Private Lives and Public Personas: female participation in the IRA during Ireland's War of Independence, 1919-1921

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Abbreviations

ADRIC	Auxiliary Division Royal Irish Constabulary
ASU	Active Service Unit
BAR	Brigade Activity Reports
BMH	Bureau of Military History
CAB	Cabinet Papers
CO	Colonial Office
DMP	Dublin Metropolitan Police
DORA	Defence of the Realm Act
DORR	Defence of the Realm Regulations
FGCM	Field General Court Martial
FOIF	Friends of Irish Freedom
GHQ	General Headquarters
GOC	General Officer Commanding
INAA	Irish National Aid Association
INAAVDF	Irish National Aid Association and Volunteers Dependents' Fund
INRF	Irish National Relief Fund
IPP	Irish Parliamentary Party
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IRB	Irish Republican Brotherhood
IVDF	Irish Volunteers Dependents' Fund
IWP	Irish Women Patrol
MSP	Military Service Pension
MSPC	Military Service Pension Collection
MSRB	Military Service Registration Board
NAI	National Archives of Ireland
NLI	National Library of Ireland
RIC	Royal Irish Constabulary
ROIA	Restoration of Order in Ireland Act
TNA	The National Archives
UCDA	University College Dublin Archives
UL	University of Limerick
WS	Witness Statement

Abstract

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While much work has been completed to date on the Cumann na mBan organisation – its structure, its membership and its achievements – a significant contribution to advanced Irish nationalism was made by women who acted outside the confines of that organisation. This thesis examines the activities of women who were not members of Cumann na mBan but who were recognised as IRA Volunteers, members of GHQ Intelligence or even members of Active Service Units. Drawing on sources from the Military Service Pension files, the court martial files of women who were arrested and sentenced, and the Colonial and War Office records in the National Archives in London, it interrogates the data to establish that not only did the women themselves consider themselves to be members of the IRA, but in some cases, the British authorities in Ireland viewed them as such. The fact that recently released state documents acknowledge that women were members of Óglaigh na hÉireann on active military service during the War of Independence, is itself revolutionary. No such claims were made by the women themselves outside the confidential confines of the pensions board. In fact, most of them remained remarkably tight-lipped about their activities during this period. This work argues that their experiences during this conflict – of raids, arrests, assaults and imprisonment – ultimately led to silence and secrecy. Their stories never became part of the narrative of Ireland's War of Independence, instead they retreated under the cloak of Cumann na mBan and a more 'respectable' female experience of revolution. These women have not been written out of history – they were never written into it. This thesis will suggest, that they were, in fact, complicit in their own anonymity.

Introduction

This thesis examines the role of women involved in revolutionary activities - particularly those who became closely associated with the Irish Republican Army (IRA) - and does so through an examination of the evidence supporting the existence of female IRA activists from 1917 to the end of the War of Independence in 1921. It approaches the subject on an evidential basis by evaluating the wealth of recently released archival documents concerning individual women who self-identified – or were identified by their peers - as members of the IRA rather than Cumann na mBan. Compiling evidence from many different sources has necessitated a forensic, evidence-based approach to analyse and evaluate the material. For example, one of the challenges evident during the research for this work was assessing whether any individual women claimed membership of the IRA rather than Cumann na mBan because of a perception that membership of the former would merit a higher grade of military pension. Consequently, multiple sources of evidence were sought wherever possible; preferably evidence that predated the establishment of the Military Service Pension (MSP) Board. Other sources used were the transcripts of court martial trials of women arrested and charged under coercion laws. The preparatory documentation for these cases sufficiently demonstrated their involvement with the IRA. In other cases, it has been possible to research the intelligence or 'Personality' files kept by the British administration on the activities of women suspected of membership of advanced nationalist organisations.[1] However, in many instances, the evidence was found not in the files of the British administration, nor in the claims women made about themselves; mostly it was found in the statements and evidence of those who shared their experiences. Women spoke about other women. Men spoke about these women. Those who participated in the same incidents and events referred to others who were present. Thus, from many archival sources it has been possible to construct a narrative detailing the political and military activities of the women discussed in this work.

Addressing the question of whether a particular female individual served within the division of the forces known as the IRA or Óglaigh na hÉireann is complex. In the Military Service Pension Collection (MSPC) records, some women self-identified as members of the IRA and requested that their applications to the MSP Board be

[1] Dublin Castle Records, Personality Files, CO904/193-216, TNA.

processed and acknowledged on that basis.[2] Other women who were identified by their (male) peers as members of the IRA self-identified as Cumann na mBan members and considered themselves to be merely seconded to IRA work. Additionally, the MSP Board identified certain women as members of the IRA, and their files show that 40 women have been recognised by them (by mid-2019) as having served within the ranks of the IRA. However, closer examination of the MSPC files reveals some anomalies in the categorisation of individual cases. These tend to emerge in cases where the applicant was not a member of Cumann na mBan but was serving with the IRA. In many instances, the organisation in which the women served is listed as 'None', yet a closer reading of the files show that these women were reporting directly to IRA Intelligence; furthermore, they self-identified as IRA Intelligence agents and were acknowledged by their male peers as such.[3] The women whose MSP applications are referred to in this work became eligible to apply for a pension under the Military Service Pensions Act (1934), which provided for the inclusion of Cumann na mBan.[4] Effectively, this opened the door for female applicants, even those who served outside the ranks of Cumann na mBan. However, as Marie Coleman points out, women were restricted to the two lowest grades of pension – D and E.[5] Details of the categorisation of the women discussed in the following chapters – and the pension grade they were awarded – are outlined in Appendix A.

The perennial difficulty encountered by historians when researching the activities of individual women during the War of Independence is that the primary documents available - particularly Bureau of Military History (BMH) witness statements and to a lesser extent MSP applications - were written many years after the events to which they relate. This presents two main problems. Firstly, there is the issue of memory and recall; the sequence of events and details may be forgotten or misremembered. Secondly, one must be constantly aware of the probability of exaggeration or understatement in the accounts. The former must be factored into any evaluation of these documents, but can be negated somewhat by consulting two or more accounts of the same event and basing conclusions only on those accounts that are verifiable. The issue of understatement presents a subtler problem to the

[2] See for example, Moira Kennedy O'Byrne, MSP34REF381 and Linda Kearns MacWhinney, MSP34REF1307.
[3] See for example, Kathleen Brennan, MSP34REF58865; Annie Barrett, MSP34REF57556; Frances Brady Cooney, MSP34REF57744; Annie Smith (née Brennan), MSP34REF23407.
[4] Patrick Blackwell, 'Short guide to relevant legislation, 1923-1980' in Catriona Crowe (ed), *Guide to the Military Service (1916-1923) Pensions Collection* (Dublin, 2012), p. 53.
[5] Marie Coleman, 'Military Service Pensions for Veterans of the Irish Revolution, 1916-1923' in *War in History*, 20:2 (2013), p. 215.

researcher, but again it can be overcome by viewing multiple accounts of the incident or event. The MSP files provide the historian with a wider view of the period; women who participated in the Irish revolution were required to give a considerable amount of detail in their applications for a military pension. These files may be more reliable than the BMH files which followed later as the MSP Board was established in the aftermath of the Civil War; consequently, the information required to substantiate claims was compiled when details were still fresh in the memory of applicants. In the lapse of time between the end of the Irish revolutionary period in the 1920s and the establishment of the BMH more than 20 years later (in 1947), Irish society – and the position of women within that society – had changed. The intervening years consigned Irish women to a political and social wilderness in a state that gradually eroded their aspirations toward equality, culminating in the 1937 Constitution. This 'explicitly defined women's contribution to the state solely in terms of hearth and home', as Margaret Ward points out.[6] Consequently, few women who played a military role with the IRA during the War of Independence spoke about it. In some cases, their experiences of the conflict – of raids, arrests, assaults and imprisonment – ultimately led to silence and secrecy. Their stories rarely became part of the narrative of Ireland's revolutionary period, instead they took refuge under the cloak of Cumann na mBan and a more 'respectable' female revolutionary experience.

Historiography and Literature Review

While there are some primary sources available on all of the women discussed in this work, mainly within the records of the BMH witness statements and/or the MSPC files, there are – to date – few secondary sources or biographies available on most, other than the brief paragraphs in Sinéad McCoole's *No Ordinary Women*.[7] Recent commemorative events acknowledged the role of women in the 1916 Rising and attention was drawn to the contribution of both Cumann na mBan and the Irish Citizen Army in the events of Easter Week. Publications highlighting the experiences of women in the Rising emerged providing a 'snapshot of female activism and participation at a particularly transformative time in modern Irish history'.[8] However, that process has not occurred for women the who participated in the War of Independence for, or on behalf

[6] Margaret Ward, 'Gender: Gendering the Irish Revolution', in Joost Augusteijn (ed), *The Irish Revolution, 1913-1923* (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 183.
[7] Sinéad McCoole, *No Ordinary Women: Irish Female Activists in the Revolutionary Years, 1900-1923* (Dublin, 2004).
[8] Mary McAuliffe and Liz Gillis, *Richmond Barracks 1916 – We were there: 77 Women of the Easter Rising* (Dublin, 2016), p. 5.

of, the IRA. Effectively, the revolutionary experiences of these women are hidden from sight and much of the narrative surrounding them has been focussed through the lens of Cumann na mBan. This work proposes to shift that focus and will instead demonstrate not only that some women served in the revolutionary organisations that previously have been regarded by historians as purely male preserves, but that in some cases they played an active military role. Peter Hart, in his work on the IRA, insisted that Irish revolutionary organisations were gender specific. 'Republican men joined the Volunteers, republican women formed Cumann na mBan and republican boys had Fianna Éireann'.[9] However, the situation was much more nuanced than his statement implies as this work will demonstrate. Women worked and fought, for and with, the IRA. Furthermore, recently released documents show that the state itself acknowledged this. 'Certain women served in Óglaigh na hÉireann… irrespective of whether or not they were formally attested or enrolled as members of the Forces [they] were regarded nevertheless as members, by virtue of military services rendered by them to the Forces'.[10] That statement was included in correspondence contained within the MSPC file for Linda Kearns MacWhinney, who claimed for service with both the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) and the IRA. Her claims were confirmed by prominent members of both organisations including Diarmuid O'Hegarty and Gearóid O'Sullivan. She is one of the few women discussed in this work about whom secondary sources exist. Two biographies were written about her – one in 1922 and another in 2002.[11] The former is a romanticised account of her activities, published to take advantage of a timely propaganda opportunity. The latter is a detailed account of her life but was published before the availability of many archival sources used in this work. No personal documents on Kearns' life were deposited into any archive since her death in 1951. However, both Eithne Coyle and Máire Comerford left a significant amount of personal papers and unpublished memoirs which are accessible through the extensive archives at University College Dublin (UCD). Some of Lily O'Brennan's personal papers are available at the National Library of Ireland (NLI) in the Ceannt Papers, but they refer mainly to her activities during the 1916 Rising. Kathleen Clarke's correspondence and that of her sister, Madge Daly, is available at the University of

[9] Peter Hart, *The IRA at War 1916-1923*, (Oxford, 2003), p. 110.
[10] Letter from F. Egan, Secretary (Rúnaí), to the Referee, Military Service Pensions Office, Griffith Barracks, Dublin, 29 July 1947. Addressed to the Finance Officer, this letter clarifies that some women served as members of the IRA (Óglaigh na hÉireann) and acknowledges their eligibility to a Military Service Pension on this basis. See Linda MacWhinney (née Kearns), MSP34REF1307.
[11] Annie M.P. Smithson, *In Times of Peril: Leaves from the Diary of Nurse Linda Kearns from Easter Week 1916 to Mountjoy 1921* (Dublin, 1922) and Proinnsíos Ó Duigneáin, *Linda Kearns: A Revolutionary Irish Woman* (Manorhamilton, 2002).

Limerick (UL) archives in the Daly Papers. Other women – Celia Collins, Mary Flannery Woods and Moira Kennedy O'Byrne - are less well known. Information on their activities has been researched through the BMH, the MSPC files, and other archival sources. Additionally, the National Archives (TNA) at Kew, in London, was a valuable source for records of the arrest, trial and subsequent prison records of women captured while on IRA duty. The prison records clearly demonstrate the belligerent stance these women adopted against the military courts in which their trials took place. Contemporaneous newspaper reports on these events provided supplementary material and enabled an analysis of the propaganda value of the arrest and imprisonment of women.

While the historiography of the War of Independence in general can boast a wealth of sources, including work by Michael Hopkinson, Michael Laffan, William Murphy and others, the historiography on female members of IRA Intelligence is limited.[12] However, John Borgonovo has published on the topic in relation to Munster in general, and Cork in particular.[13] His research demonstrates that women were involved in IRA intelligence work within post-offices and military facilities. However, as this was published prior to the release of the MSPC files, it does not refer to the lesser known women discussed in this work. Nonetheless, it provides a valuable insight into the activities of Annie Barrett, Siobhán Creedon Lankford, the Wallace sisters, and others who are discussed in the chapters that follow. In a journal article published in 2007, Borgonovo argues that 'a small number of women in the County Cork IRA served on equal terms with their male counterparts'.[14] He refers specifically to the women who were part of the intelligence network in Cork and, more crucially, points out that they became involved in work of this nature as early as 1917 or 1918. Research for this thesis concurs with his assessment as the evidence shows that the recruitment of women into IRA intelligence commenced - in some cases - as early as the post-Rising period and continued into the War of Independence. Borgonovo acknowledges the senior rank held by sisters Sheila and Nora Wallace within IRA intelligence in Cork; a fact subsequently recognised by the MSP Board.[15] To strengthen his argument, he points to Flor O'Donoghue's promotion of intelligence operative Sheila Wallace to the

[12] Examples are Michael Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party 1916-1923* (Cambridge, 2005) and Michael Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence* (Dublin, 2004).
[13] See John Borgonovo, *Spies, Informers and the 'Anti-Sinn Féin Society': The Intelligence War in Cork City, 1919-1921* (Dublin, 2007) and *Florence and Josephine O'Donoghue's War of Independence: A Destiny that Shapes our Ends* (Dublin, 2006).
[14] John Borgonovo, 'Codename "G": The Women Spies of Cork, 1920-1921', in *The Recorder: A Journal of the American Irish Historical Society,* 19:2 & 20 (2007), p. 129.
[15] Both Wallace sisters were granted MSPs at Grade D, acknowledging that they held a senior military rank.

position of Brigade Communications Officer and notes that this 'placed her in direct charge of a number of male Volunteers'.[16] He accounts for the egalitarian attitude toward female IRA members in Cork by pointing to the fact that the senior male IRA officers 'were comfortable in the presence of strong women', and suggests that this partly explains the prominent role played by women in that county. However, women rose to prominent positions in the IRA in other parts of Ireland too - most notably Dublin -though some were based in Tipperary, Limerick, Sligo and other counties. Still others were members of the IRA in London.

It would be remiss to discuss the impact of the War of Independence upon the lives of women without acknowledging that incidents of sexual assault took place, although this remains a largely unexplored part of the nation's history. Coleman has pointed to 'The paucity of definitive or reliable evidence on the extent of sexual violence' during this conflict, but there are several reasons that may account for this.[17] Firstly, as Lindsay Earner-Byrne has noted, the language used by contemporaneous publications when reporting crimes of this nature was vague; many euphemisms were used to almost conceal the fact that a sexual assault had taken place.[18] The word 'outrage' – which could mean anything from arson to rape – frequently obscured the true nature of an assault. Secondly, women who were victims of sexual violence tended not to leave memoirs or witness statements outlining their ordeals, so personal testimony is almost non-existent. Additionally, Linda Connolly argues that the crime of rape is more commonly concealed than recorded, and she cautions against rushing to judgement about the narrative that rape was rare in Ireland during the revolutionary period of 1916-1923.[19] Referencing a documented sexual assault case in Waterford in 1921, this work will examine the reporting of such incidents. It will question whether sexual assaults were under-reported or unreported and will suggest that fear of intimidation and of reprisals prevented many women from complaining to the police about crimes of a sexual nature. When such cases did occur – and crown forces could

[16] Borgonovo, 'Codename G', p. 133.
[17] Marie Coleman, 'Violence against Women during the Irish War of Independence, 1919-1921', in Diarmaid Ferriter and Susannah Riordan (eds), *Years of Turbulence: The Irish Revolution and its Aftermath* (Dublin, 2015), p. 146.
[18] Lindsey Earner-Byrne, 'The Rape of Mary M.: A Microhistory of Sexual Violence and Moral Redemption in 1920s Ireland', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 24:1 (2015), p. 84.
[19] Linda Connolly, 'Towards a further understanding of the violence experienced by women in the Irish revolution' *Maynooth University Social Sciences Institute*, Working Paper Series 7 (2019), p. 24.

be blamed - they were seized upon by publications such as the *Irish Bulletin* to highlight the prevailing conditions in Ireland.[20]

Although a significant amount of historical study relating to the early stages of the Irish revolutionary period is available, much of it has been written by and about male participants. There are some notable exceptions, such as Dorothy Macardle's *The Irish Republic*, but even this does not deal with the female experience of revolution in any depth.[21] More recently, in 2013, Senia Pašeta's work on nationalist women explores the early politicisation of women through organisations such as the Gaelic League (1893), Inghinidhe na hÉireann (1900), and Cumann na mBan (1914).[22] Quoting Sidney Gifford Czira, she acknowledges the existence of a 'movement' in early twentieth century Ireland – a mixture of cultural and nationalist groups and organisations – that drew together young political activists.[23] Pašeta points to the importance of the Gaelic League in particular, stating that for women active within advanced nationalist politics 'membership of the Gaelic League was the rule rather than the exception'.[24] The research for this work confirms the validity of Pašeta's argument. Many of the women discussed in the following chapters point to the Gaelic League – and the people they encountered within that organisation – as a contributory factor to their politicisation.

However, there is a vast chasm between the idealism of cultural nationalism and the participation in the political and military activities of advanced nationalist organisations, so which women bridged that gap and how did they do it? Initially, the vacuum created in the aftermath of the tumultuous events of 1916 - where many male advanced nationalists were imprisoned or interned - provided a space that could be occupied by women. Kathleen Clarke, the widow of one of the executed leaders of the 1916 Rising, became one of the most prominent women involved in both national aid and the reorganisation of the groups behind the Rising. To achieve this, she surrounded herself with women who shared her republican ideology, particularly those who were closely related to the organisers of the Rising. Advanced nationalist women - many of them members of Cumann na mBan – assisted in this work by collecting and distributing funds. This brought them into close contact with many of the relatives and dependants of those who participated in the recent rebellion. Additionally, their work

[20] Established in 1919, the *Irish Bulletin* was a publication of Dáil Éireann. Its propaganda value will be discussed in Chapter 5.
[21] Dorothy Macardle, *The Irish Republic* (Dublin, 1999).
[22] Senia Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women, 1900-1918*, (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 17-26.
[23] Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women*, p. 17.
[24] Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women*, p. 25.

expanded to include involvement in the compilation and dissemination of separatist propaganda, through the publication of pamphlets and the sale and distribution of postcards depicting the executed leaders of the rebellion. Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid acknowledges this in her article on national aid, pointing to the centrality of the work of the Irish National Aid Association and Volunteer Dependents' Fund (INAAVDF) in the post-Rising period.[25] While she notes that the organisation 'provided a focus around which the republican movement could re-organize itself', the article is focussed primarily on the fund-raising aspect of the INAAVDF's work.[26] Consequently, Kathleen Clarke's role in the reorganisation of the IRB and the Irish Volunteers is largely overlooked.

The importance of this post-Rising period is often understated, yet it was the time during which the reorganisation, reconstruction, and recruitment took place to enable the revolution to move on to its next phase. With each tranche of prisoners released from prisons or internment camps – in December 1916 and in June 1917 - large demonstrations took place to celebrate their arrival home. Unlike previous failed rebellions in Ireland, rather than disappearing into oblivion, the defeated insurgents and their supporters strengthened their base and emerged from the aftermath of 1916 as a determined, radicalised group. Anne Dolan and William Murphy point out the importance of national aid organisations in this process, stating that the network of these groups arguably formed 'the foundation upon which post-Rising separatism sat'.[27] Their statement is placed within the context of Michael Collins' role in the period of reorganisation, but this research demonstrates that the process commenced with Kathleen Clarke's establishment of the Irish Volunteers Dependents' Fund (IVDF). Identifying the dual aims of this organisation – provision of aid to prisoners and dependants, and the reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers and the IRB – is key to understanding the role played by Kathleen Clarke. She provided the framework within which women worked to further the ideals of advanced nationalism.

Methodology

The women chosen for discussion in this work were selected from a broad geographical and socio-economic group; some were office workers, some were

[25] Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid, 'The Irish National Aid Association and the Radicalization of Public Opinion in Ireland, 1916-1918', *The Historical Journal*, 55,3 (2012), p. 723.
[26] Nic Dháibhéid, 'The Irish National Aid Association', p. 705.
[27] Anne Dolan and William Murphy, *Michael Collins, the Man and the Revolution* (Cork, 2018), p. 52.

shopkeepers, others were property owners and women of social standing. They were all identified in the files of the MSPC as women active with or on behalf of the IRA at various times from the post-Rising period of 1916 to the end of the War of Independence in 1921. These women either self-identified as members of the IRA or were identified by their peers as on active military service with the IRA. In many cases - as will be outlined in the chapters to follow – they were also identified by the assessors of the MSP Board as members of the IRA. This research endeavoured to ensure the accuracy of their claims; consequently, some women who claimed IRA service in the files of the MSPC are not referred to in this work as it was not possible to verify their statements from other archival records. Only those whose military service could be confirmed through additional sources are discussed. These sources include contemporaneous newspaper reports or diaries, BMH witness statements, police reports, and prison records. For example, Mark Sturgis, Assistant Undersecretary at Dublin Castle, refers to Eileen McGrane in his diaries (see Chapter 4), while Ernie O'Malley mentions Marian Tobin in *On Another Man's Wound* (see Chapter 2).[28]

The research revealed that the participation of women in republican intelligence networks commenced as early as 1917 when Frances Brady, then employed in the censorship department of the War Office in London, was recruited by Michael Collins.[29] Through her, Collins was able to avoid the constraints of wartime censorship for urgent and important communications. The stress on communication, information and intelligence continued with the establishment of a network of women who operated from shops, post-offices, railway stations, barracks, and even within the walls of Dublin Castle itself. The sworn statements and testimonies in the MSPC show that many of the women discussed in this work became active, or were recruited, in the post-Rising period and prior to the commencement of the War of Independence. This is particularly significant as it indicates that a degree of forward planning for another armed conflict was already underway as early as 1917.

A common thread emerged in the statements of these republican women early in the research process. In almost every case, the women approached to work for the intelligence organisation of what later became the IRA, were encouraged by those who recruited them to remain apart from overtly political organisations such as Cumann na mBan or Sinn Féin, both of which were under surveillance by the RIC and DMP. Many of the women discussed in this work state that they were initially approached to work

[28] Michael Hopkinson (ed), *The Last Days of Dublin Castle: The Diaries of Mark Sturgis* (Dublin, 1999), pp. 103-4; Ernie O'Malley, *On Another Man's Wound*, (Dublin, 2002), pp. 173-5.
[29] Frances Brady Cooney, MSP34REF57744.

for the Irish Volunteers or the IRA by Michael Collins, Diarmuid O'Hegarty, Austin Stack or other prominent members of the IRB. Some women were approached because their jobs gave them access to intelligence information that would enable the IRA to stay ahead of its enemies in any future conflict. Women who worked as clerks or telephonists for the police, the military or the post office service were particularly useful, and these form a large cohort of the women discussed in the chapters to follow. Their individual experiences in the conflict that became known as the War of Independence will be discussed in this thesis.

Structure

This study is divided into five chapters chronologically following developments in Ireland's revolutionary period and detailing the recruitment of women into IRA Intelligence and their participation in key events. Chapter 1 traces the path of women who became active on behalf of the Irish Volunteers/IRA from their involvement with national aid organisations and/or Cumann na mBan. It commences in the aftermath of the 1916 Rising and argues that national aid, in particular, enabled the emergence of radicalised, advanced separatist women who subsequently participated in the War of Independence. The key individual – or protagonist – in this chapter is Kathleen Clarke, whose actions facilitated the reorganisation of both the Irish Volunteers and the IRB. This chapter suggests that Clarke's role has been understated in the historiography of the post-Rising period in Ireland and demonstrates the influence she had on the reorganisation process. The organisation she established, the IVDF (later the INAAVDF), became a recruiting ground for Michael Collins and other IRB members when they sought women to undertake intelligence work.

Chapter 2 examines the roles and activities of women who became early recruits into the intelligence network, establishing observation posts, lines of communication, safe houses and arms dumps for the Irish Volunteers - later the IRA. It notes the common thread that emerges from the accounts of these female recruits – the instruction to distance themselves from Sinn Féin, Cumann na mBan or any overtly separatist organisation. While this may have been a necessary precaution to ensure that the individual recruit remained free of any unwanted attention from the authorities, it had unintended consequences. Several women who left Cumann na mBan to take up intelligence work with the IRA later experienced difficulty when they applied for a Military Service Pension. Cumann na mBan officers generally regarded them as lapsed members and declined to ratify their applications. The challenges presented to these

women, both as female members of the IRA who had served in the forces, and as women whose roles were unrecognised and unacknowledged by their former colleagues in Cumann na mBan, is explored and discussed.

Chapter 3 examines the broadening roles and responsibilities of female intelligence recruits following the establishment of Dáil Éireann in January 1919 and the commencement of the War of Independence. The demand for safe housing evolved as locations were required for Dáil and Cabinet meetings in addition to overnight or longer-term accommodation for elected representatives. Their accommodations were usually of a higher standard than those provided to the working class, or lower middle-class IRA volunteer, reflecting the existing class structures in society. This chapter discusses the contribution of the women who provided these facilities and argues that a network of women had emerged by 1919 which provided not only accommodation, but also medical care and transport, to the IRA. The research for this chapter demonstrates that the medical doctors who provided their services to the IRA were predominantly female; this is noted as an anomaly as the number of medical students matriculating in the early years of the twentieth century was 96% male.[30] This chapter also discusses the establishment of a network of female intelligence agents within post offices, telephone exchanges, and police and military barracks. Outlining the internal correspondence of the MSP Board concerning the status of female members of the IRA, it demonstrates that the service of women within the ranks of Óglaigh na hÉireann was acknowledged in 1947.

Chapter 4 focusses on the year 1920 and the countermeasures taken by the British government in response to the guerrilla war now underway in Ireland. It provides evidence that some women became attached to IRA Active Service Units (ASUs) at this juncture, and were involved in planning raids and ambushes, moving arms from place to place and occasionally participating actively in engagements. It discusses the individual women on active service with the IRA and argues that one woman – Linda Kearns – was a senior IRA officer. To support this argument, evidence is produced from two IRA men who stated that they were under her command in November 1920. The introduction of female searchers to Ireland is also discussed, and how their activities - coupled with an increased number of raids by military and police - led to some successful finds for the authorities and set-backs for the IRA. Examining the capture and arrest of Eileen McGrane, Linda Kearns and Eithne Coyle towards the end of 1920, this chapter argues that their loss to the IRA was substantial. Firstly, a

[30] Laura Kelly, *Irish women in medicine c.1880s-1920s: Origins, education and careers* (Manchester, 2012), p.70.

significant number of arms, ammunition, and documents were seized by the military during these arrests, but more importantly, the British administration was now aware that women were more deeply involved in republican activity than they had previously suspected.

The treatment of these women following their arrests, and their subsequent trials and imprisonment are examined in Chapter 5. The escape from Mountjoy jail of four female prisoners in October 1921, and their sojourn in an IRA training camp where they 'underwent an intensive course in the use of arms and explosives, First Aid, and general military tactics' is discussed.[31] Outside prison, life was difficult for ordinary women as well as for those who supported republican ideals. Enforced hair-cutting as a gender-based punishment – carried out by both sides in the conflict – was regularly reported in 1921. Drawing on police reports, newspaper reports and records from the BMH and the MSPC, this chapter argues that there was an imbalance in the reporting of these assaults. Those carried out by the police or military tended to be under-reported, while those carried out by the IRA were frequently reported to the police and compensation sought for the assault. It also considers the case of a sexual assault in County Waterford, as referred to earlier in this introduction, and how the incident came to be used as a propaganda tool for opposition parties in the House of Commons. This chapter does not close with the Truce, which came into effect on 11 July 1921; many women who were imprisoned for their activities remained in jail until after the Treaty was signed in December of that year. This thesis suggests that they emerged from their prison experiences more militant, more militarised and better prepared for the Civil War that would follow.

The following chapters will demonstrate that the historiography of female contribution to Ireland's War of Independence has been understated. The research conducted for this work shows that some women were active participants in the IRA rather than Cumann na mBan. While it must be acknowledged that the IRA was a predominantly male organisation, it was not *exclusively* male as Hart argues.[32] Women were recruited into its ranks as early as 1917 to perform a wide range of duties from intelligence work through to management of safe housing. The chronological nature of the chapters will show that their work evolved over the duration of the War of Independence. Effectively, it mirrored the evolution of the male role within the IRA which moved from secretly organising and planning to participation in often violent

[31] Eithne Coyle O'Donnell, Letter to MSP Board 'In amplification of Application Form', 15 May 1945, p. 6, MPSC34REF60256.
[32] Hart, *The IRA at War*, p. 16.

engagements as part of an ASU or a flying column. Generally, the role of a male IRA member in 1919 differed from his role in 1921, mainly due to the increase in military activity against advanced republicans. The same applied to women. They adapted and modified their behaviour and activity in accordance with the circumstances prevailing at the time. This thesis will follow the trajectory of female IRA activists from the post-Rising period through to the Treaty.

Chapter 1

Rocking the Cradle of Revolution – After the Rising

I pledged him to secrecy as to who was directing him, fearing that those I told him to get in touch with in various parts of the country, in order to get the IRB and Irish Volunteers restarted, might hesitate if they knew it was a woman who was directing. – Kathleen Clarke.[1]

Introduction

The standard narrative that surrounds the emergence of radical separatist groups and the reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers following the failed 1916 Rising, is that this radicalism grew organically from the incarceration of men with a shared ideology in camps such as Frongoch. W.J. Brennan Whitmore wrote a detailed account from his own experience in the Welsh internment camp in which he discussed the camaraderie among the men and their determination to continue with an armed struggle.[2] Joost Augusteijn highlighted this aspect of post-Rising imprisonment, pointing out that the experience 'had a galvanising effect and cemented a conviction that they should try again and improve on their previous attempt'.[3] Similar accounts emanated from jails where penal servitude prisoners were serving their sentences – the prisons effectively became breeding grounds for dissent against the administration that placed them there. William Murphy's assessment that prisons became 'places where resistance, even revolution, was nurtured and enacted' probably best summarises the pervading climate in jails that held Irish prisoners in 1916 and 1917.[4] Upon release, many former prisoners continued to resist and revolt; they renewed their association with the Irish Volunteers and prepared for another fight, another day. What enabled them to do so? How did the structures develop in their absence that facilitated reorganisation of the revolutionary movement? What caused the immense sea-change in the attitude of the public that resulted in cheers rather than jeers, upon their return? This chapter will argue that plans for the reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers were put in place before the Rising commenced. Furthermore, it will demonstrate that they were carried out by

[1] Kathleen Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman,* Helen Litton (ed), (Dublin, 2008), p. 172.
[2] W. J. Brennan-Whitmore, *With the Irish in Frongoch* (Dublin, 2013).
[3] Joost Augusteijn*, From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare: The Experience of Ordinary Volunteers in the Irish War of Independence 1916-1921* (Dublin, 1998), p. 67.
[4] William Murphy, *Political Imprisonment and the Irish, 1912-1921* (Oxford, 2014), p. 10.

Kathleen Clarke behind the cloak of National Aid fundraising. Using archival documents and statements from the MSPC, it will demonstrate not only how reorganisation took place, but how it was funded and who was responsible. Much of the information can be found not in what Clarke says about herself, but what other people say about her. As Dolan stated when discussing accounts of the revolutionary period, 'You only told someone else's secrets. There were censored and uncensored versions of events'.[5] This is indeed the case with Clarke. For example, Liam Clarke - whom she recruited in the summer of 1916 to reorganise the Irish Volunteers - detailed her objectives in his statement to the MSP Board. He noted that she had 'control of a small fund' left to her by her executed husband to be used for reorganisation purposes.[6] Thomas O'Connor, who couriered cash to Clarke from Clan na Gael in the USA, also told of her role in this enterprise. Her memoir and MSP application are lengthy and detailed, but a fuller assessment of her key role in the reorganisation of both the IRB and the Irish Volunteers is only possible by evaluating the accounts of other people present during the period.

This chapter will also consider the establishment of national aid organisations and will demonstrate that Clarke used her organisation as a cover to facilitate reorganisation. It will explore Clarke's relationship with the IRB, a secret oath-bound organisation that aimed to achieve Irish independence by revolutionary means. It will argue that she acted under its instructions in the aftermath of the Rising – firstly, to establish an aid organisation, and secondly, to reorganise the Irish Volunteers. Furthermore, it will argue that the timing of her agreement to amalgamate with a rival aid organisation was significant – it occurred immediately after the first post-Rising Irish Volunteer convention was held and reorganisation had commenced. The executive and committee members of the post-amalgamation organisation were approved by Clarke and had a high representation of advanced nationalists. Seven women were included among this number, reflecting the high female participation in post-Rising national aid organisations. Clarke helped to bring this about. She was a prominent member of Cumann na mBan, whose members were to the forefront in both raising and distributing relief funds. Most of the women who remained members after the split following the outbreak of war in 1914, were the militant core of that organisation. Clarke surrounded herself with women who shared her advanced nationalist ideology; key members of her closely-knit circle were the wives of imprisoned IRB men. Furthermore,

[5] Anne Dolan, 'Killing and Bloody Sunday, November 1920', in *the Historical Journal*, 49:3 (2006), p. 808.
[6] Written statement by Liam Clarke to MSP Board, undated but stamped 3 July 1935, p. 1, MSP34REF8875.

as the following chapters will demonstrate, many of the women associated with Clarke during this period later became associated with IRA intelligence during the War of Independence.

The significance of Michael Collins' appointment as secretary to the national aid organisation cannot be overlooked. Clarke was a prime mover in ensuring that the position went to Collins; no doubt his membership of the IRB made him the ideal candidate in her eyes. Documents from the Art O'Bríain files and letters from Collins will demonstrate that he accelerated the reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers under the cover of his role in national aid. This chapter will suggest that Clarke maintained her involvement with the IRB at least until the release of penal servitude prisoners in 1917, when she delivered a report of her activities and a financial statement to IRB leaders. Her position as one of the widows of an executed leader of the 1916 Rising ensured publicity for any political event she attended. Consequently, she was among the women who campaigned during the by-election in Longford for the internee Joe McGuinness in May 1917. Clarke's high profile perhaps led to her arrest and internment during the so-called 'German Plot' that followed the anti-conscription campaign in 1918. Her internment in Holloway jail with both Maud Gonne and Constance Markievicz continued until February 1919. This chapter will discuss those events and argue that Clarke's role during this period helped to build the foundations upon which the next phase of the revolution could emerge.

