

Black and Tan Riots of August, 1920

A day of terror in Limerick

The time marks the fiftieth anniversary of a day of terror in Limerick that for sheer brutality and violence matches any of the recent pogroms in the North. The trouble began following a report that two detectives were held up and deprived of their revolvers in the vicinity of Carey's Road. The time was 11.30 a.m. and about an hour later, Black and Tans were in several parts of the city. At 12.45, when the streets were crowded with people, either returning from Sunday services or enjoying the sunshine, motor lorries of these imported constabulary, fully armed, were sent to Carey's Road and neighbourhood.

Members of the force. The police took seats in the crowded train, and, in protest, the driver and guard refused to proceed. The intending passengers were reluctant to leave their carriages, and in a minute, everything was in confusion and commotion.

The Constabulary got out of their compartments and fired several volleys in the air, with a view, no doubt, to scaring people. There was a wild stampede of men, women and children down the platform; many fainted or screamed for help, and it was only after great persuasion on the part of clergymen and others who were in the terminus that they were calmed.

Panic

When the police had gone the disappointed passengers on getting into the street were confronted with a large force of khaki-clad Black and Tans. Simultaneously, there was another outburst of rifle firing, and the people ran back into the station for shelter. The screams of the women and children were heart-rending.

There was a wild, panic-stricken rush for the door leading to the District Superintendent's and Engineer's offices, the parcels office and cloakroom. Many found shelter in the carriages from the bullets that were scattering around the building.

The firing was kept up continuously in this place for almost an hour. There was not a person on the streets converging on the station; everyone had run for shelter and in the stampede several were injured.

Burning

At about 1.30 p.m., the police were seen in front of Mrs. Birmingham's licensed premises, and having fired shots through the windows, proceeded to set it on fire. In a few minutes, the entire shop was ablaze.

The military shortly arrived and assisted the Fire Brigade, but the entire place was gutted in two hours. At the time, the proprietress and her children were on holidays at the seaside.

Shots were also fired into the house of Mr. M. Roman close by, and the shop window completely shattered. The pawn office of Mr. C. Johnston, next door, was smashed by the butt-ends of rifles. Several volleys were fired up Edward St., and at this juncture a constable (an English recruit), was shot dead.

An eye-witness, who was a member of the Constabulary stated that he was after returning from church with the Constable when they heard the firing in the street. They went to the door of the barracks to see what was happening. The recruit ventured too far into the street

and was shot through the head by a rifle bullet.

Destruction

A vigorous fusillade was kept up in Carey's Road. From the Roxboro Road down to Edward Street, the houses on both sides of Carey's Road were wrecked, either by rifle fire or the butts of rifles, and the residents underwent a terrifying experience.

Shops along Wickham Street were damaged, and in High Street, the destruction was appalling. The licensed premises of Mr. Matthew Griffin, a member of the Corporation, was burned to the ground, and the houses of Mr. F. Foley and Mr. Bourke, in the same Street and adjoining it, fared no better.

In this thoroughfare the spectacle of four houses burning at the same time was pitiable one, but blame for the outrage was placed by the people on the Black and Tans. An attempt was made to burn the house of Mr. Hurley, grocer and licensed vintner, at the corner of Mungret Street, but failed through the prompt action of the proprietor and some friends.

Woundings

But the rifle firing was not confined to any particular district of the city. Portion of O'Connell Street and Henry St. was swept by bullets. In Henry St. as the congregation was leaving the Franciscan Church, there was loud firing and the people rushed back into the church and remained there until all was quiet.

Roche's Street also claimed attention, but fortunately the thoroughfare was clear of pedestrians. The only living thing standing in the street, a jemmy yoked to a car, was shot dead.

During the firing, many people were wounded. A youth named Graham, son of Dr. M. Graham, Upper Mallow Street, received a bullet wound in the calf of the right leg and was taken to St. John's Hospital. A soldier in uniform, in endeavouring to save a child, was wounded in the left hand, and an ex-serviceman named Adamson was shot through the right arm while standing at his own door in Carey's Road. Adamson, an Englishman, had served throughout the 1914-18 War and lost an eye in the campaign.

The scenes of the outbreak were visited by the Bishop, Most Rev. Dr. Hallinan, who, vigorously denounced the mad orgy of police violence against innocent people. The Bishop was accompanied by the Mayor, Michael O'Callaghan, Fathers Connelly, Administrator, St. John's, and Father Dwane, Administrator, St. Michael's.

Brutally beaten to death by the Black and Tans, was Edward Paget, an ex-serviceman and former member of the Royal Irish Regiment, who lived at Carroll's Place, near St. Joseph's Church. The inquest on Paget fell through, as a jury could not be empanelled to determine the cause of death.

