

LIFE IN LIMERICK BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR

THE ROYAL IRISH CONSTABULARY

by P.J. Ryan

The Royal Irish Constabulary held seven barracks in Limerick city. These were located at William Street, John Street, Mary Street, Frederick Street, Edward Street, Mulgrave Street (near the Pike), Caherdavin and at Mill Road, Corbally. On the outskirts of the city, about a mile distant, there were more police barracks. These were located at Cratloe Castle on the Ennis Road, at the crossroads at Castletroy on the Dublin Road, at Dooradoyle on the Cork Road, at the end of Barrack Road, Mungret, and at Clarina. From this it can be seen that the city was held and encircled by a mobile police-force, with about 20 men in each barrack. The number of police in the city was over three hundred. In the county and country generally, there was a police barrack within a short distance of every lord's residence.

Recruits to the R.I.C. were selected for their physique. On enlistment recruits swore an oath of allegiance to the reigning monarch and his or her successors. They were then sent to a training department where they were drilled like army recruits in the use of firearms. They were armed successively with each improved form of rifle supplied to the army. They wore a bottle-green uniform with black buttons and black leather belt, holding a baton in a leather case and a pouch with handcuffs. When carrying firearms they also wore a black leather bandolier containing cartridges for their rifle. Every year they spent a fortnight on a training course. When leaving the city for this annual event they marched in military formation with rifles on their shoulders. During their absence other men took their places.

Bicycles were the normal mode of transport, but in an emergency the R.I.C. were empowered to seize any form of transport for their immediate use. In general they were not unpleasant but held themselves aloof and few people wilfully sought their company. When taking a person under arrest to the nearest barrack they would usually handcuff the prisoner with his hands in front.

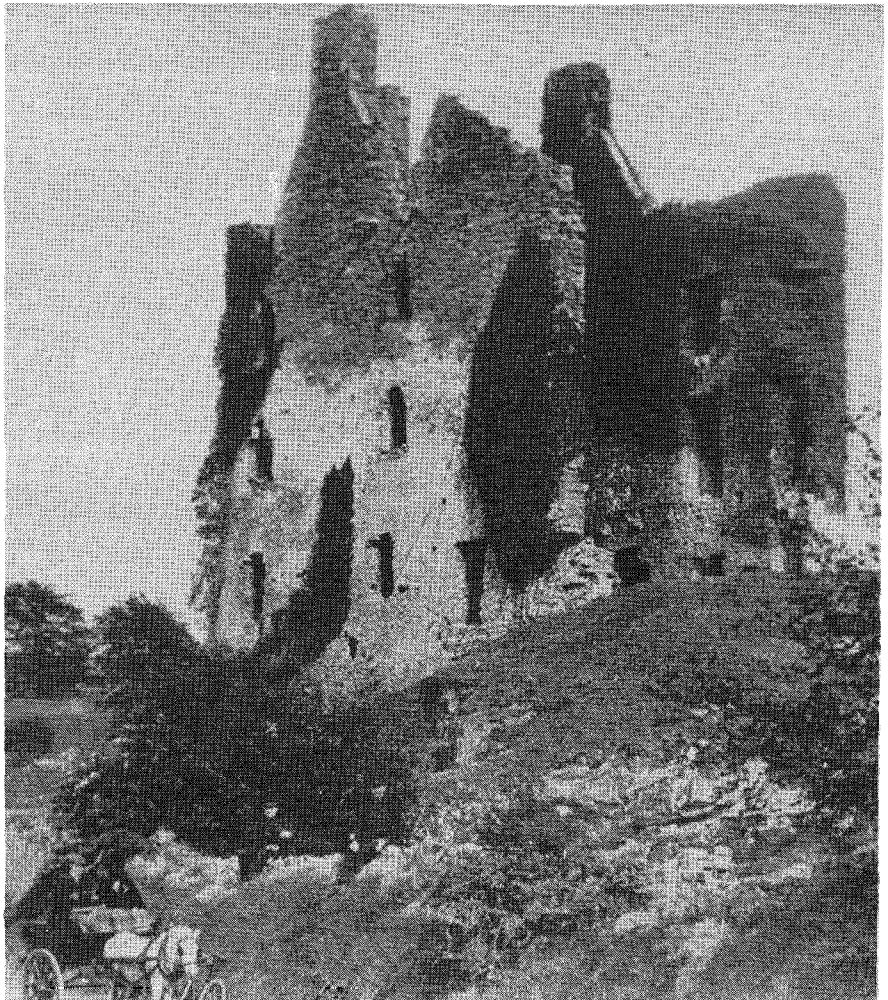
In court cases a constable would state, 'Acting on information received' etc., without divulging the source of his information. Such a statement was accepted as evidence and could result in

the conviction of an accused person. The constable could not be compelled to divulge the source of his information. On conviction a prisoner sentenced to imprisonment was taken to the County Jail in Mulgrave Street in a totally enclosed four-wheeled, horse-drawn prison van.

Every constable was sent to patrol several streets. This was called his beat. By a blast on his police whistle he could, if needed, summon help from a nearby beat. A citizen could also by a blast on a police whistle summon a constable from his beat. Few citizens availed of this privilege, as penalties

were imposed for its abuse, or for possessing a police whistle without lawful need.

Every constable was compelled to possess a civilian suit of clothes to enable him to mix undetected among the civilian population and thereby gain information. Their stature and ear-splitting silence, or their authoritative voice if they spoke, always revealed their identity. They were the eyes and the ears of the British Government in Ireland, seeing all, hearing all and putting all in their daily report to their superior officers. Promotion to the rank of sergeant was by a competitive examination, assisted by zealously filled daily reports. The higher ranks such as district inspector, etc., were the perquisite of retired colonels and majors of the British Army.



Two R.I.C. men resting in the shadow of Castletroy.