Kathleen Clarke (1878-1972)

On 6 May 1916, one of the widows of the executed leaders of the 1916 Rising, Kathleen Clarke, seized the initiative and announced that an organisation, the Irish Republican Prisoners Dependants' Fund - it shortly thereafter became the Irish Volunteer Dependants' Fund - had been established to provide immediate relief for the families of those imprisoned or executed in the aftermath of the recent rebellion.[7] Despite the loss of her husband Tom Clarke, and her brother Ned Daly, Kathleen Clarke set about implementing the plan she and her husband had prepared in advance of the Easter Rising.[8] Clarke was no innocent bystander caught up in the rebellion and suffering its inevitable consequences; she was the custodian of the IRB's secrets, including a list of its members by rank, and the names of men who would be available –

[7] Due to the strict censorship introduced after the Rising, newspapers could not accept advertisements appealing for aid under the original name chosen, so the organisation's name was swiftly changed to comply with regulations.
[8] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, pp. 85-6.

should they survive - to help with the reorganisation of both the IRB and the Irish Volunteers in the post-Rising period.[9] Clarke provided a long and detailed statement to the MSP Board, which, read in conjunction with her memoir, provides extensive background information to the period. In it she states that she was entrusted with a fund from Clan na Gael, the American wing of the IRB, which was originally used 'for arming and kindred purposes'.[10] What remained of this money would assist the dependants of those executed, imprisoned or interned following the Rising. The establishment of the IVDF would serve a dual purpose; on the one hand it would provide essential relief to the dependants of those who had participated in the Rising and were now either dead or imprisoned, and on the other hand it would provide a very convenient and necessary cover for a phoenix-like resurrection of the IRB and Irish Volunteers. In fact, Clarke later instructed the first man recruited for reorganisation purposes to pretend he was on national aid work if he was questioned by the authorities.[11]

Kathleen Clarke, née Daly, was a capable and determined woman who had a long, nationalist pedigree. Her uncle, John Daly, was a Fenian who was jailed for possession of explosives, but later released when it was discovered that he had been framed.[12] Partly because it took so long to have the charges against him overturned, and partly because of the injustice of the case, he was regarded as an iconic figure. His heroic status was recognised by the citizens of Limerick who gave him a rousing reception upon his release from prison in 1896.[13] Clarke's mother, a widow since 1890, raised eight daughters and one son. Edward (or Ned), the only boy, was Commandant of the First Battalion in Dublin's Four Courts in the Rising and was one of the youngest of those executed in 1916. Kathleen married (against her mother's wishes) another Fenian, Tom Clarke, 24 years her senior and a prison-mate of her Uncle John in Chatham and Portland prisons. He spent over 15 years in jail for plotting a bombing campaign in London yet emerged from prison an unrepentant separatist. Clarke was a member of the IRB, the group behind a series of abortive bombing campaigns during the 1880s for which he, Daly and others were imprisoned. It was also the primary force

[9] Statement by Kathleen Clarke to MSP Board, 4 June 1950, p. 2. MSP34REF61087.
[10] Statement by Kathleen Clarke to MSP Board, 4 June 1950, p. 2, MSP34REF61087.
[11] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, p. 172.
[12] Desmond McCabe and Owen McGee, 'Daly, John', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography,* (Cambridge, 2009). (http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a2382).
[13] John Daly (1845-1916) was released from prison in August 1896 having served 13 years penal servitude for charges relating to an IRB dynamiting campaign in Britain. See *Munster Express*, Saturday 15 August 1896, p.6.

behind the recent Rising which led to the death and imprisonment of many of its leaders and rank and file members.

The IRB

The Clarkes had a happy marriage which remained strong despite many financial difficulties in the early years of their relationship. They married in New York in 1901 and the first of their three children, John Daly Clarke, was born there a year later. They returned to Ireland in 1907 and Kathleen gave birth to two more boys over the following two years. The family business – two tobacconists' shops – provided cover for the IRB business that Tom masterminded; particularly the infiltration of the Gaelic League, the GAA and the Irish Volunteers by senior IRB members.[14] Meanwhile, Kathleen became one of the founder members of Cumann na mBan in 1914; an organisation about which there has been speculation that the IRB was behind its establishment.[15] Towards the end of her life, Clarke, in a letter to Síghle Humphreys, confided that 'It was the IRB who suggested the starting of Cumann na mBan and the Fianna'.[16] Whilst there is no hard evidence to support this assertion, the suggestion that the IRB was behind the establishment of Cumann na mBan is something which appears occasionally in the memoirs and statements of women who were active during this period. For example, Senia Pašeta, in her work *Irish Nationalist Women*, points out that Humphreys herself suggested that the establishment of Cumann na mBan was originally Thomas MacDonagh's idea; this is echoed in Nancy Wyse Power's BMH witness statement.[17] However, it is interesting to note that the establishment of Cumann na mBan predates MacDonagh's membership of the IRB by almost a year – he was sworn into that organisation during spring 1915.[18]

Although it is difficult to establish a firm connection between the IRB and Cumann na mBan, there is some evidence to support the claim that the IRB were complicit in the establishment of Na Fianna. Bulmer Hobson and Constance Markievicz founded this organisation in 1909 and Hobson had been a member of the IRB since 1904. He later, rather disingenuously, stated to the BMH that the IRB itself had no hand

[14] Roy Foster, *Vivid Faces* (London, 2014), pp. 201-2. See his assertion re infiltration of Gaelic League and Irish Volunteers by the IRB and how the meetings of these organisations were used as cover for IRB meetings.
[15] Cal McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan and the Irish Revolution* (Cork, 2014), p. 12.
[16] Letter from Kathleen Clarke to Síghle Humphreys, undated, but refers to events during the summer of 1969. Síghle Humphreys Papers, P106/1395, UCDA.
[17] Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women,* p. 132.
[18] Fearghal McGarry, *The Rising, Ireland: Easter 1916*, (Oxford, 2010), p. 103.

or part in the establishment of Na Fianna, but it was his 'personal aim to recruit suitable members of the new Fianna into the IRB, of which [he] subsequently became both Dublin Centre and Leinster Centre'.[19] The fact that Na Fianna became a recruiting ground for the IRB is indisputable; many of those who took a leading role in the revolutionary period cut their nationalist teeth in Na Fianna.[20] These included Con Colbert, Seán Heuston, Liam Mellows, Barney Mellows, Paddy Daly and Garry Houlihan. While proving any IRB involvement in the establishment of Cumann na mBan is difficult, there is strong evidence to suggest that it may have had some influence on the women's organisation after the Redmondite split.[21] This is suggested in the notes compiled for a proposed history of Cumann na mBan in the Síghle Humphreys papers which show that the post-split Cumann na mBan organisation was a very different and perhaps more militant group than its earlier incarnation.[22] In essence, the split reflected that which took place a month earlier in the ranks of the Irish Volunteers. In October 1914, a mere six months after its establishment, Cumann na mBan split into factions that either supported John Redmond's appeal for the Volunteers to enlist in the British Army or opposed it. Many former Cumann na mBan members who supported the war effort joined various war relief organisations including the Volunteer Aid Association, while others drifted away from activism entirely.[23] Those remaining in the ranks of Cumann na mBan aligned themselves with the anti-Redmondite section of the Irish Volunteers leading to the resignation of many of the more moderate nationalists from the organisation. Nancy Wyse Power recalled that Agnes O'Farrelly, who presided over the inaugural meeting of Cumann na mBan, was one of the number who resigned.[24] The decline in membership was significant. Cal McCarthy provides a detailed analysis of the split and the considerable impact it had on the membership numbers; he demonstrates that only about twelve Cumann na mBan branches survived the split.[25] For the remaining active branches, the documents in the Humphreys' Papers would seem to suggest that they had a much closer alignment with the Irish Volunteers after

[19] Bulmer Hobson, BMH WS31, p. 5.
[20] For an assessment of Na Fianna and the role of Bulmer Hobson see Marnie Hay, *Bulmer Hobson and the Nationalist Movement in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (Manchester, 2009).
[21] Following the outbreak of war, John Redmond, Irish Parliamentary Party M.P., during a speech in Woodenbridge, Co. Wicklow in September 1914, urged the Volunteers to enlist in the British Army. A small minority, of a more advanced nationalist persuasion, objected to this stance and broke away but retained the Irish Volunteer name. The vast majority adopted the name National Volunteers and enlisted in the British army.
[22] Notes referring to the history of Cumann na mBan, undated, Síghle Humphreys Papers, P106/1404, UCDA.
[23] New organisations were formed by women including the Ladies' Ambulance Corps in Waterford, and the Ladies' National Volunteer Association in Limerick. See Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women*, pp. 154-5.
[24] Nancy Wyse Power, BMH WS541, p. 10.
[25] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, p. 41.

the split. She recalls that 'The members throughout the country received their orders for duty from their local Volunteer officers'.[26] This alignment was both ideological and geographical; firstly, they established new headquarters at the offices of *Irish Freedom*, the publication managed by Seán McDermott and financed by the IRB. Then, when *Irish Freedom* was suppressed in December 1914, Cumann na mBan moved into the headquarters of the Irish Volunteers at 2 Dawson Street in Dublin.[27] Secondly, they adopted a military look during 1915 when they introduced a uniform for members roughly modelled on that of the Irish Volunteers.[28] Additionally, as McCarthy points out, they took on a military aspect to their training and began 'to diversify into other areas like rifle practice and gun maintenance' after the split.[29] The executive in place from then until the outbreak of the Rising in 1916, with the absence of O'Farrelly, Dudley Edwards, and women who supported the Redmondite National Volunteers, was indeed made up of more advanced nationalists. Many, including Áine Ceannt and Kathleen Clarke, were close family members of the militant - or IRB - faction of the Irish Volunteers. Pašeta provides an intriguing insight into the personalities prominent in the split and examines the individuals on each side of the debate.[30] She discusses both the purge of moderates and the rise of advanced nationalists - particularly in Kathleen Clarke's Central Branch - pointing out that the women who remained, Clarke, Ceannt, O'Brennan and others, were 'exceptionally committed'.[31] The evidence suggests that Clarke's commitment was not solely with Cumann na mBan, but that it also stretched to advancing the aims and objectives of the IRB.

Clarke told the MSP Board that she was the 'official confidant of the Supreme Council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood', and that from 1915, she was the main point of contact should the leadership be wiped out during the Rising.[32] In her memoir she is more specific, and recalls that John Devoy - the Clan na Gael representative - was told that she would be his main point of contact should anything untoward happen to those on the Supreme Council of the IRB.[33] The Supreme Council was the governing body, or leadership, of the IRB. In 1915 Denis McCullough was the chairman, Seán McDermott was the secretary, and Clarke's husband, Tom, was the treasurer. She was

[26] Notes relating to the history of Cumann na mBan, undated, Síghle Humphreys Papers, P106/1404, UCDA.
[27] Notes relating to the history of Cumann na mBan, undated, Síghle Humphreys Papers, P106/1404, UCDA.
[28] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, p. 47.
[29] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, p. 48.
[30] Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women*, pp. 148-154.
[31] Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women*, p. 150-1.
[32] Statement by Kathleen Clarke to MSP Board, 4 June 1950, p. 2. MSP34REF61087.
[33] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, p. 86.

privy to all major decisions made by this body and was provided with a list of its members so that she could ensure that the work of the IRB could continue in the event of the arrest of its leaders. She understood clearly that her role was to oversee the reorganisation of the IRB and that they in turn would see to the reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers. Joseph Gleeson, who represented Northern England on the Supreme Council of the IRB, confirmed Clarke's assertion. He stated that as early as January 1915 a discussion took place at an IRB meeting whereby it was agreed in the aftermath of any rebellion that 'we were to get in communication with Mrs. Clarke to keep up the threads of the organisation'.[34] This was the procedure in the event of any mass arrests and demonstrates that she was the designated key contact for more than a year before the Easter Rising occurred. Gleeson's statement indicates that reorganisation rather than aid was the priority for the IRB, but Kathleen Clarke tackled both.

Clarke states that she was left a sum of money (£3,100) to ensure that the families and dependants of executed or imprisoned men would be looked after; this money was used to establish the IVDF. 'My orders were to organise the care and maintenance of the dependants of men engaged in the fighting and 10 Richmond Avenue was to be the Headquarters for this work.'[35] Conceding the use of her family home at Richmond Avenue is perhaps indicative of Clarke's commitment to the IRB and Irish Volunteers, particularly as she had three young children. There is also some evidence to support the argument that there were additional sums of money left with Kathleen Clarke after the Rising. Máire Foley (née Smartt) kept £500 in notes hidden in her parent's home during the Rising, this sum had been entrusted by Tom Clarke to her future husband, Michael Foley, to be used to provide aid to dependants of those who participated in the Rising.[36] It was subsequently passed on to Kathleen Clarke in accordance with his instructions. Foley had a further package containing £500 hidden in the chimney of his Cabra Road home. His sister Bridget Foley describes in a witness statement how this sum of money escaped the notice of the military during a raid and how, 'on my brother Mick's instructions, that money was given to Mrs. Clarke'.[37] Additionally, a large sum of money was reputed to have been buried in the back garden of the Clarke family home.[38] These funds, along with the sums of money raised by the organisation following a mass appeal, allowed Clarke to move quickly with the establishment of the IVDF. The first and more immediate concern for Clarke was to

[34] Joseph Gleeson, BMH WS367, p. 6.
[35] Statement by Kathleen Clarke to MSP Board, 4 June 1950, p. 4. MSP34REF61087.
[36] Bean Mhicil Uí Fhoghludha, BMH WS539, p. 4.
[37] Bridget Martin (née Foley), BMH WS398, p. 12.
[38] Kitty O'Doherty, BMH WS355, p. 28.

provide aid to families who were in financial distress because of a bread-winner's participation in the Rising. Death, injury, imprisonment and internment effected the families of many Volunteers; addressing this need was the priority.

National Aid

A considerable degree of prior organisation and thought was applied to the distribution of IVDF monies as Clarke outlines in her memoir. In advance of the Rising, 'All Commandants had been instructed to tell their men that in case of necessity, their women were to come to me for help'.[39] Moreover, individual Commandants drew up lists of Dublin-based Volunteers whose families may need assistance. Some of these lists were brought to Clarke by Sorcha MacMahon during Easter week.[40] MacMahon was the secretary of the Central Branch and a close friend of the Clarke family. To ensure assistance for those based outside Dublin, names of men involved were to be provided by local branches of Cumann na mBan and the Irish Volunteers. Within days of the commencement of the executions of the 1916 leaders, Kathleen Clarke launched the IVDF with the help of a committee formed mostly of relatives of the dead men.[41] As most of the committee members were also members of Cumann na mBan, that organisation became prominent in the collection and distribution of funds. Clarke later said that the work of Cumann na mBan with the dependants, 'did more to steady the country than anything else'.[42] The IVDF executive was not exclusively made up from the membership of Cumann na mBan although the more advanced nationalists of the organisation were well represented there. The executive officers consisted of Kathleen Clarke (President), Áine Ceannt (Vice-President), Sorcha MacMahon (Honorary Treasurer) and E. MacRaghnaill, otherwise known as John Reynolds.[43] Reynolds was a member of the executive of the Irish Volunteers - an accountant by profession - and was the auditor for that organisation. He was also a member of the IRB.[44] He perhaps chose to use the Irish version of his name on IVDF documents to conceal his involvement with the organisation from the authorities. The committee members were

[39] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, p. 154.
[40] Sworn statement to MSP Board by Sarah Rogers (née MacMahon), 31 July 1937, p. 2. MSP34REF21175.
[41]Statement by Kathleen Clarke to MSP Board, 4 June 1950, p. 7, MSP34REF61087. The first committee was formed on Saturday 6 May 1916, while executions were still taking place.
[42] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, p. 163.
[43] Murphy, *Political Imprisonment,* p. 71. Reynolds represented the Wolfe Tone Memorial Committee, a cover group for the IRB.
[44] See summary of sworn evidence given by A.P. Reynolds to the MSP Board, referring to his father's membership of the IRB, 19 May 1941, p. 1, Augustus Percival Reynolds, MSP34REF22403.

Margaret Pearse, Muriel MacDonagh, Eily O'Hanrahan, Madge Daly, and John Daly – all related to executed leaders. John Reynolds offered the use of his office on College Street in the centre of Dublin and the group set to work. McCarthy, in his work on Cumann na mBan, expresses some surprise that Clarke, Ceannt, and McMahon, who were all members of Cumann na mBan, should move outside the auspices of that organisation to establish an aid organisation.[45] He suggests that the founders of the IVDF may have considered Cumann na mBan to be inadequate and perhaps 'doubted the ability of the women's organisation to maximise fundraising potential.'[46] He argues that an organisation comprised of both genders would have more fund-raising potential than one made of females alone. However, all three women on the executive were married to senior IRB men, therefore it is likely that Ceannt and McMahon were taken into Clarke's confidence regarding the instructions of Tom Clarke and the IRB. If Clarke intended to implement the second part of her post-Rising plan – reorganisation – she would want to be surrounded by people she could trust. The only men on the committee – John Daly and John Reynolds - were both IRB members and could be trusted to ensure that the objectives of that organisation were facilitated. Either way, Clarke had her own agenda and if she was acting on behalf of the IRB, it is unlikely that she would share that information with the Cumann na mBan executive of which she was a member. Her testimony to the MSP Board confirmed that she was pursuing the IRB's aims concurrently with IVDF fundraising. 'I was actively engaged in desseminating [*sic*] the idea that the Rising was but the first blow, the fight must be kept going until freedom was won'.[47] Secrecy was essential for anybody undertaking such clandestine activities. They would be regarded by the military authorities as seditious at best and treasonous at worst, in the climate that prevailed in the aftermath of the Rising. Clarke explained in her memoir that she was under surveillance by detectives during this period, and that for many years afterwards she kept these activities secret.[48] Therefore, it seems unlikely that she would allow anybody outside the small cohort that she trusted to be aware of her plans.

Her tightly-knit circle included women on the IVDF executive who although members of Cumann na mBan's Central Branch (or Árd Craobh), were closely associated with the IRB. Áine Ceannt was married to the executed leader and IRB man, Éamon Ceannt, while Sorcha MacMahon was fully in Clarke's confidence. Kitty O'Doherty, whose husband was an IRB man and had escaped arrest, was also a close

[45] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, p. 75.
[46] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, p. 75-6.
[47] Statement by Kathleen Clarke to MSP Board, 4 June 1950, p. 7, MSP34REF61087.
[48] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman,* p. 86.

confidant of Clarke. McMahon managed the affairs of the IVDF on Clarke's behalf when the latter fell ill in June 1916. Clarke later wrote that 'she was the only one in Dublin I trusted to that extent'.[49] The women were all members of the Keating Branch of the Gaelic League, so they were well acquainted and shared both cultural and nationalist interests. Moreover, the Keating Branch is widely acknowledged as the most militant of Gaelic League branches – Peter Hart described it as an 'IRB sleeper cell'.[50] It included many leading IRB men among its membership including Michael Collins, Piaras Béaslaí, Fionán Lynch, Diarmuid O'Hegarty, Gearóid O'Sullivan, Seán McDermott, Cathal Brugha, and others. In fact, 'there were very few members of the Keating Branch who did not take part in the Rising'.[51] Given that the IVDF relied in many cases on members of Cumann na mBan to assist in the collection and distribution of funds, it does not seem to be a case that Cumann na mBan were excluded from formal representation within the IVDF, merely that the latter organisation chose to remain independent of the former.

Within a short space of time the demand for assistance from the IVDF became almost overwhelming; consequently, the organisation occasionally encountered some difficulty in the distribution of funds, particularly during its first few weeks of operation. When Cumann na mBan members called to the houses of Irish Volunteers whom they knew to be imprisoned, they were sometimes met with hostility and denial on the doorsteps. It quickly became apparent that the families of these men were reluctant to admit to involvement with advanced nationalism when strangers came knocking on their doors.[52] Fear of entrapment was very real in the weeks after the Rising when many men were on the run hoping to evade arrest and internment. Martial law was declared in Ireland during Easter week 1916 and this, along with the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) - first introduced upon the outbreak of war in 1914 - was used to control and contain insurgents. This legislation came to be used 'as a political weapon in Ireland' and empowered the military authorities to suspend civil courts and try suspects by courts martial.[53] Furthermore, the provision of DORA enabled the authorities to arrest and intern without trial persons merely suspected of seditious activity. Although the Rising was confined to Dublin and some parts of Galway, Wexford and Meath, there were over 3,500 arrests countrywide; in effect, anybody

[49] Letter from Kathleen Clarke to MSP Board re Sorcha MacMahon (née Rogers), 31 July 1937, p. 4, MSP34REF21175.
[50] Peter Hart, *Mick: The Real Michael Collins*, (London, 2006), p. 87.
[51] Fionán Lynch, BMH WS192, p .2; also J.J. O'Kelly (Sceilg), BMH WS384, p. 13.
[52] Áine Heron, BMH WS293, p. 7.
[53] Murphy, *Political Imprisonment*, p. 34.

suspected of having an association with the rebellion was in danger.[54] Some who had no association whatsoever with the separatist movement were rounded up along with those of a nationalist persuasion who had not participated in the Rising. Consequently, prisoners and internees were a motley crew of insurgents, non-insurgents, nationalists and non-nationalists. The random raids and arrests instilled a sense of nervousness in the general population and made people particularly cautious about any open association with advanced nationalism. Despite these challenges, news about the a newly formed aid organisation was passed by word of mouth and many applied either directly to Clarke's home or to the offices of the IVDF for assistance. In her memoir, she described the scene stating, 'streams of women came to the house all day'.[55]

Other funds, including one established by Dublin's Lord Mayor, were established during May 1916, but the most significant of these was the Irish National Aid Association (INAA). Situated at an office on Exchequer Street in Dublin, the INAA also had a member of Cumann na mBan's Central Branch on its executive – Louise Gavan Duffy. A pamphlet dated 26 May 1916, circulated to appeal for funds, lists Louisa [*sic*] Gavan Duffy, Fred J. Allan, Michael Davitt and Thomas J. Cullen as the Provisional Honorary Secretaries. Lorcan G. Sherlock (former Lord Mayor of Dublin) is shown as the Chairman of Preliminary Organising Committee.[56] Louise Gavan Duffy, although she worked in the kitchens of the GPO during Easter week, did not approve of the armed uprising. She told Pearse upon her arrival at the GPO that she 'felt that the Rebellion was a frightful mistake, that it could not possibly succeed and it was, therefore, wrong'.[57] Fred Allen, a former member of the IRB's Supreme Council, was probably the most advanced nationalist among the remaining founding members. The others were associated with the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP), to a greater or lesser extent. In a similar fashion to the IVDF, the INAA appealed for donations on behalf of:

> the destitute families of some three hundred men slain during the insurrection, of fifteen executed by Courts Martial, of one hundred and thirty-four condemned to penal servitude, of two thousand six hundred and fifty deported without trial, and of about four hundred awaiting sentence of Courts Martial.[58]

Both aid organisations had similar aims and objectives and inevitably their work overlapped, but amalgamation between them was initially resisted, particularly by

[54] Mary Gallagher, *Éamonn Ceannt* (Dublin, 2014), p. 292.
[55] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, p. 160.
[56] INAA pamphlet dated 26 May 1916, Art O Bríain Papers, MS8434/11, NLI.
[57] Louise Gavan Duffy, BMH WS216, p. 6.
[58] Appeal issued by the INAA, Art O Bríain Papers, MS8434/11, NLI.

Kathleen Clarke. It was widely suggested that Clarke's main objection to an amalgamation was the presence of IPP people on the committee of the INAA.[59] Lorcan Sherlock was probably the most prominent of these, but others, including the IPP MP, Jeremiah MacVeagh, were also associated with the group. While some historians have suggested that there was hostility between the two organisations, the situation was more complex.[60] Business correspondence between executive members of each organisation - particularly Sorcha MacMahon and Louise Gavan Duffy - was very cordial during this period. In a letter dated in June 1916, McMahon confided in Gavan Duffy that 'There are many things in connection with this matter which I would like to tell you, but could only do so in person.'[61] That comment suggests that MacMahon was privy to information so confidential that she was not prepared to commit it to paper. In other instances, there is a suggestion that the rivalry between both organisations was not always friendly. For example, Nancy Wyse Power, who was associated with the INAA, was disparaging of the IVDF in a BMH witness statement. She described the IVDF as a 'rival organisation' and 'an unfortunate diversion'.[62] Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid has suggested that the IVDF regarded the INAA with some hostility, but it can also be argued that the INAA took a similar stance towards the IVDF.[63] There is a sense that Clarke, in particular, was regarded by the INAA with some suspicion. Wyse Power indicates that she (Clarke) created an air of exclusivity around the IVDF stating that 'her fund was intended solely for the dependants of members of the Volunteers'.[64] She pointed out that the INAA took a more egalitarian approach and catered to the needs of all persons in distress as a consequence of the Rising. Indeed, a sound argument can be made to support the assertion that petty rivalries existed between the groups if they are both viewed as purely fund-raising organisations established solely to support the dependants of the 1916 combatants. However, this is not the case; Clarke - and through her the IVDF - had another more secret objective, and that was to reorganise the IRB and Irish Volunteers. It is possible that this objective is the 'matter' which McMahon alluded to in her correspondence with Gavan Duffy.

[59] Kitty O'Doherty, BMH WS355, p. 32.
[60] See Nic Dháibhéid, 'The Irish National Aid Association, p. 711, and Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland,* p. 67.
[61] Letter from Sorcha Mahon (IVDF) to Louise Gavan Duffy (Irish National Relief Fund), 30 June 1916, Art O Bríain Papers, MS8435/32. NLI.
[62] Nancy Wyse Power, BMH WS587, p. 3.
[63] Nic Dháibhéid, 'The Irish National Aid Association', p. 711.
[64] Nancy Wyse Power, BMH WS587, p. 3.

Amalgamation – the INAAVDF

Clarke states that she was 'approached from many quarters' to give her consent to amalgamate both funds, but she resisted.[65] The IVDF had its own reasons for resisting or delaying an amalgamation with the INAA, but by August 1916 these reasons seem to have receded into the background and they were more amenable to a merger. Nancy Wyse Power suggested that the IVDF's inability to raise sufficient funds was the main reason that they came to the negotiating table.[66] Certainly, published figures detailing the funds raised by both organisations show that the INAA had, by August 1916, raised more than three times the amount raised by the INVF.[67] Additionally, Nic Dháibhéid refers to the IVDF's 'sporadic returns', suggesting that they did not publish their figures with the same regularity as their rival organisation.[68] This raises the question, which will be addressed later in this chapter, whether IVDF monies were used to reorganise the IRB and the Irish Volunteers under the guidance of Kathleen Clarke.

Nonetheless, both sides agreed that a sound argument in support of a merger was the opportunity to eliminate the inevitable duplication of work that existed while they continued to function as separate entities. Additionally, there was some concern raised about the discovery that some individuals were receiving aid from both organisations.[69] If anything, such incidents merely added to the argument that an amalgamation between both groups was a pressing need. This finally came about when discussions with both parties were initiated by John Archdeacon Murphy, who represented the Irish Relief Fund Committee of America. As a Clan na Gael man, Murphy was an acceptable mediator to Kathleen Clarke, but her meetings with him were at times fractious and difficult.[70] Clarke resisted any attempt at a merger while IPP representatives were involved, and stubbornly refused to alter her stance. Eventually, to achieve what they viewed as a necessary amalgamation of both organisations, Murphy and the INAA conceded to her wishes. 'As a result… an amalgamation of the two societies was unanimously effected under the title of the Irish National Aid Association and Volunteer Dependents' Fund'.[71] The new committee was evenly balanced between both former organisations; although John Gore from the National

[65] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, p. 167
[66] Nancy Wyse Power, BMH WS587, p. 3.
[67] Murphy, *Political Imprisonment,* p. 73.
[68] Nic Dháibhéid, 'Irish National Aid Association', p. 710.
[69] Kitty O'Doherty, BMH WS355, p. 29.
[70] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, p. 175.
[71] Letter confirming amalgamation and supporting documents, 17 October 1916, Art O Bríain Papers, MS8434/11, NLI.

Volunteers remained, Lorcan Sherlock stepped aside. On 14 August 1916, a letter from Fred Allen of the INAA to Art O Bríain of their London office - which operated as the Irish National Relief Fund (INRF) - confirmed that:

> the amalgamation is an accomplished fact. We appointed 12 from each side… The amalgamation was proposed by Miss Madge Daly representing Mrs. Clarke, and was carried unanimously.[72]

The new joint committee had the addition of at least one IRB member – Diarmuid O'Hegarty – and included representatives from the Dublin Trades Council, John Lawlor and William O'Brien. There were now seven women on the joint committee and dozens more working for the INAAVDF in fundraising activities.[73] Much of this work brought them into close proximity with the friends and families of those imprisoned or interned as a consequence of the Rising and, in many cases, it facilitated the politicisation of its voluntary workers. Of course, it could be argued that those who volunteered their services to the INAAVDF were more than likely to be already politicised, but now they had regular close exposure to men and women who wholeheartedly supported militant action against the British forces in Ireland. Effectively they coalesced into a movement in which they shared an ideological space with like-minded people, and anti-British propaganda was an essential part of their role. Nic Dháibhéid points out the important role played by the *Catholic Bulletin* in publicising the organisation and in disseminating propaganda.[74] Edited by J.J. O'Kelly (Sceilg), one of the treasurers of the INAAVDF, it published 'evocative photographs of the widows and children of the men executed or killed in action' to stimulate fund-raising.[75] Additionally, stories of ill-treatment of Irish prisoners and internees were widely used to gain sympathy – and funds – for the INAAVDF. The sea-change in public opinion towards the combatants – from open hostility during and immediately after the Rising to the near heroic status to which they were elevated in the weeks and months that followed – owed some of its impetus to the INAAVDF. The organisation was, as Murphy points out, 'adept at using propaganda in support of the prisoners as a means of attacking the state'.[76] The morale of the prisoners and internees improved greatly upon hearing that support had rallied for them back in Ireland, and the prison visits, parcels and moral support supplied by the London branch provided ample evidence that their

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[72] Letter from Fred Allen to Art O Bríain, 14 August 1916, Art O Bríain Papers, MS8435/31, NLI.
[73] Louise Gavan Duffy, Kitty O'Doherty, Sorcha MacMahon, Kathleen Clarke, Mrs Pearse, Eily O'Hanrahan and Áine O'Rahilly were the seven women on the committee. Gavan Duffy, O'Doherty and MacMahon were on the executive.
[74] Nic Dháibhéid, 'Irish National Aid Association', p. 723.
[75] Nic Dháibhéid, 'Irish National Aid Association', p. 723.
[76] Murphy, *Political Imprisonment*, p. 74.

incarceration was now a cause célèbre. As early as July 1916, the first batch of released internees experienced an unexpectedly warm welcome from the public upon their arrival back in Dublin. 'We were overwhelmed by a welcome at Westland Row that fairly took our breaths. We knew at once that the cause was not lost and that the Rising had not been in vain.'[77]

Due to the prevailing political conditions in Ireland, it was easier for women to move about collecting and distributing funds than it was for men. Consequently, women made up the greater number of volunteers working for the INAAVDF. Much of the work was handled at local and parish level with the assistance of local Cumann na mBan branches. Enthusiasm for participation in national aid activities was so high that in some cases Cumann na mBan branch meetings were postponed or cancelled as members devoted all their spare time to the INAAVDF.[78] In areas where there were no Cumann na mBan branches, branches of the INAAVDF sprung up and, as McCarthy points out, this introduced nationalist ideology to women who had no previous involvement with separatist groups.[79] This, in turn, led to the establishment of new Cumann na mBan branches whose membership overlapped with the INAAVDF and so fundraising for prisoners and internees largely fell under the remit of Cumann na mBan.[80] Fundraising efforts were wide and varied; they included church-gate collections, newspaper appeals, and the organisation of dances, concerts and fairs. Anti-British propaganda material featured prominently among the items for sale including souvenir postcards and photographs of the executed leaders of the Rising, many of which were published in the *Catholic Bulletin*. The British response to the rebellion in Ireland was ill-thought out at best, and vindictive at worst, consequently some postcards depicted those perceived to be the villains of the piece – General Maxwell, the British Administration, and John Redmond. (See Appendix B).

In her memoirs and her statement to the Pensions Board, Kathleen Clarke stressed the importance of the relief work. She pointed out that men who participated in the fight had the assurance that their dependants would not suffer because of their actions. This proved to be an astute move and many prisoners expressed their gratitude to those who provided aid to their families during this time. It cemented their adherence to republican nationalist ideology and assured the existence of support

[77] Seamus Kavanagh, BMH WS1053, p. 3.
[78] Éilis Ní Ríain, BMH WS578, p. 17.
[79] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, p.79.
[80] McCarthy gives as an example the Ballinalee branch of Cumann na mBan, which was initially formed to co-ordinate fundraising activities for national aid. See McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, p. 79.

mechanisms for their families. Additionally, the aid continued upon their release until they found employment again. In some cases, the INAAVDF provided the cash required to enable former prisoners and internees to start a small business or enterprise. One such beneficiary of this scheme was Michael O'Flanagan, a poultry butcher, who was dismissed from his employment because of his involvement in the Rising. The INAAVDF granted him £20 which enabled him to rent premises on Wexford Street in Dublin where he opened a small shop; this business provided a living for his family for over 18 years.[81] The movement also benefited from this arrangement as O'Flanagan allowed his premises to be used as an arms dump and a safe house from which messages and information could be transmitted and received up to the end of 1920. There was no suggestion that his activities were a quid pro quo for the financial aid given by the INAAVDF; O'Flanagan was an IRB man and an Irish Volunteer who appears to have regarded this as part of his duty on active service. Grants such as those availed of by O'Flanagan enabled many to return to their units upon the reorganisation of the Volunteers as they knew that their families had a safety net in the event of any further periods of imprisonment.

Reorganisation

Clarke's second but no less important task was to reorganise the Irish Volunteers and the IRB. It had to be tackled simultaneously with the establishment of the national aid organisation, which was 'a vehicle through which the ideals of the rebels would be advanced'.[82] This was a far more challenging proposition; firstly, because the work had to be conducted in secret, and secondly, because most of the people she could approach to take on such work were either dead or in prison. John Reynolds, who was probably best positioned to assist in this aspect of her work, was deported to England in June 1916. The military authorities, who released him after the Rising, had second thoughts when his association with the IVDF became known and ordered him to absent himself from Ireland or face internment.[83] Additionally, Clarke was in ill-health during the weeks and months after the Rising; she developed complications following a miscarriage and was close to death at one point. She was in the early stages of recovery in the month of June when Liam Clarke (no relation), a Volunteer who suffered severe facial and leg injuries in the GPO, called to her home on Richmond Avenue. He does not state the purpose of his visit, but as a member of the IRB he may

[81] Michael O'Flanagan, BMH WS908.
[82] Murphy, *Political Imprisonment*, p. 73.
[83] Sworn statement of John Reynolds to MSP Board, 25 February 1938, p. 3, MSP34REF1593.

have known that Clarke was the designated contact after the Rising. She described his visit as 'heaven sent' because 'at that time it was hard to get a man one could trust to do things; keep his mouth shut and work in such a way that the attention of the enemy was not drawn towards him.'[84] Liam Clarke was young and he was unknown to the authorities; moreover, as he was a member of the IRB, Clarke could confide in him without breaching the trust placed in her by the Supreme Council. Over several days and multiple visits to her home, she discussed her proposal for the reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers with Liam Clarke. When he accepted the job she 'gave him instructions to go to the country and get in touch with any volunteers or I.R.B. men who had escaped arrest and tell them that they were to keep drilling, arming, and organising, for the Rising was but the first blow'.[85] Liam Clarke stated that his activities were financed by 'a small fund left for the purpose by her executed husband'.[86] Kathleen Clarke, states that she paid him a small salary and travelling expenses from funds she had received from Clan na Gael 'to use for any purpose I liked'.[87] It is not clear how she divided the funds she had between the IVDF and the money received from Clan na Gael for reorganisation purposes. By her own admission, money was tight, as the IVDF was oversubscribed and underfunded. However, sufficient funds were allocated to enable Liam Clarke to continue in the role of organiser for several months. He travelled extensively around the country contacting Irish Volunteers and urging them to get their companies and units active again. Kathleen Clarke warned him to be vague if he was asked on whose authority he was acting; he was instructed to simply indicate that he was 'acting on instruction from those higher up'.[88] He met with considerable success, no doubt helped greatly by the first batch of released internees in July 1916 and a second batch a month later. Diarmuid O'Hegarty, another IRB man, was one of the first people contacted by Liam Clarke in July 1916.[89] In a letter to the MSP Board he recalled that Clarke approached him 'with a proposal that the Volunteers should be reorganised'.[90] O'Hegarty, in turn, contacted others and Clarke's plan gained momentum. By early August 1916, the reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers had progressed to such a degree that the first post-Rising meeting of the Irish Volunteers was held in the Minerva Hotel on Parnell Square. A provisional

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[84] Letter from Kathleen Clarke to MSP Board re Liam Clarke, undated, but other letters in the file are dated June and July 1935, MSP35REF8875.
[85] Statement by Kathleen Clarke to MSP Board, 4 June 1950, p. 8, MSP34REF61087.
[86] Statement by Liam Clarke to MSP Board, date stamped 3 July 1935, MSP35REF8875.
[87] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, p.173.
[88] Statement by Kathleen Clarke to MSP Board, 4 June 1950, p. 8, MSP34REF61087.
[89] Marie Coleman, William Murphy, 'O'Hegarty (ÓhÉigeartuigh), Diarmuid', *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. (http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a6802).
[90] Letter from Diarmuid Hegarty to MSP Board re Liam Clarke, 30 June 1935, p. 1, MSP34REF8875.

executive committee was elected that day which included many prominent IRB men who had either escaped capture or had been released from prison or internment. These included Gregory Murphy, Diarmuid O'Hegarty, and Cathal Brugha (elected Chairman even though he was still in hospital).[91] Kathleen Clarke's protégé, Liam Clarke, was also elected as a member of the executive. Augusteijn acknowledged the hand of the IRB behind the reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers stating that it was 'the main instrument by which the loose threads of the organisation were pulled together'.[92] However, Clarke's role in facilitating the revitalisation of the IRB is usually overlooked; perhaps the anonymity that she sought had the unintended consequence of removing her presence from the historical narrative of the period. With reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers and IRB now in safe hands, Clarke turned her attention once more to the matter of fund-raising and acceded to the amalgamation of the IVDF and the INAA as referred to earlier in this chapter.

