

# All Quiet on the Lorrha Front in 1916!

by Seamus J. King

How did the parish of Lorrha and Dorrha respond to the Rising of 1916? According to the best authority on the subject, Sean Hogan, in his comprehensive account in *The Black and Tans in North Tipperary: Policing, Revolution and War, 1913-1922*: 'The CI (County Inspector of the R.I.C.) found little support for the violent outbreak in North Tipperary, with the exception of a small number of individuals in Thurles, Templemore and Roscrea.' Not one of the 128 members of the four branches of the Irish Volunteers in North Tipperary was known to have participated in the Dublin events.

The inspector's report went on to state that no disloyal papers circulated and no meetings were held by the Sinn Fein Volunteers in North Tipperary. He was referring to the propaganda organs of the various small 'advanced nationalist' organisations, weekly or monthly news sheets produced by the Irish Volunteers, the Gaelic League and Sinn Fein.

Hogan further states that few arrests were made in North Tipperary in the immediate aftermath of the Rising. Only three from the Riding were interned. They were Patrick Gantly, an employee of the bacon factory in Roscrea, who was interned in Frongoch in Wales, Matthew Morris from Thurles and John (Jack) MacDonagh of Cloughjordan originally but who was a theatre manager in Dublin in 1916.

In fact the general feeling towards the Rising in North Tipperary is reflected in the resolution passed at the weekly meeting of Nenagh Board of Guardians early in May:

'We are convinced that the continuance of martial law and military executions in this country is causing a rapidly increasing feeling of bitterness and exasperation amongst a large majority of the Irish people who had no sympathy with the late insurrection and we are of the opinion that martial law in the best interests of the country be immediately withdrawn and no further executions under any circumstances should be allowed.'

The reason for the lack of response to the Rising may have been due to the countermanding orders and the confusion about the mobilisation arrangements. The more likely reason was the absence of any 'advanced nationalists' in places like Lorrha, where the Irish Parliamentary Party and later the Volunteers had substantial support. Also there were no individuals present who supported violent agitation such as Pierce McCan from Dualla or Edward Dwyer of Ballagh.

## Reports from the Guardian

Life in Lorrha appears to have been untouched by events in Dublin at Easter 1916 as reports in the Nenagh Guardian would lead one to believe. A report on May 6, 1916 states that John Dillon of Lorrha complained to the Borrisokane Guardians & Council of the allocation of a labourer's cottage, and of the action of the Council in taking up a pump stick in the village of Lorrha and 'depriving the people of their pump for no reason whatever.'

The report from Lorrha Petty Sessions on May 13 gives the usual litany of cases. John Tuohy was prosecuted for the larceny of some harness. Mr. F. Kelly, Kellysville, Rathcabbin was summonsed for selling Indian meal not up to the standard. Miss M. F. Quinlan was summonsed for opening her licensed premises during prohibited hours on Good Friday. Patrick Burke summonsed Michael Corcoran for assault. The parties were brothers-in-law!

The normalcy of life is illustrated by a report on June 10 of the North Board of the G.A.A. meeting at Nenagh, at which no delegate from Lorrha was in attendance. Championship fixtures were made. They included three concerning Lorrha. The club were fixed to play Silvermines in senior hurling on June 18, and to play Portroe in junior hurling a week later. Also a junior match was fixed for the village of Lorrha between Eglisish and Shannon Rovers on July 9.

One thing did happen at the same meeting which was a response to the insurrection in Dublin. The chairman, William Flannery, proposed that the board support any fund-raising, started in Tipperary for the benefit of the dependents 'of our brother Irishmen, who were slain, executed, deported and imprisoned during the recent insurrection.' The motion was seconded by Frank McGrath and unanimously adopted.

The fund referred to was the Irish National Aid Association and the list of subscribers, which was published in the Guardian on June 26, included Rev. J. Gleeson, P.P., Lorrha, who subscribed £1. Most of the names were from the Nenagh area and Fr. Gleeson was the only one from Lorrha.

## Changing Political Climate

In fact the main celebration in the parish during the remainder of 1916 had nothing to do with the Rising. It was for Private Martin O'Meara, from Lissernane in the parish, who had been awarded a V.C. for outstanding bravery at the battle of the Somme. The Guardian describes the event: 'The little village of Lorrha in North Tipperary was en fete last Friday on the occasion of the presentation to Martin O'Meara, V.C., who hails from the district. By motor car, by brake, by side car, by bicycle and by foot came hundreds of people to testify their pride in the bravery displayed by this gallant North Tipperary man. A

platform was erected in the ball alley by the side of the venerable old abbey. Gaily decorated poles with the Union Jack and the Shamrock added a bright appearance to the scene. Fortunately the weather was sunny and bright, if a trifle windy. The band of the Royal Irish came all the way from Templemore to add the charms of music to the day. Arrived on the spot a selection of Irish airs was played to the enjoyment of the large concourse of people who had assembled.'

As it transpired Martin O'Meara was not in attendance as he had returned to the army in the meantime. General Hickie, who presided at the event and made an appropriate speech, presented the gold watch to his sister, Miss Alice O'Meara.

Eleven months later when O'Meara returned to Lorrha again, his reception was much different. Instead of being the centre of attention and generating admiration for his exploits, the locals regarded him as an oddity and an outsider. He attended a number of threshings but usually found himself on the outside, without much rapport with his neighbours and a curiosity to his friends. Eventually he got the message that he wasn't part of the community anymore and returned to his battalion earlier than intended.

Martin O'Meara's experience reflects the changing political climate within twelve months of the Rising. The first big impetus to that change was the release of the Frongoch internees at Christmas. The prisoners from the Easter Rising who had been spat upon in the streets of Dublin as they were marched to internment in Wales the previous May, returned as heroes.

The celebration of the first anniversary of the Rising at Easter 1917 confirmed the change in the political climate and the dramatic transformation in people's attitudes to the insurrection.



*Lorrha IRA: Martin Needham, Jim Carroll, unknown, Felix Cronin.  
Photo: Nancy White*



*Bill Boucher, Little Portland, Nenagh and Jack Moloney, Roscrea, taken on the day that the Truce was declared in the War of Independence, 1921.*