumharsna Castle. They would never be seen alive by their family and friends again.

Following the arrest of the brothers, rumours abounded in the district regarding their fate, as Volunteer Pádraig Ó Fathaigh recalled 'contradictory rumours were widely and persistently circulated', including a persistent report that the Auxiliaries had purchased rope in Gort to bind and strangle the men. Volunteer leader Joseph Stanford remembered: 'All attempts to trace their whereabouts, or where they were brought to, failed. On enquiry at Gort Barracks, the friends were told they were not there, or that they had been brought to Galway, but there was no account of them there.' (Joe Stanford, BMH/WS; 1,3334). Pádraig Ó Fathaigh recalled:

In the meantime, disquieting rumours were circulated to the effect that the Auxiliaries had returned to Mr Coen's with the rope, and that a girl overheard the Auxiliaries conversing with an RIC man, and that the latter asked what they did with the two prisoners, and his reply was "Oh, we have killed them", and that the brothers were made carry large stones and run before the lorries, the Crown Forces prodding them with bayonets until they fell exhausted, that they were then tied to the lorries and dragged along the road, that four shots were fired in Moy O'Hynes' Wood near Kinvara on Saturday night, that men answering their description were seen in O'Hynes's Wood dead or in a dying state on Saturday, that several saw Crown Forces in the wood on Saturday night, that shots were fired, and that the two men were taken away in a lorry, and that a fire was seen near Drumharsna and that the Loughnanes were burned to a cinder.