The timing of Clarke's acquiescence to the amalgamation of both funds is perhaps significant and worthy of further consideration as it occurred shortly after the election of the first executive of the post-Rising Irish Volunteers. With the IRB once more at the helm of the Irish Volunteers, Clarke may have felt that she could now hand over some responsibility for reorganisation to that executive. Certainly, it was widely acknowledged among Irish Volunteers that the INAAVDF became a cover for their reorganisation.[93] This became increasingly obvious after the appointment of Michael Collins as secretary in February 1917. Collins was among the group of internees, both men and women, who were released at Christmas 1916. Also included among this group were prominent advanced nationalists including Gearóid O'Sullivan, Seán T O'Kelly, Michael Staines, and Arthur Griffith. The interned women, Helena Molony and Winifred Carney, were also released from Aylesbury jail. Clarke felt that part of her work was now complete, stating, 'the released men were ready to take up the work'.[94]

Michael Collins

Collins' appointment was viewed by many as political. Kathleen Clarke advocated on his behalf mainly because 'He was IRB and Irish Volunteer, and also reminded me in

[91] Gregory Murphy, BMH WS150, p. 8.
[92] Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 58.
[93] 'National Aid… became the cover organisation for the regeneration of the Volunteer movement'. Joseph Lawless, BMH WS1043, p. 218.
[94] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, p. 184.

many ways of Seán McDermott.'[95] McDermott was a close family friend of the Clarke family; whom, she says, her husband completely trusted.[96] She saw this as an opportunity to ensure that the reorganisation work continued, even if she personally had to hand the baton over to Michael Collins. 'As Secretary to the NAVDF, he would be free to move about the country without molestation'.[97] In her statement to the MSP Board, Clarke said that she was 'more or less directing everything' up to December 1916, although she was constantly under police surveillance.[98] However, directing or planning the reorganisation of a revolutionary organisation is one thing, actually visiting Volunteer companies throughout the country was a different matter entirely. This was a job for somebody who was well connected within the Volunteers and the IRB, and who could command respect among those groups. Collins actively canvassed for the job himself. William O'Brien, one of the labour representatives on the executive of the INAAVDF, was approached by Collins during the Plunkett canvass for the North Roscommon by-election in February 1917.[99] O'Brien subsequently promised him the labour votes on the committee that would approve the successful candidate for the job.[100] Joseph O'Connor, who was released from prison in August 1916 and became instrumental in the reorganisation of the Dublin Brigade, commented on Michael Collins' appointment to the INAAVDF: ' It was very widely understood that it was an I.R.B. appointment… Mick was able to give a great amount of attention to the re-organising of the Volunteers in general.'[101]

In February 1917, just a couple of months after the general release of internees, several prominent separatists were rearrested by the authorities and held under the Defence of the Realm Relegations (1914) (DORR), which led to their deportation to mainland Britain. Patrick McCartan, Darrell Figgis, Michael Foley, Barney Mellows and others were first sent to Oxford and then moved to Fairford in Gloucestershire. There, under open arrest, they were to reside either with families or in small hotels.[102] Kathleen Clarke visited the exiled men not long after their deportation to consult with Seán T. O'Kelly and other senior IRB men regarding some matters that had been communicated to her from the USA.[103] There is no indication in her memoir of the

[95] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, p. 177.
[96] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, p. 55.
[97] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, p. 177. Clarke also realised that people could come and go from the INAAVDF offices without attracting undue suspicion.
[98] Statement by Kathleen Clarke to MSP Board, 4 June 1950, p. 9, MSP34REF61087.
[99] Hart, *Mick*, p. 126.
[100] William O'Brien, BMH WS1766, p. 96.
[101] Joseph O'Connor, BMH WS487, pp. 2-3.
[102] They were given 'maintenance' allowances for their upkeep and could travel freely within a five-mile radius, although forbidden to venture further distances.
[103] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, pp. 184-5.

nature of the message, but she previously referred to communications from John Devoy. Clarke's journey to consult with senior members of the IRB indicates that even with Michael Collins in situ with the INAAVDF, she was still respected by the IRB leaders. When the meeting ended, she tried hard to persuade the men to break their house arrest and return to Ireland.[104] Coincidentally, at the same time, Collins was putting a similar message across to the men via Art O Bríain in the London office of the INAAVDF. Collins was careful to cover his tracks; the letter was written on blank notepaper – not on INAAVDF headed paper – and was sent from his lodgings at 44 Mountjoy Street.[105] In the letter he outlines a strategy that had 'been decided by the volunteers here' in relation to the deportees under open arrest in Fairford and Leominster. Echoing Kathleen Clarke's approach, the letter suggests that one of the options open to them is to break the terms of their deportation and return to Ireland. Clearly aware that these matters were outside the auspices of the INAAVDF, Collins stressed that 'any expenses incurred on the journeys will be defrayed by us as volunteers – please do not mention the matter at all to the N.A.' It is not clear what additional funds Michael Collins had access to, but obvious that he did not want National Aid (the INAAVDF) to know about it. However, it is quite likely that Kathleen Clarke was aware of this as she had appointed him to the position just a month earlier on the understanding that he would continue with the reorganising work that she had started. Additionally, as referred to earlier in this chapter, Clarke acknowledged that she had access to Clan na Gael funds; if she was surrendering much of her responsibilities to Michael Collins, then it is likely that he too would have access to those funds.

Evidence of the Clan na Gael money trail can be tied directly to Kathleen Clarke via Tommy O'Connor, an Irish Volunteer and IRB member who carried large sums of money 'and other things' from the USA to Clarke.[106] O'Connor was interned in Frongoch following his activities in the Four Courts area during the Rising – the garrison commanded by Clarke's brother, Ned. Prior to the Rising, at the behest of Tom Clarke and Seán McDermott, he took a job with a transatlantic liner company; this enabled him to act as a courier of dispatches and cash for the IRB.[107] In his pension application, O'Connor stated that his position prior to the Rising was as Liaison Officer

[104] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, p. 185.
[105] Letter from Michael Collins to Art Ó Bríain, 4 March 1917, Ó Bríain Papers, MS8443/5, NLI.
[106] Statement by Kathleen Clarke to MSP Board, 4 June 1950, p. 8, MSP34REF61087.
[107] Statement of activities from Thomas O'Connor to MSP Board, p. 1, undated, but application form is dated 17 December 1935, MSP34REF16672. O'Connor's credentials are not questioned by the Pensions Board; his claim is backed up by documentation from Seán T. O'Kelly, Éamon de Valera, Piaras Béaslaí, Kathleen Clarke and others prominent during this period.

between Ireland and the USA; as such, he transported £6000 in cash for Clarke and McDermott from November 1915 to April 1916. O'Connor resumed his role as courier following his release from Frongoch in December 1916. His pension file states that he was approached by the Supreme Council of the IRB to undertake this work, but Kathleen Clarke states that he came to her for orders and that she instructed him during this period.[108] It may be that both statements are correct – Kathleen Clarke, Clan na Gael and the IRB appear to share the same space in the post-Rising world of republicanism of 1916-17. Certainly, Clarke features prominently in O'Connor's pension application; she testified to his bona fides and she is referred to frequently by him as someone who can confirm his position within Clan na Gael and the IRB. All the evidence suggests that O'Connor was supplying funds from the USA for reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers and that Kathleen Clarke – and later, Michael Collins – had access to this fund. Evidence of the courier line managed by Tommy O'Connor, and statements from both O'Connor and Clarke that he resumed his activities from early 1917, confirm the existence of funding from the USA for reorganisation purposes. It also demonstrates that Kathleen Clarke was indeed managing two funds – one for national aid and one for reorganisation. Máire Comerford also alluded to a separate fund used for reorganisation in the chapter of her unpublished memoir in which she discusses Clarke's activities:

> It is historically important that relief funds given to men unemployed resulting from the Rising supported organisers of the I.R.B. Volunteers, Sinn Fein, etc., and in this way contributed to the quick re-organisation after the Rising.[109]

By-elections

Kathleen Clarke was elected president of the Central Branch of Cumann na mBan in 1917, but according to the vice-president, Éilis Ní Ríain, she 'did not attend very regularly owing to imprisonment and ill-health'.[110] Kitty O'Doherty also took a back seat at this time as she was engaged almost full-time on INAAVDF work, so in many ways Cumann na mBan activities in this period became subordinate to national aid work and the series of by-elections that took place during 1917. Participation in election work in North Roscommon in February, and South Longford in May, became de rigueur for any self-respecting politically aware separatist. Despite the freezing weather conditions and

[108] Statement by Kathleen Clarke to MSP Board, 4 June 1950, p. 8, MSP34REF61087.
[109] Máire Comerford Papers, LA18/8, p. 6, UCDA.
[110] Éilis Uí Chonnaill (née Ní Ríain), BMH WS568, p. 20.

heavy snow, many made the trip to Roscommon to lend their assistance in the campaign. Kathleen Clarke did not participate in this election campaign although she would lend her support to candidates in future by-elections. George Noble Plunkett, a Papal Count and the father of the executed Joseph Plunkett, won comfortably in North Roscommon against the IPP candidate, Thomas Devine, 3022 votes to 1708. The independent candidate, Jasper Tully, polled 687 votes.[111] Plunkett waited until after his victory to announce that he would abstain from taking his seat in Westminster; but abstention would become a feature of Irish elections and by-elections in the coming years.

The parliamentary seat for South Longford was going to be a tougher challenge, but the loose grouping of separatists who made up Plunkett's team had learned from any mistakes made during the North Roscommon by-election and were better organised to contest this one. Plunkett had only a small number of election workers to canvass a large constituency but South Longford's campaign was very different. Coleman points out that so many election workers volunteered that it was a challenge to find accommodation for them all.[112] A large number of motor vehicles ferried the canvassers around the constituency to campaign on behalf of Joe McGuinness while yet more volunteers provided fuel and funds.[113] He was one of the penal servitude prisoners in Lewes Jail in Suffolk. The fact that he had written to Michael Collins earlier to decline the opportunity to contest this seat was a mere inconvenience. As far as Collins was concerned, Joe McGuinness was the candidate and his election slogan would be 'Put him in to get him out!' – a reference to his current incarceration. The large number of election workers was made up of Irish Volunteers, Cumann na mBan members and, as Coleman points out, large numbers of the younger generation who enthusiastically supported the Sinn Féin candidate.[114] This grouping had by now coalesced under the Sinn Féin banner and ran a disciplined and energetic campaign. Kathleen Clarke, Áine Ceannt, Mary O'Hanrahan and Margaret Pearse travelled to Longford by train to give their support and were met by a large crowd at the station.[115] An endorsement by the 1916 widows and mothers was essential to a successful election campaign and Kathleen Clarke and her cohorts were well aware of the power of their approval. Many Cumann na mBan women added their support to the campaign and Bridget Lyons (the candidate's niece) moved to Longford for the

[111] Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland*, p. 84.
[112] Marie Coleman, *County Longford and the Irish Revolution, 1910-1923* (Dublin, 2003), p. 52.
[113] Coleman, *County Longford,* pp. 51-7.
[114] Coleman, *County Longford*, pp. 53-4.
[115] *Saturday Herald*, 5 May 1917, p. 2.

hustings. She was appointed secretary to the director of elections, Dan McCarthy – a position of great responsibility as she had to ensure that there was a steady supply of high-profile speakers to deliver the republican message and garner votes for McGuinness.[116] The campaign was successful and McGuinness was elected, albeit by a majority of only 37 votes. Nonetheless, it was a victory for the separatist movement, the penal servitude prisoners and for the women who participated in the electoral process.

The prominence of women during the South Longford campaign can be partly explained by the absence of senior republican men through imprisonment, but the situation was more nuanced than that. In the 12 months since the Easter Rising, women had assumed many roles in the republican movement that would have been previously occupied by men. They now played a part in the decision-making process of nationalist organisations – the INAAVDF and Sinn Féin, for example - that were not female-only groups. Four women were elected to the 24-person executive of Sinn Féin at the party's October 1917 convention. They were Kathleen Clarke, Kathleen Lynn, Constance Markievicz and Countess Plunkett.[117] In December of that year, Markievicz, Lynn and Jennie Wyse Power were elected to the Standing Committee of Sinn Féin – effectively the governing committee of the organisation. Women were now politically active in advanced nationalist groups. They were involved in propaganda and campaigns for prisoners' rights; they were active in the printing and distribution of seditious material and in many ways had stepped outside the predetermined gendered roles allocated to them prior to the Rising. Some women had now become politicised; others who were already politicised had become more radicalised.

The penal servitude prisoners released in June 1917 following a general amnesty encountered an Ireland profoundly changed by their actions just over a year earlier. They left the country to the jeers and sneers of many, particularly the 'separation allowance' women; now they returned to an enthusiastic welcome and the knowledge that public opinion had swung in their favour. Much of the change in attitudes was due to the work of the female activists gathered together by Clarke who took over responsibility for a substantial part of the propaganda work in addition to that of national aid. Clarke may have considered much of her work to be completed after the release of the penal servitude prisoners as many senior IRB men were among this number. Shortly afterwards, she arranged a meeting 'with men whom I knew had been

[116] John Cowell, *A Noontide Blazing: Brigid Lyons Thornton – Rebel, Soldier, Doctor*, (Dublin, 2005), pp. 114-5.
[117] Ann Matthews, *Renegades: Irish Republican Women 1900-1922* (Cork, 2010), p. 198.

in the confidence of the leaders.'[118] Diarmuid Lynch, in a document submitted to the Bureau of Military History on the history of the IRB, states that the executive of the Supreme Council in 1917 consisted of Seán McGarry (President), Michael Collins (Secretary) and himself, Diarmuid Lynch (Treasurer).[119] It is unlikely to be a mere coincidence that among the attendees at the meeting with Kathleen Clarke were both McGarry and Lynch, the President and the Treasurer of the Supreme Council of the IRB.[120] Clarke states that she briefed them on her work during their absence and explained how she had spent the funds which she had received. She then handed over any remaining money to them and 'ceased directing things'.[121] There is no suggestion in either Clarke's memoir or her statement to the MSP Board that she considered her role to be that of a mere caretaker for IRB business while the leadership was unavailable. Instead, she stated that while she ceased 'directing things', she became 'one of those directing'.[122] This indicates that Clarke continued to be one of the people consulted by Clan na Gael and/or the IRB in matters relating to the activities of those groups in Ireland. Publicly however, she turned her face to politics and Sinn Féin, becoming President of the Fairview branch in addition to her position as a member of the Sinn Féin executive.

As though anticipating the need for yet another martyr, Thomas Ashe, a member of the IRB's Supreme Council and the hero of Ashbourne during the Easter Rising, died while being force-fed while on hunger strike in Mountjoy in September 1917. Advanced nationalists moved quickly to take control of the narrative surrounding Ashe's life and death. He was depicted as another Irish martyr struck down by the cruel hand of England and his funeral was stage-managed to ensure that it was the biggest seen in Dublin since that of Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa in 1915. Thousands lined the streets to Glasnevin Cemetery where a volley of shots preceded Michael Collins' short and succinct graveside oration. The *Nationalist and Leinster Times* estimated that more than 40000 people were in attendance while thousands more lined the route from City Hall in Dublin to the cemetery.[123] The large number of people who attended was testament to the fact that public sympathy was now very clearly on the side of the nationalists.

[118] Statement by Kathleen Clarke to MSP Board, 4 June 1950, p. 9, MSP34REF61087.
[119] Diarmuid Lynch, BMH WS0004, p. 9.
[120] Statement by Kathleen Clarke to MSP Board, 4 June 1950, p. 9, MSP34REF61087.
[121] Statement by Kathleen Clarke to MSP Board, 4 June 1950, p. 9, MSP34REF61087.
[122] Statement by Kathleen Clarke to MSP Board, 4 June 1950, p. 9, MSP34REF61087.
[123] *Nationalist and Leinster Times*, 6 October 1917, p.3.

The Conscription Crisis and the 'German Plot'

The successful reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers in the post-Rising period can be gauged somewhat by the number of companies and brigades that were fully active during 1918 despite the harsh penalties for drilling and parading under DORA regulations. Seán Enright points out that more than 200 men were tried by District Courts Martial under this act for offences including possession of firearms, sedition and unlawful drilling.[124] Additionally, special courts which operated under the Crimes Act convicted more than 1100 persons for unlawful assembly or riot, most of whom received prison sentences.[125] The ranks of the Volunteers increased dramatically during the conscription crisis of April 1918 when it was feared that Irishmen would be drafted into the British army under Lloyd George's Military Service Bill (1918). This legislation, an extension to the Military Service Act (1916) which introduced conscription to England, Scotland and Wales in January 1916, would allow Ireland to come within its remit. By March 1918, casualties in Europe were high – the defeat of the Bolsheviks in Russia enabled the Germans to turn all their resources towards the Western Front. The allies were desperate to respond but needed more manpower. Rumours began to circulate that implementation of this Bill was imminent. The Catholic Church were among the first to voice strenuous objections; and where the church went, Irish public opinion usually followed. When the British government extended the Act to Ireland in April 1918, the IPP representatives walked out of Westminster in protest and returned to Dublin to rally support in opposition to the move. The sole dissenting voice was that of the Unionists in the north-east of the country who, having supplied most of the young men who had been killed or maimed in Ypres, the Somme and Verdun, looked upon the anti-conscription campaign with distain and disgust.

The anti-conscription committee organised a conference in the Mansion House in Dublin on 18 April to outline their position. The conference was chaired by a mixture of Sinn Féin members, IPP MPs and trade union leaders who appointed a delegation to confer with leading members of the Catholic Church to agree a strategy. The bishops held their meeting to discuss the conscription issue at the same time, so the Mansion House meeting adjourned at 1pm until 6pm to allow the delegation to make the journey to Maynooth for an immediate conference with the clergy. When the Mansion House meeting resumed, they issued a declaration stating 'the attempt to enforce it [conscription] will be an unwarrantable aggression, which we call upon all Irishmen to

[124] Seán Enright, *After the Rising: Soldiers, Lawyers and Trials of the Irish Revolution* (Kildare, 2016), p. 38.
[125] Enright, *After the Rising*, p. 40.

resist by the most effective means at their disposal'.[126] The bishops then threw their clerical weight behind an equally vehement declaration stating 'We consider that conscription forced in this way upon Ireland is an oppressive and inhuman law, which the Irish people have a right to resist by all the means that are consonant with the law of God'.[127] They then directed that a pledge against conscription be administered by the priests at all public masses on the following Sunday. Effectively, every Catholic in Ireland - irrespective of political views - and every nationalist in Ireland - irrespective of religious views - was under instruction from their political and religious leaders to resist the imposition of conscription by every means possible. The gauntlet had been thrown down to the British government.

While anti-conscription rallies and protests were held throughout the country, the British Cabinet met at Whitehall to discuss the situation in Ireland. A memorandum issued by the Chief Secretary for Ireland, Henry Edward Dukes, on 21 April 1918 reviewed the statements issued following the meetings in Dublin the previous week and discussed the latest police reports from Ireland.[128] The arrest and deportation of Sinn Féin executive members was considered, but it was felt that mass arrests would do more damage than good. However, although the memo suggested that 'the arrest of de Valera requires more consideration now', its overall tone was passive, suggesting that a 'wait and see' approach would be appropriate for the present. That situation altered dramatically in mid-May when the full import of the anti-conscription campaign became clear to the British administration in Ireland. The newly-appointed Irish Attorney General, Arthur Samuels, sent an update on the Irish situation to W.H. Long, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, which was submitted to the Cabinet as a memorandum on 13 May 1918.[129] It urged the arrest of 'Parish Priests and Curates preaching not only sedition but assassination' and stated that 'The Government cannot permit any longer these murderous instigations to go unpunished.' However, it outlines a fear that the Catholic members of the RIC could not be relied on to conduct such arrests. Neither could they be trusted to enforce conscription and therefore any arrests that needed to be made in this regard would have to be handled by the military. Furthermore, the report stated that 'Ireland is in a most seditious and dangerous condition. The Sinn Fein organisation is a treasonable conspiracy preparing for another rebellion – it is looking for German assistance.' The report went on to urge that the Sinn

[126] See *Irish Times*, 19 April 1918, p. 2.
[127] See *Irish Independent*, 19 April 1918, p. 2.
[128] Memorandum, The Ani-Conscription Campaign in Ireland, Cabinet Papers, 21 April 1918, CAB24/49/2, TNA.
[129] Memorandum, The Irish Situation, Cabinet Papers, 13 May 1918, CAB24/51/41, TNA.

Féin organisation should be proclaimed as a matter of urgency and that its leaders 'should be at once deported and interned. There is abundant evidence of hostile association with the German enemy forthcoming, and there should be no more delay in banishing these enemies of the State from Ireland.' No example of the 'abundant evidence' of any German intervention was supplied, but the reference may be to the capture of Joseph Dowling – an erstwhile member of Roger Casement's Irish Brigade – who was arrested after being landed by a German U-boat off the coast of county Clare. There is no evidence that Dowling was connected in any way to the Sinn Féin leadership but it was, as Paul McMahon points out, enough to convince the British Cabinet that 'the threat was real'.[130]

The 'German Plot' provided the cloak behind which the British government could hide, should any outrage ensue following the arrest of the Sinn Féin leadership and other prominent members of the party. On 16 May the 'German Plot' proclamation was issued by the new Chief Secretary for Ireland, Edward Shortt, enabling the arrests to take place.[131] Michael Collins received a tip-off in advance of the arrests that originated from Ned Broy, a Sinn Féin sympathiser within G Division (the detective unit) of the DMP.[132] Collins passed the information on to all those he felt were targets, but many, including de Valera, refused to go into hiding. Collins heeded his own advice and evaded arrest; Harry Boland and Cathal Brugha did likewise. Nonetheless, over the next two days there were more than seventy arrests which included Arthur Griffith, Darrell Figgis, Seán Milroy, Seán McGarry, and the recently elected Count Plunkett, Joe McGuinness, Éamon de Valera, and W.T. Cosgrave.[133] Kathleen Clarke also received a warning from Collins urging her to go on the run as she was a likely target for arrest, but Clarke had three young children and decided against it. 'I was neither temperamentally nor physically fit for such a life'.[134] She was arrested the following day in front of her children and brought first to the Bridewell and then to Arbour Hill Military Barracks. She was transferred later that day by lorry to the mail boat at Kingstown (Dún Laoghaire) and taken to Holyhead where she then journeyed to Euston Station in London by train. Upon arrival at Holloway Jail she found that Constance Markievicz and Maud Gonne MacBride were also held there under the same 'German Plot' pretext.

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[130] Paul McMahon, *British Spies & Irish Rebels: British Intelligence and Ireland 1916-1945* (Woodbridge, 2008), p. 24.
[131] Patrick Maume 'Shortt, Edward', *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. (http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a8066).
[132] Hart, *Mick,* pp. 206-7.
[133] *Sligo Champion*, 25 May 1918, p. 1.
[134] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, p. 195.

It caused Kathleen Clarke a considerable amount of stress that her family was unaware of her location and initially she was not allowed to communicate with anybody on the outside. Her children were her primary concern as she had been forced to leave them in the company only of her maid at the time of her arrest.[135] Murphy points out that even by early June, families of the internees were unaware of the location of their loved ones.[136] The regime eased somewhat later that month; internees were then allowed to send and receive mail (3 letters per week) and could receive parcels from home or from well-wishers. In July, Clarke wrote to her sister Agnes listing items she would like to receive, and noting 'Miss Gore Booth and Miss Gonne keep us supplied with other things'.[137] The letter indicates that the women supported each other and shared the contents of parcels they received. Of the three women interned in Holloway, Kathleen Clarke seems to have found the prison regime the toughest. She constantly worried about her children who were in the care of her family in Limerick and sought reassurances about them. 'Little things upset one in jail, when one has nothing to do but kill time'.[138] Markievicz was paying to have her meals sent in to the prison, but Clarke refused on principle to do so. She reasoned that 'the people who sent me here are responsible for my well-being', but she also found the prison food unpalatable and she claimed to have lost 9 pounds in weight during her first month of incarceration.[139] Clarke put her weight loss down to anxiety about her children, but admits that she ate very little there until the prison doctor placed her on what he called 'the hospital diet', which consisted of tea, rice pudding and milk.[140] Astonishingly, Maud Gonne MacBride claims that although she ate normally, she practiced 'auto-suggestion' or self-hypnosis to lose weight so that the authorities would be obliged to release her on health reasons.[141]

Clarke lobbied the authorities at Holloway for more fresh air and exercise – initially the women prisoners were allowed just one hour per day of exercise – and this was then increased to two hours. She continued with the campaign, claiming that her health was suffering; eventually the women were allowed out most of the time. She then turned her attention to the prison diet and lobbied until she succeeded in having the food improved; no small feat when there was rationing in place due to the

[135] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, p. 196.
[136] Murphy, *Political Imprisonment,* p. 111.
[137] Letter from Kathleen Clarke to Agnes Daly, 22 July 1918, p. 2, P2/35, Daly Papers, UL.
[138] Letter from Kathleen Clarke to Agnes Daly, 30 September 1918, p. 1, P2/36, Daly Papers, UL.
[139] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, pp. 202-3.
[140] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, p. 204.
[141] Maud Gonne MacBride, BMH WS317 (Second Instalment), p. 8.

continuing war. Although she now had a better diet, there was no great improvement in her health. She refused to go to the prison hospital unless both Markievicz and MacBride were also permitted to do so. Again, the authorities relented, and a place was secured for all three women in the hospital quarters.[142] Despite the improvement in conditions, Gonne MacBride's self-hypnosis programme bore some results – she was released to a nursing home in October 1918, but Clarke and Markievicz remained in Holloway. Although Clarke acknowledged that the prison officials 'were very decent to us', her health continued to deteriorate.[143] In November 1918, she wrote to her sister expressing her disappointment that she could not spend Christmas her family. She refused to give an undertaking of good behaviour to the Chief Secretary – 'he will wait until doomsday for one from me' - to gain her release.[144]

The war ended on 11 November 1918, but there was still no sign of a release for the 'German Plot' prisoners. However, an end to hostilities meant that a general election could now take place; this was scheduled for 14 December. In Ireland, the IPP, the Unionist Party and Sinn Féin would contest it; the Labour Party stepped aside and thereby ensured that the nationalist vote would not be split. Sinn Féin sent a message to Markievicz to ask if she would permit her name to go forward for nomination and she agreed.[145] She was subsequently elected to the Dublin constituency of St. Patrick's Division, the only woman candidate to succeed and the first woman elected to Westminster. Despite their abstentionist policy, Sinn Féin won a remarkable 73 seats, effectively decimating the IPP who returned only 6 representatives. In her memoir, Clarke expressed some surprise that she did not receive a nomination to contest the election. She found out - after her release from Holloway - that although she had been nominated to contest the seat in North Dublin, her nomination was not ratified by party headquarters.[146] She blamed Harry Boland for the internal party machinations that led to the rescinding of her nomination in favour of Dick Mulcahy. Michael Laffan argued that Sinn Féin was 'more radical than any other party in Ireland or Britain' as it selected three women to contest the December 1918 election.[147] However, one of those selected – Hanna Sheehy Skeffington – declined the invitation to contest the election. Another - Winifred Carney - was selected for the constituency of Victoria, Belfast, the unionist stronghold that was probably least likely to vote for a Sinn Féin candidate.

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[142] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, p. 207.
[143] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, p. 212.
[144] Letter from Kathleen Clarke to Agnes Daly, 16 November 1918, p. 2, Daly Papers, P2/37, UL.
[145] Lindie Naughton, *Markievicz – A Most Outrageous Rebel*, (Dublin, 2016), p. 212.
[146] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, pp. 215-6.
[147] Michael Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland,* p. 154.

Carney, who received only 4% of the votes, pointed to the Sinn Féin organisation for their lack of support during the campaign as the main reason that she did not receive a higher percentage of the poll.[148] The success of Markievicz in the Dublin constituency of St Patrick's was more attributable to her name and reputation, as she was unable to canvass on her own behalf due to her incarceration.

In early 1919 Clarke developed what was believed to be a heart condition and was referred to a specialist who recommended her release. She was released on 18 February 1919, but on her return to Dublin she became seriously ill with 'flu. The so-called Spanish 'flu was a particularly severe strain with a high mortality rate.[149] Clarke was immediately taken to a nursing home where 'death and myself had a big tussle'.[150] The nursing home was at 29 Gardiner Place in Dublin, the home of Linda Kearns, a trusted friend to the separatist movement and an acquaintance of Clarke.[151] Kearns - a nurse - and her sister had converted the house into a nurses' home, rather than a nursing home; but she occasionally took in people from the movement in need of medical care. Clarke needed a safe place with someone she could trust, and Kearns could provide both medical help and discretion on all matters relating to political and nationalist activities.

Conclusion

Kathleen Clarke's health slowly returned after almost seven weeks in the care of Linda Kearns, but the events of the previous two years took its toll on her physically and she remained somewhat delicate. She had endured the execution of her husband and her brother, had the strain of multiple raids on her home, and experienced a long separation from her children during her time in Holloway jail. However, she also achieved an enormous amount, very little of which has been publicly credited to her. Yet without Kathleen Clarke's clandestine activities, the reorganisation of the IRB and Irish Volunteers would not have been possible, certainly not within the timeframe in which she achieved it. She provided the knowledge, the contacts and the funds to facilitate the re-emergence of a revolutionary mind-set in Ireland and this time it was

[148] Denise Kleinrichert, 'Labour and Suffrage: Spinning Threads in Belfast' in Louise Ryan and Margaret Ward (eds), *Irish Women and the Vote: Becoming Citizens* (Newbridge, 2007), pp. 202-204.
[149] See Ida Milne, *Stacking the Coffins, Influenza, War and Revolution in Ireland, 1918-1919*, (Manchester, 2018) also see Anne Mac Lellan*, Dorothy Stopford Price, Rebel Doctor* (Sallins, 2014), pp. 59-61, for details of medical treatment of Spanish 'flu.
[150] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, p.219.
[151] Linda Kearns, BMH WS404, p. 3.

not confined to a small group of men. Women had now stepped forward into Irish political life; they participated in by-elections and a general election and they were instrumental in the organisation of national aid and campaigns for prisoners' rights. Moreover, they proved that they could take ownership of the separatist movement when men were interned or imprisoned.

Clarke's appointment of Michael Collins as the secretary of the INAAVDF was arguably her most significant action during this period. Firstly, he continued – and built on - the reorganisation work commenced by Clarke. Secondly, the contacts he made in this role enabled him to build a network of men and women that would allow him to lay the groundwork for the next phase of the revolutionary period. The activities of these contacts, particularly the women he recruited, will be discussed in detail in the coming chapters. Kearns, who nursed Clarke back to health, became one of Collins' most trusted female associates; others that he encountered through the INAAVDF would become key members of his intelligence organisation. Through the auspices of the INAAVDF a network of women began to emerge who possessed a shared advanced nationalist ideology. As Clarke stepped forward into public, political life with Sinn Féin, many of her female associates stepped back into the shadowy world of underground intelligence work for Collins.

Chapter 2

The First Female Intelligence Workers: Early Recruits

Ireland was awakening. The old people, reared in the Fenian tradition, recognised a revival of the spirit which had fired their own youth; the young people filled with a sort of quiet and secret elation, joined forces and organised.[1]

Introduction

Perhaps one of the reasons why Kathleen Clarke's secrets were safe with Linda Kearns was because Kearns had plenty of secrets of her own, most of which pertained to her own involvement with advanced nationalism. Not every woman who became associated with revolutionary politics in the post-Rising period emerged from the ranks of the Cumann na mBan or Inghinidhe na hÉireann. In fact, Kearns had no overt political affiliation although it may have been known to surviving IRB members that she offered her services as a nurse to the combatants in the 1916 Rising. Post-Rising, she lectured in first-aid to both the Ranelagh and Central (Árd Craobh) branches of Cumann na mBan although she never officially joined that organisation. Kearns does not state why she never formally became a member of Cumann na mBan, although she was active during the 1916 Rising and knew most of the key men and women involved. However, considering her clandestine military activities from 1917 onwards, membership of any advanced nationalist organisation would have served no useful purpose and may have attracted the unwanted attention of police or military. This and subsequent chapters will examine the activities of Kearns and other women who were acknowledged by their peers as members of the IRB, the Irish Volunteers or the IRA. In most cases, they acted outside the confines of Cumann na mBan and claimed service as members of the Irish Volunteers or Óglaigh na hÉireann. Their claims were acknowledged and recognised by the state and they were awarded Military Service Pensions on that basis.[2] However, little detail of their activities is available outside the BMH or MSP files as few, if any, left detailed memoirs. Consequently, the role of these women and their contribution to Irish revolutionary history has been largely overlooked.

[1] Macardle, *The Irish Republic,* p. 200.
[2] Letter from F. Egan (Rúnaí), Griffith Barracks, to Finance Officer, 29 July 1947. Letter acknowledges 'that certain women served in Óglaigh na hÉireann'. MSP34REF1307.

However, in the case of women who were arrested by British authorities, records of any subsequent trial or court martial have been researched for this work.

