

# Who did we name the station after?



Fair City actress Martina Flynn presents an achievement award to Gerard Geary (14), of Killeedy.



Celine Whelan presents a McDonald Child of Achievement Award to Nicola Cregan (13), of St Patrick's Road. Nicola is suffering from Hodgkins Disease.



Mary Fitzgerald hands Peter O'Connor (11), of Tournafulla, his achievement award in Jury's Hotel, Dublin.

COLBERT STATION, Limerick.

But who was Colbert, and what did he do to merit having a big city station named after him?

The main square in Newcastle West is named in his honour too, even though people living there don't know that.

We can start our search for Colbert on Sarsfield Bridge. There are three figures on the memorial there — Ned Daly, Con Colbert and, below, Tom Clarke.

Colbert was among the leaders of the 1916 insurrection in Dublin and was executed by firing squad after a military trial in its aftermath.

But why name the Limerick station after him? Was he as important as Pearse or Connolly, who have Dublin stations in their honour? Or was he as little-known as Sean Heuston, whose place of honour is the Iarnród headquarters itself, Kingsbridge?

True, neither Heuston nor Colbert were signatories to the proclamation, but were they — was Colbert in particular — central to the events that shook, shaped and pre-ordained a nation?

The answer is yes, and here is his background.

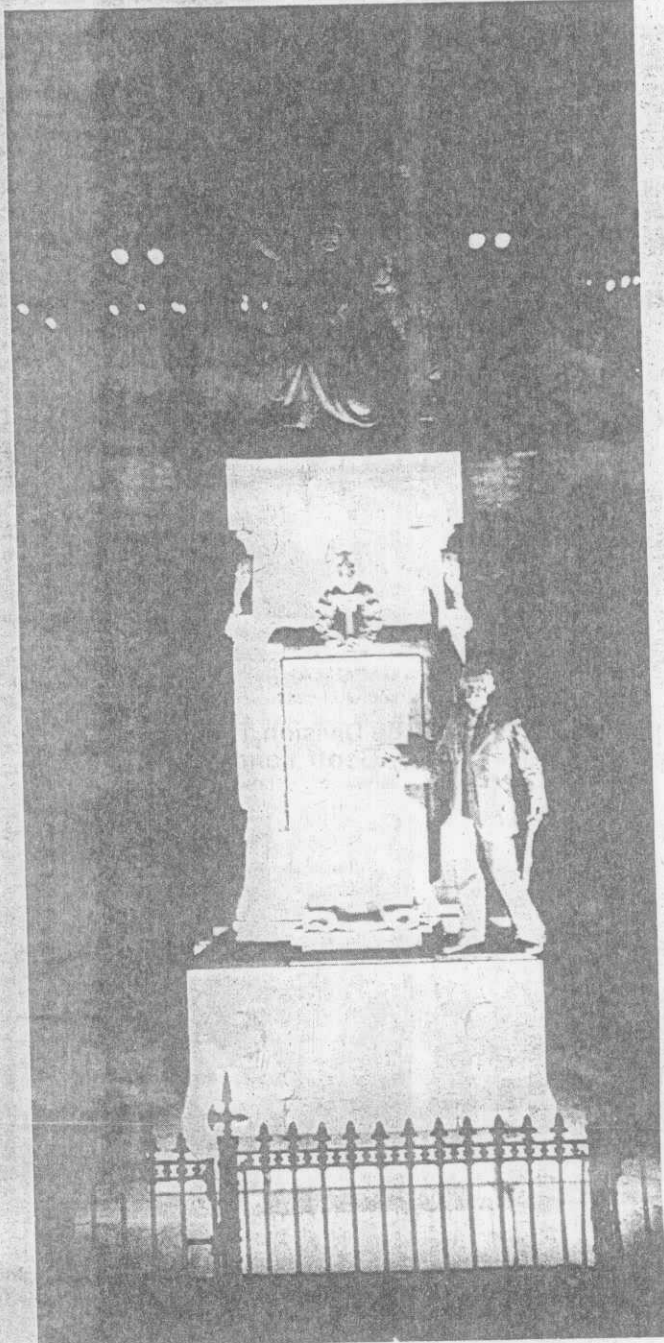
Con Colbert was tenth of a family of thirteen, born at Monlana, Castlemahon, to parents Michael Colbert and Nora (nee McDermott, of Cooraclare) in October, 1888.

That made him 28 years of age when 1916 came about — and not a mere boy as legend seems to have decided. His maternal grandfather, Cornelius McDermott had been a legendary teacher at Cooraclare NS. The Colberts were a quite respectable family, boasting a magistrate and a doctor, as well as landowners.

