

# One man's Birth of a Nation

## The RIC

The British were still in occupation of the country. The British Army was concentrated in barracks strategically located while the eyes and ears of the system of occupation, the Royal Irish Constabulary, occupied posts in the towns and villages.

This was not a police force in the normal accepted sense but a paramilitary force armed with rifles whose main function was to keep the country in subjection to England.

The members of the force were all of native stock and a rigidly-enforced regulation of the force was that no member could serve in his native county.

One of its main duties was to report regularly to Dublin Castle on the activities of those suspected of separatist leanings or activities or who were in any way connected with nationalist organisations.

Mr Birrell, Chief Secretary for Ireland, told a Royal Commission:

"We have the reports of the RIC who send us in almost daily reports from almost every district in Ireland which enable us to form a correct general estimate of the feelings of the countryside in the different localities."

A further extract, this time from the official records of the RIC, states:

"Against political agitations, the RIC have invariably proven themselves most effective. It is largely due to the efficiency of their excellent organisation that the Rebellion of Easter Week 1916 was kept within bounds and speedily suppressed throughout the country."

It is clear, therefore, from the foregoing that if the writ of Dáil Éireann was to operate as given expression to by the people, that the RIC had to be dealt with.

Dáil Éireann a resolution of social ostracism against the force, which resulted in many defections and resignations. This was followed by attacks on police barracks throughout the country and, later on, we shall see how this campaign was effectively waged in East Limerick.

## The National Loan

TO FINANCE the work of Dáil Éireann a national loan was floated for the sum of £250,000. The British decreed that the loan was illegal and took steps to suppress it. They made every effort to identify the persons involved in the collection of the money and in the identification of the bank accounts to which the money was lodged.

Notwithstanding those attempts, the Minister for Finance, Michael Collins, succeeded in raising £379,000 in Ireland.

## The Republican Courts

The Dáil, in furtherance of its aims to be the legitimate parliament of Ireland, decreed the boycotting of the British law courts and, in their place, set up parish and district courts with Republican justices appointed by Austin Stack, the Minister for Home Affairs. Those courts supplanted their British counterparts and litigants brought their cases before them. They also received the support of solicitors and barristers.

The following quotation from Ulick O'Connor's book, *A Terrible Beauty is Born*, is from Lord Monteagle, whose estate was situated at Mount Trenchard, Foynes, Co Limerick.

"The Sinn Féin courts are steadily extending their jurisdiction and dispensing justice even-handed between man and man, Catholic and Protestant, farmer and shop-keeper, grazier and cattle-driver, landlord and tenant. The Sinn Féin police are arresting burglars, punishing cattle-drivers, patrolling the streets, controlling drink traffic, apparently in some places with the acquiescence of the local military authorities, who thus show themselves wiser than either the Castle officials or the British Government. And mark the double significance of this fact. It shows the powerlessness, in Sir Horace Plunkett's phrase of the 'government with the dissent of the governed'. It also shows the growing and remarkable capacity of the Irish people for self government."

A further quotation from the same book is also worthy of reproduction:

"The British Cabinet were well aware of the authority of these illegal courts. A friend of Walter Long, chairman of the Irish Committee of the Cabinet, wrote to him in July giving him a detailed account:

I have just returned from a visit to my home in County Limerick. I found everything quite quiet. Sinn Féin rules the county - and rules it admirably.

At our local races, the Sinn Féin police controlled the traffic, crowds, etc., 'parked' the motor cars and, in fact, did all the work which has usually been done by the police, and did it excellently.

Petty thefts, or indeed crimes of any kind are dealt with by the Sinn Féin courts who try the accused with perfect fairness and administer justice in the most thor-

ough fashion."

As the British writ ceased to operate in the countryside with the withdrawal of the RIC into the larger centres of population and in order to curb lawlessness, a Republican police force was organised under the Department of Home Affairs and this force operated effectively up to the establishment of the Free State.

## Income Tax

THE DÁIL declared the collection of income tax by the British in Ireland to be illegal and, in April 1920, income tax offices all over Ireland were raided by the IRA and all the records therein destroyed. On the same occasion, over 400 evacuated RIC barracks were burned down.