Witnesses

Typical excerpts from evidence given at a public enquiry in the Town Hall were—

"I saw the police from my top window. They approached down High Street, along Wickham Street in a motor car in which they had tins of petrol."

"They came down High Street firing all the time. At first the police passed Mr. Griffin's house and went to Mr. Madden's, where they broke the windows. They threw the contents out, with which they smashed the windows at the other side of the street. Police entered the shop and you could hear them firing and shouting all the time inside, and I saw a Black and Tan bringing in one tin of petrol."

"The fire having broke out, the police came into the street again and fired up and down. They clapped and cheered, and they watched the flames. They were led by a young Black and Tan officer."

Another witness gave evidence—

"I heard people roaring and shouting 'The Black and Tans.' I went into Carey's Road to see what was the matter, and I saw a number of police smashing the street. I spoke to a Black and Tan and asked him why they were acting so, and he told me to mind my own business."

"They carried on all round Carey's Road, wrecking in all directions. A Black and Tan fired up Edward Street and I saw a man fall at McCormack's Corner."

"The Black and Tan turned to me and said 'That was a good shot for the fellow at the corner.' The man shot at the corner was a Black and Tan. I helped to carry him into the barracks, and rang up the military for an ambulance. I got help from four or five civilians to remove the body, and they ran the risk of being shot."

There was widespread terror in the city, and it was Providential that many lives were not lost and that there were so few wounded.

An official report issued in Dublin stated: "Two plain clothes policemen were attacked by a mob in Limerick at 11.30 o'clock, and were stripped and beaten. The police turned out into the street and were fired upon from several directions. Constable Nathan was shot dead at Boherbuoy Barracks. Very serious firing took place from a public house. The police defended themselves by throwing bombs at the public house, which was set on fire and destroyed. The military turned out and assisted in restoring order."

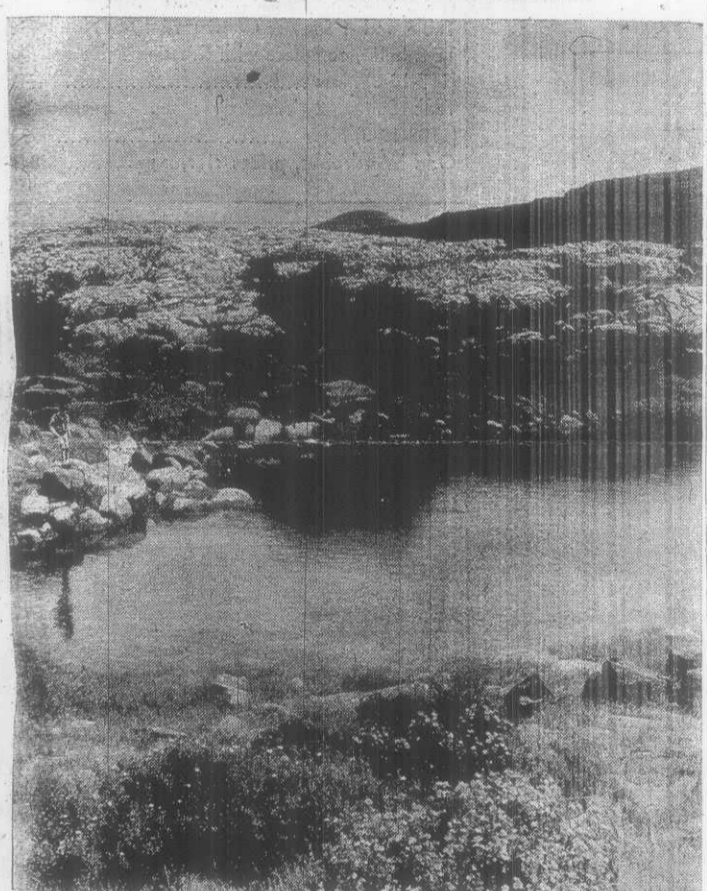
Claims

As a result of the disturbances, claims for damage to property in the city to the amount of £29,250-16 were lodged with Mr. William M. Nolan, Town Clerk.



A section of old Carey's Road. The road, on which there were at both sides about 120 houses, was partially wrecked in the Black and Tan riots of August 15, 1920. With a few exceptions all the houses at both sides had their windows smashed. In some, the furniture, ware and pictures were broken and the floors were covered with the debris. Similar outrages were committed in some of the lanes branching off Carey's Road. Two of the houses attacked and burned belong to widows with young children.

OUTING TO THE BURREN



The Burren of Clare will be visited on Sunday, September 13, by the Ennis Archaeological and Historical Society, and talks will be given by Mr. Gerard Kenny, B.L., on Caherconnell Fort and Ballynalacken Castle. Two other parts of the Burren area are pictured here—Lemaneagh Castle and a quiet pastoral haunt. The outing will leave from the Franciscan Friary (Ennis) at 2.45 p.m.

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