The emerging evidence, particularly from recent MSPC releases, that there were many women who successfully claimed pensions as members of the Irish Volunteers or the IRA is worthy of further comment and the activities of more of these women (particularly those who became active from 1919 onwards) will be explored in the following chapter. The paucity of information outside the MSPC files about these female activists may be explained by the fact that republican organisations like Cumann na mBan and Sinn Féin were quite overt in their actions and activities while the Irish Volunteers, and later the IRA, had, by the very nature of their work, to be covert. Women working for – and with – the Volunteers or IRA had to remain free of any obvious connection to 'the movement' and they tended to be quite secretive about their business; most of them left no record (other than a pension application) of their clandestine activities. Additionally, very few men acknowledged that women may have been members of the same force as themselves and tended to consider that the women working with them were merely seconded from Cumann na mBan. However, in the MSPC files, one document from the Military Service Registration Board (MSRB) acknowledges the presence of women within the ranks of the IRA and states 'There was no rule debarring women from membership of the I.R.A.'.[3] Nonetheless, outside the confines of the MSPC there is little information directly connecting women with IRA membership during the War of Independence. Whilst these factors make researching women who claimed membership of the IRA more challenging, sufficient evidence is there in the MSPC to support their existence. Furthermore, there are numerous accounts, many referenced in this chapter, that 'republican post offices' and 'safe houses' run by women were well established before the War of Independence commenced in January 1919. These were the first - or earliest established - links in the intelligence chain and were in use both before and after the conscription crisis. Their level of sophistication developed as time went on. For example, many business premises and homes were modified to construct concealed closets and storage areas to ensure the safety of documents, arms, or people. One owner of a 'republican post

[3] Letter from Secretary of Military Service Registration Board (MSRB) to Fahy, Finance Officer MSRB, 7 April 1934 re IRA membership of Margaret (Peg) Clancy, File 1RB1609 in MSP34REF1666.

office' – Celia Collins – stated that Michael Collins arranged to have modifications made to her premises to facilitate concealment.[4]

The women discussed in this chapter became active on intelligence duty at a very early stage in the revolutionary period; most of them state that they were providing these services to the Irish Volunteers from 1917 onwards. The fact that women had been recruited for such work so long in advance of any open conflict with the British forces is quite remarkable. Arguably, it shows an extraordinary degree of forward planning for the War of Independence which did not commence until January 1919. Furthermore, it places women from the advanced nationalist community at the heart of intelligence activity during this period of organisation and reorganisation. Those who took on the role of intelligence work came from many parts of Ireland; women from Cork, Limerick, Tipperary and elsewhere worked closely with the Irish Volunteers and IRA to supply essential services such as intelligence work, arms storage, despatch management and the provision of safe houses for meetings and 'on-the-runs'. Many of them operated behind the cover of shops and business premises to conceal the true purpose of the frequent visitors to their doors. The geographical spread of female involvement in this work demonstrates that the reach of the IRB and Irish Volunteer's intelligence group extended beyond the island of Ireland – one woman recruited in 1917, Frances Brady, was employed in the War Office in London.[5] Another, Mary Egan, worked with the Irish Volunteers and IRA munitions group in London from 1918.[6] This chapter will explore their experiences and those of other female advanced nationalists recruited by members of the IRB and Irish Volunteers and will focus on those who became active prior to the commencement of the War of Independence. It will outline their background and activities individually and will assess the value of their work to the revolutionary movement.

Linda Kearns (1886-1951)

Accounts of Kearns' activities during the earlier part of the revolutionary period are drawn from two primary sources: *In Times of Peril: Leaves from the Diary of Nurse*

[4] Such concealments became even more common upon the onset of the War of Independence as will be seen in the following chapter. See Sworn Evidence given before the Referee and Advisory Committee by Celia Collins, 29 May 1946, p. 6, MSP34REF60829.
[5] Summary of evidence given by Frances Brady Cooney to MSP Board, 12 July 1940, p. 1, MSP34REF57744.
[6] See Summary of Evidence given to MSP Board by Agnes O'Boyle, 18 July 1940, p. 1, MSP34REF57567; and Letter from B. Ahern to MSP Board re Mary Egan, 24 May 1938, p. 1, MSP34REF55889.

Linda Kearns from Easter Week 1916 to Mountjoy 1921, edited by Annie M.P. Smithson and originally published in February 1922, and from Kearns' sworn statement to the Advisory Committee of the MSP Board made in November 1935.[7] In the latter, Kearns was asked what her activities were up to the time of the general release of prisoners in June 1917; she replied that she became acquainted with members of the IRB through her association with Kathleen Clarke. 'Through her I got to know Diarmuid O'Hegarty and Collins. These were the first two to send me on this work.' The 'work' she refers to is 'the carrying of despatches from and to the Supreme Council of the I.R.B. and the commanding officers in Dublin and the West and in organizing work for the I.R.B.'[8] The main secondary source drawn upon is Proinnsíos Ó Duigneáin's biography of Kearns, *Linda Kearns, A Revolutionary Irish Woman*; the oral sources used by the author are of particular interest in this work.[9] However, oral sources are not relied upon as evidence and are only used in conjunction with primary archival sources.

Diarmuid O'Hegarty wrote that Linda Kearns was working for him by the end of 1916 conveying messages and arms between IRB members in Dublin and the west of Ireland,[10] but unlike Kathleen Clarke, there is nothing in the background of Kearns to suggest political militancy. She was born in 1886 and was one of eight children in a family of small farmers in the electoral district of Dromard West, County Sligo. In the 1901 census returns she is listed as a fifteen-year-old scholar, indicating that she was still in the educational system at this time although the census shows that many of her neighbours – those of a similar age and background - were already working with their families on the land or earning a living elsewhere.[11] Present in their family home on the night of the 1901 census were her mother and father, her older sister Mary, younger sister Norah, her brother Michael, and Linda herself – although she is listed as Belinda on the census return.[12] Mary's occupation is listed as 'Lady Companion, unemployed', whilst Michael's is listed simply as 'Farmer's son'. There are seventeen families listed

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[7] Smithson*, In Times of Peril* and Linda Kearns MacWhinney, Military Service Pension File, MSP34REF1307. See Sworn Statement.
[8] Linda Kearns MacWhinney, MSP34REF1307. Section dealing with continuous active service during period comprising April 1916 to March 1917. See page 3.
[9] Ó Duigneáin, *Linda Kearns*. The author interviewed many relatives of Linda Kearns, including her daughter, Ann Keating (since deceased); these oral accounts provide a supplement to the primary sources available.
[10] Letter from Diarmuid O'Hegarty to the MSP Board in support of Linda Kearns' pension application, 14 December 1935, MSP34REF1307.
[11] Among the 17 families in the townland of Cloonagh, there are 7 children aged between 15 and 17, three of which are members of the Kearns and Clarke family. All 3 are still in the education system. Of the remaining children in the district only one is listed as a scholar, the others – male and female – are listed as farmers' sons or daughters.
[12] 1901 Census, National Archives of Ireland (NAI).
http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai003865702/

in the townland of Cloonagh, Dromard West and the Kearns household is one of only three in the district with five or more windows at the front of the house and six rooms inside. There are only four families who have six or more outhouses on their property, one of which is the Kearns family, indicating that they were one of the more prosperous small farmers in the area. Although their house had a thatched roof, there were only two houses in the district who had homes with a slate or tiled roof, one of which was the home owned by the Clarke family – close relatives of the Kearns'.[13] Matthew Clarke was her maternal uncle; he too had a daughter named Belinda who was a year older than her cousin of the same name; she is also listed as a 'scholar' on the 1901 census returns. The Kearns family, despite lacking great wealth or influence, placed a high value on education and appearance; photographs included in Ó Duigneáin's work show that they dressed in the manner of the middle-classes so it may be assumed that they shared middle-class values on education too.[14] Additionally, one of Kearns' maternal aunts, Honora Kelly (née Clarke) was the schoolmistress at the local Ballacutranta national school and taught Kearns and her sisters in the girls' part of the school; James Clarke, her uncle was the teacher in the boys' school.[15] There is no evidence to indicate what occupation – if any – was held by her mother, Catherine, prior to her marriage, but it may be assumed that she received some education as she had at least two siblings who were primary school teachers and a younger brother in Dublin who was a substantial property owner and local politician. Details of this brother, Thomas, are outlined in the following paragraph. The 1901 census shows that Catherine bore her first child, Mary, when she was twenty-four years old. However, the 1911 census returns also indicate the length of a marriage and these documents show that Thomas and Catherine Kearns were married forty-one years and bore nine children over the course of the marriage, eight of whom were still living.[16] There are some anomalies in the Kearns' family census returns of 1911 with regard to the ages of family members and therefore it is likely that the duration of the marriage documented on these returns may also be incorrect. Michael, who is documented as being eighteen years old in 1901 is listed as thirty years old in 1911; the mother, Catherine, documented as fifty years old in 1901 has aged significantly in the space of ten years – she is listed as sixty-five years old in 1911. One possible explanation for this is the introduction of the

[13] The Clarke family listed as resident at No. 14 and the Kearns family as resident at No. 15 on the House and Building Return, 1901 Census, NAI. http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai003865686/

[14] Photographs included in Ó Duigneáin's work show Linda's father as a well-dressed man in a bowler-type hat, another shows her mother in furs with a feather headpiece and a large family group photograph depicts well-dressed women in hats and men in cravats.

[15] Ó Duigneáin, *Linda Kearns,* p. 11.

[16] 1911 Census returns. NAI. http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai003272564/

old age pension scheme which became effective on 1 January 1909 and was payable to persons of seventy years and over. It became apparent following the introduction of the scheme – which was greatly oversubscribed – that there were many fraudulent claims, particularly as it was difficult to prove the age of claimants; it can therefore be difficult to ascertain the veracity of information with regard to ages on the 1911 census returns.[17]

No documentary evidence exists to indicate the political views held by the Kearns family and although Ó Duigneáin cites several contradictory oral sources, not all of these have subsequently proved verifiable. It is suggested by Ó Duigneáin's sources that Kearns' father, Thomas Kearns, was a loyalist, whilst her mother's brother, Thomas Clarke, was a member of the Home Rule Association.[18] There is some evidence to support the latter assertion. Thomas Clark, according to Ó Duigneáin, came to Dublin in 1868 and was elected to the Board of Guardians of Rathdown Union, Co. Dublin.[19] Records show that a Thomas Clarke, J.P. was elected to Blackrock Urban District Council, Booterstown Ward in 1902, became vice-chairman of the council in 1903 and was elected chairman a year later.[20] The 1901 census shows him to be residing at 14 Avoca Avenue in Blackrock, County Dublin.[21] This was a substantial property with fourteen rooms and a rateable evaluation of £55.[22] Clarke lists his occupation as 'Justice of Peace for County Dublin, Urban District Councillor Blackrock, P.L. Guardian Rathdown Union, Chairman Deans Grange [*sic*] Burial Board, Owner – House and Land Property'. His wife, Alice, is also listed as a 'house, property and land owner' so it is clear that the Clarke family lived quite comfortably. Sarah (Daisy) Kearns, Linda's older sister, is also listed as resident in the house; she was seventeen years old and a 'scholar'. The Clarkes had no children of their own but they adopted Daisy Kearns when she was very young.[23] By 1911, Clarke had moved his family to 28 Belgrave Square East in Monkstown, County Dublin; this house had a rateable evaluation of £63 per year indicating that it was a more valuable property than his previous home in Avoca Avenue.[24] Clarke's occupation is then listed as 'County

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[17] *Irish Independent*, 28 January 1909. The newspaper carries reports of suspected claim abuse stating that the Galway Excise district received three times as many claims as expected.
[18] Ó Duigneáin, *Linda Kearns,* pp. 11-13.
[19] Ó Duigneáin, *Linda Kearns,* p. 13.
[20] *Thom's Directory*, 1902, 1903, 1904.
[21] 1901 Census returns. http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai003736972/
[22] 1901 Census returns and *Thom's Directory* 1901.
[23] In the announcement of Daisy Kearns' marriage to Charles James MacGarry she is referred to as the 'niece and adopted daughter of Thomas Clarke, J.P. and Mrs Clarke'. Marriages, *Irish Times*, 21 October 1907, p.1.
[24] *Thom's Directory,* 1912 & census returns 1911. NAI. http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai000229598/

Magistrate and property owner'; no occupation is listed for his wife. Although Clarke was no longer the chairman of Blackrock UDC, having stepped down from this position earlier in 1911, he was still actively involved in the political arena. An article in the *Freeman's Journal*, reporting on the South County Dublin election in 1910, reported on a speech by Clarke which was strongly supportive of the IPP candidate, Alderman Cotton. The article reports Clarke calling on voters to 'strike a blow at our hereditary enemy, the House of Lords'.[25]

Clarke's position as an influential and wealthy member of the middle-classes in Dublin may have proved beneficial to his sister's family in County Sligo. In 1902 when Linda Kearns was sixteen, she and her younger sister Nora were sent to the Convent of the Blessed Virgin in Beirlegem, Belgium – a finishing school for young Catholic girls. Ó Duigneáin suggests that the cost of this was largely borne by Thomas Clarke and partly subsidised by their older sister Mary.[26] This aspect of their education was unusual among their peers in a small farming community in Sligo, but the Kearns family appear to have valued social mobility and perhaps viewed this type of education as a means to attaining greater social status. The girls spent two years in the convent where they studied French, music and art and learned how to conduct themselves within a socio-economic class above that into which they had been born. Kearns never forgot the lessons she learned in Belgium, which in the succeeding years enabled her to move freely through society as either a farmer's daughter or a woman of means as the situation dictated. Perhaps this skill is what made her an invaluable asset to Michael Collins during the War of Independence and to de Valera on the women's fund-raising lecture tours of America during the Irish Civil War.[27]

After the completion of her education in Belgium, Kearns returned to Ireland and in 1907 commenced four years training as a nurse in Baggot Street's Royal City of Dublin Hospital. It is likely that she was a 'probationer' as she spent four years in Baggot Street. Pauline Scanlon's work on Irish nursing states that during the first decade of the twentieth century probationers had to pay a fee but this was returned to them in a monthly salary.[28] Normally they paid a fee of £10 for the first year of training, £12 for the second year and £14 for the third and fourth years; they received the fee back as a salary but by the third year of training they were usually earning income for

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[25] *Freeman's Journal*, 10 January 1910.
[26] Ó Duigneáin, *Linda Kearns*, p.14.
[27] See Joanne Mooney Eichacker, *Irish Republican Women in America: Lecture Tours 1916-1925* (Dublin, 2003) for an account of fund-raising lecture tours undertaken by Linda Kearns, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, Kathleen Boland and Muriel MacSwiney.
[28] Pauline Scanlon, *The Irish Nurse, a Study of Nursing in Ireland: History and Education 1718-1981,* (Manorhamilton, 1991) p. 102.

the hospital in nursing fees.[29] The scope of nursing broadened in the early twentieth century; Scanlon quotes the objectives of the Dublin Nurse's Club as 'to bring into touch with each other the members of the different branches of the profession' which she lists as medical, surgical, fever, obstetric, mental and massage nurses.[30] Additionally, nursing was just emerging as a respectable profession rather than a mere job and as such became a more attractive career choice for the middle-classes:

> The lady nurses of the Dublin hospitals were recruited from Dublin and the provinces and from a spectrum of Victorian social strata that included the lower-middle-class, better-off artisans and farmers, and the well-placed families of the middle and upper-middle-classes.[31]

In addition to hospital work, there were opportunities to obtain a position as a private nurse to wealthy individuals or families. Probationers were addressed as 'nurse' from their first day on duty and were also addressed by the public in this manner. Kearns proved to be an excellent student, graduating with first class honours and remained working there until the end of 1911. In her witness statement to the BMH, she states that she began to take an interest in politics around this time.[32] Her comments, following a visit to a typhus hospital in Belmullet where her sister Norah was nursing, indicate that she shared the political views of advanced nationalists:

> It was not a hospital at all; it was only an old barn that was converted to this purpose. You could see the sky through the ceiling and walls and the patients were lying in filth on the floor. It occurred to me that it was time that the government that was responsible for that state of affairs should be expelled from the country. [33]

It is reasonable to assume that Kearns may have kept her political views to herself during this period as by now she had secured employment as a private nurse with wealthy Protestant landowner Maurice Lindsey O'Connor Morris in Tullamore, King's County (now Offaly). Her new employer was the only son of Judge William O'Connor Morris (1824-1904), a professed Unionist who was the author of several published works on Napoleon and Hannibal as well as works on Irish history.[34] Both the

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[29] Gerard M. Fealy, *A History of Apprenticeship Nurse Training in Ireland* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 69-71.
[30] Scanlon, *The Irish Nurse*, p. 103.
[31] Fealy, *A History of Apprenticeship Nurse Training*, p. 69.
[32] Linda Kearns MacWhinney, BMH WS 404, p. 1.
[33] Linda Kearns MacWhinney, BMH WS 404, p. 1.
[34] His published works on Ireland included *Ireland, 1494-1868*, (Cambridge, 1896), *Letters on the Land Question of Ireland*, (London, 1870) and *Present Irish Questions* (London, 1901).

1901 and 1911 census returns show the O'Connor Morris residence to be a substantial home with fifteen windows to the front and twenty-three rooms inside.[35] There were eight live-in servants in 1901 and six in 1911 to cater to the needs of the family. Kearns' new employer was listed as a 'Justice of the Peace and practicing barrister' on the 1901 census but was not in residence there in 1911. Although he was an active man in his youth, the onset of serious illness in early middle age left him in need of full-time nursing care, hence he engaged Kearns. She travelled extensively with him spending time in Switzerland, France and Egypt where the warmer climate proved beneficial to his symptoms.[36] Consequently a close friendship was forged between Kearns and her employer and when he drafted a will in 1914, he named her as one of the main beneficiaries. O'Connor Morris passed away aged fifty-one in February 1916 leaving Kearns £2,500 of the £6,500 estate.[37] Following the funeral, in which she was one of the chief mourners, Kearns made her way to Dublin where she had many acquaintances and friends. There she purchased a large Georgian house at 29 Gardiner Place with some of the funds from the O'Connor Morris bequest. During her employment with O'Connor Morris, Kearns attended the Gaelic League Gaeltacht in Tourmakeady over three successive summers and became an enthusiastic student of the Irish language. In her witness statement, she cites her time with the Gaelic League and a chance encounter with Thomas MacDonagh on Mountjoy Square in 1915 as contributing to her politicisation.[38] Kearns makes no reference, in her memoir or her statements to the BMH, to the political beliefs of O'Connor Morris, but she does not appear to have had any difficulty pursuing her studies of the Irish language and her membership of the Gaelic League during her time in his employ.

Kearns was in her home in Gardiner Place when the Easter Rising took place in 1916. She was visited by a neighbour, the proprietor of Fleming's Hotel, John O'Mahony, who asked if she would consider opening a Red Cross hospital for wounded volunteers.[39] Kearns agreed and identified an empty house on North Great George's Street as a suitable location for the enterprise. She collected bedding from nearby houses whose occupants were willing to donate to the cause and was given medical supplies from the chemist shop of E.J. Toomey, whose family was sympathetic to the separatist movement. Kearns had six girls to assist with nursing duties and two

[35] National Archives of Ireland census returns for 1901 and 1911.
[36] Ó Duigneáin, *Linda Kearns,* p. 18.
[37] *Irish Independent*, 2 June 1916, 'Mr M.L. O'Connor Morris, J.P., Tullamore, who died worth £6,500, left £2,500 to his nurse Linda Kearns'. p. 4.
[38] Linda Kearns MacWhinney, BMH WS 404, p. 1.
[39] O'Mahony was a close friend and associate of several of the 1916 leaders; Seán McDermott and his ADC, Gearóid O'Sullivan, stayed in Fleming's Hotel just before the Rising.

young boys as stretcher bearers. On the first day she tended several wounded - volunteers and citizens - including two British soldiers with hand injuries acquired during the conflict. On the Thursday of Easter week she was ordered to 'make the hospital strictly military' by a British officer – meaning that she could only attend to British wounded – or to close the hospital entirely.[40] Kearns chose the latter and then moved onto the streets to see if there were any wounded volunteers who needed assistance. The following day she attempted to remove the body of The O'Rahilly from Moore Street and succeeded in getting through the barricades but was stopped in her endeavours by a British officer who told her that there was no point in removing him as he was 'quite dead'. Kearns claims in her witness statement that she always regretted not being able to do something for The O'Rahilly.[41] Her activities during Easter Week 1916 were confirmed in her 1935 MSP application by both Patrick Stephenson (D Company, 1st Battalion) and Éamon de Valera; the latter issued her with a pass to allow her to move between the Mount Street and Jacobs' posts for communications purposes.[42]

Kearns escaped the attentions of the authorities in the period following the Rising but was, according to her sworn statement, approached by Diarmuid O'Hegarty in late 1916 and Michael Collins in early 1917 to carry despatches from Dublin to contacts in Sligo, Mayo and Galway. She mostly travelled by train during her work as a despatch carrier as she did not purchase her first car until sometime during 1918. Kearns does not refer to any of the contacts by name in the Smithson work but in the documents supporting her pension application she named Alec McCabe, a member of the Supreme Council of the IRB, as the main contact in her home county of Sligo. Additionally, J.J. Berreen, who was acting Connaught Centre of the IRB while Alec McCabe was in jail, confirmed that Kearns carried ammunition as well as dispatches for him.[43] Kearns had few money worries and was in the fortunate position of being able to travel around the country at will as her Dublin home, now converted into a nurses' home, provided her with a regular income. She rarely took patients into her home, but she made an exception in 1919 for Kathleen Clarke, as referred to in the previous chapter. Kearns' value to the IRB increased upon the acquisition of her first car; from

[40] Smithson, *In Times of Peril*, p. 5.
[41] Linda Kearns MacWhinney, BMH WS 404, p. 2.
[42] The original copy of this pass, signed by de Valera, is contained within Kearns' MSP file, MSP34REF1307.
[43] J.J. Berreen represented Connaught on the Irish Volunteer Executive from the Convention in late 1916 until the 1917 Convention at which de Valera was elected president of the Irish Volunteers. Berreen remained a member of the IRB and was acting Connaught Centre until 1918.

then, her role evolved from carrying despatches to moving arms and ammunition. By early 1920 Kearns was reporting to the brigade leaders in Sligo, Frank Carty and Billy Pilkington, and was engaged in activities that included transporting men 'on the run' from Dublin to the west of Ireland as well as occasionally transporting weapons from place to place.[44] Her contact point was the Harp and Shamrock Hotel in Sligo which was used as republican headquarters and it was normally to this location that she went for instructions as to her next assignment. Kearns arguably served her apprenticeship with republican groups during this period, but during the War of Independence, she emerged as a key member of the IRA Brigade in Sligo, participating – by her own admission – in raids and ambushes. These activities will be discussed in the section on 'Active Service' in Chapter 4. Kearns continued to act as courier between Dublin and Sligo at the behest of IRB leaders. During the time she spent in Dublin, she was engaged to give basic first-aid classes to the Cumann na mBan branches in Ranelagh and in Parnell Square where she encountered other women with advanced nationalist views, including Lily O'Brennan. O'Brennan was also engaged upon intelligence work and reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers by 1917, although she was one of few to do so while still retaining an outward connection with Cumann na mBan.

Lily O'Brennan (1878-1948)

There are few primary sources available to the researcher on O'Brennan. The Lily O'Brennan papers held in UCD's archives cover only the period of her imprisonment during the Civil War (1922-1923) which is outside the scope of this work. Consequently, the witness statements, pension applications and writings of her contemporaries form a large part of the sources available on her activities during the post-Rising period and throughout the War of Independence. Lily O'Brennan was the sister of Áine - the widow of Éamonn Ceannt, one of the executed signatories of the 1916 Proclamation. Both women were members of Cumann na mBan since 1914, although during the War of Independence Lily played a more active role in the organisation than her sister.[45] The women, along with their mother Elizabeth, and Áine and Éamonn's only child, Rónán, lived at number 44 Oakley Road in the Dublin suburb of Ranelagh during the period covered by this work. The matriarch of the family,

[44] Smithson, *In Times of Peril*, pp. 6-7.
[45] The attendance records for members of the Cumann na mBan Executive for 1920-21 show that of the three vice-presidents of the organisation, Áine Ceannt attended no meetings, Mrs Pearse attended 9 meetings and Mrs O'Rahilly attended 38 meetings. Ceannt Papers, MS41,494/1, NLI.

Elizabeth O'Brennan (née Butler), had given birth to four daughters, the eldest of whom died. Tragedy struck again when her husband, Francis O'Brennan, died shortly before the birth of Áine, who was originally called Frances after her father.[46] Kathleen, the second born, moved to the United States but the remaining O'Brennan women remained close; in fact, both Elizabeth and Lily moved in with Áine and Éamonn following the birth of their son. Elizabeth ensured that all her daughters were educated by the Dominican sisters on Eccles Street in Dublin, a school with an excellent reputation that provided education and tuition up to graduate level.[47] Lily attended Eccles Street Convent as a day pupil where she received a certificate of merit from the Society of Science, Letters and Art in London for secondary level examinations she sat as a pupil with the Dominicans.[48] Áine attended the same school as a boarder and both sisters found employment at clerical work upon completion of their education.[49] They each became active within the Keating Branch of the Gaelic League and it was through membership of this organisation that Áine met Éamonn Ceannt. In fact, the 1911 census return for the Ceannt home shows that all residents of the house (with the exception of Elizabeth Brennan) were Irish speakers. The family were all advanced nationalists – in addition to Áine's and Lily's membership of the Central Branch of Cumann na mBan, Éamonn Ceannt joined the Military Council of the IRB in 1915 and was one of those responsible for the planning of the Easter Rising.[50]

O'Brennan was elected as secretary to the Cumann na mBan Executive in 1917 and participated in a wide range of Cumann na mBan activities including collecting and distributing funds for the INAAVDF. She did not leave any detailed memoir, but much of the information about her involvement in the pre-Civil War part of Ireland's revolutionary period is found within the Ceannt Papers in the NLI.[51] Unfortunately, although O'Brennan's application to the MSP Board refers to her activities during the War of Independence, she left no witness statement as she died in 1948 before she had an opportunity to make a statement for the then newly established BMH. However,

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[46] The family continued to use the diminutive, Fanny (for Frances), when writing to Áine.
[47] With the passing of the Intermediate Education Act, 1878, girls had the opportunity to compete on equal terms with boys. The Dominican sisters were one of the first to instruct female pupils for this exam. See Eibhlin Breathnach 'Women and Higher Education in Ireland (1879-1914)' in Alan Hayes and Diane Urquhart (eds) *The Irish Women's History Reader* (London, Routledge, 2001), pp. 44-49.
[48] The Certificate of Merit shows that she was examined in arithmetic, geography, algebra, Euclid, grammar, French and history. Ceannt and O'Brennan Papers, MS41,508/2, NLI.
[49] Biographical notes by Áine Ceannt in Ceannt and O'Brennan Papers, MS41,481.
[50] McGarry, *The Rising,* p. 103.
[51] See Ceannt and O'Brennan Papers, 1851-1953, NLI. This collection covers the papers of Éamonn Ceannt, Áine Ceannt and both Kathleen and Lily O'Brennan. The section on Lily O'Brennan contains some documents relating to Cumann na mBan, published and unpublished articles, poems, novels and part of an uncompleted autobiography.

O'Brennan wrote several accounts of the Easter Rising and her involvement in it.[52] The execution of her brother-in-law and the events in the South Dublin Union and the Marrowbone Lane Garrison are subjects that were frequently covered in her writing.[53] Although O'Brennan was a member of Cumann na mBan's Central Branch, she assembled at Emerald Square with members of the Inghinidhe Branch, presumably to remain in close proximity to her brother-in-law, Éamonn Ceannt. There are several witness statements relating the events of Easter week inside the Marrowbone Lane distillery which they occupied, but the most detailed are those of Rose McNamara, vice-Commandant of the Inghinidhe Branch, and that of Annie Cooney, another Cumann na mBan member.[54] The accounts are broadly similar in content although McNamara's is the most detailed as it is constructed in a diary format, relating the events on a day by day basis. O'Brennan's account, although similar in factual content, is constructed with a strong nationalist rhetoric that often romanticises the difficulties endured within the distillery and glorifies the bloodshed and death that followed:

> The history of Ireland; her songs; music, traditions seemed a surging force behind me, as I saw with pride the soldiers of Ireland prepare to fight again for her freedom, and Oh! How glorious it was that we girls were by their side to help.'[55]

In all, twenty-two Cumann na mBan women from the Marrowbone Lane Garrison under the command of Con Colbert surrendered on Sunday 30 April.[56] They marched with the Irish Volunteers to Richmond Barracks from where they were transferred to Kilmainham Jail along with women from other garrisons throughout the city.[57] Many, including O'Brennan, were released on Monday 8 May, the day that Éamonn Ceannt, Con Colbert, Seán Heuston, and Michael Mallin were shot.[58] For O'Brennan, in particular, her presence in Kilmainham during the execution of her brother-in-law only served to reinforce her nationalist aspirations. In fact, following her return to the family

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[52] 'The Dawning of the Day' published in the *Capuchin Annual* in 1936, pp. 157-168 is a romanticised account of Easter Week 1916 from Lily O'Brennan's perspective.
[53] O'Brennan published some of her work, particularly poetry and short stories under the pseudonyms Esther Graham and Eliza Cronin; she mainly wrote factual articles under her own name.
[54] Rose McNamara, BMH WS 482, pp. 3-11; Joint statement by Annie O'Brien (née Cooney) and Lily Curran (née Cooney), BMH WS 805, pp. 5-9.
[55] O'Brennan, 'The Dawning of the Day'.
[56] 25 women were attached to the Marrowbone Lane garrison most of whom were members of the Inghinidhe Branch of Cumann na mBan. 3 chose to return home when news of the surrender reached them, but 22 remained and surrendered with the men.
[57] McAuliffe and Gillis, *Richmond Barracks 1916,* p. 73.
[58] All the executions, apart from those of Connolly and McDermott took place while the women were held in Kilmainham. The final two executions took place on 12 May 1916.

home, she arguably assumed the role vacated by Éamonn Ceannt; she not only became the main breadwinner but also became the most radicalised member of the family group.

O'Brennan's cool head and quick wits came to the attention of the Irish Volunteers in June 1917. A public meeting was due to take place at Beresford Place, adjacent to Liberty Hall, on Sunday 10 June to rally support for the penal servitude prisoners still held in Lewes jail in Sussex. As the meeting was to be addressed by Count Plunkett and Cathal Brugha, the authorities decided to proclaim it. However, more than 3,000 people turned up, including the two speakers.[59] Inspector Mills, Sergeant Higgins, and Sergeant Edmund O'Connell of the DMP intervened to break up the meeting and to place Brugha under arrest. During the ensuing melee, Inspector Mills was hit over the head with a hurley and collapsed; he later died of his injuries.[60] O'Brennan, wearing a full Cumann na mBan uniform and carrying her first-aid kit, was close to the scene.[61] She stated that she threw her first aid kit to the police so that they could attend to their injured colleague and she rushed from the scene with the young attacker; who turned out to be a Fianna boy. Later, she was asked by an Irish Volunteer to drop the assailant off to a safe place so that he could be smuggled out of the country safely as news had broken of the Inspector's death.[62] Evidently she was trusted with sensitive information as notwithstanding her connection with Cumann na mBan, O'Brennan had already become engaged with intelligence work by 1917, probably through her connection with Collins in the INAAVDF. Between 1917 and 1919 she worked full-time for Cumann na mBan while spending her remaining free time volunteering with her former full-time employer, the INAAVDF. Consequently, she became known as someone who could be trusted with confidential information and was increasingly relied on by members of the reorganised Irish Volunteers for intelligence work. Joe O'Reilly, Michael Collins' adjutant, stated that he called to O'Brennan at her home sometimes twice or three times a day with 'correspondence from headquarters.[63] Curiously, Gearóid O'Sullivan described her work as 'a cross between Messenger and Intelligence Officer', suggesting that her duties may have been mainly on dispatch work.[64] Nonetheless, he acknowledged that she was working for Collins on intelligence

[59] See *Evening Herald*, 12 June 1917, p. 1.
[60] Report of Dublin Coroner's jury published in the *Irish Independent*, 13 June 1917, p. 3.
[61] Sworn statement made by Lily O'Brennan before the advisory committee on 22 May 1936. See MSP34REF2229.
[62] The boy was subsequently smuggled out of the country and brought to the USA. See Áine Ceannt, BMH WS 264, p. 49-50.
[63] Letter from Joe O'Reilly to MSP Board re Lily O'Brennan, 18 May 1936, MSP34REF2229.
[64] Sworn evidence given before the advisory committee by Gearóid O'Sullivan on behalf of Lily O'Brennan, 5 September 1936, p.2, MSP34REF2229.

matters. The MSP Board recognised O'Brennan's work, awarding her a Grade D pension as a member of Cumann na mBan. However, O'Brennan stresses that from 1917, she worked on a variety of intelligence matters including the planning and execution of attempted jail breaks.[65] Her role expanded over the revolutionary period leading to work with both the Department of Labour and the Department of Publicity; this will be discussed in Chapter 4. O'Brennan became acquainted with Michael Collins during the time that they both worked for the INAAVDF; she took a clerical position there shortly after the establishment of the organisation, while Collins, as discussed in the previous chapter, was appointed as secretary to the organisation in early 1917. By the end of that year, both Linda Kearns and Lily O'Brennan were acting as intelligence agents for Collins and his fellow IRB members. As Dolan and Murphy point out, by the end of 1917 Collins was both Treasurer of the IRB and Director of Organisation for the Irish Volunteers.[66] Therefore, those he recruited for intelligence duty were effectively working for one (or both) of those organisations. Like Kearns, O'Brennan's role in intelligence would evolve in line with the political and military situation in Ireland; she too was serving her apprenticeship in 1917. From that year onwards, she worked fulltime in a variety of advanced separatist organisations and republican bodies including Cumann na mBan and the First Dáil's Department of Labour. She stated that she continually worked for Collins on intelligence duties throughout the period – including the time during which she was employed by Markievicz's Department of Labour.[67] The INAAVDF proved to be a fruitful recruiting ground for Michael Collins as its committee, employees and volunteers were mainly women who were already committed to the separatist campaign. As adherents of separatist ideology, they made reliable, trustworthy couriers who often put themselves and their homes at the disposal of the movement.

