

# First Limerick Volunteer to die for Ireland

## Plaque marks grave of Robert Byrne

By TOM TOBIN

THERE was no ceremony . . . nothing to indicate the chapter in history that was being honoured in stone above the simple grave in Mount St. Laurence Cemetery on the outskirts of Limerick.

The little stone records the name of Robert Hurley Byrne—the first Limerick Volunteer to die in the cause of Irish freedom. It was erected a few days ago by relatives and old comrades . . . 46 years following his death in a farmhouse at Knockalishen. But it gives no indication of the story that will keep the patriot's name immortal in the annals of the brave.

It has been placed on record that Limerick's fight for freedom began with the rescue of Bobby Byrne from police custody at the Workhouse Hospital on Passion Sunday, April 8th, 1919—a rescue that ended in death for the Dublin-born Post Office telegraph clerk whose home was at Town Wall Cottage by Limerick's historic wall.

Bobby Byrne was Adjutant of the Limerick City 2nd Battalion of the I.R.A. and was a prominent member of the Trades and Labour Council. His march to martyrdom began on December 31, 1918, when his home was searched by police. They found an unloaded six-chambered revolver, a pair of field-glasses and eight large and one small round of revolver ammunition. He was taken into custody until January 21, when he was tried before a court martial consisting of Major Wakefield, Captains Grey and Rush. Byrne declined to plead.

"This tribunal," he said, "represents an army of occupation in Ireland, and that being so the members of this Court cannot, in my view, be impartial judges." It was not until February 1 that his sentence of twelve months was announced. In Limerick County Jail he joined sixteen other political prisoners, all of whom were agitating for the treatment which they felt their status demanded. The day after the arrival of Bobby Byrne they backed their demands by force. Between six and seven o'clock in the evening, the prisoners barricaded themselves in their cells, smashed the glass windows and wrecked whatever bit of furniture there was in their cells. It was three hours later before order was restored.

### REPRISALS

Reprisals followed this outburst and these were so brutal that they drew strong protests from the Limerick Trades and Labour Council. It was after this that Byrne resorted to the last weapon—hunger strike—and on March 12 he was removed to the Workhouse hospital in a very weak condition. A protective force of five policemen and a prison warder stood constant guard by his bedside . . . And at I.R.A. quarters, the rescue of Bobby Byrne was being discussed at length.

His comrades met in the Roger Casement Sinn Féin Club in Gerald Griffin Street, where a plan was drawn up so that between thirty and forty carefully selected men would infiltrate with the visitors to the hospital. Twenty of these were to make their way to the prisoner's ward and at the blast of a whistle at 3 p.m.

they would overpower the guard.

Byrne was a patient in No. 1 ward under the watchful eyes of Sergt. John J. Goulding, Ballyneety; Constable J. H. Spillane, Askeaton; Constable John Fitzpatrick, Clarina; Constable James Tierney, Killybeg; Constable Martin O'Brien, Caherconlish; and Prison Warder O'Mahony. There were no restrictions on visitors to the hospital at this hour on Sundays and no special attention was paid to the large number of men in and around the place. But sharply at 3 p.m. the shrill whistle rang out through the hospital wards and men dashed to their positions. The encounter was brief. The police and warder were rushed by twenty anxious men and were quickly overpowered.

### SHOT IN BED

But as the shots echoed throughout the ward, 28-year-old Bobby Byrne's hopes of rescue faded with the bullet that penetrated his chest. He had been shot as he lay in bed . . . a fact which was not noticed by his comrades until they had left the hospital grounds. Constable O'Brien was shot close to the region of the heart. Constable Spillane was hit in the spine and the three other Constables and the Warder were badly beaten up.

In the midst of the confusion that followed, officials of the hospital rushed in to find Constable O'Brien lying on the floor in a dying condition. The Constable asked for a priest and the Chaplain of the institution, Very Rev. Canon O'Driscoll, P.P. who was in the house at the time, rushed to the scene and administered the Last Sacraments. Constable O'Brien died shortly afterwards. The other Constables and Warder had been tied up by the rescuers and were located later in the operating theatre adjoining the ward. The raiders were not recognised.

Meanwhile, Byrne's rescuers found to their horror that he was seriously wounded. An undertaker's carriage which was to take him to a hiding place was nowhere to be found and a pony and trap had to be requisitioned in a hurry to take him to the house of Mr. John Ryan at Knockalishen. There in the shadow of the Clare Hills, he died at 8.30 that fateful evening of Passion Sunday, 1919, and his body was laid out in the uniform of Colonel Austin Brennan, Limerick's first martyr had fallen . . . the fight had begun.

### MANY ARRESTS

There were many arrests and several baton charges during which people were injured. At the inquest on Volunteer Byrne, Mr. M. Brennan, an officer of the Irish Volunteers, complained to the Coroner, Mr. M. Brady, J.P., that the Volunteer uniform which was on the body of the deceased, had been removed by the authorities.