## IRA organisation and strength

THE IRA strength reached its peak in 1918 during the anti-conscription campaign, but only a small number had arms. It was at this time that the company units were organised into brigades.

In 1919, permanent units, better known as Flying Columns, were formed and the East Limerick Brigade had the distinction of being the first brigade in Ireland to form such a unit.

Those columns operated as mobile striking forces, moving about the country, carrying out ambushes on British convoys and patrols and on police barracks. The local volunteers co-operated with them and the local populations provided the necessary support with accommodation, food and intelligence.

A state of guerilla warfare obtained in many parts of the country, and those columns, led by resourceful and fearless officers, showed an amazing aptitude and skill in the type of guerilla warfare carried out.

An assessment of the type of person who formed the nucleus of the IRA in the countryside has come from a lieutenant general in the British army, Sir Henry Lawson, as quoted in Ulick O'Connor's book, *A Terrible Beauty is Born*.

"The captains of the volunteers appear to have been almost all quite young men, farmers' sons for the most part, some of them schoolmasters, most with what, for their class, must be considered a good deal of education, ignorant, however, of the world and of many things but, as a class, transparently sincere and singleminded, idealists, highly religious for the most part, and often with an

almost mystical sense of duty to their country. These men gave to the task of organising their volunteers their best in mind and spirit. They fought against drunkenness and self-indulgence, and it is no exaggeration to say that, as a class, they represented all that was best in the countryside."

"They and their volunteers were trained to discipline, they imbibed the military spirit, the sense of military honour, etc, and then, as now, they looked upon their army as one in a very real sense; an organisation demanding implicit obedience and self-abnegation from rank to rank."

"The Irish republican Army seems to be particularly free from ruffians of the professional type, and the killings of police officers and others, sometimes under circumstances which evoke our horror, were almost certainly done by members of the IRA acting under military orders. Young men imbued with no personal feeling against their victims, with no crimes to their record, and probably then shedding blood for the first time in their lives. ..."

"Behind their organisation there is a spirit of a nation - of a nation which is certainly not in favour of murder but which, on the whole, sympathises with them and believes that the members of the IRA are fighting for the cause of the Irish people."

I have failed to come across any reliable estimate of the numbers involved on the side of the IRA in the campaign. This is understandable in the case of a guerilla force where the role of soldier and civilian carrying on his normal occupation were interchangeable as circumstances dictated. To the British, therefore, it was impossible to distinguish the guilty from the innocent; all the *Paddies* looked alike - the terrorist and the civilian.

having regard to the overwhelming imbalance in the number of troops available to both sides and the quantity and superiority of the British equipment, it is obvious that the IRA had to fight a war whereby they would have an advantage to counter the logistical imbalance referred to, viz.

- knowledge of the terrain;
- the advantage of anonymity in that they could merge with the civilian population easily;
- the full support and loyalty of the people.
- a cause to fight for and the will to win deeply-rooted in the national psyche.

## The British Forces

THE STRENGTH of the RIC had dwindled from 12,000 to 10,000 due to resignations and the failure to attract new recruits. To fill the gaps, the British advertised in England for recruits. As the influx of recruits

grew, sufficient RIC uniforms were not available to clothe them and so they were provided with items of police and military uniforms of different hues, and hence the derivation of the name *Black and Tans*.

A large number of these men were drawn from the less desirable elements of English cities. Their name will forever be associated with murder, looting, burning and reprisals.

The Auxiliaries were formed at the same time. This was a more formidable force than the *Black and Tans*. They were, in the main, men of the officer class who had served in the Great War of 1914/18. They received higher pay than the *Black and Tans* and were of superior courage and intelligence. In 1921 it is estimated that the garrison in Ireland consisted of the following:

British regular troops	35,000
RIC, Black & Tans, Auxiliaries	14,000
Dublin Met. Police	1,200
TOTAL	50,200

The IRA therefore had to fight a force of 50,000 men, well armed and equipped and in occupation of barracks and strong points throughout the country with the logistical and fiscal backing of the powerful British Empire. The fact that Mr Lloyd George in a speech in the House of Commons stated that in Ireland they had to face 200,000 armed men, shows that British intelligence had failed to estimate the real situation in Ireland.

