

# 8. "Limerick: A handbook of local history" 941.94 (R)

On Monday night, 2nd February, 1920, a mixed patrol of military and police were booed as they passed through Limerick City. The military retaliated by firing indiscriminately up and down the streets. Richard O'Dwyer, a publican, was shot dead behind the counter in his premises in Catherine Street, and Miss Lena Johnson was mortally wounded in Sarsfield Street. At a meeting of the Corporation a few days later the Mayor, Michael O'Callaghan, said: "Under the present regime men's homes were no longer sacred nor their lives safe." He would say to the British Government: "Clear your soldiers out of the country and we will see to it that every citizen is safeguarded. Withdraw the soldiers, place the police under municipal control and we will look after our own city." A year later Michael O'Callaghan was to meet the same fate.

## LIMERICK CITY CURFEW MURDERS

### MICHAEL O'CALLAGHAN:

Michael O'Callaghan loved Ireland, worked for Ireland and died for Ireland. As a boy he was proud of the fact that his grandfather, Eugene O'Callaghan, in 1843, proposed the Repeal of the Union in Limerick Corporation. Michael was a member of the first Sinn Féin Club in Limerick in 1905. He was also a member of the Irish Industrial Development Association and was one of the gifted group of Limerick men, who, Sunday after Sunday, addressed meetings in Limerick and the neighbouring counties, impressing on the people the importance of supporting native goods. He was a member of the Gaelic League and in the midst of his business cares (the firm of O'Callaghan's of the City Tannery), he made time to take lessons in the Irish language from George Clancy who met his death on the same tragic night.

In January, 1914, he was present at the meeting in the Athenaeum to establish the Irish Volunteers and spoke on the platform with Patrick Pearse and Roger Casement. After the 1916 Rising he was one of the small band that kept the heart of the country alive. He helped to circulate throughout the country thousands of copies of Bishop O'Dwyer's letters and other "seditious" pamphlets! In 1920 he was elected mayor of the City of Limerick by the newly-elected Corporation. He and the Corporation at once pledged allegiance to Dáil Eireann and the Irish Republic and he was proud of the fact that he was the first Republican Mayor of Limerick.

In March, 1920, he received a threatening letter: "Prepare for death. You are a doomed man." Several raids were made on his house and for many months he did not sleep at home. On Christmas Day he decided that, no matter what the risk was, he was not going to leave home again. (His home was "St. Mar-

garet's", North Strand, now O'Callaghan Strand.) The final raid, the murder raid, was made on Sunday night, March 6th, 1921, when he was murdered in the presence of his wife in the hallway of their home. On Wednesday, his body and that of the murdered Mayor, Seoirse Clancy, were placed before the High Altar in St. John's Cathedral and were laid to rest in the Republican Plot in Mount St. Lawrence.

### SEOIRSE CLANCY:

Seoirse was born in the village of Grange, Co. Limerick. His mother was the daughter of a Fenian, his father was scout and recruiter for Stephens, Luby and O'Leary, in the early 'Sixties. In 1899 he went to Dublin, entered the Royal University and graduated in 1904. While in the Capital he joined the Gaelic League and his first Irish teacher was Pádraig Pearse. He knew and loved old Michael Cusack, founder of the G.A.A., whom he often met. After Dublin, Seoirse went to Clongowes Wood College, as language teacher, and in 1908 came to Limerick as teacher of Irish in the schools and Gaelic League. Every school-going child in the city knew and loved him. For more than ten years he taught the Irish Language and Irish Nationality to the children of Limerick.

With Michael O'Callaghan, he welcomed Pádraig Pearse and Roger Casement to Limerick in 1914, when the Volunteers were formally and publicly established. When the split came, Seoirse's spirited answer to the pessimists put new heart into them. He was arrested after the Easter Rising but was released within a few days. At the historic election of de Valera for East Clare in 1917, Seoirse did effective work as a speaker at the meetings and as personation agent on the day of the poll. He fell a victim to the severe influenza epidemic of 1918 and had to give up teaching in the schools. Later when he regained his strength he became superintendent of the Irish National Assurance Company. In January, 1921, he was appointed Mayor of Limerick.

Raids and searches were an outstanding feature of the English campaign against Irish Nationality, in the years 1916 to 1921. So frequent were the raids at the Clancy home that no record has been kept of them.

