

Limerick never let its hero Finn be forgotten

■ Commemorations, plaques and poetry have ensured the Rathkeale man's legacy

WE CONTINUE on from last week the story of Irish Volunteer Sean Finn, who lost his life in the fight against the Black and Tans at Ballaroe 95 years ago.

Finn's death was a stunning blow to his comrades, and his native county and it brought waves of sorrow into the homes of Limerick. Thousands of people from near and far attended his funeral a few days later.

He was buried in Rathkeale cemetery amid tight security as the troops patrolled the streets armed to the teeth, in a show of armed arrogance meant to intimidate those attending the funeral.

Following the truce a Sinn Féin Memorial Committee was formed to erect a suitable memorial cross to his memory.

It was unveiled on March 30, 1924 to mark the third anniversary of his death, and thousands of people attended including Volunteers who served under him, and also members of his old column. The Rathkeale Brass Band headed the march to the cemetery playing the Dead March. The slow and measured steps of the marchers was touching and impressive.

Sean Brouder, chairman of the Newcastle West Town Commissioners, oversaw the proceedings, and Countess Markievich TD spoke. A letter was read from Sean T. O'Kelly TD regretting his absence due to an engagement in London. At the conclusion of the proceedings, The Soldier's Song was sung by Mr O'Leary, with all present joining in. A very impressive Celtic cross marks his final resting place, with the following inscription:

*Erected to the memory of Brigadier Commandant
Sean Finn, Rathkeale West Limerick Brigade I.R.A.
Killed in an Engagement 30 March 1921.*

On March 30, 1924 Sean Finn was also remembered in Ballyhahill on the spot where he fell.

David O'Connor recited the Rosary with all present responding with emotion and respect. A cross was also erected at Ballaroe to mark the spot where Sean Finn was shot, and a commemoration was held there on April 18, 1971, to mark the 50th anniversary of his death.

A further commemoration was held there on April 2, 2000, on the occasion of the unveiling of a cross to Sean Finn.

The address was delivered by the late historian Mainchin Seoghe, from Tankardstown, and a large crowd attended.

The Finn family played an active role after the formation of the state with his brother Tom, sister Mary and nephew Sean Hayes, serving as members of Limerick County Council.

A number of verses have been composed over the years about Sean Finn which does justice to his memory. I have in my possession two different ones, but only the author of one. The final verse of A Poem on Sean Finn, concludes:

*There is one more I want to state,
before I drop my pen*

*He fought the Tans both ten to one
he was Commandant Finn*

*In Woodcliffe plains fell his remains
but bullets they did not fail*

*But in blessed clay he lied today
in his native place Rathkeale.*

Ballaroe was composed by the late John Hayes, and it is sung to the Air of Who fears to speak of Easter Week. The second last verse goes as follows:

*The lark will sing at morn's break
o'er the spot where Sean Finn died*

*The cuckoo and the corncrake
will be there at eventide*

*When summers rose in fragrance
blows and through winters frost
and snow*



Sean Finn, in a portrait painted by the late Rathkeale-born artist Jack Donovan and photographed by Dan Donovan, Donovan Studios Photography. An exhibition of this painting and other portraits by Jack Donovan, among them Ned Daly, Con Colbert and Michael Collins, will open later this month in the Rathkeale Arts Centre



Then & Now

with Tom Aherne

*His memory shall ever be revered
around that spot called Ballaroe.*

The Rathkeale G.A.A. Club called its football team Sean Finns, and their hurling team St Mary's until recently changing to Rathkeale. The Limerick Council Office in Rathkeale was named after him in 2007, and I can recall seeing his portrait hanging in the Office of Limerick County Council.

Sean Finn was politically active in the 1918 General Election, and he campaigned for the Sinn Féin candidate, against John Redmond in Waterford.

His intervention at a critical stage in 1920 saved the Limerick Co-operative Agricultural industry from internal collapse. Sean played a major role in the formation of the Sinn Féin police, and the Sinn Féin Courts in West Limerick.

Dan Breen writing in his book *My Fight for Irish Freedom* mentioned meeting Sean Finn.

He declared him one of those heroes who were proud to die for the freedom of their beloved country.

Now 95 years on the knowledge of his great deeds, and fight for Irish freedom must never be forgotten.

May his brave soul and the souls of all his comrades rest in peace.

THE LATEST edition of the Green and White Limerick GAA Youth Magazine is another top-class publication.

The award-winning magazine is nearly 20 years old and remains at the top of its field. Congratulations to Ciaran Crowe, Joe Lyons, and the team who won the Cumann na mBunscol publication of the year yet again in 2015.

In this issue the magazine pays tribute to two recently retired inter-county hurlers Donal O'Grady and Stephen Walsh.

Donal from the Granagh/Ballingarry club has given outstanding service to club and county and was one of Limerick's most popular captains. He can look back on numerous achievements, including leading Limerick to a Munster title in 2013. Donal was a great hurler, a mighty leader, a true gentleman, and he will be missed.