Eily O'Hanrahan (1888-1974)

Eily O'Hanrahan, one of the founding committee members of the IVDF, secretly continued the IRB work of her executed brother, Michael, at the family home and business at 384 North Circular Road in Dublin.[68] Along with her brother Harry and her

[65] Sworn statement made by Lily O'Brennan to the Advisory Committee on 22 May 1936, p. 2, MSP34REF2229.
[66] Dolan and Murphy, *Michael Collins*, p. 89.
[67] Sworn statement made by Lily O'Brennan to the Advisory Committee on 22 May 1936, pp. 2-3, MSP34REF2229.
[68] Michael O'Hanrahan (executed on 4 May 1916) was Quartermaster of the 2nd Battalion of the Irish Volunteers.

two sisters, she stored documents, arms, ammunition, food and clothing there, and ran a clearing house for messages and despatches. These clandestine activities took place during the time she was a member of the committee of the INAAVDF.[69] The only primary sources available to the researcher on the activities of O'Hanrahan are those from the BMH and the MSP Collection. However, her name is frequently mentioned – and her work is referred to – by other female activists. Additionally, Piaras Béaslaí, in his biography of Michael Collins, refers to the O'Hanrahan family business. He notes that it was one of the places used by the Irish Volunteers and the IRA as despatch centres and storage sites for arms and ammunition.[70] O'Hanrahan stepped into the role vacated by her brother, Michael, and conducted this work alone for extended periods when her remaining brother, Harry, was either interned or jailed. Her two sisters, Áine and Máire, and her widowed mother looked after the family shop and the home, but they assisted her when necessary. She later described her home as a 'veritable arsenal' since 1917 owing to the amount of arms and ammunition held there.[71] The arms dump was in the roof of the house.[72] Although the house was raided many times in the later stages of the War of Independence, no arms were ever located by the military. Yet throughout this time, O'Hanrahan was storing arms for officers and taking weapons, when required, to men on active service. Many of those prominent in the reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers and the establishment of Michael Collins' intelligence organisation refer to the O'Hanrahan home as a safe place to leave urgent messages.[73] Ned Broy (the detective from G Division who later provided intelligence to Collins) stated that he was leaving messages there for the Irish Volunteers as early as August 1917, months before he formally became Collins' man inside the detective division of the DMP.[74] O'Hanrahan also stored files and documents for Diarmuid O'Hegarty, some of which she believed were taken from Dublin Castle.[75] In addition to being an arms dump and a despatch centre, the O'Hanrahan home also functioned as a safe house for 'on-the-runs,' and somewhere that wanted men could go for a meal or a change of clothes. The fact that she lived over the shop that functioned as the family business enabled O'Hanrahan to be present at that location both day and night. Moreover, the shop on the ground floor provided an excuse for the many comings and

[69] Sworn statement made by Eily O'Hanrahan O'Reilly before the MSP Advisory Committee, 22 May 1936, p. 4, MSP34REF17180.
[70] Piaras Béaslaí, *Michael Collins and the Making of a New Ireland, Volume I* (Dublin, 2008), p.272.
[71] Letter from Eily O'Reilly to Frank Aiken, TD, 22 March 1938, MSP34REF17180.
[72] Sworn statement made by Eily O'Hanrahan O'Reilly before MSP Advisory Committee, 30 March 1938, p. 7, MSP34REF17180.
[73] Seamus Finn, BMH WS 857, p. 4.
[74] Éamon Broy, BMH WS 1280, pp. 69-70.
[75] Eily O'Hanrahan O'Reilly, BMH WS270, p. 17.

goings during the day as despatches were dropped off and collected. Máire Comerford, in her unpublished memoirs, described the home life of the O'Hanrahan sisters as 'full of danger, excitement, service and financial sacrifice', and referring to the clandestine activities in the O'Hanrahan shop situated close to Mountjoy, she said:

> Behind their normal business they had opportunities to find out what was going on behind the high walls and iron gates; they were on the secret line of communication with prisoners.[76]

O'Hanrahan devoted her entire time to the Irish Volunteers and national aid organisations but even senior members of Cumann na mBan were unaware that she was still active as she had ceased to attend meetings and parades. From 1917 onwards, all O'Hanrahan's work was on behalf of the IRB and the Irish Volunteers, but due to the confidential nature of the work and the secrecy required, she was obliged to distance herself from Cumann na mBan. She stated that she was instructed to avoid any public appearances with that organisation but does not state from whom the instructions came.[77] However, the likelihood is that this order came from the individual within the Irish Volunteers or IRB who recruited her; many women who entered intelligence work tell of similar orders to absent themselves from overtly nationalist organisations. Unfortunately, this absence from Cumann na mBan caused her a considerable amount of difficulty in 1936 when she applied for a Military Service Pension as that organisation regarded her as a lapsed member from 1916.[78] The Cumann na mBan consultant to the MSP Committee advised them in relation to O'Hanrahan's case that 'She ceased to be a member of Cumann na mBan. If you don't attend your meetings you are not a member'.[79] O'Hanrahan was not the only former Cumann na mBan member working for the IRA who encountered difficulties with the MSP Board. Gertrude Murphy (née Colley) found herself in a similar situation. Her pension application was only approved upon the intervention of former IRA man Frank Henderson who testified on her behalf. 'A lot of these girls were told to drop out [of Cumann na mBan] and were thus a lot more useful'.[80] Although even the officers of Cumann na mBan had no inkling of the work that O'Hanrahan was engaged upon,

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[76] Unpublished memoir, chapter titled 'The Northside', undated, Máire Comerford Papers, LA18/20, UCDA.
[77] Sworn statement made by Eily O'Hanrahan O'Reilly before Advisory Committee of MSP Board, 30 March 1938, MSP34REF17180.
[78] Sworn statement made by Miss M. Kennedy on behalf of Mrs O'Hanrahan O'Reilly, 1 October 1936, MSP34REF17180.
[79] Sworn statement made by Miss M. Kennedy on behalf of Mrs O'Hanrahan O'Reilly, 1 October 1936, MSP34REF17180.
[80] Sworn evidence given on behalf of Gertrude Murphy by Frank Henderson, 29 October 1936, MSP34REF2293.

another former Cumann na mBan woman engaged on similar work, Éilis Ní Ríain, stepped forward to verify O'Hanrahan's claims.[81] Additionally, Diarmuid O'Hegarty, Greg Murphy, Oscar Traynor and other prominent members of the Irish Volunteers and/or IRA during that time period also contacted the MSP board on her behalf: 'During the re-organisation period we continuously made use of Mrs. O'Reilly's service in various ways and especially in collecting information and correspondence from our intelligence agents… I can certify that much valuable information was collected through her agency'.[82] Following an appeal by O'Hanrahan, she was called for another interview with the MSP Board. O'Hanrahan was consistent in her statements during a lengthy and robust meeting and referred throughout to her role as an intelligence officer.[83] Her appeal was upheld, and she was later rewarded an MSP albeit at the lower end of the scale at Grade E.

Kathleen Brennan (1897-1951)

As reorganisation of the Irish Volunteers and the IRB gained pace in 1917, the demand for safe, secure places to leave verbal and written messages increased. While the O'Hanrahan household was useful due to its proximity to Mountjoy Prison, too much movement around the premises increased the risk of discovery. Consequently, additional contact points were essential, preferably ones free from suspicion. Fortunately, the perfect candidate moved into business premises adjacent to the O'Hanrahan home in 1917. Kathleen Brennan, who was the courier used by Pearse to carry news of the impending Rising to Tullamore in 1916, moved into 392 North Circular Road in Phibsborough and opened a shop. Brennan was not affiliated with any nationalist organisation, in fact she had been instructed by both Austin Stack and Countess Markievicz to 'keep aloof from the Cumann na mBan' and subsequently did so.[84] Her position highlights the nuanced circumstances that existed between women who were active on behalf of the IRA and had no affiliation to Cumann na mBan, and those like Eily O'Hanrahan who absented herself from that organisation to take up work of this nature. Women with a prior affiliation to Cumann na mBan often had difficulty in

[81] Letter from Éilis Uí Chonaill (née Ní Ríain) on behalf of Eily O'Hanrahan O'Reilly to MSP board, 21 May 1936, MSP34REF17180.
[82] Letter from Gregory Murphy to MSP Board re activities of Eily O'Hanrahan O'Reilly, 21 May 1936, MSP34REF17180.
[83] Sworn statement made before the advisory committee by Mrs Eily O'Hanrahan O'Reilly, 30 March 1938 (Appeal), pp. 1-16, MSP34REF17180.
[84] Letter from Kathleen Brennan to MSP Board, undated, probably 1939. Also sworn statement made before the advisory committee on 6 November 1939, MSP34REF58865. Austin Stack was the IRB 'centre' in Kerry; also see Fearghal McGarry, *The Rising*, p.46.

having their service recognised for pension purposes as discussed earlier. Moreover, McCarthy argues convincingly that the IRA used Cumann na mBan as a source to provide 'a pool of republican women into which the IRA could dip if required.'[85] Indeed, when women were required for one-off military engagements they were usually mobilised for duty through a branch officer, or contacted directly by a member of the Irish Volunteers or the IRA. However, it is important to differentiate between women on full-time duty, such as Kearns, Brennan, O'Hanrahan etc., and those who were occasionally employed to move arms, ammunition or carry dispatches. Those on full-time duty, by the very nature of their work, had to remain apart from any association with political or military groups. Additionally, the available evidence shows that these women were usually working for and with the leadership of the IRA, rather than conducting occasional work for rank and file members. Therefore, secrecy and discretion were of paramount importance. Consequently, it was rare for women working with the IRA to be members of Cumann na mBan. This instruction to remain away from overtly political organisations is common to almost all the accounts of women who became active politically and militarily during this period. The obvious reason was to avoid the suspicions of the authorities and it was a ploy that worked in almost all the cases discussed. In the case of Brennan, her brothers were active in the Irish Volunteers both in Tullamore and in Dublin, but she appeared to avoid the attention of the authorities following her move to Phibsborough. Previously, she was the proprietor of a restaurant on Sarsfield Quay in Dublin that she claimed was raided by the military after the arrest of her brothers in 1916.[86] It seems likely that those raids were solely due to the activities of her brothers, Seamus and Frank Brennan, as no military or police troubled her from 1917 through to 1920. This seems rather remiss of the authorities as many well-known Irish Volunteers and IRA men were sheltered there while others used it as an observation post for the adjacent Mountjoy prison.[87] George Plunkett based himself there during the Thomas Ashe hunger strike in September 1917 to watch movements to and from the prison as windows on the upper floor of her premises offered a clear view to the prison entrance.[88] Brennan also played an important role in monitoring the condition of hunger-strikers in Mountjoy during the 1917 strike. She frequently met with prison warders to get information on the health

[85] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, p.128.
[86] Sworn statement made by Kathleen Brennan before the MSP Board Advisory Committee, 6 November 1939, p. 2, MSP34REF58865.
[87] Sworn statement made by Kathleen Brennan to the MSP Board Advisory Committee, 6 November 1939, MSP34REF58865.
[88] George Plunkett was the brother of Joseph Plunkett, executed after the 1916 Rising, and the son of Count Noble Plunkett, who took the IPP seat for Sinn Féin in the North Roscommon by-election in 1917.

and morale of those on hunger strike and passed this information on to Plunkett.[89] On other occasions, Brennan, on the instructions of Peadar Clancy, watched the movement of prisoners to and from Mountjoy and reported any information back to General Headquarters (GHQ).[90] Her premises were frequented by prison warders and Brennan encouraged their business. She stated that from 1919 onwards, warders sympathetic to the republican cause called frequently to the shop and left letters and notes from prisoners with her. She named Scally, Murray, Bailey, Breslin and Finlay as the warders who were her most regular contacts.[91] Any notes and letters she received from these men were usually passed on to prominent Irish Volunteers such as Peadar Clancy or Seán Tracey.[92] On some occasions it was necessary to have messages brought in to the prison so Brennan would either call to the prison herself and request a visit with the appropriate prisoner, or arrange the message to be passed on by one of her group of friendly warders. She stated that during 1918, messages from prisoners for Michael Collins were brought out of the prison two or three times a week. The warders left the documents with her and they were normally collected from the shop; some warders - although not all - required payment for their services. Brennan so successfully cultivated her friendships with warders that 'on several occasions the crowds outside Mountjoy Prison almost mobbed me for my apparent friendliness with the enemy forces'.[93] Corroborating evidence to support her account of sympathetic prison warders can be located in many BMH Witness Statements and in several contemporaneous secondary sources.[94] In addition to intelligence work and despatch clearing, from 1918 onwards Brennan also stored arms and ammunition in the roof of her premises.[95] She estimated that she stored about twelve rifles and a quantity of revolvers for a period of two or three months; these were eventually removed by Frank Harding, who was Quartermaster of the 1st Battalion of the Dublin Brigade Irish

[89] Sworn statement made by Kathleen Brennan to the Advisory Committee of the MSP Board, 6 November 1939, continuation p. 1, MSP34REF58865.
[90] Peadar Clancy was a native of Clare who fought with the Four Courts Garrison in 1916 and subsequently became the O/C of Munitions with the Dublin Brigade, IRA.
[91] Summary of evidence of Kathleen Brennan, 6 November 1939, p. 2 and letter from her to MSP Board, undated, MSP34REF58865.
[92] Tracey was a member of the IRB who spent time in jail when he was arrested in the aftermath of the 1916 Rising. A native of Tipperary, he was an associate of Dan Breen, Séamus Robinson and Seán Hogan.
[93] Letter from Kathleen Brennan to MSP Board, undated, probably 1939, MSP34REF58865.
[94] See Béaslaí, *Michael Collins, Volume II*, p.63. Also see Paddy O'Daly, BMH WS387, pp. 4-5; Seán MacKeon, BMH WS1716, p. 194 relates how Warder Breslin was complicit in his (McKeon's) escape attempt from Mountjoy.
[95] Sworn statement made by Kathleen Brennan to MSP Board Advisory Committee, 6 November 1939, p. 5, MSP34REF58865.

Volunteers until his arrest in 1919.[96] Despite a wealth of references from IRA officers supporting her claim, Brennan was only awarded a pension at Grade E. There is no indication in the notes made by the referees or the advisory committee as to why she did not merit a higher pension. However, a hand-written note in the file expresses some surprise and concern at Brennan's position vis-à-vis Cumann na mBan. The note states:

> On further examination of this file I find that the applicant does not claim Cumann na mBan service at all. She claims she was 'attached' to G.H.Q. – was responsible to Mr Austin Stack E.W. 1916 & subsequently other I.R.A. officers – and had no contact with C. Ban.[97]

Perhaps the individual assessors within the MSP Board who examined Brennan's case in 1939 had not encountered women claiming IRA service yet. There is a sense of incredulity about their response to her application, yet the references supporting her claim were exemplary. She did not appeal against the grade awarded to her, possibly because other correspondence in the file indicates that she was in difficult financial circumstances. Nonetheless, it seemed a poor acknowledgement of the work that Brennan accomplished as the IRA messenger between Mountjoy jail and the outside world.

Celia Collins (1890-1959)

Shops owned and run by women, particularly women without any openly nationalist connections, functioned well as 'republican post offices' because they largely escaped the attentions of the police and military. The sobriquet 'republican post offices' was coined by Piaras Béaslaí in his work *Michael Collins and the Making of a New Ireland* to describe premises used 'as clearing houses for letters, documents and (in some cases) arms and equipment'.[98] While some of the more prominent women associated with Cumann na mBan or Sinn Féin were under surveillance by the authorities, women who kept their nationalist sympathies to themselves generally succeeded in avoiding detection. In 1918, Michael Collins approached Celia Collins (no relation), the owner of a business premises at 65 Parnell Street in Dublin's city centre.[99] Celia's husband

[96] For information on Frank Harding, who died prior to the MSP Board was established, see sworn statement made before the Advisory Committee by James Murray, 22 June 1936, p. 2, MSP34REF21495.
[97] Note in Kathleen Brennan MSP file dated 15 November 1940, initialled 'OK', MSP34REF58865.
[98] Béaslaí, *Michael Collins, Volume I*, p.272.
[99] Sworn statement by Celia Collins to MSP Board, 9 May 1946, MSP34REF60813.

Maurice was an IRB man who had a long acquaintance with Michael Collins stretching back to when they both joined in IRB in London around 1909.[100] From mid-1918 Maurice Collins was mostly on the run, but his wife, Celia, and her sister Anna looked after the business. They ran a dairy and a tobacconist shop with a billiard hall to the rear so the sight of men coming and going from the premises at all hours of the day drew little attention. Additionally, the shop and billiard hall were in close proximity to Vaughan's Hotel and Devlin's Bar, two more ad-hoc meeting places for Collins and his coterie of intelligence officers in training. Several times a day, Michael Collins, Joe O'Reilly (his adjutant) or other trusted associates would call to the business owned by Mrs Collins and either deposit or collect messages; some verbal, some written. When organisers arrived in Dublin from the country, frequently, their first port of call was Collins' tobacconist shop. Collins stressed to the MSP Board that she was never a member of Cumann na mBan; possibly this absence of any connection with an overtly nationalist organisation is something that made her home and business an attractive location for processing sensitive information. Furthermore, as her husband was already known to the authorities, it was only prudent for her to remain publicly unconnected to nationalist groups. Sometimes meetings were held in an upstairs room there, but by the conscription crisis of 1918, the premises were used only as a clearing house for dispatches. Occasionally packages arrived for Hubert Kearns, who acted as ammunition courier at the time.[101] Collins stated that she never asked what was in the packages as they were usually collected promptly, but she was aware that she was taking risks. In an interview with the MSP board in 1946, she stated that she was involved in intelligence work for Michael Collins and was taking her orders from GHQ officers.[102] Her testimony for the period prior to the War of Independence was confirmed by Piaras Béaslaí. He confirmed that her business 'was largely used as a means of communication by Michael Collins and members of his staff'.[103] He also described it as 'a kind of I.R.A. Post Office'.[104] Indeed, Béaslaí refers to both the O'Hanrahans' and Maurice and Celia Collins' shop as businesses that fulfilled this

[100] See Hart, *Mick,* p.65 for details of how Michael Collins was sworn into the IRB in 1909. Also see BMH WS 550, p. 5, Maurice Collins re his introduction to the IRB at the same time and his close friendship with Michael Collins.
[101] Sworn Evidence given by Kathleen O'Donovan (née Boland) to the MSP Advisory Committee, 29 May 1946, MSP34REF60813. Hubert (Hugh) Kearns was on the staff of the QMG (Quartermaster General) and was responsible for the distribution of arms and ammunition.
[102] Sworn evidence given by Celia Collins before the MSP Referee and Advisory Committee, 29 May 1946, p. 10. MSP34REF60813.
[103] Letter from Piaras Béaslaí to MSP Board, 27 May 1946, MSP34REF60813.
[104] Letter from Piaras Béaslaí to MSP Board, 27 May 1946, MSP34REF60813.

role.[105] Like many women providing this type of service to the Irish Volunteers, Collins found that her workload – and the danger associated with it - increased upon the outbreak of the War of Independence; this will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Nora Wallace (1893-1970) and Sheila Wallace (1892-1944)

While Celia Collins and others provided these services to the Volunteers in Dublin, women were also recruited in other Irish cities and towns. Possibly one of the most important establishment in the south of the country was the shop owned by Sheila and Nora Wallace on Brunswick Street (now Augustine Street) in Cork city. The newspaper and tobacconist shop run by the Wallace sisters became what was described as 'the centre for the receipt and issue of despatches, the point of touch for verbal messages, and… the Brigade headquarters for operations in the city area.'[106] The women made the rooms at the back of the shop available to the officers of the Irish Volunteers for brigade meetings and ensured that all messages that were left at the premises – written or verbal – were delivered safely to their intended recipients. The sisters also lived on the premises and so were effectively on duty day and night, seven days a week. When they applied for recognition of their services under the 1934 Military Service Pensions Act, their applications initially puzzled those who assessed them. Both women claimed service as members of the Irish Volunteers and the IRA rather than with Cumann na mBan and this created a flurry of correspondence to ascertain which division of the forces in which they actually served.[107] In response to a query from the Department of Defence, Tomás Crofts replied, 'Miss Nora Wallace was in actual fact a member of the I.R.A. from 1916 to 1922'.[108] The same response was received to the query from another correspondent, Seán Hegarty, who also stressed that Sheila Wallace had served in the IRA alongside Nora.[109] Hegarty was former O/C of the Cork No. 1 Brigade and acknowledged that the Wallaces' shop was the Brigade headquarters and was the centre of republican activity in the city of Cork. Hegarty did not exaggerate; all Brigade intelligence for Cork city was routed through the Wallaces' premises. Messages and copies of coded telegrams extracted from the military and

[105] Béaslaí, *Michael Collins, Volume I*, p.272.
[106] Letter from Seán O'Hegarty, re Nora Wallace, 21 May 1934, MSP34D2124, File 1RB1721.
[107] Letter from T. Markham, Rúnaí, Department of Defence to Seán Hegarty and Tomás Crofts re Nora Wallace, 18 May 1934, MSP34D2124, File 1RB1721.
[108] Letter from Tomás Crofts to Secretary, MSP Board re Nora Wallace, 24 May 1934, MSP34D2124, File 1RB1721.
[109] Letter from Seán O'Hegarty to MSP Board re Nora Wallace, 21 May 1934, MSP34D2124, File 1RB1721.

RIC were dropped off directly with the Wallace sisters.[110] Dissemination of intelligence information appears to have been one of the main responsibilities of the sisters; Cumann na mBan woman Anna Hurley-O'Mahoney confirmed that GHQ despatches were received via the Wallaces.[111] These despatches were either picked up by members of the Brigade or, if urgent, were delivered to the appropriate person by one of the women. The discipline and efficiency of the sisters was recognised by their senior officers during the War of Independence, and as John Borgonovo points out, Sheila Wallace was promoted by Florrie O'Donoghue (Cork No. 1 Brigade's head of intelligence) to Brigade Communications Officer.[112] Nora 'acted as a conduit' between the IRA and their key spy inside Cork's Victoria Barracks, and ensured that all sensitive information reached the Brigade officers.[113] The Wallace sisters remained apart from any obvious association with Cumann na mBan and this is probably what enabled them to stay beneath suspicion, certainly until the last part of the War of Independence. The services provided by them were acknowledged to be of such importance that the women were both granted Military Service Pensions at Grade D, this was the award given to a Divisional, GHQ or Medical Officer.[114]

Nan Phelan (1884-1966)

Nan Phelan returned to her native Cork from London in August 1916 along with two revolvers which she 'pinched' from her then employer, Major Franks.[115] She moved back into the family home on Douglas Street ostensibly to look after her aging mother. The family owned the 3-story building in which they resided and to provide additional income, they rented out part of the ground floor to a barber while they retained the living accommodation overhead. Phelan was a widow and her brother, Michael Murphy, was O/C of the 2nd Battalion, Cork No. 1 Brigade.[116] In 1918, he constructed a dugout to conceal arms and ammunition on the ground floor of the family premises. As he was out at work during the day, Phelan took over management of the dugout/arms

[110] Leo Buckley, BMH WS1714, pp. 4-5.
[111] Anna Hurley-O'Mahoney, BMH WS540, p.1.
[112] Borgonovo, 'Codename "G":' p. 132.
[113] Borgonovo, 'Codename "G":', p. 133.
[114] See 'Rules for determining the grades of rank in the Forces' in Crowe (ed), *Guide to the Military Service Pensions Collection,* p. 175.
[115] Sworn statement made before the Advisory Committee of MSP Board by Mrs. Nan Phelan, 4 March 1939, p. 1, MSP34REF57668.
[116] Nan Phelan's maiden name was Julia Ann Murphy. Her marital status is listed as 'widow'. She had a daughter, Maureen Phelan. No record of her husband's death has been located to date, nor has it been possible to ascertain if she was widowed prior to her return to Ireland.

dump and stored rifles, revolvers, bombs and grenades there.[117] For the next two years, she managed the inventory of arms and ammunition, supplying weapons as required and then storing the items again after use. The dugout was positioned in a hallway that gave access to the rear of the barber shop and the stairway to the family home. Men could enter through the barber shop doors as though they were having a shave or a haircut, then slip out into the back hall and retrieve or dispose of their arms. This arrangement kept suspicion away from the family home as the separate front door to their living accommodation was never used by those needing the arms dump. Phelan stated that by 1920, the Douglas Street area was 'getting too hot', consequently she found a house at Fitzgerald's Place in the city and her brother constructed another arms dump there.[118] She was solely responsible for the second dump which held large quantities of arms as well as papers and documents; frequently she would carry grenades, bombs and weapons to the site of ambushes if it was not possible for them to be collected.[119] Phelan remained above suspicion throughout the period even though she cultivated friendships with the wives of RIC men and was successful in getting information from them about proposed raids. This information was, in turn, passed on to the Irish Volunteers or IRA and as a result several wanted men evaded arrest.[120] During the course of the War of Independence, Phelan made two trips to London to procure revolvers and ammunition to replenish her arms dump.[121] She brought several despatches back and forth and returned to Ireland with ten revolvers; the procurement of arms was facilitated by Mary Egan, a friend of Phelan's from the time she was resident in London.[122] Egan was a member of the IRA in London and her involvement and activities will be discussed later in this chapter. Despite the extent of Phelan's clandestine activities, she drew no unwelcome attention from either the police or military and was never arrested. Additionally, she was so circumspect about her connection with the Irish Volunteers and the IRA that there is no record of this outside the files of the MSPC. However, within these files, are several letters from IRA men in Cork testifying to Phelan's work for them. One states that 'she was actively connected

[117] Sworn statement made before the Advisory Committee of MSP Board by Mrs. Nan Phelan, 4 March 1939, p. 1. MSP34REF57668.
[118] Sworn statement made before the Advisory Committee of MSP Board by Mrs. Nan Phelan, 4 March 1939, p. 2. MSP34REF57668.
[119] Sworn statement made before the Advisory Committee of MSP Board by Mrs. Nan Phelan, 4 March 1939, p. 3-4 and letter from Pat Collins to MSP Board on behalf of Nan Phelan, undated but probably February 1939, MSP34REF57668.
[120] Letter from Denis Hegarty to MSP Board on behalf of Nan Phelan, 28 February 1939 and letter from Michael Murphy to MSP Board, 2 March 1939, MSP34REF57668.
[121] Continuation of sworn statement made by Nan Phelan on 4 March 1939, p. 3, MSP34REF57668.
[122] Letter from Mary Egan, undated but probably February or March 1939. MSP34REF57668.

with the IRA during the Tan and Civil War periods'.[123] Another states that she was 'closely connected with the I.R.A. activities' in her brother's brigade.[124] The internal notes made by the referees at the MSP reveal that they held Phelan's pension application for discussion with Volunteer Officers, noting – from a conversation with Cumann na mBan representatives - that she was never a member of that organisation.[125] Having satisfied themselves as to the veracity of her application, she was subsequently awarded a pension at Grade E; the accompanying documentation is stamped 'Óglaigh na hÉireann' to indicate the military body in which she served.[126] The tendency towards silence and secrecy, while a great asset to those involved with proscribed organisations, can be challenging to the historian researching the subject decades or even a century later. Women who took advantage of their employer to procure intelligence information, for example, were most unlikely to speak about it, particularly if they continued to work in the same profession or job in the years that followed. Women who worked in post offices, the civil service or for the railway network tended to be tight-lipped about their association with revolutionary organisations as these jobs were viewed as 'permanent and pensionable'.[127] Yet, despite the danger - not only to their jobs, but potentially their lives - some women agreed to supply information or to act as conduits for information for the Irish Volunteers.

Frances Brady (1897-1977)

Frances Brady came from an affluent family background; her father was a Manchester-born linen merchant and her mother was from Meath. Brady was the second eldest of four girls and two boys; the girls were educated at the Loreto Convent boarding school in Balbriggan near Dublin. The 1901 census shows that the family were living in a large house on Kirkliston Drive in Belfast.[128] It was rated as a 1st class house with nine rooms and nine windows to the front. A children's maid was employed and lived with the family. By 1911 they had moved to a larger thirteen-roomed property at Alexandra Park in Hollywood, County Down.[129] Brady's father, James, was a nationalist and a

[123] Letter from Tom Crofts to MSP Board, 1 March 1939, MSP34REF57668.
[124] Letter from Denis Hegarty to MSP Board, 28 February 1939, MSP34REF57668.
[125] Notes made during MSP Board's meeting with Mrs Lucey and Mrs O'Donovan, 1 May 1939, MSP34REF57668.
[126] Form MSP/34/2 in MSP34REF57668.
[127] See Rosemary Cullen Owens, *A Social History of Women in Ireland 1870-1970* (Dublin, 2005), pp. 231-2.
[128] 1901 Census, NAI. http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai000720456/
[129] 1911 Census, NAI. http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai002211223/

supporter of the IPP.[130] However, his aunt, Eleanor Brady, had a more militant outlook. She offered safe refuge to escaped Fenians in Manchester in 1867.[131] The Brady daughters all seemed to espouse their grand-aunt's views as both Kathleen and Frances became embroiled in the War of Independence.[132] Another two daughters, Mary and Beatrice, moved to Dublin and became active members of the University Branch of Cumann na mBan.[133] In 1917, Frances Brady was working in the British War Office in London; she was based in the department which dealt with censorship of letters, predominantly those sent to and from German citizens living in Britain and German prisoners of war. During the summer of 1917 while she was holidaying in Donegal and in Dublin, she met Fintan Murphy who in turn introduced her to Michael Collins.[134] Brady agreed to commence working for Collins upon her return to the War Office; from then until June 1919 she supplied Collins with copies of all confidential documents to which she had access including information on so-called 'blacklists' - documents dealing with the treatment of prisoners of war and most importantly, lists of people whose mail was allowed through uncensored.[135] A secure courier line for correspondence was established between Dublin and both Brady and Art O Bríain in London.[136] She then supplied Collins with samples of the glazed writing paper that was issued to prisoners of war and internees. Collins had replicas of this paper made and sent letters back to Brady which she inserted into sacks that had already been censored. By this method, people in Germany and neutral countries with whom the IRB wished to make contact could receive their mail uncensored.[137] When despatches arrived for O Bríain or others working with him in London, these were brought to him personally by Brady. Her employment with the postal censorship division ceased when that department closed in June 1919 and she returned to Belfast. By July 1919 she was working with the IRA in Belfast carrying despatches to and from Dublin on their

[130] *Irish Independent*, 13 May 1977, p. 6.
[131] *Nenagh Guardian*, 21 May 1977, p. 7.
[132] See Kathleen Brady, MSP34REF57568 and Frances Brady Cooney, MSP34REF57744.
[133] See Appendix to BMH WS1752: Members of the University Branch, p. 2. Eileen MacCarvill (née McGrane). Beatrice Brady was appointed as an Auditor to the Dáil Department of Local Government on 1 August 1921, See T.J. McArdle, BMH WS501. She later became Prioress of the Carmelite Order at Tranquilla, Knock; see Annie O'Brien, BMH WS805.
[134] Letter from Fintan Murphy to MSP Board, 26 January 1942 re Frances Brady Cooney, MSP34REF57744.
[135] Sworn statement made by Frances Brady Cooney before Advisory Committee, 12 July 1940, p. 1. MSP34REF57744.
[136] Keiko Inoue 'O'Brien, Arthur Patrick Donovan' *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a6508
[137] Sworn statement made by Frances Brady Cooney before Advisory Committee, 12 July 1940, p. 1. MSP34REF57744.

behalf.[138] Her sister, Kathleen, had a flat at 46 Leeson Street and this became the point of contact for the Brady sisters with IRA and GHQ officers in Dublin.[139] Brady continued to move back and forth between Dublin and Belfast until December 1920 when she moved to Dublin to begin working full-time with Constance Markievicz's Department of Labour. She was appointed to work on the Belfast Boycott by Joe MacDonagh and therefore spent much of her time travelling to different parts of the country to ensure that the boycott was being maintained.[140] During her travels, she continued to carry despatches as well as small arms and ammunition. Brady did not attract the attention of the military until June 1921 when she was caught in possession of a firearm and seditious documents at the home she shared with her sister. She was subsequently charged under the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act (ROIA) (1920), court-martialled and sentenced to 2 years imprisonment.[141] She later made a claim for an MSP and was awarded a pension at Grade D. Although her service was acknowledged as highly valuable to the IRA, and all her senior officers were IRA men, she was not recognised as a member of the IRA. Nor did she self-identify as a member of the IRA. The internal memo 'Observations on Service' in her MSP file, bears the intriguing line 'No knowledge of Cumann na mBan'.[142] The MSP Board, while awarding her a pension equivalent to that of Brigade Officer, allocated her service to neither Cumann na mBan nor the IRA. Instead, the division of the forces under which she served is listed as 'None'; no explanation was provided on the documentation for this unusual entry.

Mary Egan (1875-1956)

Mary Egan, Irish by birth but living in London, became involved with the Irish Volunteers in 1917 according to a statement she gave to the MSP Board.[143] Egan claims that her superior officer was Sam Maguire and that during this period her main duties concerned the welfare of prisoners and internees.[144] The likelihood is that Egan was mostly associated with the INRF at that particular time; firstly, because of her role

[138] Sworn statement made by Frances Brady Cooney before Advisory Committee, 12 July 1940, p. 2. MSP34REF57744.
[139] Sworn statement made by Frances Brady Cooney before Advisory Committee, 12 July 1940, p. 2. MSP34REF57744.
[140] Continuation of sworn statement made by Frances Brady Cooney before Advisory Committee, 12 July 1940, p. 1. MSP34REF57744.
[141] See Court Martial Charge Sheet in MSP34REF57744.
[142] Observations on Service, Form R18, 3 June 1942, MSP34REF57744.
[143] Mary Egan, Application to the Minister for Defence for a Service Certificate, 30 April 1937, p .4, MSPC34REF55889.
[144] Mary Egan, Application to the Minister for Defence for a Service Certificate, 30 April 1937, p .4, MSPC34REF55889.

with prisoner and internee welfare, and secondly, because as Gerard Noonan points out, the Irish Volunteers were virtually moribund in Britain during 1916-1918.[145] Conscription had removed many Irishmen of fighting age and those who wished to avoid being conscripted into the army had returned to Ireland and participated in the 1916 Rising. However, by 1917, the IRB in London had reorganised and had already commenced gunrunning activities under the supervision of Seán McGrath – one of Egan's supporters in her pursuit of a Military Service Pension.[146] She was already known to the leading figures in the Irish separatist movement (including McGrath) by the time the War of Independence started in January 1919 and she appeared to have been active for some time. Mick Murphy, brother of Nan Phelan, pointed out that Egan was involved with advanced nationalism as early as 1914.[147] Her main role appears to be in the area of arms procurement as she kept one of the main arms dumps in London for the Irish Volunteers and later the IRA. Egan never joined Cumann na mBan, but appeared to be attached to a military organisation as from early 1919 through to his death in 1922, Reggie Dunne, the O/C of the London IRA was her superior officer.[148] Her MSP file demonstrates that her home in North London became the hub of IRA activities during this period. Members of the IRA's Cork Brigade were directed towards Egan in 1919 to facilitate them with the importation of arms to Ireland. From February 1920 she was supplying them with 'large quantities of arms and ammunition… including two Lewis Guns'.[149] Egan does not indicate the origin of the weapons, but Murphy states that she purchased them on behalf of his Cork No. 1 Brigade.[150] Cork IRA Officer Michael O'Brien who spent time in London on business, also acknowledged Egan's key role in the procurement of the Lewis guns, stating 'To Mrs Egan must go full credit for this'.[151] Furthermore, Egan was the main point of contact for people travelling from Ireland wishing to make contact with the leaders in London.[152] When necessary, she harboured men on the run from Ireland and nursed wounded Volunteers back to

[145] Gerard Noonan, *The IRA in Britain, 1919-1923* (Liverpool, 2014), pp. 27-8. Noonan argues that the only active areas were Glasgow and Liverpool.
[146] See Noonan, *The IRA in Britain*, p. 28. Also see letter from Seán McGrath to MSP Board re Mary Egan, 19 May 1938, MSPC34REF55889.
[147] Letter from Mick Murphy to MSP Board on behalf of Mary Egan, 23 May 1938, p. 1, MSP34REF55889.
[148] Reggie Dunne was hanged for his part in the assassination of Sir Henry Wilson in June 1922; arguably the incident that triggered the Irish Civil War.
[149] Statement from Michael O'Brien to MSP Board re Mary Egan, undated but possibly May 1938, MSPC34REF55889.
[150] Letter from Mick Murphy to MSP Board on behalf of Mary Egan, 23 May 1938, p. 2, MSP34REF55889.
[151] Statement from Michael O'Brien to MSP Board re Mary Egan, undated but possibly May 1938, MSPC34REF55889.
[152] Letter from Billy Ahern (former O/C in London from 1922) to Tom Crofts re Mary Egan, 24 May 1938, MSPC34REF55889.

health.[153] She successfully evaded interest from the authorities throughout the War of Independence although that changed upon the outbreak of the Civil War in Ireland.[154] She claimed – and was granted – service as a member of the Irish Volunteers and the IRA and was awarded a pension at Grade D.[155] The documentation shows that her service was acknowledged to be within the ranks of the London Battalion of the IRA.