Among those who took part in the rescue were: Mick Stack, Joe O'Brien, Dinny Maher, Thady Kelly, Willie

Wallace, Tom "Corky" Ryan, Jack Keogh, Joe Saunders, Connie Mackey, Tom Mack, Jack Cowhey, Mickey Danford, Michael Clancy, Mick Ringrose, Brian Crowe, Jack "Tarry" Enright, Jack Butler and Jack Gallagher.

The following Tuesday, the body of Robert Hurley Byrne was removed from Knockalishen to St. John's Cathedral. The coffin, draped in the Republican colours, was borne the entire distance of three miles on the shoulders of his friends. The immense cortege included several companies of the Irish Volunteers. The following day an official warning was issued by the authorities to the effect that anything in the shape of a military parade or assembly would not be tolerated . . . and every step was taken to enforce the prohibition. Extra forces of military and police were on duty on the streets and in the barracks, cars were posted at various sites and two aeroplanes hovered over the Cathedral and the route of the funeral procession to Mount St. Laurence.

### FULL HONOURS

It was an impressive sight. Thousands turned out and every Volunteer in the area marched in the procession. So large was the procession that it took an hour and ten minutes to pass a given point. As the coffin passed the military on duty, they smartly presented arms in respect for the dead. Bobby Byrne was given full honours.

In retaliation for the shooting of Constable O'Brien, Limerick was proclaimed a special military area and was surrounded by a cordon. It was impossible to get in or out without a permit. This action angered the people and Limerick United Trades and Labour Council, representing thirty-five trade unions, countered with a general strike. This took effect on Monday, April 14, at 5 a.m. . . but following special consideration of the effects, bakeries, groceries and provisions stores were allowed open to alleviate distress.

Tally notes to the value of 10/-, 5/- and 1/- were issued by the Trades and Labour Council for the purchase of supplies by those in need and were redeemed from the shopkeepers by the Council at the end of the strike. All public houses were closed.

The strike ended on April 27. It had shown the world that Limerick had rebelled against the tyranny of the oppressor and had tempered the spirit of the citizens for the fighting years that lay ahead.

Such is the story that is commemorated by the new memorial above the grave of Bobby Byrne in Mount St. Laurence Cemetery.

## HINTS FOR THE HOME

By MARY HARDING

If you are going to decorate eggs (or let the children do it) for Easter, so that they are long-lasting ornaments it is only the shell that is going to be of use. In other words—empty the egg of its contents first.

How to get rid of the contents without smashing the shell? Make a hole at the broad end of the egg with a metal meat skewer. Pierce the yolk

Mr. John Coffey, sculptor, Mulgrave Street, Limerick, at the monument in Mount St. Laurence Cemetery, which he completed this week. With him is Eamon de h-Oir, William Street, who organised the tribute to Volunteer Bobby Byrne.

## Inspection of meat for hospitals

THERE was a very strict inspection and control of all meat bought by public institutions the Manager of the Limerick Health Authority told Ald. S. Coughlan at a meeting of the Limerick Health Authority. The matter arose when Cllr. M. Lipper referred to the fact that beef and mutton was being bought by the Authority for 2/6 and 3/2 a lb.

He said that at that price the meat could not be of very good quality as it was too cheap. The meat should not be purchased at the expense of the patients and should be inspected before being used.

The Manager said that there was a daily inspection in hospitals at all times in addition to the inspection by the veterinary surgeon.

Ald. Coughlan said that the inspection was purely a disease inspection.

Manager—Oh no. The meat is inspected for quality as well and a very careful watch is kept. I would also like to remind you that we have very responsible people in matrons and storekeepers.

Mr. P. Harnett (Secretary)—We have qualified people in the hospitals to inspect meat.

## P.A. for careless driving

John Keating, Ballyallinan, Rathkeale, was charged at Kilmallock Court with alleged dangerous driving at Kilmallock on January 11.

Sgt. Cannon said that the defendant drove his car through the town crossing at Kilmallock at between 25 and 30 miles per hour. Defendant said he did not see the "Yield Right of Way" sign.

Mr. W. A. Lee, solr., appeared for the defendant, and the Justice reduced the charge to one of careless driving and applied the Probation Act.

OLDCHURCH  
HOSPITAL  
ROMFORD  
ESSEX

(651 Beds)  
Student Nurses Female

## I.C.A.. NOTES

Congratulations Askeaton Irish speaking team, on winning the second trophy in the Elenore Gibbon contest.

The members of this team are: Mrs. Mary Fitzgibbon, Chairman; Mrs. N. Hawkes, Speaker; Mrs. Margaret Moran, Proposer of vote of thanks; Mrs. M. O'Riordan, Seconder of vote of thanks.

The presentation of this award will take place in the Vocational School, Portlaoise, on April 10, at 4 p.m.

