

The Whit Sunday march - 1915



On the Whit Sunday of 1915, an excursion train arrived from Dublin. It carried the usual holiday crowd whose journey was made easier by the

fact that the return fare was but five shillings. Over three hundred Volunteers arrived on that train. They were joined at the railway station by a local company. In all, there were nearly five hundred men on parade. They were led by Mr. Patrick Pearse B.L. They marched through the Georgian part of the city without incident.

Having crossed over Thomond Bridge, the parade passed by King John's Castle, where British soldiers on the ramparts watched the marchers progress with interest. They were now entering the historic part of the ancient city - the Englishtown. From the Castle onwards and over Baal's Bridge into the Irishtown, the parade was greeted with evidence of hostility.

In that age, parochial hostility towards strangers from the next parish was commonplace all over the country and was particularly strong in small towns, where all strangers from Limerick or other cities were regarded as city slickers. Dubliners were regarded with particular prejudice and suspicion.

by P.J. Ryan

Amid growing hostility, the Volunteers marched uphill through the Irishtown and Mungret Street. Here then was a parade of Dubliners marching like conquerors through the most historic part of "An ancient city studied in the arts of war". Their presence was as offensive as the memory of the Williamite army marching through the city after the siege of 1691, two hundred years earlier. Little as the citizens cared for the presence of the British, they cared less for an armed band of Dubliners swaggering through their city. They could not tolerate the presence of this army of men, whose activities could only lead to bloodshed and the loss of innocent lives by violence. The citizens regarded the parade as a deliberate provocation to a breach of the peace.

Angry men and women came swarming from the houses by the city walls, from John's Gate, Garryowen, Palmerstown and Watergate, and converged on the route to the railway terminal. The pressure of the surrounding crowds closing in on the Volunteers

forced them closer together and open violence broke out against them. By the time they reached the railway station, they were being attacked along the route by many hundreds of angry citizens. Their ranks were broken and scattered. With the greatest difficulty they reached the security of the railway. In their efforts to get into the station they received great help from the railway porters and staff who formed a cordon around the iron gate into the forecourt.

One Volunteer mounted a jarvey car and, like a charioteer, attempted to run down the crowds with the car. He used the jarvey's whip right and left, but the horse was held and he was pulled to the ground. A few Volunteers fired some shots in the air and one was seen taking aim, but the gun was knocked from his hands and broken in pieces. Many wooden guns and real ones were likewise broken. The shots attracted and compelled the attention of the R.I.C., who arrived in large numbers and prevented the crowds from swarming over the iron railings or forcing the gates into the forecourt. The crowds were dispersed and the excursion train returned to Dublin. The story that over a thousand men marched in that parade is absurd, as such a large number of men would have been well able to defend themselves against any aggression.



Some Irish Volunteers drilling outside Limerick.