Margaret Frewen (1901-1986)

Margaret Frewen ran the Eason's book stall at Limerick Junction train station in county Tipperary selling books, periodicals and newspapers. In August 1918 she was introduced to John Mulligan, a member of the Intelligence Division of the Irish Volunteers. He was a ticket checker on the railway and therefore travelled from Dublin to Limerick Junction and back every day. Mulligan asked her if she was willing to receive, retain and forward dispatches to the various active centres around the train station.[156] He may have known that her brother was already a member of the IRA and that it was likely that she would cooperate. Frewen agreed to the proposition and from then on worked for the Irish Volunteers and IRA Intelligence under the cover of her bookstall. It was the ideal business for despatch clearing purposes as men and women could come and go from the stall without raising suspicion. They could converse and pass information verbally or in writing while a newspaper and money changed hands. Furthermore, Limerick Junction was the main station linking transport to Dublin, Cork, Kerry, Tipperary and Limerick so despatches and intelligence documents were processed in a timely and efficient manner. Frewen was aware of the importance of her work and pointed out to the MSP Board that her post at Limerick Junction was the primary link in the communication line between Dublin and Munster. 'The centre I was in charge of was the only centre of communication for the above-mentioned areas, therefore communication was impossible otherwise'.[157] As the conflict developed, so too did Frewen's work. She stored arms and ammunition, supplied intelligence information regarding impending military raids and acted as a local guide for couriers

[153] Letter from Mick Murphy (Former O/C 2nd Battalion Cork No. 1 Brigade) to MSP Board, 23 May 1938, MSPC34REF55889.
[154] In 1923 she was deported from Britain and interned in Mountjoy Jail and the North Dublin Union.
[155] Service Certificate, MSP34/3 in file 34D1455, Mary Egan, MSP34REF55889.
[156] Letter from John Mulligan to MSP Board re Margaret Breen (née Frewen), 18 April 1942, MSP34REF5023.
[157] Letter from Margaret Breen (née Frewen) to MSP Board, 22 October 1940, MSP34REF5023.

who needed to get in touch with the local active units.[158] She was regarded by her peers as 'an active member of the Intelligence in South Tipperary', and her work was highly valued.[159] The former Adjutant of the Tipperary 3rd Brigade confirmed to the MSP Board that Frewen was attached to GHQ Intelligence and was the conduit for despatches to and from Dublin for that Brigade.[160] Furthermore, Dan Breen acknowledged that she was the person 'in charge' at Limerick Junction for all despatches passing through there.[161] She was the 'clearing-house' for all of Breen's despatches in the wake of Soloheadbeg.[162] Summarising her sworn evidence, the MSP Board noted that she was not a member of Cumann na mBan. They acknowledged the quality and extent of the intelligence that she supplied which included information on the movement of prisoners and details of military personnel travelling by rail.[163] Furthermore, Andrew Kennedy, who worked with the traffic department at Limerick Junction train station from January 1919, confirmed Frewen's central role in the management of the IRA's intelligence system there:

> Very often, when I brought a letter to the bookstall which might be intended for the O/C, South Tipperary Brigade, the two R.I.C. Detective Officers, Fox and Cadogan who frequented the station, were leaning over the bookstall, but they never seemed to suspect that messages were being passed because it was done so openly.[164]

Frewen revealed that this method of disseminating intelligence information proved to be successful for the greater part of the War of Independence. However, later in the conflict the bookstall on the platform came to the attention of the military and she was searched several times by them. Although she was brought in for questioning on two occasions, she was never detained and proved to be a very successful recruit for GHQ Intelligence. She applied for an MSP based on her service from August 1918, but despite the support of prominent IRA leaders, including Dan Breen (no relation), her initial claim was rejected. She successfully appealed the ruling and was granted a pension at Grade E. Curiously, although the referees noted that

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[158] Summary of sworn evidence given by Margaret Breen (née Frewen) before the interviewing officers, 16 January 1942, MSP34REF5023.
[159] Letter from J.A. Mooney to MSP Board re Margaret Breen (née Frewen), 23 January 1942, MSP34REF5023.
[160] Letter from Thomas Lynch to MSP Board re Margaret Breen (née Frewen), 13 January 1942, MSP34REF5023.
[161] Letter from Dan Breen to MSP Board re Margaret Breen (née Frewen), 21 October 1940, MSP34REF5023.
[162] Dan Breen, *My Fight for Irish Freedom* (Tralee, 1964), p. 55.
[163] Summary of sworn evidence given by Margaret Breen (née Frewen) before the interviewing officers, 16 January 1942, MSP34REF5023.
[164] Andrew Kennedy, BMH WS963, p. 5.

'Mrs Breen was not a member of Cumann na mBan', and that she served with HQ of 3rd Tipperary Brigade, her service certificate bears the stamp 'Cumann na mBan' on the section of the certificate indicating the 'Forces in which active service was rendered'.[165] Such anomalies within the files of the MSPC heighten the challenge for historians attempting to ascertain the number of women who claimed active service within the IRA. However, in Frewen's case, the evidence within the files demonstrate that she claimed for work which she identified as intelligence duty undertaken for and on behalf of the IRA. Furthermore, she was identified by her peers within the ranks of the IRA as someone who served with that organisation. Therefore, consideration must be given to the possibility that the documents within the files of the MSPC may occasionally bear the stamp 'Cumann na mBan' on the applications of women who were politically and militarily active within the IRA.

Marian Tobin (1870-1955)

A similar pattern of recruitment by the Irish Volunteers Intelligence team was repeated in several parts of the country; firstly, a house or business owned or run by a woman sympathetic to 'the movement' was identified. Secondly, the woman had to be free of any overt connection with any republican organisation and thirdly, if she was willing to accept the associated risks, she undertook to perform the duties of a 'Republican Postmistress' or provide safe lodgings from her home and business. Marian Tobin made her home in the small townland of Tincurry, County Tipperary, available to members of the Irish Volunteers from 1917 onwards. Tincurry House was a large period building with extensive farmland. It was the home of the Tobin family and was inherited by Marian and her three children upon the death of her husband, James, in 1918. It has not been possible to establish the cause of his death at the relatively young age of fifty, but he was later described as 'an officer in the Volunteers', and it appears that his widow shared his separatist views.[166] The 1911 census returns show that Tincurry House had thirteen windows to the front and was designated a 1st class property.[167] The Tobins had two farm servants and a general domestic servant living on the property and assisting with the running of the farm and the house. Marian Tobin appeared to be a capable woman fondly described by Ernie O'Malley in his memoir *On Another Man's Wound*.[168] O'Malley also wrote to the MSP Board in support of Tobin's

[165] Service Certificate, MSP34/3 in file 34E6639, Margaret Breen, MSP34REF5023.
[166] *Irish Press*, 21 September 1955, p. 5.
[167] 1911 Census returns. NAI. http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai003290931/
[168] O'Malley, *On Another Man's Wound*, pp. 173-5.

pension application. He pointed out that she placed her home at his disposal throughout the War of Independence, and frequently drove him on IRA business to East Limerick and North Cork.[169] She was later described by Dan Breen as 'one of the best workers we had from 1917 to 1923' and indeed, Tobin provided a safe house for Breen, Seán Treacy and Seán Hogan after the Soloheadbeg ambush.[170] In his memoir, Breen recalled that after Soloheadbeg, they spent two nights at Tobin's, a 'good friend on whom we could rely for a night's shelter'.[171] The fact that Tobin's was known to Breen as a safe haven prior to any armed conflict indicates that the strategy to establish safe houses and despatch centres during the period of reorganisation had worked. Many members of the Tipperary 3rd Brigade and the GHQ staff, including O'Malley and Seán Hogan, took shelter at Tobin's home before and after raids. Her home effectively became a safe house, an arms dump and a clearing centre for despatches throughout this period. Like other women performing similar duties, Tobin remained clear of contact with any political organisation although she was recognised later (for pension purposes) as being a member of the IRA.[172] She initially experienced difficulty arguing her case with the MSP Board as she had no service with Cumann na mBan and they could not determine the organisation in which she served. However, Seamus Robinson, the O/C of the IRA's 3rd Tipperary Brigade came to her rescue. In the supporting documentation for her pension application, he stated that Tobin would never have been allowed to join Cumann na mBan ('an unnecessary ostentation'), so useful were her services to the IRA.

> I personally have no hesitation in stating that, whether or not you were officially a member of Cumann na mBan, you were defacto and de jure a member of the IRA. I base that contention on the fact that any person who put himself or herself under the orders or directives of IRA officers and was used continuously by them, as you undoubtedly were, was ipso facto a member of the IRA. Your claim for membership in the "Forces", comes, in my opinion, under the heading of the IRA.[173]

Robinson served as a referee and member of the MSP Board from December 1935 to April 1943 and probably understood the qualifying criteria as well as any among his

[169] Letter from Ernie O'Malley to MSP Board re Marian Tobin, 14 May 1950, MSP34REF61176.
[170] Letter from Dan Breen to MSP Board re Marian Tobin, 26 March 1950, MSP34REF61176.
[171] Breen, *My Fight for Irish Freedom*, pp. 45-6.
[172] Letter from Seamus Robinson to MSP Board re Marian Tobin, undated, but claim was made in 1950. MSP34REF61176.
[173] Letter from Seamus Robinson to MSP Board re Marian Tobin, undated, but claim was made in 1950. MSP34REF61176.

peers.[174] His support was integral in ensuring that Tobin was recognised as a member of the IRA and was awarded a pension – at Grade E - in recognition of her service.[175] However, as in the case of Margaret Frewen, when the Service Certificate was released, it was stamped 'Cumann na mBan' in the section which indicates the section of the forces in which service was rendered.

Conclusion

The precautions taken by many of these female activists in their endeavours to remain at a safe distance from known political organisations paid off. Inevitably, Cumann na mBan attracted the attention of the authorities. General Joseph Byrne, General Inspector of the RIC from 1916 to 1920, in a report on political activity in Ireland during May 1918, reported an increase in the number of Cumann na mBan branches from 35-80 and noted that 'these Women's Sinn Fein Clubs are now learning first-aid and ambulance work.'[176] The RIC's assumption that Cumann na mBan was the female arm of Sinn Féin can perhaps be explained in light of the fact that many members of Cumann na mBan were prominent among the speakers and canvassers urging a Sinn Féin vote in the succession of by-elections that took place in 1917 and 1918. Additionally, several members of the executive of Cumann na mBan, including two of the 1916 widows – Kathleen Clarke and Áine Ceannt – became visible and vocal members of Sinn Féin. In McCarthy's analysis of the relationship between Cumann na mBan and Sinn Féin, he points out that some Cumann na mBan members may have considered their organisation to be 'more of an auxiliary to Sinn Féin than to the Volunteers'.[177] He bases this assertion on the concern noted by the Cumann na mBan executive at their 1918 Convention. They worried that during 1918, perhaps mainly due to the conscription crisis, Cumann na mBan, Sinn Féin and the Irish Volunteers had practically coalesced into a republican movement in which membership lines tended to blur. Consequently, McCarthy argues, most women enthusiastically supported the aims and objectives of Sinn Féin without having to officially join that organisation.[178] Instead, their membership of Cumann na mBan became a badge of support for all other

[174] Crowe (ed), *Guide to the Military Service Pensions Collection*, p. 88.
[175] Service Certificate, MSP34/3 in file 34E9273, Marian Tobin, MSP34REF61176.
[176] Report by Inspector-General, Royal Irish Constabulary for month of May 1918, Part II, Political Activity, 11 June 1918. Presented to a Cabinet meeting on 2 August 1918. National Archives, CAB/24/59.
[177] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, p.89.
[178] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, p.91.

organisations under the republican umbrella and this mind-set, or republican outlook, was frequently referred to as 'the movement'.

The RIC and the DMP were closely observing developments within advanced nationalist organisations and monitoring the activities of prominent individuals associated with them. Some women who were prominent within Cumann na mBan were also under observation by the police. For example, a DMP report for the month of May 1918 lists the movements of both Kathleen Clarke and her sister Madge Daly.[179] These were the only two women mentioned in that report although there were many other women, both members and non-members of Cumann na mBan, who were actively working to advance the aims of the Irish Volunteers. The activities of this body of women may have escaped the notice of the DMP. Nonetheless, the DMP had a considerable number of what they called 'Extremists' under observation during 1918 and noted that Dr Kathleen Lynn, Mrs Wyse Power, Miss O'Rahilly, Countess Markievicz, Miss McCreevy, Mrs Hegarty and Patricia Hoey were among those who attended meetings at the Sinn Féin premises on Harcourt Street during May 1918.[180] The DMP also observed the proceedings at a meeting held in the Mansion House in Dublin on 30 May 1918 to make arrangements for 'All Ireland Women's Day', which subsequently became known as Lá na mBan. Held on Sunday 9 June 1918, this event focussed on the avoidance of conscription at all costs. Mrs Stopford Green, Mrs Desmond Fitzgerald and Mrs Reddin were among those observed in attendance at the Mansion House meeting and were noted signing the anti-Conscription pledge at Dublin's City Hall. Also reported by the DMP as being 'in charge of the arrangements' at City Hall were Countess and Miss Plunkett, Margaret Kennedy, Helena Molony and Marie Perolz.[181] Significantly, however, neither Celia Collins nor Eily O'Hanrahan were on these lists. Neither were Linda Kearns nor Lily O'Brennan. In fact, the women who were performing some of the most valuable work for the Irish Volunteers were beneath the notice of police and military authorities and therefore went about their covert duties unmolested.

[179] Report by Superintendent Owen Brien of the DMP, 3 June 1918 as part of the 'Report on Movements and Meetings of Extremists in the Dublin Police are during the month of May 1918'. Presented to a Cabinet meeting on 2 August 1918. National Archives, CAB/24/59.
[180] Report by Superintendent Owen Brien of the DMP dated 3 June 1918 as part of the 'Report on Movements & Meetings of Extremists in the Dublin Police are during the month of June 1918'. Presented to a Cabinet meeting on 2 August 1918. National Archives, CAB/24/59.
[181] Report by Superintendent Owen Brien of the DMP dated 2 July 1918 as part of the 'Report on Movements and Meetings of Extremists in the Dublin Police are during the month of June 1918'. Presented to a Cabinet meeting on 2 August 1918. National Archives, CAB/24/59.

A by-election was held on 20 June 1918 for the constituency of East Cavan following the death of the elderly IPP sitting MP, Samuel Young. Arthur Griffith was chosen to stand as the Sinn Féin candidate and was opposed by the IPP candidate, J.F. O'Hanlon, who hoped to hold onto the seat for his now-beleaguered party. However, Griffith was arrested in May as part of the 'German Plot' round-up along with many other prominent Sinn Féin members, so those who had escaped arrest had to manage the campaign. Several women travelled to Cavan to assist in the canvass including Jenny Wyse Power and Grace Gifford-Plunkett. They were observed by the DMP travelling to Kingscourt and Cootehill; the times of both their arrival and departure were noted and reported upon.[182] Due to the activity surrounding the by-election, there were a number of meetings held at the Sinn Féin headquarters and these were also under surveillance by the DMP. They took note of all the women attendees as well as the men and reported them accordingly. Whilst both the DMP and the RIC were actively reporting on the activities of women who had taken prominent roles within advanced nationalist groups, those who kept a low profile continued unobserved and undetected. They quietly continued to provide essential courier or intelligence services to the Irish Volunteers during this reorganisation period. It is evident that the women discussed in this chapter had active roles in establishing the essential functions and services that would be required before the revolution could move on to its next stage. As Ireland moved towards guerrilla war, their work would expand and evolve, and more women would be required to fill the additional roles that would become necessary in an armed conflict.

[182] Report by Superintendent Owen Brien of the DMP dated 2 July 1918 as part of the 'Report on Movements and Meetings of Extremists in the Dublin Police are during the month of June 1918'. Presented to a Cabinet meeting on 2 August 1918. National Archives, CAB/24/59.

Chapter 3

Women and The War of Independence – The Opening Salvo, 1919

Stop the blasted forming fours, get out of Cumann na mBan and do some work.[1]

Introduction

In early 1919, tensions were beginning to escalate throughout the country as the British administration tried to quash the challenge to their authority from the newly emerged Irish Republican Army.[2] This chapter will consider those tensions in light of the events of 1919 and the establishment of an IRA intelligence network that eventually led to the demise of G Division of the DMP as an intelligence-gathering force in Ireland.[3] Although the IRA's intelligence division was initially staffed by men, women participated in its success, particularly those who worked within the post office system and the clerical staff of the British administration. Women were recruited to supply information on troop movements and strengths, military and RIC codes and cyphers, and to act as the eyes and ears of IRA intelligence in locations throughout Ireland. The crowning accomplishment, however, was securing two women who were positioned to provide information from inside Dublin Castle itself. By early 1919 a network of women had been established that fed information through to IRA GHQ on many aspects of the lives, movements, habits and plans of the police and military in Ireland. Most of these women were recruited by the local IRA Brigade's Intelligence Officer (IO); some were recruited directly by Michael Collins. Few of them left any record of their activities outside the BMH or MSPC files so these form the main source of information on their lives during this period. A Dublin Castle Intelligence file exists for Siobhan Creedon Lankford, so this has been accessed to provide additional information on her activities. Almost without exception, these women were asked to cut their ties with Cumann na

[1] Michael Collins to Moira Kennedy O'Byrne, Moira Kennedy O'Byrne, BMH WS1029, p. 3. 'Forming Fours' refers to a drilling exercise popular with Cumann na mBan.
[2] Diarmaid Ferriter, *A Nation and not a Rabble: The Irish Revolution 1913-1923* (London, 2015), p. 186. Formally known as the Irish Volunteers, the term 'IRA' began to come into use following the establishment of the First Dáil. See also Frank Henderson, BMH WS821, p. 65. As Commandant of the 2nd Battalion, he administered the Oath of Allegiance to the men under his command during the summer of 1919. 'From this time forward the Volunteers were officially the Irish Republican Army'.
[3] McMahon, *British Spies and Irish Rebels*, p.26.

mBan and other nationalist organisations and to maintain a low profile. Additionally, there was an elite group of women recruited by Michael Collins whose class, wealth or social standing allowed them to move freely on IRA business without attracting undue attention. These women had the responsibility for matters such as the purchase and provision of safe houses which were essential to ensure against the capture of key members of the separatist movement. Some also arranged the provision of covert medical care for those who could not present themselves at a doctor or hospital; others organised safe places to conceal arms, ammunition and valuable documents. Similarly, safe houses were established for the normal foot-soldier or working-class IRA Volunteer, reflecting the class structures that existed in Irish society in the early twentieth century. The position of women within the revolutionary movement has traditionally been viewed through the lens of Cumann na mBan and much of the historiography reflects that.[4] Hopkinson, for example, in his detailed work on the War of Independence, states 'The movement came to embody separate spheres: there appeared to be no possibility of women fighting alongside men as they occasionally had during the Easter Rising, nor of them taking direct command'.[5] However, as demonstrated earlier, there is now evidence to suggest that many women who were never members of Cumann na mBan were active within IRA units. Furthermore, the MSPC files demonstrate that female IRA membership was acknowledged by the state when women, claiming IRA service, applied for pensions. The first reference to female membership of the IRA in the files is to be found in an application made under the Army Pensions Act (1932) by Margaret (Peg) Clancy for a pension or gratuity in respect of an illness contracted while on military service with the IRA.[6] Initially this caused some consternation within the administration of the Department of Defence. Correspondence between the Finance Officer in the Department of Defence and the MSRB queried Margaret Clancy's eligibility under the Act, asking:

> that the Board will be good enough to state precisely the evidence on which the claim to membership of I.R.A. has been accepted by them. Are the Board satisfied, having regard to the rules governing military membership of the I.R.A., that there is no doubt as to applicant's military membership of the organisation.[7]

[4] See, for example, McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan,* and Matthews, *Renegades*.
[5] Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence*, p. 199.
[6] Letter from Secretary of Military Service Registration Board (MSRB) to Fahy, Finance Officer MSRB, 7 April 1934 re IRA membership of Margaret (Peg) Clancy, File 1RB1609 in MSP34REF1666.
[7] Letter to the Secretary, Military Service Registration Board from Finance Officer re Margaret (Peg) Clancy, 28 March 1934, MSP34REF1666 (1RB1609).

The reply to the Finance Officer from the MSRB stated that 'this case is based on the explicit evidence of the Officer Commanding the Brigade to which applicant was attached. There was no rule debarring women from membership of the I.R.A.'[8] Clancy's O/C was Seán Moylan and his statement to the MSRB confirmed that she was working under 'active service conditions of Brigade H.Q. Staff'.[9] Clancy's claim was processed and granted showing that 'The applicant was a member of Óglaigh na h-Éireann (I.R.A.)' from 1920 through to 1923 and held the rank of 'Assistant to Brigade Adj 2nd Cork, and later attached to Four Courts Command.'[10] Her application for a MSP in February 1935 shows that she was engaged on 'clerical, dispatch and intelligence work' with the East Limerick Brigade IRA, North Cork Brigade IRA and GHQ. She was granted a Grade D pension - awarded to those who are deemed to be of officer rank.[11] Peg Clancy may have been one of the first women to apply for recognition as a member of the IRA but over the succeeding years many others followed suit. By July 1947 the MSP Board acknowledged six other women as members of the IRA, although this number increased as the years passed. The women were named as Linda Kearns, Teresa Nugent, Sheila Wallace, Mary Egan, Mary Christine Ryan and Éilis McNamara.[12] In a note to the Finance Officer at the Department of Defence, naming the initial 6 women, the Referee 'reported that they were members of Óglaigh na hÉireann. They established to his satisfaction their claims to have served in that body of the Forces'.[13] Most of these women either had no ties with Cumann na mBan or were recruited from within its ranks and effectively reassigned to the IRA for the duration of the War of Independence. This chapter will examine how the intelligence network was established, how it functioned, and how women participated in it. It will examine how safe houses operated and the women who were prominent in maintaining them. Furthermore, it will demonstrate that the activities of these women contributed towards the success of the IRA campaign during 1919 and early 1920. It will also discuss the key events during the first half of the War of Independence and

[8] Letter to Finance Officer, Department of Defence from MSRB, Collins Bks re Margaret (Peg) Clancy, 7 April 1934, MSP34REF1666 (1RB1609).
[9] Forms submitted by Seán Moylan to T.G. Markham, Military Service Registration Board re Margaret Clancy, 3 October 1933. MSP34REF1666 (1RB1609).
[10] Service Certificate issued by the Military Service Registration Board to Margaret Clancy (Form A.P. 53), 15 March 1934, MSP34REF1666 (1RB1609).
[11] Crowe (ed), *Guide to the Military Service Pensions Collection*, p. 175.
[12] Letter to the Finance Officer, Department of Defence from the Office of the Referee, Griffith Barracks re female membership of the IRA, 13 July 1947. Linda MacWhinney (née Kearns), MSP34REF1307.
[13] Letter to the Finance Officer, Department of Defence from the Office of the Referee, Griffith Barracks re female membership of the IRA, 13 July 1947. Linda MacWhinney (née Kearns), MSP34REF1307.

demonstrate that the role played by women was integral to the construction of a revolutionary network that enabled the first Dáil to function.

The Opening Salvo

The first ambush of what became known as the War of Independence took place in Soloheadbeg, County Tipperary, on 21 January 1919 - the same day that the newly elected Dáil met for the first time in Dublin's Mansion House. Two RIC men died in the attack which was initiated by the South Tipperary Brigade led by Dan Breen, Seán Treacy and Seumas Robinson, who subsequently had to go on the run. The object of the exercise was to seize a quantity of gelignite being transported under police escort to a local quarry, but when the RIC men defended their position they were shot and killed.[14] The following month, on 3 February, Éamon de Valera, Seán Milroy and Seán McGarry escaped from Lincoln Jail where they had been interned in the round-up of prominent Sinn Féin supporters following the so-called 'German Plot' discussed in Chapter 1. Their escape was facilitated by Michael Collins, Harry Boland and Fintan Murphy, all of whom travelled from Dublin to arrange and oversee the plan.[15] In early March, there was a mass release of the 'German Plot' internees following the death of Pierce McCan in Gloucester Jail as a result of an outbreak of Spanish 'flu.[16] Milne, in her work on the subject, points out that although arrangements had been made to release the prisoners prior to McCan's death, Sinn Féin seized the opportunity to propagandise the situation.[17] McCan's funeral – from the Pro-Cathedral in Dublin to Kingsbridge railway station and from there to Thurles – was described as 'impressive', with 'an immense concourse assembled' at the train station in Thurles.[18] McCan was the elected representative for Tipperary East in the First Dáil and was the only fatality in Gloucester, although many other prisoners, including Arthur Griffith, contracted the virus. Later in March there were two further escapes, this time from Mountjoy Jail in Dublin. On the night of 16 March, Robert Barton escaped with the help of a file that had been smuggled into the jail earlier, and a rope ladder thrown over the wall by members of G Company, IRA.[19] Barton's escape was greeted by a degree of hilarity by the Dublin public as it was widely believed that he left a note in his empty bunk thanking

[14] Kevin Haddick Flynn, 'Soloheadbeg: what really happened?' in *History Ireland*, Issue 1 (Spring 1997).
[15] Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence*, p. 26. The remaining 'German Plot' internees were released the following month.
[16] For an account on the influenza outbreak and its effects, see Milne, *Stacking the coffins.*
[17] Milne, *Stacking the coffins,* p. 217.
[18] *Sunday Independent*, 9 March 1919, p. 1.
[19] Patrick J. Kelly, BMH WS781, pp. 49-51.

the governor of Mountjoy for his hospitality, but stating that the standard of accommodation was not to his liking.[20] Barton was elected as Sinn Féin representative for West Wicklow in December 1918. He was appointed as Director of Agriculture and operated in that capacity from an office in the home of Lily O'Brennan and her sister, Áine Ceannt. Barton remained there undetected until his re-arrest in January 1920.[21] A few days after the Barton escape, on the night of the 19 and morning of the 20 March 1919, a successful raid for arms took place at Collinstown Aerodrome which resulted in the capture of seventy-five rifles and several thousand rounds of ammunition. It was a well-planned operation that required about twenty-five men and five cars and succeeded in overpowering the military guard without any loss of life or any injuries.[22] Members of the Dublin Brigade of the IRA were growing in confidence as their successes mounted in the absence of any adequate response from Dublin Castle. Then on 29 March there was a daring mass-escape from Mountjoy Jail in which Piaras Béaslaí and Paddy Daly were among twenty men who successfully got over the wall. In the latter incident, at least two sympathetic prison warders colluded with republicans on the outside to facilitate the escape.[23]

The series of prison escapes and internee releases during the first quarter of 1919 had two immediate effects. Firstly, they provided an immediate morale boost to the IRA by placing key political and military strategists back into the organisation where they would assume leadership in the emerging military campaign. Secondly, they embarrassed and undermined British authority in Ireland while adding to the growing reputation of the IRA's new Director of Intelligence, Michael Collins. Collins had what Eunan O'Halpin describes as 'an extraordinary administrative capacity', which enabled him to juggle the multiple roles of Minister for Finance, leader of the IRB and Director of Intelligence.[24] By 1919 he had also begun to establish an intelligence network consisting of ordinary citizens as well as Volunteers. This embraced people in a variety of roles - waiters, railway workers, hotel porters, post office workers, newspaper vendors etc., but more importantly, he began to develop a web of key contacts within the RIC, the DMP, the prison service, and inside Dublin Castle itself. Some members of

[20] Robert Brennan, BMH WS779, p. 579.
[21] Barton, Minister for Agriculture in the First Dáil, successfully ran his department from the O'Brennan/Ceannt home throughout 1919. See Áine Ceannt, Military Service Pensions Collection, File Ref. MSP34REF63426.
[22] Right Rev. Monsignor M. Curran, BMH WS687, p. 365; Patrick McCrea, BMH WS413, p. 6.
[23] For an account of the escape see T. Ryle Dwyer, *The Squad & the Intelligence Operations of Michael Collins* (Cork, 2005), p. 33. Both Béaslaí and Daly later played prominent parts in the War of Independence.
[24] Eunan O'Halpin, 'Collins and Intelligence 1919-1923: From Brotherhood to Bureaucracy' in Gabriel Doherty and Dermot Keogh (eds), *Michael Collins and the Making of the Irish State* (Cork, 2006), p. 73.

this intelligence network were women who were recruited because they had access to sensitive information through their jobs. A post mistress or post office clerk, perhaps, had access to police and military communications; if she was sympathetic to the republican cause, she might be prepared to offer her services. Similarly, an experienced telephonist who had access to military and police calls and the skills to tap into their lines would be of great benefit to the IRA's intelligence service.

Post Office Workers

Several women who contributed vital information to the IRA intelligence division were recruited in the manner outlined above. Curiously, two of these women, Annie Barrett (1888-1973) and Siobhán (Hannah) Creedon (1894-1986), worked in Mallow post office. Both women supplied information to the local IRA on troop movements, proposed raids and military and RIC communications. Neither woman was openly associated with Cumann na mBan during the period of their active service. The information they provided was in line with instructions from Florence O'Donoghue, the IO in Cork – to focus on 'all messages sent by enemy police, soldiers or agents'.[25] Many successful raids and ambushes were planned by the IRA as a result of the information they got from these women; additionally, some potential traps were avoided and IRA volunteers evaded capture due to timely information supplied by both Barrett and Creedon.[26] It appears that neither woman was aware that the other was also providing intelligence information to the IRA, particularly as they both frequently reported the same information, often to the same IRA Intelligence Officer.[27]

Creedon was dismissed from the post office by the British authorities in April 1920. In a sworn statement to the MSP Board, she says that she was dismissed 'as a result of a colleague's report on my army activities'.[28] This is confirmed in notes made by the examiners during separate interviews with both Barrett and Creedon (now Mrs Lankford) by the MSP Board which indicate that Barrett was the culprit.[29] However, a

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[25] Borgonovo*, Florence and Josephine O'Donoghue's War of Independence,* p.212.
[26] Statement from Tadhg Byrne (Brigade O/C) and Michael O'Callaghan (Brigade IO) to MSP Board on behalf of Siobhán Creedon Lankford, revealing that she 'was responsible for helping men to evade arrest in 1919 and 1920 and for saving lives in 1921', undated but possibly late 1941, MSP34REF29397.
[27] See Siobhán Creedon Lankford, MSP34REF29397 and Annie Barrett, MSP34REF57556. Also see Annie Barrett, BMH WS1133, pp. 3-6 for details of arrests and ambushes that were avoided due to timely information supplied by her.
[28] Statement of Active Service of Siobhán Creedon Lankford, undated but accompanying documents are dated throughout 1938, MSP34REF29397.
[29] See Siobhan Creedon Lankford file. Notes taken during discussion with George Power and D. Barry regarding Creedon's dismissal from Mallow P.O. state 'Reported by Miss Barrett', 20

more complete picture emerges from a file of correspondence that passed between the post office authorities, the RIC and the Under Secretary's office at Dublin Castle concerning Creedon.[30] Creedon had been under observation for some time and arrangements had been made for 'listening-in' on calls made by her from Mallow post office.[31] The results of the investigation confirmed the suspicions that had been raised about her and these ultimately led to her dismissal. Correspondence between the GPO and Dublin Castle demonstrate that Creedon first came to their attention as far back as 1917 'for prominently identifying herself with the Sinn Fein Movement'.[32] She was officially warned that 'she was expected to maintain a certain reserve in political matters' and presumably refrain from membership of any nationalist organisations. Even though she was not a member of Cumann na mBan, both Creedon and her family were kept under observation. The covert surveillance on the Creedon family and their associates was quite extensive. A report from the Intelligence Department of Dublin Castle in February 1920 refers to her father as 'a well-known Sinn Feiner who is suspected of harbouring wanted men.'[33] An earlier report from the County Inspector's office in Mallow noted that Creedon associated with people connected with Sinn Féin, and as such, her employment in Mallow post office was 'a source of danger'.[34] It can only be speculated that Barrett may have implicated Creedon to protect herself if there was a suspicion that there was a leak within Mallow post office.

An explanation may be found in Creedon's memoir written under her married name of Siobhán Lankford and published in 1980.[35] However, as this was written almost 60 years after the events in question, it is possible that some details may have been forgotten or misremembered. In the memoir, she correctly claimed that she was under suspicion prior to her dismissal, however, she did not realise that she was under surveillance by Dublin Castle. She assumed that she was dismissed because the Postmaster was closely watching her activities. He found a piece of carbon paper which she secretly used to make an additional copy of a ciphered message meant for

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September 1941, Form R18, MSP34REF29397. The Annie Barrett file bears the note 'This is the girl who got Miss Creedon dismissed', taken during discussion with Richard Willis, 25 February 1941, Form R18, MSP34REF57556.

[30] Dublin Castle Records, 'Personalities' File, Miss Hannah Creedon, CO 904/197/16, TNA.

[31] Letter from the Secretary, GPO Dublin to The Under Secretary, Dublin Castle re Miss H.M. Creedon, 9 April 1920. CO 904/197/16, TNA.

[32] Letter from the Secretary, GPO Dublin to the Under Secretary, Dublin Castle re Miss H.M. Creedon, 9 April 1920. CO 904/197/16, TNA.

[33] Letter from J.J. Taylor to the Secretary, GPO, 27 February 1920, CO 904/197/16, TNA.

[34] Report on Hannah Creedon from the County Inspector to the GPO and the Dublin Castle, 23 February 1920, CO 904/197/16, TNA.

[35] Siobhán Lankford, *The Hope and the Sadness: Personal Recollections of Troubled Times in Ireland* (Cork, 1980).

the RIC District and County Inspectors. She surmised that he was not prepared to make a bald accusation himself, instead suggesting that he induced Barrett to submit a written report about her activities. Barrett, by her own admission, had always maintained a low profile, kept on cordial terms with the British in Mallow and was not openly associated with any nationalist organisation. In fact, she states that an earlier dalliance with Cumann na mBan came to an end at the start of 1919; 'I was instructed by Liam Lynch, through Dan Hegarty who was then Brigade Vice-Commandant, Cork II Brigade, to discontinue my activities in this connection'.[36] Creedon, although not a member of Cumann na mBan, was an Irish speaker who moved in Gaelic League circles where she openly associated with Liam Lynch, George Power and other prominent IRA members. Furthermore, her family's involvement with Sinn Féin, noted above, gave the authorities grounds for suspicion. Her memoir suggests that Barrett succeeded her as the intelligence agent in Mallow post office, but all other documentation suggests that both women were active at the same time.[37] Additionally, both women subsequently claimed rank as IRA Intelligence Officers. In his work on the intelligence war in County Cork, John Borgonovo refers to Siobhán Creedon Lankford as 'one of the few women officers in the IRA'.[38] However, the documents recently released as part of the MSPC demonstrate that there were several women active in this capacity in different parts of the country during the period 1919-1922.[39] Creedon applied for a MSP under the 1934 Act stating 'I am entitled to be accorded Rank D as an officer of the Intelligence branch of the Irish Volunteers and IRA.'[40] Additionally, the hand-written notes taken by the examiner during her interview with the MSP assessors bear the observation 'I.R.A. member. Not C na mBan.'[41] Another document in the file signed by the Cork 2nd Brigade O/C (Officer in Command) and IO states:

> We know Mrs Lankford (nee Siobhan Creedon) to have been a member of the late Gen. Liam Lynch's special Intelligence Staff attached to Brigade, General

[36] Annie Barrett, BMH WS1133, p. 3.
[37] See supporting documentation and references in the Military Service Pension applications of both women, MSP34REF29397 and MSP34REF57556.
[38] Borgonovo*, Spies, Informers and the 'Anti-Sinn Féin Society',* p.55.
[39] In addition to Creedon and Barrett in Mallow P.O., May Bourke (MSP34REF2569) was performing the same services at Kilfinane P.O. while telephonists Margaret Pendy (MSP34REF50762) and Jennie Scannell (MSP34REF59791) did so at Tralee and Cork telephone exchanges, respectively.
[40] Letter from Siobhán Creedon Lankford to MSP Board, 3 December 1941, MSP34REF29397.
[41] Handwritten notes taken during interview with Siobhán Creedon Lankford on Form R18, 20 September 1941. MSP34REF29397.

> and Divisional H.Q.; and to have been Director of the Secret Service in the Mallow Area and to have been in charge of the civilians comprised in this unit.[42]

Despite providing 11 references from senior IRA members to attest to her application, Creedon was not awarded the Grade D she claimed and had to accept a Grade E. She appealed the findings of the MSP Board and vigorously defended her position, but her appeal was dismissed. A note in her file in the MSPC indicates that her dismissal from the P.O. in April 1920 may have affected her claim:

> Applicant claims that she is entitled to Rank "D" as an Officer of the Intelligence Branch… if she were in the P.O. during the 6th and 7th periods she might be entitled to Rank "D" but as she was not it is doubtful if Rank can be granted.[43]

The MSP Board defined periods 6 and 7 as the times between 1 April 1920 to 11 July 1921 which coincided with Creedon's dismissal from her position in Mallow post office. Although her service during this period was granted, the intelligence work she performed appeared to be considered of a lesser value outside the environs of the post office. Although Creedon was acknowledged by the MSP Board as a member of the IRA - albeit only deserving a pension at Grade E – the Service Certificate issued to her, bore the stamp 'Cumann na mBan'.[44]

Similarly, Barrett was also awarded the same lower grade despite having a reference that described her as 'one of the most important secret Intelligence Officers in the Brigade area.'[45] In her initial application for a pension, Barrett stated that she 'acted as Intelligence Officer to the I.R.A. from 1918 to the end of the Civil War'.[46] She reiterated this in an interview with the advisory committee of the MSP Board, stating that she was not a member of Cumann na mBan during this period, instead 'I offered my services to the IRA but they placed me on Intelligence.'[47] However, Barrett did not contest the award even though her service for the period prior to 1 April 1919 was not acknowledged by the MSP Board. Furthermore, although she self-identified as a member of the IRA and was acknowledged by IRA officers in the Cork Southern

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[42] Statement from Tadhg Byrne and Michael O'Callaghan in support of Siobhán Creedon Lankford, (undated), MSP34REF29397.
[43] Memo to Advisory Committee from P. O'Murchadha re Siobhán Creedon Lankford, 12 December 1941, MSP23REF29397.
[44] Service Certificate issued to Siobhán Creedon Lankford, 9 January 1943, File 34E6532 in MSP34REF29397.
[45] Statement from Tadhg Byrne, Richard Willis and Michael O'Callaghan in support of Annie Barrett, 6 December 1939, MSP34REF57556.
[46] Covering letter sent with MSP application by Annie Barrett, 17 December 1938, MSP34REF57556.
[47] Sworn statement made before the advisory committee by Annie Barrett, 8 December 1939, MSP34REF57556.