The final of the English speaking teams will take place on the same evening. There are four teams, Ballymackey, Longford T.A., Tara Hill and Blanchardstown.

### BORD FAILTE EIREANN

Miss O'Sullivan from Bord Failte Eireann will give a demonstration and talk on the making of native craft souvenirs at the Vocational School, Kilmallock, on April 27. There will be two sessions—2 o'clock to 3.30 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

All interested in good quality souvenirs are invited to attend. A special invitation is extended to local carpenters, smiths and metal workers, knitters, basket makers, Irish crochet workers and all lace makers.

Miss O'Sullivan is anxious to contact people whose work is suitable for the souvenir trade, and would be glad to see samples of crafts made locally. Orders will be given to craft workers whose work reaches the required standard.

### CONFERENCE NEWS

Next conference meeting will take place at the Gaelic League Hall, Limerick on Saturday, April 24, at 3.30 p.m. All international officers will be notified of this meeting.

Mrs. M. Fitzgibbon, Hon. Secretary, Limerick Federation, has been appointed aide to Mrs. E. M. Spry, Chairman of the General Purposes Committee of A.C.W.W.

### IMPORTANT

Every federation has been allotted four extra tickets for the conference, September 14 to 24. Each ticket costs £10. Any I.C.A. member may apply for one of these tickets, but at her own expense. All travelling expenses and your stay in Dublin during the conference, are your own responsibility.

Apply to Federation Hon. Secretary before April 20.

Mrs. Farrell, Ardsallagh, Co. Roscommon, will be glad to receive traditional Irish savoury recipes for the new I.C.A. cookery book, as soon as possible.

A conference meeting will take place in the supper room, Mansion House, Dublin, on Wednesday, April 21, at 7.30 p.m. sharp. All I.C.A. members in Dublin for the Annual General Meeting on the following day are invited to attend.

### SPRING FEDERATION MEETING

Kilfinane was the venue for the Spring Federation meeting held on March 24. Guilds from as far away as Athlone attended this meeting, which was most successful.

Guest of honour was Very Rev. J. McCarthy, P.P., Kilfinane.

Mr. Collins Powell from the Voluntary Health Authority was guest speaker.

Mrs. J. O'Doherty, President, Kilfinane Guild, welcomed Fr.

### FEDERATION COMPETITIONS

Mrs. Fitzgibbon, Askeaton, gave particulars of the Choral Verse Speaking competition; Mrs. Geary, Limerick T.A., the one-act play competition, and Mrs. Moloney, Kilmallock, the garden competition. Leaflets giving particulars of these competitions will be sent to guild secretaries.

### PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Mrs. Reeves gave a report on her work in the county since January. The following guilds were visited: Murroe, Adare Bruree, Galbally, Ballygarry, Kilfinane. She was glad to report that all guilds were working satisfactorily, and that she would be visiting the new guilds next month. There were inquiries from three parishes for new guilds and these would be attended to after Easter. She paid a tribute to Miss Ann Roche who is leaving the I.C.A. as organiser on being seconded to Country Markets Ltd for a period of three years. Mrs. Reeves said that Miss Roche had always been most helpful and co-operative in Limerick.

### TREASURER'S REPORT

Mrs. Ryan, Murroe, Hon. Treasurer, gave a satisfactory account of the Federation expenditure.

### PRODUCTION OFFICER

Mrs. Hogan, Adare, was glad to report that production was going well. Kilfinane group were ready to take their test and arrangements were made for Mr. Skak, B.Agr.Sc., to be examiner. Murroe had formed a livestock group. Bruree a gardening group.

Fedamore were interested in poultry and livestock and Adare had secured the services of Miss Bond for a six day visit when a home decorating group would be formed.

### TEACTA'S REPORT

In the absence of Mrs. Ahern, Limerick, Mrs. K. O'Sullivan read a report from her. An appeal was made to members to support as many courses as possible at An Grianan.

### ORGANISER'S REPORT

Miss Roche gave a report on her activities since January. A very full schedule was reported on, and she regretted very much leaving Limerick where she had received so much kindness and consideration.

### LIMERICK SHOW

COMMITTEE I.C.A. HOME INDUSTRIES SECTION

It was decided to form a new committee this year to handle the very important section of Limerick Show. The president and secretary of every guild, as well as a committee from Limerick T.A., Mrs. O'Shaughnessy, Mrs. Moriarty, Mrs. Geary and Mrs. Reeves, to be members of this new committee. The schedule had been altered to suit the primary, secondary and vocational schools needlework and craft programmes. Schedules would be available from the Show Society at the end of May.

### ELENORE GIBBON COMPETITION

Mrs. Fitzgibbon, Askeaton, Contest Hon. Secretary gave a report on the Regional finals held in Limerick, where Ballymackey (Tipperary) were the winners. It was a very satisfactory contest in every way.

### INTERFEDERATION COMPETITION