

# Time to honour our forgotten hero

ROBERT (Bobby) Byrne was the first republican volunteer to die following the outbreak of the Irish war of independence.

Born on November 28, 1889 in Upper Oriel Street, Dublin, his father also known as Robert was from the North Strand area of Dublin and his mother Anne Byrne (nee Hurley) came from Limerick City.

Robert joined the civil service in 1907 at the age of 18 as a learner in the GPO in Dublin; he was transferred to Kinsale in July 1908 to train as a sorter and then on to Bandon. He was finally moved to Limerick GPO in 1911 to work as a telegraphist. In the postal telegraphs section.

After his father died in 1911 the family moved to Limerick City. They lived in Town Wall Cottage also known as Donovan's Lane/Row Johnsgate Area. in Limerick. His first cousin was Lord Mayor of Dublin, Alfie Byrne.

Robert worked as a telegraph operator in the GPO in Limerick, where he was able to pass on vital information to the IRA. At this time he came under the notice of the RIC for his connection to the nationalist movement and it was reported he had insulted the union jack at



Over 20,000 people lined the streets of Limerick during Robert Byrne's funeral

the post offices clerks' dance. For these reasons he was dismissed from the Post Office in 1918, he was president of the Limerick Branch of the post office clerks association and he represented them on the Limerick United Trades and Labour Council. He was prominent in nationalist politics as adjutant of the second Limerick brigade of the IRA.

On January, 13 1919 his house was raided by RIC and was charged for the holding of revolver and ammunition. He

was sentenced to 12 months hard labour in Limerick prison.

In prison he started a hunger strike for political status for republican prisoners. Robert became ill while on hunger strike and was moved to the Union Hospital Shelbourne Road. The local IRA branch decided to rescue him from there on Sunday the 6th of April which they succeeded in doing but he was wounded in the attempt and a RIC Constable, Mark O'Brien was killed in

the escape.

Robert died later that day from his injuries in a cottage in Knocklisheen, Meelick. As people learned the details of Robert Byrne's shooting and death and Limerick prepared to mourn a dead hero

On the day of his removal from St. John's Cathedral 20,000 people filled the streets of Limerick, he got a full republican funeral. The British authorities tried to ban but failed in their attempt.

After the rescue and death of Robert Byrne the British army imposed martial law in the city where permits were needed for workers to enter and leave the city. A general strike was called by the workers of Limerick in opposition to this and the workers ran the city for 10 days from April 14 to 24 in 1919 but the strike failed due to lack of support from outside unions and the intervention of the Mayor and the Bishop. Known as the Limerick Soviet This is the 100th anniversary of the death of Robert (Bobby) Byrne but he is widely forgotten in local and Irish history.

- Robert Byrne 1919-2019

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## Facts and fossil fuels

I AM prompted to write following your



Limerick and Clare Education Training Board. These enabled us to get help and advice from a tutor and also to meet others who were interested in and learning about painting.