Division as one of their Intelligence Officers, the Service Certificate issued to her was also stamped 'Cumann na mBan' in the section indicating the division of the forces in which she actively served.[48]

Mary (May) Bourke performed similar duties for the IRA from her position in the post office at Kilfinane, County Limerick. Documents from the MSP files show that she was the IO of the East Limerick Brigade of the IRA and was active from 1919 until her arrest and Court Martial in 1921.[49] Bourke stated that she was not a member of Cumann na mBan; in her testimony, she outlined how she supplied copies of coded and cyphered messages to and from the RIC and military to the IRA which in turn were passed onto Intelligence GHQ in Dublin. Bourke made an application for a pension in January 1935 and despite having her position with the East Limerick Brigade of the IRA acknowledged, she too was only awarded a Grade E pension.[50] She appealed against the findings of the board, pointing out that she had been sentenced to two years in prison as a result of her activities for the IRA, but her appeal was denied.[51] Nonetheless, at the time, the information supplied by May Bourke was considered important enough to be immediately forwarded to GHQ in Dublin for action.

Margaret Pendy (1881-1943) worked as the 'principle operator at the telephone exchange at Tralee' when she began working for the Irish Volunteers and later, the IRA.[52] She was initially approached in 1919 by Austin Stack, whom she described as a neighbour, and asked to provide any information that may be of assistance to him.[53] Stack advised her not to join Cumann na mBan 'as she would be in a better position to help them by remaining outside'.[54] Pendy listened in to phone calls to and from the police, the military and the local jail; she then passed on anything of interest to John O'Sullivan, a postman who was the Tralee IRA's IO. In addition, she copied any telegrams that were telephoned through to the exchange by the military; this was a particularly risky endeavour as the staff at Tralee post office were regarded by the IRA as 'not sympathetic to the movement at that time'.[55] All information that she received on military and police matters was passed on to the IRA. Pendy revealed in her statement

[48] Service Certificate issued to Annie Barrett, 17 May 1941, File 34E197 in MSP34REF57556.
[49] Mary Bourke, Military Service Pensions collection, File Ref. MSP34REF2569.
[50] Letter from Daniel McCarthy, former O/C East Limerick Brigade to MSP Board re Mary Bourke, 23 May 1940, MSP34REF2569.
[51] Letter from Mary Bourke to MSP Board, 12 March 1942, MSP34REF2569.
[52] Letter from Patrick Raymond to MSP Board re Margaret Pendy, 23 May 1940, MSP34REF50762.
[53] Sworn Statement of Margaret Pendy made before the Advisory Committee of the MSP Board, 24 May 1940, MSP34REF50762.
[54] Summary on case of Margaret Pendy, heard on 24 May 1940, MSP34REF50762.
[55] Letter from J. Baily to MSP Board re Margaret Pendy, 22 May 1940, MSPC34REF50762.

to the MSP Board that the IRA had tapped the Tralee/Dingle railway phone line, with the knowledge of the local stationmaster who was a Volunteer.[56] She reserved a particular phone number - Tralee 41 - as a designated line for calls to the train station so that she could ensure security and privacy. Pendy's knowledge of the telephone system ensured that nobody within the exchange was aware of this line's existence. According to her testimony, her part in IRA communications was simply to connect the calls to this line from the exchange and to ensure that the calls were not logged in the official book. J. Baily, the stationmaster at the time, highlighted the importance of Pendy's work: 'Tralee Station was virtually Headquarters for the Tralee IRA and the phone was constantly in use on their behalf'.[57]

The infiltration of telephone lines by the IRA and the number of telephonists that assisted them in these endeavours was widespread. Even the telephonist in the Vice Regal Lodge, Miss Wilson, was passing information about Lord French's movements on to the IRA.[58] Frank Saurin, from IRA GHQ, reported that 'The Shelbourne Hotel telephonist was one of my agents, and she tapped all calls going through the Shelbourne switchboard which might be of use'.[59] The North Roscommon Brigade reported that they had the post office in Rooskey tapped and that one of the staff members, Mrs Cullen, supplied them 'with copies of all telegrams coming from Dublin to Elphin and vice versa to the enemy garrisons'.[60] When they could not decode the messages they were sent to GHQ in Dublin for analysis. By these methods and assisted by the extensive use of women workers in post offices and telephone exchanges, what Hart described as 'the success enjoyed by IRA Intelligence' during 1919 and 1920, was achieved.[61]

IRA GHQ Intelligence Structure

GHQ was established to co-ordinate information supplied from Intelligence Officers throughout the country. An office was procured at 3 Crow Street, just off Dame Street in Dublin, which although in close proximity to Dublin Castle, functioned as Intelligence GHQ. The building was initially staffed with Liam Tobin as Deputy Director of

[56] Sworn Statement of Margaret Pendy made before the Advisory Committee, 24 May 1940, MSP34REF50762.
[57] Letter from J. Baily to MSP Board re Margaret Pendy, 22 May 1940, MSPC34REF50762.
[58] Sworn statement of Denis O'Callaghan before the Advisory Committee, 20 December 1935, pp. 5-6, MSP34REF4158 and Margaret O'Callaghan, née Peg Flanagan, BMH WS747, p. 5.
[59] Frank Saurin, BMH WS715, p. 4.
[60] Seán Leavy, BMH WS954, p. 24.
[61] Hart, *Mick*, p. 205.

Intelligence and Tom Cullen as Assistant Deputy Director. Other key members of staff were Frank Thornton, Joe Guilfoyle, Frank Saurin, Charlie Dalton, and Charlie Byrne, but additional members were added to the team as demand for their skills grew. The office operated in such a way as to appear to be a regular business – the intelligence staff kept regular business hours and dressed in business attire. Nothing was done to draw any attention to the premises and staff members were instructed 'to keep away, and if necessary to resign, from the Volunteer Companies'.[62] This is the same instruction that was given to women intelligence operatives – that all association with nationalist organisations or groups had to be severed to ensure that the individual remained above suspicion.

During early 1919, GHQ staff established the organisational structures of an intelligence network throughout the country. Frank Thornton, who operated undercover as a New Ireland Assurance Company agent, left a detailed witness statement explaining how this was approached.[63] Thornton was, in fact, appointed as a Divisional Inspector for New Ireland covering counties Louth, Monaghan, Cavan, Longford, Armagh and Down. The Deputy Director of Intelligence, Liam Tobin, held the same role for Cork, and 'while seriously undertaking this job of creating an organisation to get control of insurance in Ireland, at the same time we were using this organisation in its early stages as a cover for our general activities in organising the Volunteers'.[64] Thornton and Tobin were not behaving in a dishonest way towards their employer – all senior staff members of New Ireland Assurance Company, including the Secretary, Michael W. O'Reilly, and the Treasurer, Michael Staines, were Irish Volunteers and many were also IRB members. Thus, the company itself was complicit in the provision of cover to GHQ staff. In fact the idea, or concept, of an Irish-based assurance company was initially conceived by Arthur Griffith and the possibility of establishing such an entity was discussed in Frongoch camp as early as 1916 by Michael Collins, Michael W. O'Reilly and Jim Ryan.[65] The primary aim of the company was to ensure that the funds of Irish policy holders would be invested inside the country and consequently would ensure the growth and development of the Irish economy. This, arguably, demonstrates that some degree of long-term planning for an independent Irish economy was already underway during the post-Rising period and was led by senior members of Sinn Féin, the IRB and the Irish Volunteers. Thornton also revealed that representatives of New Ireland Assurance Company played a large role in

[62] William James Stapleton, BMH WS822, p. 34.
[63] Frank Thornton, BMH WS615, pp. 3-4.
[64] Frank Thornton, BMH WS510, p. 51.
[65] Frank Thornton, BMH WS510, pp. 46-50.

collecting funds throughout Ireland for the Dáil Éireann loan and indeed the New Ireland head office in Dublin 'was one of the main calling stations for people coming to Dublin to deposit Dáil loan money'.[66]

The nationwide intelligence organisation largely established under the cover of New Ireland Assurance Company consisted of an IO in each Volunteer Company whose brief was to collect information from both inside and outside the military and police and to recruit wherever possible sympathetic people inside those bodies. In the case of Mallow in County Cork and Kilfinane in County Limerick, the evidence suggests that the role of IO was taken by a woman as referenced earlier. The officer would also note any troop movements in his/her area and report this information in turn to the Battalion IO. The latter was responsible for all Company IOs in his area and for analysing the reports passed on to him. He would then in turn pass on any relevant information to the Brigade IO who dealt directly with GHQ. In this manner, most parts of the country – certainly those with a strong Irish Volunteer presence - were covered with a network of intelligence agents. Meanwhile, staff in GHQ in Dublin were instructed to find and cultivate at least one person in each government department who would 'work quietly and secretly for our Army'. Frank Thornton states that these methods resulted in 'quite a number of them, when contacted, agreeing to work for us inside the enemy lines'. [67]

Embedded with the enemy

An ability to keep secrets was a prerequisite for any intelligence operative, but particularly so when that intelligence operative was literally embedded with the enemy. This was the case for Lily Mernin (1886-1957), a shorthand typist in Dublin Castle. Mernin was a native of Waterford and came from a family of shopkeepers and confectioners. In 1909 she moved to Dublin, secured a job in the civil service and stayed with her aunts above the newspaper and tobacconist shop they owned on Abbey Street. Mernin joined the Gaelic League and attended classes, meetings and céilí dances at the Keating Branch in the centre of the city – the branch attended by many members of the IRB including Cathal Brugha and Piaras Béaslaí. Mernin and Béaslaí became friends and he frequently called into the shop owned by her relatives which was adjacent to the *Evening Telegraph* building in Abbey Street where he

[66] Frank Thornton, BMH WS510, p. 51.
[67] Frank Thornton, BMH WS615, p. 5.

worked as a journalist.[68] By the time Mernin and Béaslaí met again in late 1919, she was living in a flat in Dublin's Blessington Street and was still working with the civil service. She was now with 'A' Branch at the Garrison office in Dublin Castle; in fact, her office was in the same building as the Intelligence Department. Béaslaí was elected to the First Dáil as a TD for East Kerry and was editor of *An tÓglagh*, the Irish Volunteer's newspaper.[69] Rearrested during the summer of 1919 for possession of seditious documents, he escaped from Strangeways prison in Manchester on 25 October 1919 along with Austin Stack and four other prisoners and was on the run.[70] Béaslaí, having reacquainted himself with Mernin, realised that she had access to vital intelligence documents as part of her job and approached her about providing information to him. Although neither Mernin nor her family had any discernible record of nationalist sympathies, she agreed to meet with Béaslaí and a friend of his – Mr Brennan - at her flat in Blessington Street to discuss aspects of her job and how she could be of assistance.[71] Brennan showed great interest in Mernin's responsibilities, particularly her access to 'strength returns'; documents detailing the number of British personnel in Ireland and the locations in which they were based. Mernin claimed in her BMH witness statement that she did not realise at the time that Mr Brennan was, in fact, Michael Collins.[72]

Mernin began to make additional carbon copies of any relevant information that passed through her hands and brought these on a weekly basis to the home of Paddy Moynihan on Clonliffe Road in Dublin. Moynihan was a post office official who operated as an intelligence agent for GHQ and he provided a small room in his home, equipped with a typewriter, for Mernin to use on her weekly visits. She typed up additional copies of the documents and any other information she had acquired on troop movements and military matters and left them at Moynihan's home.[73] She was provided with a key to the house so that she could come and go without drawing attention to herself. If she acquired any information that needed immediate attention, she was instructed to give this directly to Béaslaí or to leave it at Vaughan's Hotel on Dublin's Parnell Square. This was a safe location for the IRA as many of the hotel staff were reporting to GHQ Intelligence and would ensure that any message left there would safely reach its

[68] Testimony of Piaras Béaslaí to MSP Board on behalf of Lily Mernin, 27 September 1937, p. 2, MSP34REF4945.
[69] *An tÓglach* was printed and circulated in secret. It served as a means of communication between GHQ and more remote IRA companies and was also a propaganda tool.
[70] Murphy, *Political Imprisonment*, p. 159; Ryle Dwyer, *The Squad*, p. 55-6.
[71] Testimony of Piaras Béaslaí to MSP Board on behalf of Lily Mernin, 27 September 1937, p. 1, MSP34REF4945.
[72] Lily Mernin, BMH WS441, p. 1.
[73] See account of this in Frank Saurin, BMH WS715, p. 3.

destination.[74] Mernin's importance to the organisation was such that Tom Cullen, the Assistant Deputy Director of Intelligence, was appointed as her liaison officer, although she continued to see Piaras Béaslaí regularly and he was a regular caller to her home.[75] Mernin, according to the MSP documents, also passed on information about both military and civilian staff in Dublin Castle that included 'their personal habits, their national sympathies (if ascertainable) and places in Dublin frequented by them'.[76] Additionally, she reported any gossip or rumours overheard in the course of her job that may be of interest to GHQ Intelligence. As the War of Independence moved into a more militant phase during the summer months of 1920, government, military and police authorities moved to quash the IRA with a mixture of legislation (ROIA), increased troop numbers, and the recruitment of additional intelligence staff. These events put Mernin in a more vulnerable position as the new staff recruited into Dublin Castle during 1920 at least had some intelligence training and would be more likely to look for leaks inside their own organisation.[77] It is indisputable that she took huge risks to fulfil the role thrust upon her by Piaras Béaslaí, particularly as she had no previous nationalist affiliations other than membership of the Gaelic League. It is possible that she was a late convert to militant nationalism, but more likely that she consented because she had a romantic involvement with Béaslaí. Coleman has acknowledged that Mernin gave birth to a boy in London in June 1922 and that 'there is circumstantial evidence to suggest that his father was Piaras Béaslaí'.[78] Béaslaí's biographer, Pádraig Ó Siadhail, who wrote about his subject in the Irish language, also suggested that Béaslaí fathered Mernin's child.[79] Neither Béaslaí nor Mernin ever publicly commented on the matter, and the child, Seán Maguire, grew up under the impression that Mernin was his aunt and Béaslaí merely his godfather.[80] However, Michael Collins may have

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[74] Frank Henderson described Vaughan's Hotel as 'a meeting place of some of the senior IRA officers'. See BMH WS821, p. 108. Christopher Harte, the 'Boots' or hotel porter acted as a messenger and courier for Michael Collins.
[75] Typewritten statement by Lily Mernin to MSP Board, undated, but her sworn statement was made on 30 October 1936, File Ref. MSP34REF4945.
[76] Sworn statement by Lily Mernin to MSP Board, 30 October 1936, p. 1, MSP34REF4945.
[77] McMahon*, British Spies & Irish Rebels,* p.33. From March 1920, British Intelligence recruits were trained in Hounslow before being dispatched to Dublin to take up intelligence duties.
[78] Marie Coleman, 'Mernin, Elizabeth ('Lily'; 'Little Gentleman'), *Dictionary of Irish Biography.* (http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId-a5800); Diarmuid Breathnach and Mary Murphy, 'Béaslaí, Piaras (1881-1985)' in Ainm.ie, (https://www.ainm.ie/Bio.aspx?ID=4).
[79] Pádraig Ó Siadhail*, An Béaslaíoch: beatha agus saothar Phiarais Béaslaí (*Dublin, 2007), p. 502 and p. 565. 'D'éirigh sí torthach. Ní féidir a chruthú go huile is go hiomlán gurbh é an Béaslaí athair an linbh a bhí á iompar aici ach tugann ar tharla ina dhiaidh sin le fios gurbh é. (She became pregnant. It is not entirely possible to prove that Béaslaí was the father of the child she was carrying, but events following suggest that this was the case).
[80] Maguire was Mernin's mother's maiden name. See Waterford County Museum online exhibition,

been aware of the situation as he supplied the funds to enable Mernin to leave the country in late 1921. She claimed that she had a nervous breakdown at this time after she was dismissed from her position, and that 'Collins immediately gave me a sum of money to enable me to go away and take a holiday out of Ireland'.[81] The timing of her departure suggests that she may have left the country to conceal her pregnancy. Mernin and Béaslaí do not appear to have been related, although they are frequently referred to as 'cousins'. However, Mernin does not refer to any familial relationship with Béaslaí in the statement she made to the MSP Board, merely commenting that she had known him for many years.[82] Béaslaí echoed this in his testimony to the MSP Board on her behalf. 'I knew her for many years, I knew her in the Keating Branch, her people had a shop in Abbey St. when I was in the *Evening Telegraph*'.[83] When Mernin left a BMH witness statement in October 1950, she claimed that they were indeed related and this narrative may have suited them both as it provided an excuse for their closeness and their correspondence. Additionally, it provides an explanation for the number of photographs that Béaslaí accumulated over the years of Seán Maguire.[84] As Béaslaí played a significant role in her life throughout the War of Independence, she may have become involved with intelligence work because it would bring her closer to his sphere within the revolutionary movement. Nonetheless, she was acknowledged by the MSP Board as a member of the Intelligence Department, GHQ, Óglaigh na hÉireann (or IRA) for pension purposes.[85] She described herself as an 'Intelligence agent…under direct control of the Director of Intelligence'.[86] Her testimony was corroborated by Frank Saurin, one of the first recruits to GHQ Intelligence as referred to earlier, but despite the quality of her intelligence work for the IRA, she was only awarded a Grade E pension. The grade awarded may have reflected the fact that Mernin was not deemed to hold any rank within the forces and had served only from late 1919 until the Truce in July 1921.

Annie Brennan (1894-?) was a close friend of Robert Collins, the manager of the canteen that served the military and police inside Dublin Castle. The canteen was effectively a bar as well as a restaurant and was the preferred place of relaxation for

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http://www.waterfordmuseum.ie/exhibit/web/Display/article/382/31/Waterfords_Revolutionary_Women_19161922_Lily_mernin.html

[81] Statement by Lily Mernin to MSP Board, 23 May 1935, MSP34REF4945.

[82] Sworn statement to the Advisory Committee of the MSP Board by Lily Mernin, 30 October 1936, MSP34REF4945.

[83] Verification by Mr. Beasley in the case of Miss Lily Mernin, 27 September 1937, MSP34REF4945.

[84] Béaslaí Collection. National Photographic Archive (NPA), BEA101.

[85] Service Certificate issued to Lily Mernin, 30 June 1938, File 34E3714 in MSP34REF4945.

[86] Lily Mernin, MSP application, Part III, p. 14, 17 May 1935, MSP34REF4945.

Auxiliaries both before and after duty.[87] Brennan, at the behest of her brother John, who was with GHQ Intelligence working on communications, approached Collins to ascertain if he was prepared to supply her with information.[88] Specifically, Brennan wanted to know about the whereabouts and treatment of IRA prisoners inside the Castle, the habits and haunts of Castle personnel and the methods of communication that were used by the military and police to alert them in the event of an incident involving the IRA.[89] Collins, who was sympathetic to nationalist aspirations, acquiesced and an arrangement was established whereby Brennan would collect information from him and pass it on to GHQ. Of particular interest to the IRA was the Castle communications system as GHQ personnel inside the Central Telegraphic Office were attempting to find means to bypass this system.[90] Moira Kennedy O'Byrne of the IRA, who will be discussed later in this chapter, acted as the liaison between Brennan and GHQ. Each time Collins had information to impart, Brennan would visit him at his home on St Alban's Road, just off the South Circular Road in Dublin. Following each visit, she typed this information into a report and brought it to Kennedy O'Byrne, who then passed it on directly to Michael Collins.[91] Brennan also facilitated contact between prisoners in the Castle and their comrades outside so it is apparent that Robert Collins acted as a conduit for a great deal of information that flowed both ways. Brennan claimed that she was engaged on this intelligence work on a full-time basis throughout the duration of the conflict and this is confirmed in a letter from Kennedy O'Byrne. 'She was constantly on the move and I collected important messages from her almost nightly up to the Truce'.[92] The messages were described as 'of great importance to the D/I', (Director of Intelligence, Michael Collins) and stressed that Brennan's contact with the Castle was 'considered most important' by him.[93] Her application for an MSP was successful, but she was denied any rank and so was awarded the lower Grade E. She was acknowledged by the MSP board as an intelligence agent who reported directly to GHQ – and recognised by her peers as such – but even following an appeal against the Board's decision, no change was made to the grade awarded. Although Brennan was not a member of Cumann na mBan, the service certificate issued to her bore the

[87] For an account of the behaviour of Auxiliaries in Dublin Castle's canteen see David Neligan, BMH WS370, p. 13.
[88] Account of activities from Annie Smith (née Brennan), undated, but accompanying letters dated 31 December 1945, MSP34REF23407.
[89] Account of activities from Annie Smith (née Brennan), undated, but accompanying letters dated 31 December 1945, MSP34REF23407.
[90] See letter from John J. Brennan to MSP Board, 2 April 1943, MSP34REF23407.
[91] Statement from Mrs A.M. Smith (née Brennan), 28 January 1943, MSP34REF23407.
[92] Letter from Moira Kennedy O'Byrne to MSP Board, 24 June 1942, MSP34REF23407.
[93] Letter from Moira Kennedy O'Byrne to MSP Board, 24 June 1942, MSP34REF23407.

stamp of that organisation.[94] There is a sense that perhaps the MSP Board placed a low value on intelligence work undertaken by females. Nonetheless, many of the operations carried out by the 'Squad' during the conflict were planned utilising information from women like Mernin and Brennan.[95]

The Squad

It is almost impossible to consider the role of women within the provision of safe housing, medical personnel and arms dumps without setting it in context within the establishment of the Squad. The emergence of this more militant faction within the IRA occurred during the absence of de Valera from the Dáil Cabinet. De Valera travelled to the United States in June 1919 – following Harry Boland, who had been sent there just a month earlier – ostensibly to seek diplomatic and political support from President Woodrow Wilson for recognition of Ireland's right to independence from Britain. However, his tour had rather mixed results; while he succeeded in highlighting Ireland's right to independence from Britain, he had some very public disagreements with Judge Daniel Cohalan, John Devoy and members of the Friends of Irish Freedom (FOIF) organisation, the public face of Clan na Gael.[96] Diarmaid Ferriter makes the point that although the trip was 'a considerable propaganda triumph', which increased de Valera's personal profile and channelled American sympathies towards Ireland, it meant that 'de Valera was also absent during a crucial stage in the War of Independence'.[97] This absence created a vacuum which the military faction of the newly elected First Dáil moved to fill by establishing key networks of intelligence officers, safe houses and medical personnel to support their war effort. Many of these roles were taken by women.

The British intelligence system operating in Ireland became the primary target of a new military campaign. To this end, in July 1919, several Volunteers with the Dublin Brigade were asked to attend a meeting at a house in North Great George's Street where they were met by Dick McKee, O/C of the Dublin Brigade, and Mick

[94] Service Certificate issued to Annie Smith (née Brennan), 12 May 1943, file 34E8433 in MSP34REF23407.
[95] For the importance of Mernin in these matters see Ryle Dwyer, *The Squad*, p. 15. As no secondary sources exist to date on Annie Brennan Smith, the importance of her intelligence work in identifying names of Dublin Castle personnel, their habits and the places they frequented can only be estimated by her file in the MSPC.
[96] For more on the FOIF, the personalities involved and the disputes that arose during de Valera's tour, see David McCullagh, *De Valera: Rise 1882-1932*, (Dublin, 2017), pp. 162-88.
[97] Diarmaid Ferriter, *Judging Dev* (Dublin, 2007), p.36.

McDonnell, a captain with the Second Battalion. A proposal was outlined to them about the formation of a new unit that would undertake 'special duties'; these duties included the execution of hostile G men and spies.[98] Those present at the meeting were given the option of leaving if they thought the nature of the work unpalatable; those who remained formed the nucleus of what would become the first Squad: arguably, a team of assassins who executed to order. Frank Thornton outlined their modus operandi:

> The Intelligence Officer having carried out his investigations to the satisfaction of GHQ, the operation was then ordered by Mick Collins, but the Intelligence Officer or Officers who had carried out that investigation always accompanied the Squad for the carrying out of the operation to ensure correct identification of the individual'.[99]

The first 'hit' was carried out on 30 July in Drumcondra, Dublin, when Detective Sergeant Patrick Smyth was shot while returning to his home on Millmount Avenue. James Slattery, Mick Kennedy, Tom Ennis and Tom Keogh were the gunmen and according to Slattery, all four men fired.[100] Smyth was targeted because he had arrested the recent escapee from Mountjoy, Piaras Béaslaí, for making a seditious speech.[101] Smyth had been warned not to produce evidence in court that would incriminate Béaslaí, but he defied these warnings and consequently Béaslaí was sentenced to two years in jail. Smyth did not die of his wounds immediately; he was taken to hospital but despite treatment, he died on 8 September 1919. The British administration in Ireland moved quickly in response to this most recent death and announced that Dáil Éireann, Sinn Féin, the Irish Volunteers, Cumann na mBan and the Gaelic League were all proclaimed. In effect, this suppressed all overtly nationalist organisations and made it a criminal offence to associate with any of them. Conversely, the suppression of these groups may have been more advantageous to them than to the military and police authorities. On the one hand, it gave the authorities the tools with which to remove known members of republican organisations from public life, but on the other hand it succeeded in driving Dáil Éireann and Sinn Féin deeper underground thereby making it more difficult to ascertain their activities and identify key individuals. Arthur Mitchell argues that 'The banning of the Dáil was not its end but

[98] James Slattery, BMH WS445, p. 2-3; Michael McDonnell, BMH WS225, p. 7; Frank Thornton, BMH WS615, p. 27.
[99] Frank Thornton, BMH WS615, p. 27.
[100] James Slattery, BMH WS445, p. 5.
[101] Ryle Dwyer, *The Squad*, p. 45.

really its making' as the administration thrived in the face of adversity, growing in strength and extending its power and influence to all corners of the country.[102]

Throughout 1919, the Dáil continued to meet, to appoint ministers and to establish the mechanisms for government in Ireland. In April, it was decided to implement a boycott of the RIC; this tactic, which was in use on an ad-hoc basis over the previous year or more, would now become official policy. Consequently, RIC men and their families became the target of widespread ostracism – shops refused to supply them with goods and services, neighbours ceased to acknowledge them and even their children were shunned and ignored at school. For many, the social boycott was the worst aspect of the campaign; while they could commandeer food, goods and services, they could not commandeer friendship. The boycott led to many resignations from the force. As D.M. Leeson points out: 'Not many middle-aged men like these could bear the mental and physical stresses of counter-guerrilla warfare'.[103] Effectively, the RIC boycott contributed to the creation of a vacuum in policing in Ireland that would lead to the introduction of the Black and Tans and the Auxiliary forces in 1920. By the end of 1919 a total of fifteen policemen had been killed in action, but this would escalate into a bloody war of attrition over the coming year.[104] Despite, or perhaps because of the boycott, many RIC and DMP men with nationalist sympathies now supplied information to IRA intelligence officers. Some – particularly those with more senior roles within the police – were in contact with Michael Collins via many of the female-run 'republican post offices' discussed in this work. Ned Broy, Jim McNamara and David Neligan who were with G Division (Intelligence) of the DMP were some of the most valuable contacts, but sergeants and constables from Donnybrook, Kingstown, Rathmines, Kevin Street, and Fitzgibbon Street also supplied valuable information about planned raids and arrests.[105]

Dáil meetings and members – Finding a safe place

While members of the DMP and RIC were being cultivated by GHQ, the Director of Intelligence, Michael Collins, began recruiting women from both inside and outside the Cumann na mBan organisation to procure and supply safe houses, arms dumps and

[102] Arthur Mitchell 'Alternative Government: 'Exit Britannia' – the Formation of the Irish National State, 1918-21', *The Irish Revolution,* pp. 75-6.
[103] D.M. Leeson, *The Black & Tans: British Police and Auxiliaries in the Irish War of Independence* (Oxford, 2013), p.18.
[104] Leeson, *The Black & Tans*, p.9.
[105] Frank Thornton, BMH WS615, p. 17. A list of names, their rank and the stations in which they were located is supplied in this document.

medical aid. The recent ban of Dáil Éireann led to a demand for safe, secure locations in which Dáil meetings could take place. Additionally, it created a requirement for secure business locations from which various government departments could function without arousing suspicion. Probably most importantly, safe houses were required for prominent members of Sinn Féin and Dáil Éireann who were on the run - they had to live somewhere - and in fact, these were frequently utilised by Collins himself. A room in the house at 44 Oakley Road, the home of Lily O'Brennan and Áine Ceannt was frequently used by Collins, Richard Mulcahy and Rory O'Connor when a safe place was needed in which to conduct a meeting.[106] The provision of such premises and accommodation was initially managed by Batt O'Connor, a prominent member of the building trade and former Frongoch internee who was a close associate of Collins. However, O'Connor was known to the authorities so safer, less obvious providers of safe houses were needed. The definition of 'safe house' began to evolve during this period; the term came to mean considerably more than a place to temporarily seek refuge from danger. Indeed, a safe house had to be somewhere that men on the run could obtain shelter, food and lodgings, but it also needed to be available on a long-term basis if possible. Ideally, it needed to be away from prying eyes and wagging tongues and have a concealed place in which to store arms and ammunition.

Finding a location that was large enough to facilitate Dáil meetings in a location that would not arouse undue attention was challenging; but one particular property owner fitted the bill perfectly. Mrs. Margaret MacGarry (1865-1940) had been involved with the movement almost all her life.[107] Her son, Milo, was educated at Pearse's school, St. Enda's, and she endeavoured to ensure that all her children were exposed to nationalist ideas and rhetoric.[108] She was a trusted friend and confidante of many prominent members of Sinn Féin and attended the founding meeting of Cumann na mBan with her daughter, Maeve. A former suffragist, she was active in the Gaelic League and had acted as one of the female dispatch carriers for Pearse during the Easter Rising.[109] Now in her mid-fifties, Margaret McGarry (née Flynn) married her husband James in July 1885; they had five children - two boys and three girls.[110] Although they both came from the lower middle-class area around the South Circular

[106] Memorandum of details of service rendered by Áine Ceannt, 30 September 1953, p. 2, MSP34REF63426.
[107] Although she had a lifelong attachment to the separatist movement, neither MacGarry nor any of her children applied for Military Service Pensions.
[108] Maeve MacGarry, BMH WS826, p. 1.
[109] Maeve MacGarry, BMH WS826, p. 4.
[110] Marriage record of James (Jacobus) McGarry of 8 Lennox Street in Dublin, and Margaret Flynn, of 3 Florence Street in Dublin at Harrington Street Church on 26 July 1885. See https://registers.nli.ie/registers/vtls000633734#page/123/mode/1up

Road in Dublin, their fortunes improved greatly over the duration of their marriage. James McGarry was a tobacco merchant who accumulated considerable wealth, so they moved house several times eventually settling at 17 Rathgar Avenue (the former home of George Russell (AE) in 1898.[111] In 1909, they acquired property in Fitzwilliam Street, and unusually, all the entries in *Thom's Directory* from this year onwards were in Margaret's name.[112] James MacGarry appears to melt into the background as there is no evidence to show that he had any involvement in the separatist movement. In fact, it appears that he had opposing views to his wife as stated by their daughter Maeve in a Bureau of Military History witness statement: 'My father…did not agree with her outlook, although he never interfered with her national or political activities. He was very quiet and so my mother was able to bring up us children in the way she wanted'.[113] As a prominent member of Cumann na mBan and the Gaelic League, she was on friendly terms with many of the leaders of the 1916 Rising. Her son Milo, and daughter Maeve were also committed to the separatist movement, but the most attractive thing about Margaret MacGarry, from an intelligence perspective, was that she was wealthy, respectable and the owner of several large properties in Dublin.

One of her homes, at 31 Upper Fitzwilliam Street, accommodated the friends and relatives of the 1916 internees upon their release in December 1916. Kathleen Clarke's family, the Dalys from Limerick, stayed there; and Marie Perolz and Helena Molony stayed with the MacGarrys after their respective releases from Lewes and Aylesbury jails. Following an approach by Collins, MacGarry made any property she owned available to the movement. A mews cottage at the rear of the building was used as an office from 1919 by Dan O'Donovan, an administrator with the Finance Department who was working on the Dáil loan, and Michael Collins had an adjacent room in which he occasionally stayed.[114] The MacGarrys also owned number 5

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[111] Although the census of 1901 shows that they resided at Rathgar Avenue, there is no census record for 1911, possibly because Mrs. MacGarry, a suffragist, joined the boycott against the census.

[112] See *Thom's Directory* for the MacGarry's various addresses: 16 Ovoca Road (1887), 9 Arbutus Place (1888), 26 Lombard Street West (1889-1892), 9 Rathgar Avenue (1893), 111 Donore Terrace (1894-1897), 17 Rathgar Avenue (1898-1907). All these properties list James MacGarry as the primary occupant. From the move to 31 Fitzwilliam Street Upper in 1909, Margaret MacGarry is listed on all *Thom's* entries; there is no reference to her husband. However, there is no evidence to suggest that their marriage had broken down; furthermore, the BMH witness statement of Maeve MacGarry (WS826) shows that they both James and Margaret lived together at 31 Upper Fitzwilliam Street.

[113] Maeve MacGarry, BMH WS826, p. 1.

[114] Maeve MacGarry (WS826) erroneously states that Daithí O'Donoghue, the Secretary of the Department of Finance occupied this office. O'Donoghue's Witness Statement (WS548) reveals that the office was used by Dan O'Donovan (the two were frequently mixed up as their names in Irish were similar). O'Donoghue states that he disapproved of the use of these premises as the back entrance led onto Lad Lane, where a DMP barracks was situated.

Fitzwilliam Square which was frequently used for both Dáil and Cabinet meetings, and De Valera stayed in the top floor flat here prior to his departure for the USA in June 1919. Moreover, the MacGarry's house on Fitzwilliam Square became the headquarters of the Irish-American delegation during their brief stay in Dublin in May 1919.[115] Margaret MacGarry hosted a lavish reception for them that was attended by de Valera, Griffith, Count Plunkett and many other prominent members of Sinn Féin.[116] Despite the fact that her family was closely associated with the nationalist movement, her wealth and social status seem to have conferred an immunity from suspicion upon her, certainly through the early part of the War of Independence.

The main advantage to the properties owned by MacGarry in the Fitzwilliam area was that they were accessible from both front and rear so that people could come and go without being observed. Another property owned by Margaret MacGarry was 'Loughnavale', on the Strand Road in Merrion.[117] This was a large house surrounded by extensive walled gardens. Tall trees and hedging ensured privacy while access to it was via a securely gated driveway. It was the ideal hideaway for de Valera after his return from the USA in December 1920, and he remained there for several months until documents seized during a raid at the MacGarry property at 5 Fitzwilliam Square rendered it unsafe. These papers showed Mrs MacGarry's ownership of the Merrion house and so it was considered wise to move de Valera to a safer location to avoid the inevitable follow-up raid. Shortly afterwards, a similar property was acquired by Mrs. MacGarry to accommodate de Valera; this was 'Glenvar', on the Merrion Road in Blackrock. This house cost £3,500 - a considerable sum of money in 1921 – and Collins contributed £1,000 from Department of Finance funds.[118] MacGarry purchased the house under the pseudonym Mrs McCarthy as it was no longer considered safe for her to conduct Sinn Féin or Dáil business under her own name. She was now openly associated with Sinn Féin having successfully contested the local elections in January 1920 for the Fitzwilliam Ward. She was one of five female Sinn Féin councillors elected to Dublin Corporation – the others were Jennie Wyse Power, Kathleen Clarke, Hanna

[115] The Irish-American delegation was the group from Philadelphia who went to Paris in 1919 to plead Ireland's case before the Peace Conference. They met with de Valera, Griffith, Cosgrave and Count Plunkett during their visit to Dublin.
[116] See the *Irish Times* for a report of the MacGarry's prominence in the visit of the delegation, 5 May 1919, p.6.
[117] Loughnavale is listed in *Thom's Directory* for 1919 and 1920 as occupied by Mrs Grace, possibly a pseudonym used by MacGarry to conceal her connection with the property.
[118] The Glenvar property became the subject of a controversial court case in 1926, The Minister for Finance v MacGarry, whereby the State claimed £2,500 was owed to it by MacGarry. An agreement was reached by both parties and the case was settled out of court with the State conceding MacGarry's right to her property and acknowledging their appreciation of 'her services to the State'. See the *Irish Times*, 12 June 1926, p.13.

