

The shooting of Constable Christopher Miller

by Tom Donovan

When the 1916 Rising commenced on Easter Monday the leaders were dispatched to take control of strategic buildings in the city. Commandant Éamonn Ceannt, who was in command of the 4th Battalion consisting of around 120 Volunteers, occupied the South Dublin Union. This building is now the site of St James' Hospital and is located in the south side of Dublin, two miles from the GPO. It was built as a workhouse in the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1916 it housed about 3,200 inmates and a large number of medical staff, which did not make it very suitable as a stronghold during a rebellion.

However, the old workhouse was in a strategic position, as it overlooked Kingsbridge (Heuston) Railway Station to the north and controlled the route from Richmond Barracks and the Royal Hospital military headquarters leading to the city centre. The entire complex was laid out in streets, alleys and courtyards and was set in fifty acres surrounded by a high stone wall.

Ceannt established his headquarters there and also occupied three outposts, assigning a captain and about twenty men to each: Captain Seamus Murphy to Jameson's Distillery in Marrowbone Lane to the south east; Con Colbert to Watkins' Brewery in Ardee Street to the east; and Captain Thomas McCarthy to Roe's Distillery in Mount Brown.

On Thursday 27 April Colonel Oates, who was under attack near Rialto Bridge and the South Circular Road, sent an urgent message to Portobello Barracks¹ requesting reinforcements. Sir Francis Fletcher Vane of the Royal Munster Fusiliers responded to Oates' request for assistance. Vane assembled all the men not on duty, about fifty in all, many of them from the Royal Irish Rifles, with no fewer than six officers from five different regiments. Two members of the Royal Irish Constabulary, Constable Christopher Miller and Constable Martin Meany



Constable Christopher Miller in uniform



Christopher Miller in civilian clothes

accompanied the soldiers. They were conspicuous in their uniforms as they wore army khaki breeches and the police cap and tunic. Miller and Meany were attending the school of instruction for non-commissioned officers at Portobello Barracks.

Oates handed over command of the assault on South Dublin Union to Sir Francis Fletcher Vane. Vane targeted a rebel flag flying from a rooftop.

British soldiers entered the Union grounds in five sections of twenty men and advanced in short runs to the Nurses Home. The soldiers fired at the windows of the building occupied by the Volunteers to allow them to move forward. The two policemen were in the vanguard of the attack. Constable Meany was severely wounded during the assault on the building, but his comrade Constable Miller managed to get through.



South Dublin Union Workhouse

Volunteer Peadar Doyle noticed that the barricade at the front door had been tampered with and reported this to Commandant Ceannt. Both men made a desperate dash to the entrance.

As they put their shoulders to the now open door in an attempt to close it, they felt a huge force pushing from the other side. Constable Miller had seen the door open and was now pushing his way

As he heaved on the door Ceannt and Doyle slid across the floor as they lost their footing. Miller was almost six foot tall and of a strong build. He was getting the upper hand and the door was slowly opening. Then Ceannt stuck his automatic pistol out through the gap in the door and squeezed the trigger. The policeman was hit and he staggered backwards a few yards before collapsing. The Volunteers managed to close the door and secure the position. Lieutenant Monk Gibbon, who was part of the attacking force, was called upon to give aid to the stricken policeman. He picked up a water bottle and darted across in front of the Volunteer's position, but as soon as he reached Miller's body he could see by his pallor that he was dead.²

Following the Rising Éamonn Ceannt was held in Kilmainham Gaol until his execution by firing squad on 8 May 1916, aged 34. He is buried at Arbour Hill.

Christopher Miller was born into a Church of Ireland farming family in

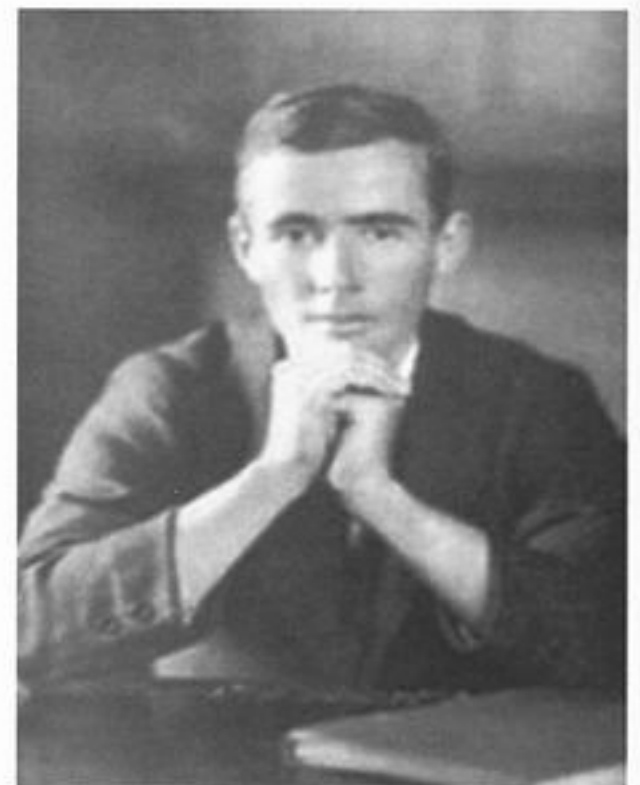


Eamonn Ceannt

Pallaskenry, County Limerick. He was the eldest of nine children born to Peter and Agnes Miller, of which seven survived.³ His mother Agnes was a sister of Sergeant George Neazor who was also shot in the Hibernian Hotel, Rathkeale in March 1920, during the War of Independence.⁴

Christopher joined the RIC in 1908 and in 1916 he was serving in Belfast. At the outbreak of the Rising he was in Dublin attending the school of instruction for non-commissioned officers at Portobello Barracks, in Rathmines.

Little did Constable Miller suspect that when he left Belfast he would be drawn into combat during his stay in Dublin, leading to his untimely death.



Lieutenant Monk Gibbon

The 29 year old officer had eight years and three months service with the RIC. His remains were buried in a cemetery on the grounds of the Royal Hospital Kilmainham.⁵

(Endnotes)

1. Portobello Barracks is now known as Cathal Brugha Barracks and is home to the Military Archives.
2. Paul O'Brien, *Uncommon Valour: 1916 & the Battle for the South Dublin Union* (Cork, 2010).
3. 1901 and 1911 Census returns and see also <http://winters-online.net/winters/g0/p47.htm>
4. *Limerick Chronicle* 13 March 1920
5. www.irishconstabulary.com



Portobello Barracks, Dublin