Stephen who was a dual player for his county is featured in a question and answer interview. It is very interesting to read about the commitment that is now needed to play at the top level. He played with Limerick from minor to senior level, and highlight was winning the Munster Senior Championship in 2013. Stephen will continue to play football with Ballylanders, and hurling with Glenroe.

Lorraine McCarthy, the Limerick camogie captain from the Bruff club, is featured in Player Profile. Her favourite GAA memory was winning the All Ireland Intermediate Camogie title with Limerick in 2014. She works as a nurse, and her ambitions in the GAA are to progress her club and push for more senior trophies with Limerick.

Peter Nash, the Limerick footballer who works as a GDA in Limerick city, also comes under the spotlight. The Kildimo/Pallaskerry clubman who also plays hurling describes working hard and pushing himself to the limits, and having fun with his friends as the best thing about playing GAA.

A number of Ardscoil Ris players who won a fourth Harty Cup give their answers to questions posed by the Green and White team.

Na Piarsaigh players write about what their club means to them in the run up to the All-Ireland club final against Cushendall (which, of course, they won). James Landon continues his series on GAA Programmes, with three pages devoted to the 2004 Munster Football Final and replay involving Kerry and Limerick, and their meetings in 1970 and 1982.

All the Primary school competitions, Sarsfield Cup Larkin Shield, County Football Shield, Celtic Image Shield and South City East and West schools, are reviewed with photographs of the competing teams. The Green and White on Holidays, the Green and White Gallery around the grounds, crossword letters, cartoon corner, and all the other regular features are included.

Some people
the hump over
resting place

John B. Keane

OUT IN THE OPEN

REGARDING remarks of mine on television recently about the camel's grave which is to be seen in a field near the village, I have received a letter from a Duagh man who claims that no such grave exists.

"I never," he writes, "read such boloney from the pen of our so-called leading writers. What upsets me however is the fact that there is a select group of people who are prepared to believe anything as long as it has appeared in the newspapers.

"I'm sure that there are many people in Duagh and outside of it who will believe there is a camel's grave in the district of Duagh. I defy you to come out here and publicly point out the grave. Advertise your coming and you will be assured of a crowd.

"Why not have it as part of the attraction of Writers' Week?"

There is a lot more of this letter but unfortunately for the author and fortunately for me we must think of others.

About the camel's grave. In 1902 George Hanratty's circus visited Listowel after a most unsuccessful tour of South Kerry. He fared no better in Listowel so he went on the booze and the animals in his circus were forced to fend for themselves.

There was a monkey known as Bill to whom we have frequently referred in these columns and there were a few piebald ponies. The star of the show was an ancient buck camel.

George Hanratty left Listowel in a hurry pursued by his irate creditors. Some months afterward he died in Ennis, having successfully cut his throat with the cover of a cocoa canister. The ponies in the circus were seized by the creditors.

The monkey lived on till 1906, during which year he was photographed at the bottom of Church Street. The photograph now forms part of the famous Lawrence Collection, but all this is well known to most of my readers.

No account

IT IS with the camel that we must busy ourselves. When Hanratty was on the booze the camel broke out of his compound and spent a happy period with some migrant asses in Gurtenard Wood. It is reported that he sired some of the mares but if he did there is no account of the progeny.

Tiring of the asses, he left Gurtenard and spent a time grazing the roadside at the back of Ballygrenane Hill. Persecuted by local youths he took to the road once more. He died coming on the winter of 1902.

Some say he died from starvation. Others say he

was put down after breaking a leg. More insist that he was shot by the R.I.C.

Whatever about the truth in which he met his death only one thing is certain that is that he is buried in a field at the right hand side of the road as you go from Listowel.

There is an account of a burial in the local paper for the period. For years there was a wooden cross over the grave. It has long since rotted.

On it were written the words: "Here lies a camel who died a long way from home. Take pity."

In Bruff

THERE ARE countless legends about the legendary Taylor of Glensharrol who was a man of immense strength who was so hungry because when he was in his heyday there were many slack bellies in Ireland.

Most of the time he worked for farmers. On one occasion he lived with a farming family near Ennis. In the house were his brothers and one sister who was unmarried.

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Bill started work on the first of February. He rose at five o'clock in the morning.

He would come in for breakfast at seven o'clock. Lunch was at one o'clock. Supper was at seven o'clock. As the days grew long hunger started to afflict him in earnest. He was abandoned in his notice when the brothers died suddenly.

On the day of the funeral Bill had a feed of drink that night when he was bedded he grew ravenous with hunger.

He waited till all was quiet and then he crept up the stairs. In the darkness he found a plate of cold meat and cabbage.

He tackled it at once and did not rise from the table till all was eaten.

In the morning there was an uproar but Bill maintained that he saw a man who resembled the dead brother in the kitchen.

Thinking it was a trick Bill came down: according to himself, it was then he saw the brother. He was eating meat and cabbage at the kitchen table.

Every night after the brother and sister left on the table when they