

# Memorial to man whose death sparked Soviet

■ Robert Byrne was first republican casualty of War of Independence

MIKE DWANE

A MEMORIAL will be unveiled this weekend to the Limerick man remembered as the first casualty of the War of Independence and whose death triggered the general strike and campaign of mass resistance known as the Limerick Soviet.

Historian Tom Toomey – author of the War Of Independence In Limerick – is one of the committee behind this Sunday's ceremony in memory of Robert Byrne.

It will take place this Easter Sunday at Knockalisheen, close to the spot where Byrne died after an attempt by IRA comrades to spring him from what is today St Camillus' Hospital, where he was being detained by the RIC.

Mr Toomey explained that Byrne had been arrested and jailed in January 1919 after guns and ammunition were found in the family home at Town Wall Cottage

near St John's Cathedral. "Because they were refused political status, Byrne and a number of other prisoners in Limerick Prison went on hunger strike. When Byrne's health began to deteriorate, he was transferred to the hospital attached to the Union Workhouse at Shelbourne Road. While in the hospital, Byrne was guarded by a detachment of policemen," Mr Toomey said.

"On Sunday April 6, 1919 a group of Limerick City IRA men rescued Byrne from the hospital. In the course of the rescue, one of the policemen, Constable Spillane, opened fire and mortally wounded Byrne. After the rescue, Byrne was taken to the farm house of John Ryan at Knockalisheen where he died from his wounds on the evening of Monday, April 7, 1919."

The funeral that followed was one of the largest seen in Limerick for decades, Mr Toomey said.



Robert Byrne was the first casualty of the War of Independence in April 1919

"Robert Byrne was the first republican to die following the outbreak of the Irish War of Independence in January 1919 and his death was the prelude to the Limerick Soviet taking control of the city in April 1919. In addition

to his involvement with the IRA, Byrne was also extremely active as a member of the trade union movement."

Fianna Fail's Cllr Cathal Crowe, who is also on the committee, said Byrne's funeral had been "unique in that the man in charge of the funeral cortege was Michael Brennan of Meelick, commanding officer of the East Clare Brigade, although Byrne was an officer of the Mid-Limerick Brigade".

The official unveiling of the memorial at Knockalisheen will take place this Easter Sunday, April 5, at 1pm and close to where Ryan's farmhouse once stood

Mr Toomey will give an oration followed by a wreath-laying ceremony. Cllr Crowe stressed the event would be "very much a community event and all are welcome on the day".

"The Meelick-Parteen and Cratloe Commemoration pride themselves on being

non-political. They come from many walks of life and are united in their interests in local history," Cllr Crowe said. The other committee members are Pádraig Ó Ruairc, Johnny White, Eamon O'Halloran, Jody O'Connor, Tom Gleeson, Pat McDonagh and Ger Hickey

Meanwhile, a new documentary on the Limerick Soviet will be broadcast on Easter Monday.

It will chronicle how the workers of Limerick resisted the imposition of martial law in the wake of Robert Byrne's death.

The Limerick Soviet will examine the events leading up to, during and after the Soviet and will be broadcast on Cork community television at 8pm, ahead of a public screening in Limerick on May 1 next.

You can watch the documentary online at [www.corkcommunitytv.ie](http://www.corkcommunitytv.ie) or on UPC Digital Cable, channel 803.

## DEATHS IN

**PUTT**, Yvonne. 49 Cluain Mhuire, Pallaskenry, Limerick.

**O'DONNELL**, James. Highfield, Templeraíne, Arklow, Wicklow and formerly of Limerick. Ma 25, at home in the tender care of his family Jan loving husband of Mary (née Moran) and dear loved father of Noreen and Michelle. He will be sadly missed by his loving Wife, daughters, granddaughters Ciara, Fiona and Enya, brother Hugo, sister Mary (Midge), sons-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law Nora, special cousin Mike, nephews, nieces, relatives, friends and neighbours.

**O'CALLAGHAN**, Angela (nee Liston) Sunny Heights, O'Malley Park/Rathbane, Limerick. Angela passed away peacefully at Milford Care Centre. Late of Limerick Shoe Factory & Clover Meats. Sadly missed by her loving family, husband Tommy, children Tracey, Elaine, Brendan, Thomas, Catherine, Ashling, Caroline, Jessica, grandchildren, sister, brothers, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, nieces, nephews, other relatives, life long friend Ann & Donal (O'Mahony) and other friends.

**MURRIHY**, Dermot Anthony. Clareview Terrace Farranshane. Peacefully, at Milford Hospice. Deeply regretted by his brothers Pat and Fergus sister-in-law Sigi, nieces Esther and Tanya, nephew Ollie, grandnieces, grandnephew, relatives, neighbours and friends.

**MOORE**, Leonard. Ballyclough Avenue, Ballinacurra Weston. Suddenly at his residence Late Electrical Rewinds & Young Munster R.F.C. Pre deceased by his wife Ann. Sadly missed by his loving family, sons, daughters, grandchilder sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, brothers, sisters brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, nephews, niece, other relatives & friends.

**GRAHAM**, Katherine (Kathleen) (nee O'Connell) Glenview Gardens, Farranshane and formerly of Ennistymon. March 24 peacefully. Katherine (Kathleen), beloved wife of the late Christopher and dearly loved mother of Marie, Gerard and Christopher. Sadly missed by her son-in-law Mike, daughters-in-law Orla and Nikki, grandchildren Lucy, Joseph, Shane, David, Cian,