

The Tragic Death of Constable Patrick Sheahan D.M.P.



As one stands at O'Connell Bridge, Dublin, looking south along Burgh Quay, there is an attractive monument in the centre of the junction of the Quay with Hawkins Street. The limestone memorial, with columns and panels honed from pink polished granite, was erected by public subscription to commemorate the bravery of DMP Constable Patrick Sheahan.

Patrick Sheahan was born in Ballyguilteneane, Glin, County Limerick in 1876. Patrick went on to attend the new primary school, which was erected in Ballyguilteneane, also in 1876. Even in his youth, stories of his heroics had begun to emerge. He was reputed to have once pulled a dead horse from a lime kiln. Like his brother John and many other locals, he joined the Dublin Metropolitan Police and was assigned to B Division in the city centre.⁽¹⁾ He was well built for the job, being 6ft 4ins tall and weighing 18 stone. Both he and his brother John were members of the force's champion tug-of-war team. The stories of his heroism, which began in his native Glin, continued in Dublin. He once rescued an elderly couple from a collapsing building in Townsend Street and in a famous incident in Grafton Street, he wrestled with a runaway bull and quipped afterwards to his friend, Constable Woulfe, that he was afraid the animal's horns would break.⁽²⁾ Little did he know that his gallantry was to have a tragic end.

The Accident

On Saturday May 6th 1905, a workman named John Fleming opened a manhole-cover at the corner of Hawkins Street and Burgh Quay at around 3 p.m. He descended a ladder into the 24-foot sewer to investigate a broken pipe and he was immediately overcome by the deadly gas, as were two of his colleagues who rushed to assist him. Christopher Nolan, a newsboy who witnessed the incident, ran for help.

He found Constable Sheahan, of College Street Station, standing at O'Connell Bridge. Tragically for him, he was on duty to relieve a friend who wanted to go to the theatre. Meanwhile, the two other men who went down the manhole were also overcome by gas. They were John Coleman, a workman, and Tom

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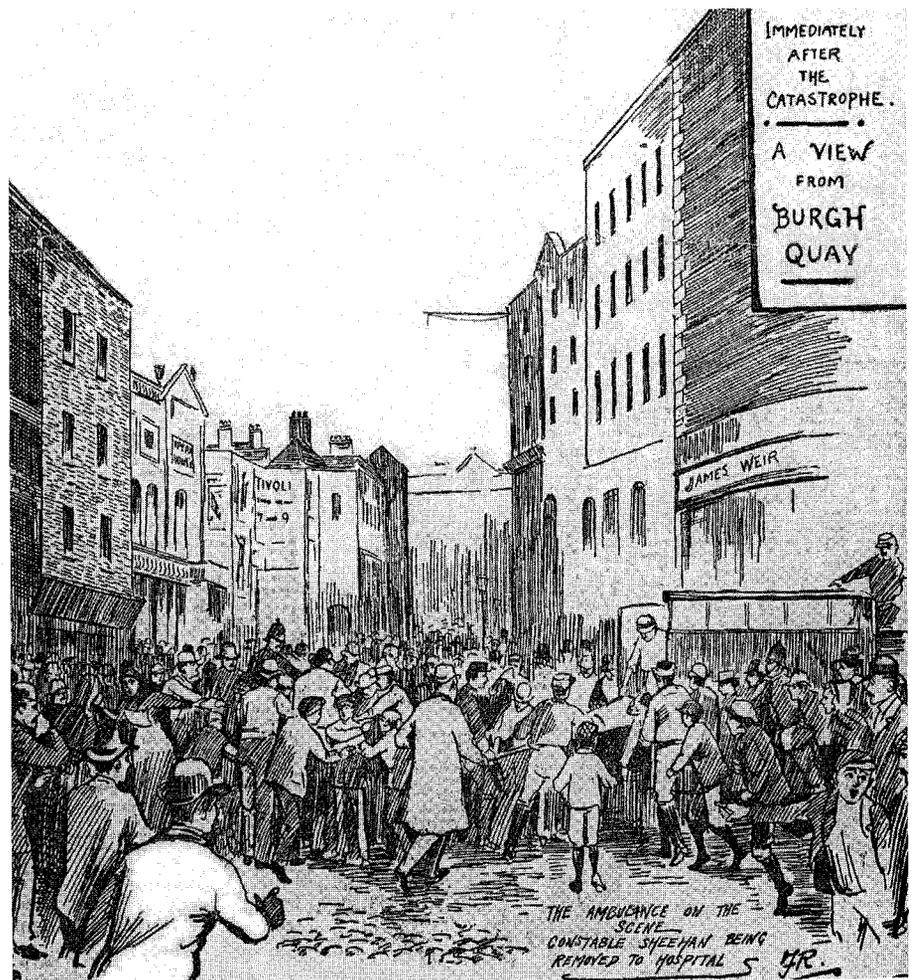
Rochford, a clerk of works with City Corporation. A third man, Kevin Fitzpatrick, a hackney-driver, tied a rope around himself and lowered himself down, attempting to rescue the unconscious men.