On Sunday night, March 6th, three tall men wearing goggles, with caps drawn over their faces, raided the house. Seoirse, like Michael, O'Callaghan, was shot dead in the presence of his wife. On Wednesday he lay in state at St. John's Cathedral with his murdered comrades and next day six Irish Mayors bore his body to the grave. His name is commemorated in Limerick in "Clancy's Strand", where he lived.

During the night that Mayor Clancy and ex-Mayor Michael O'Callaghan were assassinated another brutal murder was perpetrated on the person of Volunteer Joseph O'Donoghue. He was a native of Ballinacarrigy, Westmeath, and had been in Limerick about two years where he was employed as Manager of the River Plate Meat Company, William Street. An ardent worker in the Gaelic League and the G.A.A. he was but a brief time in Limerick when he became attached to the Second Battalion, I.R.A. He stayed as a paying guest at "Tig na Fáinne", the residence of Mrs. B. Lyddy, situated in the then sparsely populated district of Janesboro.

On the night of the murders, the Rosary had just been finished at 11.40 and the Lyddy household was preparing to retire for the night, when a loud knocking was heard at the door. It was opened to twelve members of the R.I.C. All poured into the living-room and one of the party asked Joe O'Donoghue his name. When he gave it, his interrogator cried, "You are the man we want". Violent hands were laid on him and he was hurried from the house.

What happened subsequently is known only to God and the murderers. Early next morning his body with eighteen bullet wounds in it was found lying some distance away on what was then known as Janesboro Avenue, now O'Donoghue Avenue.

There were many attacks by Black and Tans in Limerick and its neighbourhood during the following months. Soldiers in Crossley tenders drove through the streets and sometimes without any provocation, opened fire on innocent citizens. Under curfew regulations, the entire population was compelled to be indoors by 8 o'clock each night, during the summer months. This made it extremely difficult for the Active Service Units of the various I.R.A. Companies to effectively pursue the plan of campaign which provided for intensification of the fight against the British. But, undaunted, they never gave in and we hear of attacks and ambushes by them at such places as Carey's Road, Singland Bridge, Pennywell, and various other places.

So did the era of the Black and Tans end in Limerick, with the fighting men gallantly supported by the people, still unbroken and unconquered. Surely it was such as those who fought for Irish freedom that the poet Aonghus Mac Daighre Uí Dhálaigh had in mind when nearly three and a half centuries earlier he addressed the men who fought for freedom in his day in his great poem, "Dia Libh a Laochra Ghaoidheal". God with you, Heroes of the Gael.

## ADDITIONAL NOTES OF INTEREST

City Walls; Bridges; Houses of Old Limerick; Parish Churches; Precious Relics of the Past; Our Lady of Limerick; The Mayoral Chain; The City Seal; Streets of Old Limerick; Old Registers; The Treaty Stone.

## THE CITY WALLS:

The old walls, starting near Villier's Alms House for widows (which was established in 1815), leave traces between St. Munchin's churchyard and the river. The Wall runs along the Island, leaving St. Francis Abbey on the outside. It goes on between the Island Road and old Dominic Street, and along by the back of St. Mary's Convent. The wall continues along by New Road, where it forms an angle and extends along Exchange Street. From Watergate it goes from the corner of Loch Quay on through the grounds of St. John's Hospital. [In 1237 a toll was granted for the purpose of enclosing the city within a wall.] The wall then ran from the hospital across in front of the Cathedral to just beyond the Sarsfield Statue, then crossed Cathedral Street, and Gerald Griffin Street, down to Mungret Street, then down via the Markets, towards Carr Street to Westgate and Baal's Bridge (see map). On some of the walls, houses were actually built so that when going into these houses people stepped over the city walls.

## BRIDGES

## THOMOND BRIDGE:

King John caused a bridge to be erected about 1210 A.D. As King John's Castle was of stone so probably was the bridge. It was very narrow, so could not be used for vehicular traffic. There was a fortified gate-house at the city end and a castellated gateway or drawbridge at the seventh arch (there were fourteen arches) and this was called Thomond Gate. That gate led out to the North of Munster or Thomond. Although this bridge cost only £30 it lasted 600 years. It was taken down in 1838 and the new one erected on the same site in 1840, cost £10,000.

## BAAL'S BRIDGE:

This bridge connects English Town and Irish Town. In 1340 a charter was granted for building it. After the Sieges of Limerick (1690-1691) houses were built on each side of it, five or more on each side with just sufficient room in between to let a horseman pass. But in 1775 a high tide damaged the bridge and several of