The family moved back to the ancestral home at Athea some years later, and Con got his early education at Athea national school.

Because of the size of the family, the youngsters were farmed out to various places, and Con was dispatched to his aunt Lizzie at Shanagolden, going to Kilcoleman school to age 13, when he returned to Athea. He took a keen interest in Irish while at school, and got an interest in geography and, of course, politics.

Then he moved to Dublin to stay with his sister Katty at Ranelagh Road, and took bar-work at Mooney's. He went back to school and took the equivalent of the junior cert, and was called to the Customs and Excise service but he turned that down because of the mandatory affirmation of allegiance to the Crown. Instead he went to work in a bakery in Parnell



The 1916 memorial on Sarsfield Bridge, which replaced the one to the British hero, Wellesley, blown up by zealots. It carries the text of the 1916 Proclamation, and preserves the name of Con Colbert forever. (LL)

Street, working as a bookkeeper.

But he continued his studies, taking night classes and did a correspondence course in accountancy for five years. And he attended Conradh na Gaelige Irish language and literature classes—he himself would, in turn, teach the language to youngsters at Ranelagh at the bottom of the garden.

He was quite small (five feet two or three inches) but swarthy in appearance—he neither smoked nor drank and, despite an arduous lifestyle, was a daily Communicant, and insisted in buying Irish clothing and goods, where possible.

He was so serious about the forthcoming fight for freedom that he employed a military instructor to teach him drilling on Sunday mornings.

And he was a poet in Irish and English.

He wrote of his hope for independence in allegorical terms:

*Aon lá amháin do chonaic mé*

*An caifín deas a siubhiadh*

*Trí mhogadh is curraidh bhí sí as triall*

*Ag seinm Yann dom' cusladh*

*Is Éire, a luinn mo*

*gradh, mo lill*

*Mo thír mo chuid an domhain.*

*Agus taidhbhseadh dom, a stór na cruinn,*

*Mo Roisín Dubh a saoradh.*

(As delivered by Dr Oliver Snoddy in Athea, 1965)

Colbert joined Fianna Éireann at its first meeting in August, 1909.

He was made a captain because of his skills and, on the following Tuesday, drilled his first squad. He became a centre of what was known as the John Mitchell circle of the IRB, and it was here that all matters of policy were discussed and decided.

Colbert also taught PE through Irish at Pearse's Scoil Eanna.

With Pearse, he formed Cumann na Saoirse, a radical group of Irish speakers, which didn't last very long.

In the meantime, he actively recruited the senior boys at Scoil Eanna to the IRB and drilled them as he would drill a platoon of adults.

The IRB went public in 1913, and Colbert was on the provisional committee, was given F Company in the Fourth Battalion and had the Inchicore area to deal with.

The movement grew rapidly, and became an item which Redmond, the leader of the Irish Party in Westminster, could not ignore. Redmond sought control, and got it, but only after a vote which was opposed by most of the officers, and the organisation began to drift away from the idea of armed insurrection.

With the outbreak of the Great War, Redmond's opinions were so far from the IRB's thinking that his nominees were expelled from the governing council, and Colbert was instrumental in kicking them out. There was only a minority now in the IRB — maybe ten thousand in all.

A further reorganisation in 1915 saw Colbert on the Ard Comhairle of Fianna Éireann.

The last time that Colbert saw Athea was at Christmas, 1915, where he put the locals through an intensive drill course.

And so we come to Easter.

McNeill cancelled the hostilities at the last moment, and threw everyone into confusion.

But a sort of an insurrection went ahead, and Colbert's girlfriend, one Lucy Smyth, went to the GPO. Colbert was in command of the 20 men in Watkins' brewery, a South Dublin outpost, transferred during the week to augment the distillery at Marrowbone Lane.

But the whole event was doomed, and he eventually marched his men out and they were all taken into detention. He was identified as being one of the supreme leaders of the nationalist cause, and was shot.

Many people believe that Con Colbert was unimportant compared to the other leaders. Yet, he had been under close observation by the powers at Dublin Castle for years.

To his sister, Nora, May 7, 1916:

Kilmainham Gaol  
My Dear Nora

Just a line to say "goodbye" to you and yours and ask you to say a prayer for my soul. Don't blame me—perhaps God's way of saving a soul.

Goodbye and God bless you and yours,

I am  
Your loving brother,  
Conn.

He was executed by firing squad at 3.45am on May 8.

## Table Quiz

THE Belltable Film Club presents a table quiz next Tuesday at 8.30.

The quiz will be held in the Glentworth hotel and the proceeds go towards the film archive fund.

The admission is £12 per team of four.

There will be special visual and audio rounds and excellent spot prizes.