Sheahan rushed to the scene, removed his tunic and went down the 24-foot ladder in an attempt to rescue Fleming and his colleagues. He went back a second time to rescue Fleming and he too was overcome by fumes. He was not to know that Fleming was already dead. Both Sheahan and Fleming were rushed to Mercer's hospital, but it was all too late, as both men had suffocated. John Fleming was 42 years old and left a widow and 9 children to mourn his loss. The youngest child was

only 14 months old. Constable Sheahan was 29 years of age, single and in the prime of his life.

The Funeral

On Tuesday May 9th, St. Paul's Retreat, Mount Argus, was thronged for the requiem Mass for Constable Sheahan, celebrated by Fr. Columban Tyne, C.P. The funeral cortege left Mount Argus Church after Mass. In the early morning sunshine, the citizens of Dublin lined the route all the way to Kingsbridge railway station. The coffin was placed in the hearse by four Limerick men, Constable John Sheahan (brother of deceased) Constable Woulfe (best friend of deceased)⁽³⁾ and Constables Tim Roche and Edward Ryan. The cortege was led by a D.M.P. mounted troop, followed by the bands of the D.M.P. and the R.I.C. The hearse was



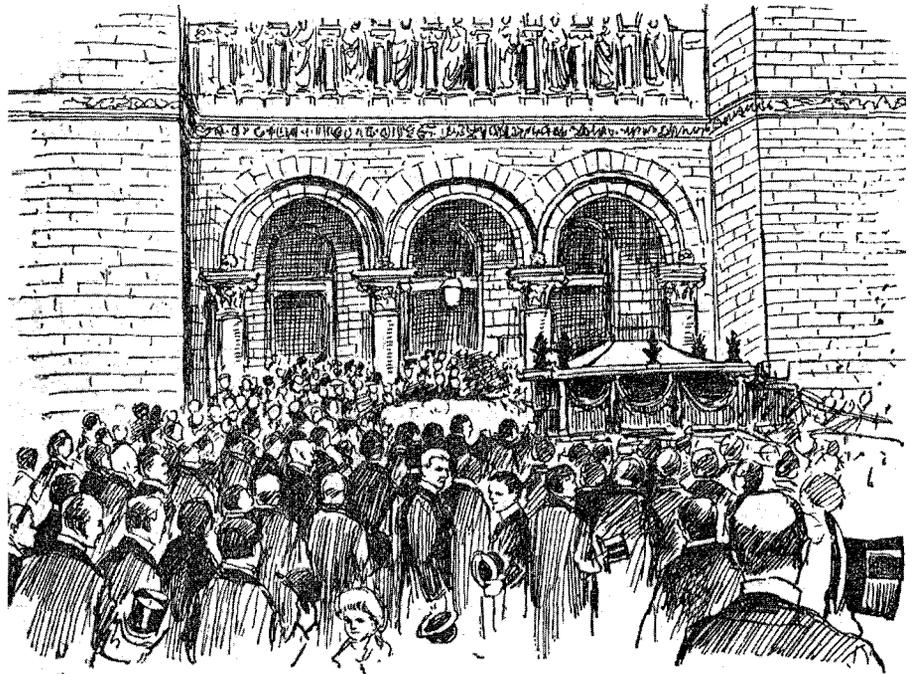
drawn by four white-plumed horses, followed by bodies of policemen, firemen and tram drivers all in uniform.

