

A Curfew List: Surviving Relic of the War of Independence

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The owner of a farm in Shantraud, Adare, Co. Limerick, drew the author's attention to a pencilled list on the inside of an old farm building which he identified as a 'Curfew List' that related to the former owners, the Collins family, some of whose names appear on the list.

The 'Curfew List' in question was originally closely adhered to the inside of a door in a building now used as a storage shed but originally the dwelling house of the Collins family, which probably explains its survival.¹ It is written on white, unlined paper measuring 16 cms wide by 17 cms deep, in its present distressed state (Fig. 1). There remains



Fig. 1 Curfew notice.

¹ Richard Kennedy is the owner of the farm, just west of the junction where the roads from Kilcornan and Kildimo meet on the way to Adare, which was bought by his grandfather from the Collins family.

some evidence of an underlying piece of paper that was larger than the above dimensions. Some of the details are missing in the damage, so only three of the original five entries are fully legible.

The rarity of such an item is attested by several historians who have worked on this period of our history in Limerick. One presumes the fixture of most such notices were not as permanent as the one described here, hence their lack of survival. Most of them were likely to have been removed following the lifting of curfew sanctions resulting from the Truce and the Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921. Other factors may explain the survival of this list; the family may have had a more enlightened appreciation of their recent history and thus preserved this reminder of the past regime.

The imposition of curfew during the War of Independence was sanctioned by Colonel Strickland, Cork-based Commander over Munster and the south of Ireland generally. Martial Law was first applied in December 1920 to counties Cork, Kerry, Tipperary and Limerick and extended to Clare, Waterford, Wexford and Kilkenny in early 1921.² The main purpose of this law was to curtail public assembly, travel after dark and freedom of movement. This latter condition was the reason for the curfew lists to be affixed inside the doors of dwelling houses, thus recording the presence and control of those within. The 'Defence of the Realm', Regulation 13, namely 'Ordering inhabitants to remain indoors' would thus be a local imposition on an unruly area, or perhaps on a family home especially if the family was suspected of threatening the realm by harbouring 'subversives' or of staying out-of-doors during curfew. Such curfew lists had been used in the Boer War and later in the British Rhine Zone following World War 1.³ Colonel Strickland's initiative did not have the desired effect and Ainsworth⁴ pointed out that the very opposite of its purpose became the fact.

The 'Curfew List' only specifies those present in the house on the one particular night of curfew. Four members of the Collins family are listed: Maurice Collins, Mary Collins, Con Collins and Maurice Collins. The ages of Mary, Con and the lower Maurice are given but it is not possible to read the top Maurice's age due to damage. The final name on the list is missing but the age 14 survives. Based on an examination of the 1901 and 1911 census returns it is possible to identify all of them. While we might expect Maurice the head of the family to top this list, it may well be the son Maurice who is recorded here and if so his age here should be given as twenty-nine. Mary's age is given as thirty-five and such age would correspond (roughly) to the daughter Mary. Con at age thirty-six would loosely correspond with ages given on the Census returns for him. The second Maurice on the list could possibly record the father, which would mean that the age given here is sixty-six. We do not have the name of this fourteen year old on the Curfew List but there is a correspondence in age with a Collins family member, a granddaughter Kathleen who was aged 4 in the Census of 1911.

There is a local belief that Maurice Collins the head of the family was given the farm in lieu of compensation by his employer Fosbery for an injury sustained on his farm.⁵ Fosbery's main holding was at Curraghbridge in an adjoining townland and this farm in Shantraud would have been adjacent to it. The Fosbery house and lands were later to pass

² John Ainsworth, *British Security Policy in Ireland, 1920-1921* (eprints.gut.edu.au/6/1/British_Security_Policy_in_Ireland.Pdf).

³ William Sheehan, *A Hard Local War, The British Army and the Guerrilla War in Cork 1919-1921* (Dublin, 2011) p. 97.

⁴ Ainsworth, *British Security Policy in Ireland*.

⁵ Oral testimony of Richard Kennedy.

to a branch of the Bury family that had settled near Pallaskenry and built Shannongrove house, in the early 18th century. Ten years before the recording of the Collins family on their door, the Census of Ireland in 1911 recorded eleven persons in the house, which was the only one registered for the small townland of Shantraud of forty acres. Both the 'Head of Family' Maurice and his wife Mary are aged fifty-six and had been married for thirty-one years at that time. The marriage details were not found in the Adare Catholic Register, indicating the place of marriage was in the wife's parish elsewhere. Of the total of six children recorded as 'Born Alive', four are present on the night of the census: Cornelius, aged twenty-seven; Thomas, aged twenty; Bridget, aged twenty-two and Kate Bury, aged twenty nine. In the 1901 census she and her husband William Bury are listed as 'Visitors'. The former is aged thirty two, a member of the Church of Ireland and a 'Landed Proprietor.' According to the 'Adare Parish Records, 1833 -1900', he had married Catherine Collins on April 29th, 1899. Two grandchildren, Kathleen, aged 4 and Timothy, aged 2, were also present on Census day and under 'Where Born', 'England' is given for both.

Richard Kennedy indicated that the Collins family might have originated from the Cappagh area, and this is reinforced by the fact that their place of burial is there. Their headstone in the cemetery there records the deaths of Maurice Collins, Shountrade, Adare on 27 February 1929 aged 75 years and his wife Mary Collins on 8 March 1930 aged 75 years as well as their sons Stephen and Bobby and Maurice's father Stephen.

There is no surviving evidence of the precise reasons for the imposition of a curfew on the Collins family. Their nearest neighbours in Shantraud were the Hickey family across the road from them in the townland of Curraghbridge. The last surviving Hickey still in his home place is Michael who has good recall of the Collins' in their latter days from information gained both from first-hand and from his parents. According to him Con and his mother were often on the road after dark in their pony and trap and it is possible that this fact alone would attract the attention of the police force. This may have been a factor in the imposition of curfew on the Collins home in Shauntraud.

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