

# Limerick Republican Plot in Mount St. Lawrence Cemetery - a short history

*by Des Long*

**D**uring the war for Irish freedom waged in 1920-1921, an R.I.C. constable was shot dead in an engagement in Dublin. Several arrests were made and a curfew order was imposed in the city. The order, which was implemented by the British authorities, made it an offence for any person, other than members of the Crown forces to be on the streets between midnight and 5 a.m. This order was later imposed in many other towns and the times were advanced to earlier hours, which facilitated night raiding by Black and Tans, R.I.C. and other military.

Erskine Childers wrote at the time, 'take a typical night as citizens go to bed, the barracks spring into life. Lorries, tanks, and armoured searchlight cars, muster in fleets to impose the curfew on the streets and to raid the homes of terrorised citizens.' Thus it was in Limerick city also. During curfew on the night 6/7 March 1921 a murder squad under the command of George Nathan went about its evil work in the deserted streets of the city. The raiders first went to Liddy's house in Janesboro, took Volunteer Joseph O'Donoghue from the house at 11.30 p.m. and murdered him. They then proceeded to the North Strand, raided the homes of Mayor George Clancy and ex-mayor Michael O'Callaghan and shot both men in front of their wives at 1 a.m. A few days later all three men were buried together in Mount St. Lawrence Cemetery.

After these deaths the Republican movement purchased a number of graves in the same area of the cemetery, as it was expected that more members would die in the ongoing fight. By the time of the truce on 11 July 1921, there were eight

Volunteers buried in the plot. On 9 April 1922 another Republican was also buried there during the truce. Captain Thomas Keane who was executed on 4 June 1921 and buried in the New Barracks (now Sarsfield Barracks) was reinterred in the Republican plot.

During the Civil War that took place between 28 June 1922 and 24 May 1923, a further ten Limerick Republicans were killed fighting the Free State army or died due to ill treatment as prisoners of war. They too were buried in the Republican plot. When the plot was first used in March 1921, it was intended to mark the Republican graves in an appropriate manner to commemorate their heroic deeds. As the years passed that plan was not carried out. A committee was put in place to complete this task. A sub-committee was also put in place to raise the necessary finance, composed of the following people.

Miss Madge Daly, Ard Aoibinn  
Limerick,  
Thomas Geary, O'Connell St.  
Limerick.  
Jas. A. Hennessy, Cuilgreine,  
Limerick

S.M. O Mara, Alderman,  
Strand House, Limerick.  
Paddy Ryan, M.C.C. Doon,  
Co. Limerick.  
Seán Carroll, T.D. Castleconnell,  
Co. Limerick.  
James Corbert, T.D. Athea,  
Co. Limerick.

The intention was to surround the plot with stone of a suitable height, and a distinctive design in the tradition of Irish monumental art. The committee estimated that the work would cost one thousand pounds and decided that Mr. Oliver Sheppard RHA should be engaged to design the monument.

Oliver Sheppard (1865- 1941), a Protestant of staunch Nationalist ideals, was born in Cookstown County Tyrone. He was famous for his many sculptures and works of art, including the 'Dying Cuchulain' which he designed and manufactured in 1911. This statue is now a major attraction in the GPO in Dublin. The committee was delighted with his design and engaged a local firm, Messrs Keane Monumental Sculptors, to carry out the work.



The large funeral attendance at the graveside, with the three coffins in the foreground.

Inset: The two widows  
Kate O'Callaghan and Maire Clancy.

Republican plot, photographed in May 1922.  
by David Long

Bill Keane, the owner of the firm, was chosen to carry out the work for two reasons. Firstly, he and his workmen were fine sculptors. A lot of Bill's work can still be seen, such as the beautifully crafted cross he made and erected over his father and brother's grave in St Patrick's Graveyard in the late 1890s. He also manufactured and erected the grotto in St. Patrick's Well. The second reason he was chosen was because he was a staunch Republican. Bill Keane and his sons, Andy and Maurice were members of the Pike Company IRA Second Battalion and had seen active service. Bill was Captain of that Company and was often on the run to avoid arrest or worse.



Bill Keane

The Republican plot when it was completed was 10 metres long and 9.15 metres wide, and the cross is 7.2 metres high, the arm span is 1.45 metres wide. The figure on the Crucifix is of a national figure with a long tunic. The twenty-one slabs bearing the names of those buried in the plot are 0.75 metres long by 0.45 metres wide and it should be noted that all the inscriptions are in Irish.

The inscription on the cross reads:

Óraid  
Do Naonbhar déag  
Do Fuair bás ar son  
Poblacht Na hEireann.



Translation of the above:

A Prayer  
For nineteen

Who died for the Republic of Ireland.

In March 1934 the work on the Republican plot was finally completed. On Sunday 18 March 1934, the cross was solemnly blessed by Rev. Thomas Wall, PP Stonehall and unveiled. The music for the occasion was supplied by a choir, of close on one hundred voices with Mr. Joseph Scallion as the conductor.

The nineteen people commemorated and buried in the plot included two brothers, Donnada Ó Duibhir (Denis O'Dwyer) and his brother Eadmonn (Edward). Both brothers died on the same day 7 August 1922. They were killed in two separate engagements against the Free State Army in Newcastle West, County Limerick.

There is only one member of Limerick Cumann na mBan buried in the plot. Maigread Bean Uí h-Aírneádh

(Margaret Hartney), was attending to the Republicans, wounded by Free State forces that attacked the IRA after they had taken over Adare. During the shelling she was caught in an explosion and died on 4 August 1922.

Today, there are twenty three people buried in the plot. The four others, who make up this number, are Seán Sabhat, who died in an attack on Brokeborough RUC Barracks, County Fermanagh on New Years Day 1957. On 16 March 1961 Kate O'Callaghan died and was buried beside her husband Michael. The wife of Mayor George Clancy, died on 8 June 1962, and she is also buried with her husband. The final burial in the plot took place when Helen Keane died on 22 February 1968. She was the wife of Thomas Keane who was executed by the British on 4 June 1921 just one month before the Truce was declared on 11 July 1921. She now also rightly rests beside her husband.



A section of the attendance of over 3,000 at the unveiling on 8 March 1934, which included Marie Clancy Kate O'Callaghan and Helen Keane whose husbands are buried in the plot (Photo David Long)

**Des Long**, a life-long Republican, is chairman of the Limerick Republican Graves Committee that has repaired a number of damaged Republican graves and memorials in the past and continues to do so. The committee is also responsible for the erection of memorials to Republican Volunteers, who were not commemorated heretofore. He is also chairman of Coiste Cuimhneachain Seán Sabhat, which was responsible for the erection of a memorial plaque on the house where Seán Sabhat was born and reared. Des has published the book *Seán Sabhat (1928-1957)* and booklets on the murders of Blake and O'Neill, at Grange and Hartnett and Healy at Abbeyfeale. He has also published booklets on John Daly, Fenian, Volunteer Joseph Collopy and Limerick Republican Plot.