The coffin was placed on board the 9.15 a.m. train bound for Limerick. The cortege was met at Limerick station by Mrs. Sheahan, the mother of the dead policeman. He had recently visited her in St. Vincent's Hospital, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin, and now the frail old woman was on the station platform to receive his coffin. About twenty comrades from the D.M.P. accompanied the remains on its last journey to Foynes. The coffin was removed from the train at Foynes where the rail line ended. All the way to Glin people collected along the route as a mark of respect. The Glin Industrial School band met the hearse outside Glin and led it to Kilfergus graveyard. Archdeacon Roche and his two curates officiated at the graveside. The coffin was covered in wreaths, including one from "his comrade and brother John and his wife and child" and one from his sister Johanna.

Memorials

In August 1905, the Lord Mayor of Dublin opened a public subscription to erect a memorial to the two men who lost their lives that May. It was commenced by the Lord Lieutenant, who subscribed £25. It was finally unveiled by the Lord Mayor, Joseph Hutchinson, in August 1906. In 1985 the monument was restored to mark the eightieth anniversary of the tragedy. It was the only monument erected by public subscription and was an indication of the national feeling of sympathy towards the two men. The monument has the following tribute inscribed:

This memorial
Was erected in memory of
Patrick Sheahan
a constable in the
Dublin Metropolitan Police Force who
lost his life in the 6th day of March
1905



THE REMAINS BEING PLACED IN THE HEARSE
AT MOUNT ARGUS

in a noble and self-sacrificing effort to rescue John Fleming who had in the discharge of his duties descended the main sewer close by this spot and was overcome by sewer gas. It was also intended to commemorate the bravery of a number of other citizens who also descended the sewer to assist in rescuing the beforementioned, thereby risking their lives to save those of their fellow men.

The D.M.P., unlike the R.I.C., did not award medals for bravery. However, Patrick Sheahan did receive a posthumous commendation from the Royal Humane Society and his comrades in the D.M.P. erected a magnificent Celtic cross over his grave. A mural tablet was placed in the baptistry of his native parish church, bearing the following inscription:

"Of your charity pray for the soul of

Patrick Sheahan, late Constable D.M.P. son of Edmond Sheahan of this Parish, who lost his life in Dublin, while nobly trying to save the lives of others on the 6th of May 1905 - R.I.P.

Erected by Sir John Ross, of Bladensburg, K.C.B. Chief Commissioner".

The next member of the D.M.P. to die while on duty was Constable James O'Brien. He was the first casualty of the 1916 rebellion and coincidentally, he was also from Glin.

SOURCES

Limerick Chronicle, 9 May 1905

ibid., 11 May 1905

ibid., 13 May 1905

ibid., 24 August 1905

Evening Herald, 9 May 1905

Irish Independent, 10 May 1905

ibid., 15 May 1905

ibid., 2 January 1935

ibid., 4 May 1955

Limerick Leader, 22 June 1985

Ballyguiltene Rural Journal, 17th Christmas and New Year Edition 1994/1995: The Tragic Death of Constable Patrick Sheahan - The Man and the Legend by Tom Donovan.

NOTES

1. Constable John Sheahan was a member of the "A" Division of the D.M.P. and is grandfather of John Sheahan, who is a member of the Dubliners ballad group.
2. He received a reward in 1900 for recovering a city flag from a group of Trinity students in Dawson Street and restoring it to the Mansion House, and another one in 1904 for special police services.
3. For more information on Constable Woulfe of Ardagh, county Limerick, see:
<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/mwoulfe/homepage.htm>