At this time also, public opinion abroad, particularly in the United States and among decent-minded English people was aroused by reports of events in Ireland. The British Government also realised that the Irish people could not be bludgeoned into submission and accordingly the British Prime Minister addressed a letter to the President, Mr deValera, inviting him, with his colleagues, to a conference to discuss the possibility of a settlement.

Thus was set in motion the chain of events which led to the meeting between officers of the IRA and the British army at the British GHQ at Parkgate Street which led to the Truce of 1921.

I commenced this historical introduction at Limerick on October 3, 1691, when Sarsfield, an Irish general, and Ginkel, an English general, agreed a truce which led to the Treaty of Limerick.

The Truce of July 1921 was the first recognition by the British since 1691 that the army of the Irish Republic was a legally constituted force, no different in the context of international law from the army of Kaiser Wilhelm with which they had recently negotiated in the forest of Compeigne.

(CONCLUDED)

## CENTRE

~2 lb.  
Green  
Streaky  
Rashers  
**£1.70**

Pork Steak,  
Skirts &  
Kidneys, Offal  
Drippings,

When in town why not visit

## "Modesty" Clothing

where you will find a large selection of new, nearly new and antique clothing to choose from.

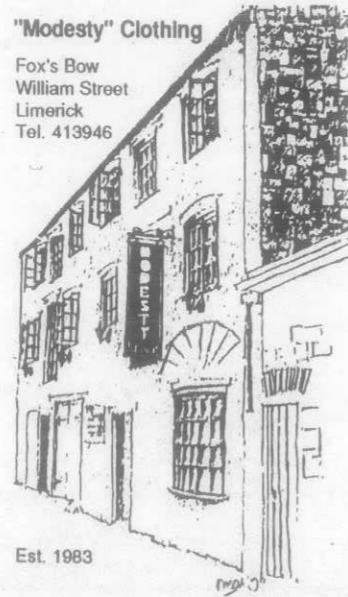
In stock at the moment:

LADIES: Cocktail Dresses, Skirts, Jumpers, Blouses, Leather Jackets, Jeans, etc.

GENTS: Suits.

### "Modesty" Clothing

Fox's Bow  
William Street  
Limerick  
Tel. 413946

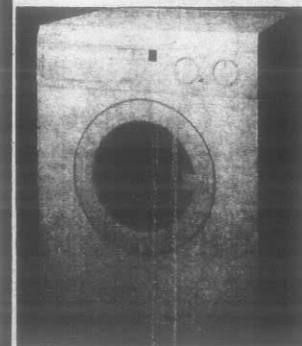


Est. 1983

# BERNIE CLIFFORD

30/31 Wickham Street. Phone (061) 417156

## ELECTROLUX AUTO

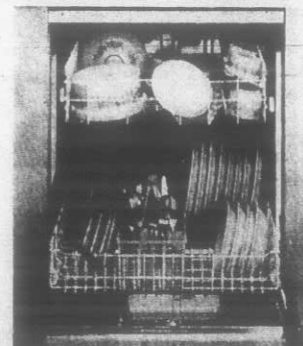


400/800  
SPIN

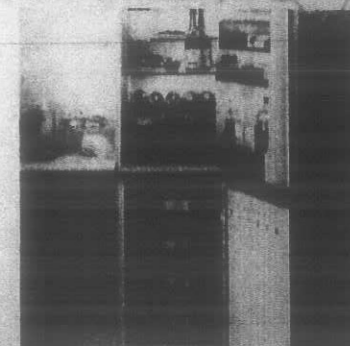
QUICK  
WASH

5-Year  
Guarantee

## ELECTROLUX DISHWASHER



## ELECTROLUX FRIDGE FREEZER



HALF  
& HALF

BEIGE/  
WHITE

Drink  
Dispenser

Electrolux now offers you parts and labour guarantee

See New Range on Display