

Ambush survivor tells of shoot-out

BY FERGAL KEANE

THE LAST survivor of the Sologheadbeg ambush, which sparked off the War of Independence, was talked exclusively to the Limerick Leader about the historic event.

Mr. Patrick McCormack of Mayorstone, Limerick, referring to the killing of two RIC men, declared: "We didn't go out with the intention of shooting them".

So on January 21, 1919, they waited by the roadside concealed behind a hedgerow for a force of R.I.C. men (so they thought) who were guarding a consignment of gelignite for the Sologheadbeg quarry.

Escort reduced

The escort of ten men was reduced to two after the convoy left Tipperary town and this information was passed to Breen and comrades by a scout watching the approaches to the quarry.

As the two R.I.C. men and two County Council men approached, a shout came from the hedgerow telling them to raise their hands. At this point they raised their guns as if to fire and a volley of shots rang out leaving them for dead on the road.

The two County Council men looked on aghast as Breen and his men took the cart and headed away from the scene.

Mr. McCormack told me: "As the two R.I.C. men came up the road, Breen told me to keep down and he shouts at them 'Hands up', telling me to go out and take their guns from them.

'Me or them'

"As I stepped out on to the road they lifted the rifles and pulled the bolts making to fire. It was me or them. If the lads hadn't fired I would be dead now", said Paddy.

"We didn't go out with the intention of shooting them. We had intended to tie them up and take the dynamite".

Paddy was then 20 years old and, as he said himself: "I wouldn't hurt a cock of hay at the time".

Like the other ambushers, Paddy could not say for sure who actually fired the first shots. Many believe it was Sean Treacy but this view has never been properly substantiated.

"It didn't shock me in the least - I said to myself that it was their own fault", Paddy, a native of Clonoulty, commented.

Paddy now lives in Mayorstone but he is a native of the parish of Clonoulty, Co. Tipperary.

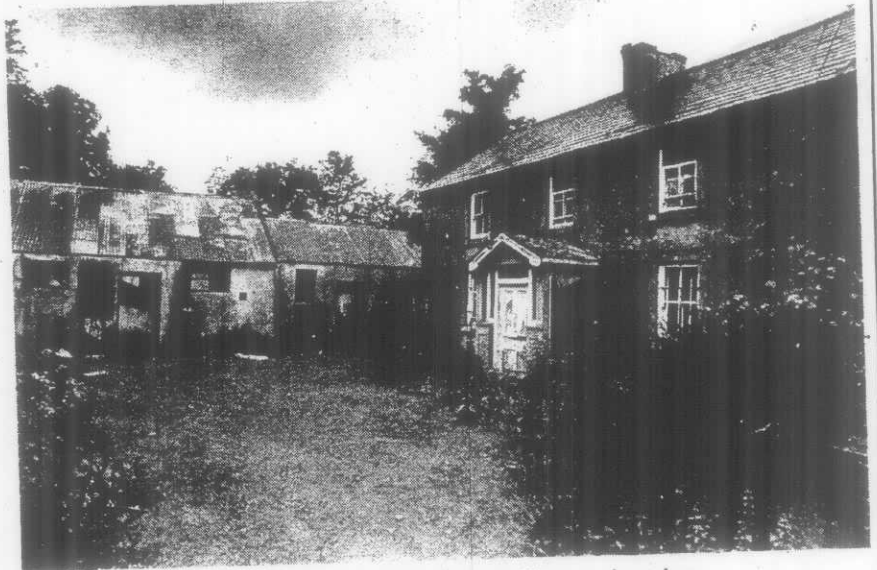
The ambush sparked off a wave of condemnation from the clergy and press who called the act the "Tipperary outrage". The Limerick Leader of January 22, 1919, carried the heading: "County Tipperary tragedy, Attack



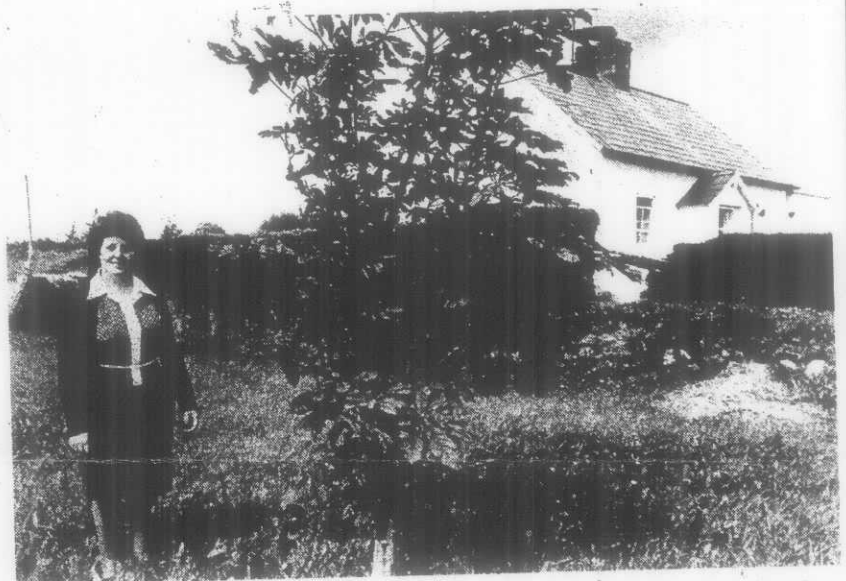
a lone survivor, now living in Mayorstone.



McCormack, now living in Mayorstone.



Sean Treacy's house at Donohill, now in ruins. Pictures: DERMOT LYNCH.



Mrs. Teresa Nagle (nee Breen) standing by a tree planted in the memory of her uncle, Dan Breen. In the background is the house where Dan was reared.



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