Sheehy Skeffington, and Anne Ashton.[119] During a time when more women were moving into public and political life, it had now become apparent that those involved in the provision of safe houses – particularly for the elite - needed to be free from any obvious allegiance to nationalist politics. This may explain why MacGarry had resorted to purchasing property for de Valera's use under a pseudonym.

Arms, ammunition and documents – Finding a safe place

Although what was effectively a guerrilla war was underway in Ireland from early 1919, for most people outside the military and police service, life continued a normal footing. People still went to work or to school and they became accustomed to the sight of military personnel on the streets, and to the roadblocks and random searches that became part and parcel of daily life. However, for those engaged in nationalist activities, life became more challenging. At a time when the possession of seditious documents or nationalist publications was enough evidence to warrant arrest or imprisonment, a great deal of ingenuity and imagination were required to avoid the attention of the military and police. Women had a distinct advantage over men as they were less likely to draw the attention of the military, particularly if they were well-dressed and appeared to be from the professional or middle-classes. Consequently, the women recruited by Michael Collins to supply safe houses for documents, arms, ammunition, but especially for men on the run, tended to be from a more affluent background. Generally, they were well-educated women of impeccable reputation whose social standing placed them beyond reproach. Few of these women had any obvious association with Cumann na mBan as Michael Collins stressed the necessity for them to be untainted by any alliance with overtly nationalist organisations. When a suitable candidate for intelligence work - or the management and supply of safe housing - was openly associated with Cumann na mBan, it was suggested that she sever these ties immediately and distance herself from that organisation.[120]

This was certainly the case with Moira Kennedy O'Byrne (1882-1969), who was recruited by Michael Collins in 1919. She joined the Ranelagh branch of Cumann na mBan after the 1916 Rising and was involved with all the organisation's activities, including work with the IVDF and later the INAAVDF. Kennedy O'Byrne was a single

[119] Mary Cullen, 'Women, Emancipation, and Politics, 1860-1984' in J.R. Hill (ed), *A New History of Ireland, Volume VII: Ireland, 1921-1984*, (Oxford, 2010), p.861.
[120] Moira Kennedy O'Byrne, BMH WS1029, p. 3. See also Mary Flannery Woods, BMH WS624, p. 25 and Annie Barrett, BMH WS1133, p. 3. All statements mention that they were instructed to sever ties with Cumann na mBan upon their commencement of intelligence work.

woman from an upper middle-class family with strong nationalist roots; she lived with her father and sisters on Highfield Road in the affluent Dublin suburb of Rathgar. Her uncle, Garrett O'Byrne, had been the IPP MP for Wicklow and her father, John, (then 79) was a retired civil servant.[121] Her brother was a medical doctor working in England, and she had trained as a nurse at Temple Street Children's Hospital in Dublin, although she was not employed in that capacity. It is possible that the household had a reasonable income from John Kennedy O'Byrne's pension or from the sale of another property in Dublin, because she did not appear to be under any economic necessity to work.[122] By 1919, together with her two sisters, she was looking after her elderly and widowed father at home, albeit with the assistance of some domestic help. She was well-educated, refined, and showed a willingness to work for the nationalist movement.[123] Kennedy O'Byrne did not meet any opposition to her political views at home – in fact she describes her father as 'an enthusiastic Nationalist and all his life anti-British'.[124] Her sister, Eithne, was also a committed nationalist and supported Moira through her various activities. As a consequence of her work with Cumann na mBan and the INAAVDF, she became friendly with Michael Collins. In a BMH witness statement she tells that she received a note from Collins at some stage in 1919 when 'things had begun to be active'. The note told her to 'stop the blasted forming fours, get out of Cumann na mBan and do some work'. She then stated that:

> He must also have sent word to the authorities of Cumann na mBan, because my name and those of a few others, such as Mary Comerford, were erased from the records. From that on we were recognised as belonging to the I.R.A.'[125]

Female membership of the IRA was unusual, but not unheard of. Most of the women discussed in this work were affiliated to the IRA rather than Cumann na mBan but on some rare occasions, they were affiliated to both. Lily O'Brennan, for example, retained her position on the executive of Cumann na mBan while she 'did intelligence

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[121] John Kennedy O'Byrne was a senior civil servant with Customs & Excise. Originally based in Dublin Castle, he was transferred to Edinburgh early in his career where he remained for several years until he succeeded in getting a transfer back to Dublin.
[122] The family lived at 1 St Philomena's Road in Glasnevin prior to the move to Rathgar in 1914. See Census of Ireland, 1911. http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Dublin/Glasnevin/St__Philomena_s_Road__Finglas/9086/
[123] See Scanlon, *The Irish Nurse,* also Fealy, *A History of Apprenticeship Nurse Training in Ireland* for details on standard of education required for 'Probationer Nurse'. Also included are details of additional education and training provided through the hospital employing the Probationer.
[124] Moira Kennedy O'Byrne, BMH WS1029, p. 1.
[125] Moira Kennedy O'Byrne, BMH WS1029, p. 3.

work for the late Michael Collins'.[126] Joe O'Reilly confirmed this in a letter to the MSP, stating that 'Miss O'Brennan did a lot of intelligence work for the late Michael Collins and she was highly esteemed by him'.[127] However, in most instances where a woman was requested to undertake work of a secret nature, she usually terminated her affiliation with overtly nationalist organisations such as Cumann na mBan. Kennedy O'Byrne was thirty-seven years old when she was recruited by Collins and she spent the next two years moving arms, ammunition and explosives to various safe houses and arms dumps. These were then distributed to IRA volunteers when required for ambushes and engagements. The transportation of arms and ammunition is a subject that frequently occurs in the statements of women members of the IRA during this period. One reason for this may be that women, particularly middle-class women, were less likely to be searched by the military or police than their male associates, particularly if they appeared to be merely going about their normal business. However, his tactic became less workable as the War of Independence progressed; eventually the police and military realised that they were being duped and introduced women police searchers in 1921. (See Chapter 4).[128]

Like Margaret MacGarry, the procurement of safe houses in which to locate government departments and to shelter men on the run was also one of Kennedy O'Byrne's duties. Additionally, the family home at Highfield Road held what she described as 'a secret room… where things could be hidden and it was never discovered'.[129] She also acted as the liaison between Collins and other intelligence agents as in the case of Annie Brennan, discussed earlier. Kennedy O'Byrne must have been one of Collins's most trusted operatives as he placed £10,000 - money that was sent from the USA for arms procurement - with her for safe-keeping. Members of the Dáil were aware that Dublin Castle authorities were investigating various bank accounts used by them and consequently felt that it was safer to place the money temporarily with trusted sources. Her witness statement describes how she concealed the notes about her person under her clothes and felt certain that anybody who passed her could hear the crackling of the brand new bank notes every time she moved.[130] When she arrived home she packaged up all the notes into a parcel and brought it to

[126] Sworn statement made by Lily O'Brennan to MSP Board Advisory Committee, p.2, 22 May 1936, MSP34REF2229.
[127] Letter from Joe O'Reilly to MSP Board re Lily O'Brennan, 18 May 1936, MSP34REF2229.
[128] Niall Whelehan, 'The Irish Revolution 1912-23' in Alvin Jackson (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish History* (Oxford, 2014), p.631. For a near-contemporaneous account of women police searchers in Ireland see Mary Sophia Allen, *The Pioneer Policewoman* (London, 1925).
[129] Moira Kennedy O'Byrne, BMH WS1029, p. 3.
[130] Moira Kennedy O'Byrne, BMH WS1029, p. 10.

the Munster and Leinster bank in Rathgar where she persuaded the bank manager to accept the parcel for safe-keeping. She never told him what it contained and he never asked. According to her witness statement, it remained there safely until she retrieved it after the Truce. Nor was she the only woman to be trusted with large sums of IRA money. Julia O'Donovan, a cousin of Gearóid O'Sullivan[131] (a friend of Michael Collins who was appointed adjutant general of the IRA in February 1920) permitted Collins to temporarily place £4,000 of Dáil Loan funds in a bank account in her name.[132]

Kennedy O'Byrne's MSP file, which pre-dates her BMH witness statement by twenty years, reveals some significant facts about her activities during the War of Independence. The file elaborates on her withdrawal from Cumann na mBan, stating that she was 'instructed to cut out parades and to appear as if [she] was not active in any way'.[133] These instructions came from the Director of Intelligence (Michael Collins); it also states that she was 'transferred to IRA service by Director of Intelligence for work in his Department'. Furthermore, she claimed rank at Grade D (Staff Captain) and added the comment 'I desire to make clear that my service from 1st April 1918 to Sept 1920 was as a member of the I.R.A. – my service in Cumann na mBan ceased on the former date.'[134] Her service was subsequently acknowledged by the MSP Board as that of a member of the IRA and she was granted a Grade D pension in recognition of this. Kennedy O'Byrne's main female associate during this period was Lily O'Brennan – they were frequently engaged on the same 'jobs', and prior to the truce period, Kennedy O'Byrne took up a position within Constance Markievicz's Department of Labour alongside O'Brennan.[135] Their duties were neither clerical nor administrative, instead they continued to focus on the location of safe houses for men on-the-run and for arms and ammunition. The function of the Department of Labour, which was almost exclusively staffed by women, will be discussed in Chapter 4. While these women were single and at liberty to pursue their duties for the IRA's GHQ Intelligence Department, other female intelligence operatives had more complicated domestic arrangements.

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[131] Patrick Long 'O'Sullivan, Gearóid', *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. (http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a7059).
[132] Julia O'Donovan, BMH WS475, p. 1.
[133] Statement of active service from Moira Kennedy O'Byrne to MSP Board, undated but submitted in support of application dated 8 January 1935, MSP34REF381.
[134] Note made by Moira Kennedy O'Byrne on application for MSP, p. 14, 8 December 1934, MSP34REF381.
[135] O'Brennan was also awarded a pension at Grade D. See MSP34REF2229.

Somewhere to live – Safe housing, provision and procurement

Mary (Mollie) Flannery Woods (1875-1954) tells a similar story, detailing how she was introduced to Michael Collins by their mutual friend Batt O'Connor.[136] The daughter of a staunch Fenian and a native of County Sligo, Flannery Woods also joined Cumann na mBan after the 1916 Rising, although she moved in nationalist circles for many years prior to that.[137] She was an aspiring writer, and had had several poems and short stories published in periodicals and newspapers.[138] After her initial contact with Collins she was asked to cut her ties with Cumann na mBan and stated 'From this period onwards, my activities were definitely in conjunction with the I.R.A.'.[139] This account is remarkably consistent with that of Moira Kennedy O'Byrne and other women who claim IRA rather than Cumann na mBan service. Arguably, it indicates that there may have been a protocol in place to facilitate the recruitment of female intelligence operatives into the ranks of the IRA. The Captain of the Ranelagh Branch of Cumann na mBan, Phyllis Ryan (Bean Uí Cheallaigh) confirmed this account of Flannery Woods' experience, so it appears that senior members of Cumann na mBan were perhaps complicit with the IRA in the transfer of personnel from the former organisation to the latter.[140] In an MSP application, Woods stated that she was 'relieved of attendance at Cumann meetings' due to the 'nature and extent of my special work with Collins and Mellows'.[141] She was acknowledged as 'engaged in active work of an intelligence nature' and claimed the rank of Captain in recognition of this.[142] The MSP advisory committee accepted her evidence and awarded her a Grade D pension.

Mary Flannery Woods was aged forty-six and was married with five children - three boys and two girls aged from nine years up to seventeen years - when she commenced working for GHQ. Her eldest son was educated at Pearse's school, St. Enda's, whilst her daughters were taught by Louise Gavan Duffy in St. Stephen's Green. Many advanced nationalists sent their children to these establishments to be

[136] Letter from Brigid O'Connor to MSP Board re Mary Flannery Woods, 20 January 1938, MSP34REF20402.
[137] Mary Flannery Woods, BMH WS624, p. 4. 'I was brought up in a hotbed of nationalism'.
[138] Her work was first published in the 1890s in the *Weekly Freeman*. Over the following years she had articles pushed in the *United Irishman*, the *Glasgow Herald*, the *Sligo Champion* and the *Irish Independent*. She described one article as being 'full of sedition'. See BMH WS624, p. 5.
[139] Letter from Mary Flannery Woods to MSP Board containing 'Additional particulars of service', 8 April 1938, p. 3, MSP34REF20402.
[140] Letter from Phyllis Ryan to Mary Flannery Woods re the latter's MSP application, 17 November 1937, MSP34REF20402.
[141] Letter from Robert Briscoe to MSP Board in support of Mary Flannery Woods, 14 December 1937, MSP34REF20402.
[142] Letter from Mary Flannery Woods to MSP Board containing 'Additional particulars of service', 8 April 1938, MSP34REF20402.

educated and to encounter others with similar backgrounds and views; in fact, Flannery Woods first got to know Batt and Brigid O'Connor because their children attended the same schools. Like Margaret MacGarry, Flannery Woods started out as a cultural nationalist and her views evolved from that point towards separatism. In contrast, Andrew, her husband, was a member of the Ancient Order of Hibernians and was essentially a constitutional nationalist.[143] They were both active in the Irish National Literary Society and lived in a large property at 131 Morehampton Road in Donnybrook, Dublin where they were well regarded by their neighbours. However, behind the cloak of middle-class respectability, number 131 was an arms dump for members of the 3rd Battalion and a secure hiding place and safe house for dozens of IRA volunteers and Dáil deputies. In fact, Liam Mellows and Seán Etchingham spent eighteen months living with the Woods family under assumed names.[144] Like Kennedy O'Byrne, Mary Flannery Woods was also entrusted with large sums of money by Michael Collins, but she was instructed to use the money to buy and rent property that could be used as safe houses. The first house she purchased (ostensibly for her nephew) was on Harcourt Terrace and cost £800; this property was used by Collins until the Truce.[145] Her BMH witness statement describes the modifications that Batt O'Connor made to the property.[146] These included a concealed cupboard that could hold a substantial amount of arms and ammunition – or a man, if necessary. Another modification provided a concealed area beneath the flooring that led into the foundations of the house; this facilitated multiple concealments and at any given time could contain documents, arms or men on the run. Flannery Woods also rented a house at 9 St. Mary's Road, Ballsbridge for a six-month period for Michael Collins; Máire Comerford arranged for her mother to move in as his housekeeper. However, Mrs. Comerford (who stayed there under the alias Mrs. Quinn) was forced to leave when she was recognised by some neighbours.[147]

Flannery Woods rented and purchased several houses over the course of the War of Independence; some turned out to be safer than others, but she always had a network of women with whom she could place a man on the run for safe-keeping for a night or more. Although there is no documented account of how this network

[143] The AOH (Ancient Order of Hibernians) was a Catholic – some would say sectarian – political organisation that supported the IPP in their push towards Home Rule.
[144] C. Desmond Greaves, *Liam Mellows and the Irish Revolution* (Belfast, 2004), p.222.
[145] See Charlie Dalton, BMH WS434, p. 8, for a description of the Harcourt Terrace office used by Collins.
[146] Mellows first used the name Mr Anderson and later Mr Nolan. Etchingham went under the name Quinn. Mary Flannery Woods, BMH WS624, pp. 11-13.
[147] Máire Comerford Papers, LA18/30, undated, UCDA. The circumstances leading to this incident are detailed in this unpublished memoir.

functioned, the women involved all appear to be known to each other, certainly they were all known to Mary Flannery Woods. They all lived in middle-class or upper middle-class areas and were nationalist sympathisers.[148] Many were married women who readily accepted men on-the-run into their homes; presumably with the acquiescence of their husbands. As Andrew Woods and his family owned several properties, his wife's activities in the property market did not attract unnecessary attention. It is noteworthy that Flannery Woods and MacGarry, although both married, took the initiative in the matter of property acquisition on behalf of the IRA. In each case their spouses appear to have receded into the background while these women confidently assumed a leadership role in the relationship. Furthermore, the actions of these women frequently placed other members of the family in danger – particularly during police and military raids – and yet they seem to have enjoyed a freedom from spousal interference which was perhaps unusual during the early part of the twentieth century. In short, their husbands turned a blind eye to their activities on behalf of the IRA. Nonetheless, Andrew Woods was much admired by many who encountered him through his wife's activities. Máire Comerford, commenting on Flannery Woods said:

> If God created another Irishwoman to match her it would be my urgent aim to get acquainted, and as soon as possible. She had the best little man who ever declared he was no republican for a husband, and three boys and two girls beginning with Tony, a very young Volunteer.[149]

Tony Woods, Mary and Andy's son, stated: 'my father was a neutral, shadowy figure, while my mother was a political extrovert, and a strong Nationalist, despite being from a Galway Blazer type of set.'[150] Maeve MacGarry made a very similar point about her father as referenced earlier in this chapter – he was quiet, non-political and tended to take a passive role in the marriage insofar as his wife's political activities were concerned.

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[148] In her BMH Witness Statement WS624, she names those to whom she could send men for 'safe-keeping'. Among those were her sister-in-law, Mrs B. Woods at Eglinton Terrace, Mrs Hand and Mrs Considine who were neighbours on Morehampton Road, Mrs McCarthy on Parkgate Street, Mrs Byrne of Donnybrook and Mrs Humphries on Aylesbury Road.
[149] Máire Comerford unpublished memoir, chapter titled 'Woods', Máire Comerford Papers, LA18/30, undated, UCDA.
[150] Tony Woods interviewed in Uinseann Mac Eoin, *Survivors*, (Dublin, 1980), p.311. The term 'Galway Blazer', refers to the famous Galway Hunt indicating that his mother was of that social class.

Medical Care

Flannery Woods counted Lily O'Brennan, Moira Kennedy O'Byrne and Máire Comerford among some of her main contacts and they frequently sent escaped prisoners and men on the run to her for safe-keeping. Additionally, she had a long list of sympathetic people she could call on to harbour a man for a day, a week, or more; which was often the case when her own home was filled to capacity. Flannery Woods looked after all contingencies including arranging access to medical care for her charges. Among the medical practitioners she could trust were Doctors Richard Shaw of Donnybrook, Eleanora Fleury of Richmond and later Portrane Asylum, Kathleen Lynn, Alice Barry, Dorothy Stopford Price and Dr McElhinney. Each one provided assistance and medical care to sick or wounded IRA Volunteers.[151] It is interesting to note that the majority of these doctors are female, despite the fact that women doctors made up only a small percentage of those practising medicine in Ireland during this period.[152] Dr Alice Barry, in a BMH witness statement, remarks that she and her family were approached by Michael Collins who 'asked us to disassociate ourselves with Sinn Féin and public politics and to keep our house as a refuge for dangerously wounded IRA men'.[153] Máire Comerford recalls in her memoirs that Stopford Price 'disappeared from our circle' at one stage during the War of Independence; later she discovered that the doctor was running a secret IRA cottage hospital in county Cork.[154]

Stopford Price (1890-1954) trained as a medical doctor in Trinity College graduating in 1921; she completed her training in the Meath and Rotunda Hospitals.[155] She joined the University branch of Cumann na mBan, but as she came from a Protestant, Anglo-Irish family, she escaped the attention of the authorities for the early part of the War of Independence. In March 1921 she travelled to Kilbrittain, County

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[151] See Éilis Ní Ríain (Bean Uí Chonaill), BMH WS568 for her account of bringing wounded IRA Volunteers to Dr. Fleury for treatment. See Áine Heron, BMH WS293 for an account of Dr. McElhinny's assistance. See Stephen Keys, BMH WS1209 for an account of Dr. Shaw tending to multiple wounded Volunteers at the home of Mrs Dudley Edwards. For biographical details of Eleanora Fleury and Kathleen Lynn, see Beulah Bewley, 'On the Inside Sitting Alone: Pioneering Irish Women Doctors' in *History Ireland*, Vol. 13, Issue 2, Mar/Apr 2005. https://www.historyireland.com/20th-century-contemporary-history/on-the-inside-sitting-alone-pioneer-irish-women-doctors/

[152] Kelly, *Irish women in medicine,* p.70. Table 3.6 shows the number of medical students matriculating in 1906 from the 6 Irish medical schools; there were 236 male students and 4 female students.

[153] Dr. Alice Barry, BMH WS723, p. 1.

[154] Unpublished memoir in Máire Comerford Papers, undated, LA18/23, UCDA. Part of an unpublished memoir in which Comerford refers to Dorothy Stopford's absence from Dublin. Comerford worked for Alice Stopford Green, Dorothy's paternal aunt and a well-known nationalist. She may have learned of Dorothy's involvement with the west Cork flying columns from her employer.

[155] Mac Lellan, *Dorothy Stopford Price,* pp. 62-3.

Cork, where she lectured in first-aid for Cumann na mBan and tended to injured IRA men.[156] Returning to Dublin briefly for her graduation in April 1921, she decided to move back to Kilbrittain to take up the post of dispensary doctor.[157] She continued to perform medical duties for the IRA in the district, travelling mainly cross-country on horseback to avoid military patrols.[158] Stopford Price was only one of many doctors, nurses and pharmacists who assisted the IRA during the War of Independence. This medical network provided a vital service that ensured that wounded volunteers did not fall into the hands of the British and provided them with the medical care they needed to recover from their injuries.

Geraldine O'Donel (1883?-1958), the owner of a nursing home on Eccles Street, adjacent to the Mater Hospital in Dublin, frequently provided beds to wounded IRA men who had to be moved from the Mater Hospital because of impending raids.[159] O'Donel was originally from Foxford in county Mayo and came from a prosperous middle-class family who owned several properties in the town.[160] Her father was a Fenian and the O'Donels claimed direct descent from Hugh O'Donel of Donegal.[161] The daughters of the family were sent to boarding school to be educated, first to Dublin and then to Louvain in Belgium. On completion of her education, Geraldine O'Donel went to the Mater Hospital in Dublin, where she trained as a nurse during the years 1913-1916. She was prosperous enough to open a nurses' home at 24 Eccles Street in 1917 then she subsequently acquired premises at number 62 Eccles Street to open a nursing home in 1920.[162] O'Donel's sister, Lil, was a member of Cumann na mBan, but O'Donel states that she never joined the organisation as she was told (she does not say by whom) that she would be more useful if she did not join.[163] However, she was close friends with many prominent IRA and IRB members and made her premises available to them on a regular basis. She recalled that in early 1920 'the whole top of the house was occupied by wounded Republicans'.[164] Some of the medical staff from the Mater Hospital, particularly the surgeons Dr Charlie McAuley and Dr Gabriel Ryan, operated on the more seriously wounded patients there. Dr John Loftus of Jervis Street Hospital

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156 Mac Lellan, *Dorothy Stopford Price,* p. 66.
157 Mac Lellan, *Dorothy Stopford Price,* p. 69.
158 Mac Lellan, *Dorothy Stopford Price,* pp. 79-80.
159 Geraldine O'Donel, BMH WS861, p. 4.
160 See Census return for 1901. Geraldine O'Donel is described as 'Landlord's Daughter'. http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/reels/nai001090785/
161 Geraldine O'Donel, BMH WS861, pp. 1-2.
162 Linda Kearns also owned a nurses' home; her premises at 29 Gardiner Place was less than a kilometre from O'Donel's.
163 Geraldine O'Donel, BMH WS861, p. 3.
164 Geraldine O'Donel, BMH WS861, pp. 3-4; see also Oscar Traynor BMH WS340, p. 75 in which he states that O'Donel's Nursing Home is 'where all our volunteers were treated'.

also tended patients in O'Donel's nursing home. Loftus was not just sympathetic to the nationalist cause, he was also the Medical Officer for the 6th Battalion of the Dublin Brigade.[165] Twomey, the pharmacist on Denmark Street and close associate of Linda Kearns, was the liaison between GHQ and the wounded IRA patients. GHQ looked after all their medical expenses, which O'Donel says, 'we kept at a very reduced rate'.[166]

Mollie Flannery Woods had a car at her disposal, so she frequently moved injured or sick volunteers to safe medical locations by road. Occasionally she used the car to travel with a disguised Liam Mellows and Seán Etchingham as they went about Dáil or IRA business.[167] Seán Etchingham was Minister for Fisheries in the First Dáil, while Liam Mellows was Director of Purchasing for GHQ, and their ministries sometimes took them to remote locations in the country. Máire Comerford usually acted as driver for them on their business trips outside Dublin. The two women provided good cover for Etchingham and Mellows and succeeded in keeping them out of the hands of the British forces for the duration of the War of Independence. While every woman who engaged in intelligence activities for the IRA during this period ran enormous risks, the stakes were arguably higher for a woman with children. Flannery Woods' husband, Andy, although not hostile to the nationalist cause, was perhaps more than a little ambivalent. However, he appears to have turned a blind eye to almost everything of a political nature that went on in the family home during this period. Additionally, her children were, on occasion, drawn into the subterfuge. Her eldest son, Tony, joined the IRA, her younger children served as decoys, and, during one raid, carried explosives out of the house in their underwear.[168]

Safety for the Squad

In 1919, British intelligence in Ireland was primarily the responsibility of the DMP and the RIC with local constables reporting on any nationalist political activity that took place within their own jurisdictions. G Division of the DMP was perhaps the closest comparison to a 'secret service' functioning in the capital.[169] However, the activities of 'G' Division were seriously undermined for two main reasons. Firstly, at least three of

[165] Andrew McDonnell, BMH WS1768, p. 50.
[166] Geraldine O'Donel, BMH WS861, p. 5.
[167] Liam Mellows had pale colouring and fair hair and frequently dyed his hair and eyebrows a dark shade of brown to facilitate a disguise. See Máire Comerford unpublished memoir in Máire Comerford Papers, undated, LA18/30, UCDA. Also see Alf Monahan BMH WS298, p. 43.
[168] Mary Flannery Woods, BMH WS624, p. 39.
[169] Peter Hart, *British Intelligence in Ireland, 1920-21: The Final Reports* (Cork: 2002), p.4.

its staff – Broy, Neligan and McNamara – were already actively assisting IRA intelligence, and secondly, G Division agents were out on the streets, in railway stations, and waiting around hotels and bars to note the movements of prominent Sinn Féiners, so their identities were well known to those under observation. Similarly, the RIC Special Branch carried out these duties outside the metropolitan area, but they were few in number and had no training specific to intelligence gathering. With the commencement of the RIC boycott and the targeted assassinations of their members, they were, as Peter Hart phrased it, 'demoralised, underpaid, underfunded, undermanned, almost entirely uniformed and non-partisan in their duties and outlook'.[170]

As Squad activity increased, the demand for safe houses for men and arms also rose. The men on duty with the Squad were not usually sheltered in the larger houses of Dublin's leafier suburbs, instead they normally found refuge close to the city in the homes of sympathisers. A very different structure appears to exist between the provision of safe houses for what could be considered the 'elite' members of the IRA – either elected representatives in the First Dáil or senior IRA/IRB members – and the regular foot soldiers. While those harbouring the elite on-the-runs were normally expected to distance themselves from Cumann na mBan and other nationalist organisations, this does not always appear to be the case for women who provided safe houses to regular IRA men. Frequently, the women providing safe houses were serving members of Cumann na mBan and many of them were married to active IRA men. The dichotomy between open republican activist and secret provider of safe houses was bridged by working class women in many different ways. Nellie Lambert (later Mrs. Ellen Stynes) and her sisters Bridget, Kathleen, and Josie were all members of the Dundrum branch of Cumann na mBan. Nellie and Bridget were both in the GPO during the Easter Rising and their father (who passed away in 1919) fought with the Irish Citizen Army.[171] The family lived in a cottage at the rear of Oldbridge House in Milltown, Dublin. Although the house was small, they sheltered men from Active Service Units (ASUs) almost every night, storing their arms and ammunition in the attic. Even though there were 4 Cumann na mBan members in the house, it was never raided during the War of Independence. Nellie Lambert believed that this was due to the location of the cottage as it was situated at the back of the local 'Big House' and was possibly considered to be above suspicion. Her sister Bridget stated that the

[170] Hart, *British Intelligence*, p. 5.
[171] Sworn evidence of Ellen Stynes to MSP Board, 2 May 1941, p. 2, MSP34REF56696.

house was in a discreet position and could not be seen from the main road; she moved freely carrying both arms and dispatches without being observed.[172]

Closer to the city centre on Grantham Street was the home of the Malone family. The house was occupied by Mrs Malone and her two daughters Áine and Bridget; a son, Michael, was killed at Mount Street Bridge during the 1916 Rising.[173] The family were all advanced nationalists. Both girls worked as typists for Michael Noyk, the solicitor who handled legal work for the IRA and represented Constance Markievicz. Bridget Malone (? -1984) was on active service duty from 1919 through to the end of the War of Independence when she married Dan Breen of the South Tipperary Brigade IRA. She was awarded an MSP at Grade E, later increased to a Grade D after an appeal, which included a strongly worded letter from her husband. Breen told the MSP Board, 'I consider it an insult, and I should expect better from you towards my wife'.[174] She also wrote to protest against the 'mealy portion' awarded to her.[175] The letters had the desired effect and her appeal granted. Although her service was acknowledged as a member of Cumann na mBan from 1917-1922, she appears to have considered herself to be on IRA intelligence duties during this period. 'I worked for G.H.Q. & for Intelligence Dept. I was, I think the only woman with access to the Adjutant General's Department.'[176] Certainly, her service during the War of Independence was corroborated by IRA officers rather than members of Cumann na mBan. These officers included Jim Slattery and Joe Leonard from the Squad, Patrick Kennedy from GHQ Intelligence and Simon Donnelly, a staff officer at GHQ.[177] However, while she never claimed to be a member of the IRA, she stated that 'The late Vice Commandant P. Clancy ordered myself and my sister to leave Cumann na mBan so that we could work for him quietly.'[178] Based on the correspondence in this file, it is likely that Malone's initial application was presented purely as that of a Cumann na mBan activist and awarded with a Grade E pension on that basis. She self-identified as a member of Cumann na mBan, rather than the IRA. However, when an appeal highlighted her military and intelligence work for the IRA, it was deemed to be of a higher quality and subsequently increased to Grade D. Malone's application and

[172] Sworn evidence of Bridget Doran (née Lambert) to MSP Board, undated, but probably November 1941, MSP34REF57178.
[173] Sworn evidence given by Bridget Breen (née Malone) to MSP Board, 13 December 1940, p.1, MSP34REF28100.
[174] Letter from Dan Breen to MSP Board re Bridget Breen's application, 21 February 1941, MSP34REF28100.
[175] Letter from Bridget Breen to MSP Board, 23 February 1941, MSP34REF28100.
[176] Letter from Bridget Breen to MSP Board, 23 February 1921. MSP34REF28100, p. 6.
[177] See letters to MSP Board in support of Brigid Breen's application, MSP34REF28100.
[178] Letter from Bridget Breen to MSP Board, 23 February 1921. MSP34REF28100, p. 5.

subsequent appeal highlight the inconsistencies that existed within the MSP Board when evaluating the cases of women working for and on behalf of IRA Intelligence. There appears to be a tendency to consider the work of many Cumann na mBan members – even those seconded to IRA GHQ – as being of a low value and therefore less deserving of rank.

Áine Malone (1889-1950) – a sister of Bridget Breen - was active with Cumann na mBan from the 1916 Rising through to 1919. That year, she states, she was instructed by Peadar Clancy to distance herself from Cumann na mBan and make herself available to the ASU under his command.[179] This ASU was the Squad and from this point onwards the Malone home became a safe house for Squad members as well as a place of refuge for men from the South Tipperary Brigade. Áine Malone became the custodian of arms and ammunition for Squad members, mostly transporting these items back to the arms dumps after Squad operations. Joe Leonard testified that she moved the weapons used in the attacks on Detectives Hoey and Barton (shot by the Squad in September and November 1919) back to the dumps afterwards.[180] She was awarded a pension at Grade D as she was acknowledged to have had service in the 1916 Rising. (She received gunshot wounds while carrying dispatches from St Stephen's Green to the Jacobs Garrison).[181] She never claimed IRA membership, although she too was active on IRA Intelligence duty. However, she was very clear in both her application to the MSP Board and her subsequent interview with them, that she was taking orders directly from Paddy Daly of the Squad. The sense from Malone's application is that she considered herself to be a member of Cumann na mBan who was transferred to the IRA for special duties. Furthermore, the former Vice Commandant of the 3rd Battalion, Simon Donnelly, described her as 'an active worker with the IRA' who was 'exempt from parades of Cumann na mBan to be of greater service for the more important duties assigned her'.[182] An examination of their MSP files reveals that the Malone sisters showed an incredible amount of courage and daring given that their home on Grantham Street was in close proximity to Portobello Barracks. However, many of the streets around that area harboured active republicans, including the Delaney home at 71 Heytesbury Street which mirrored much of the

[179] Sworn statement of Áine Fitzgerald (née Malone), made before the MSP Advisory Committee, 23 February 1937, p. 2, MSP34REF39275.
[180] Letter from Joe Leonard to MSP Board re Áine Fitzgerald (née Malone), 13 November 1936, MSP34REF39275.
[181] Sworn statement of Áine Fitzgerald made before the Advisory Committee on 23 February 1937, p. 1, MSP34REF39275.
[182] Letter from Simon Donnelly to MSP Board re Áine Fitzgerald (née Malone), 2 December 1936, MSP34REF39275.

activity taking place at nearby Grantham Street.[183] Another member of the South Tipperary Brigade, Seumas Robinson, married Bridget Keating, a stepdaughter of Joe Delaney. This network of streets just off Camden Street subsequently became known as 'The Dardanelles' due to the frequent attacks that took place in the vicinity on military personnel travelling to and from Portobello Barracks.[184] In one sense, it almost became a 'no-go' area for the military enabling families like the Malones, Delaneys and others to continue with their clandestine activities with some degree of safety.

The British Response

Clearly, immediate action was required both to restore order and to address the morale issue of the police force in Ireland. Lord French, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, grasped this particular nettle in his memorandum to the British Cabinet on 25 September 1919.[185] Reporting on the situation in Ireland, he stated 'in my opinion, the adoption of Martial Law in certain districts, could not be too drastic a measure, but before proceeding so far I feel that every available means of crushing this murderous band should be adopted'. French urged the Cabinet to allocate additional funding to Ireland, stressing that the secret service must be improved, and that money must be made available to recruit more detectives, particularly in G Division. He also encouraged them to consider the implementation of an extension to DORA, to enable the arrest of known suspects, recommending their internment in British prisons. He deemed Irish prisons to be unsuitable and declared that it was 'inadvisable to keep such prisoners in the country'.[186] This is hardly surprising in light of the large number of prisoners who had escaped from Irish prisons in previous months, and his underlying suspicion that no Irishman – not even a prison warder – could be fully trusted. French added that if his suggestions were implemented, he believed that 'it may be possible to break up these gangs and to bring the murderers to justice'. The 'gangs' to which French referred very likely included the Squad as they had been active again during the month of September 1919. On the night of Friday 10 September, Detective Constable Daniel Hoey of G Division in the DMP was shot dead almost at the door of G Division HQ on Townsend Street. Hoey had become a significant threat because he led a raid earlier

[183] Sworn testimony of Annie Reardon (née Keating) to MSP Board, 10 June 1940, MSP34REF56181.
[184] Michael Flanagan, BMH WS908, p. 8; Laurence Nugent, BMH WS907, p. 232.
[185] Cabinet Papers, Joint Memorandum by Lord French and Ian MacPherson, 25 September 1919, CAB24/89/27, TNA.
[186] Cabinet Papers, Joint Memorandum by Lord French and Ian MacPherson, 25 September 1919, p. 2, CAB24/89/27, TNA.

that day on the Sinn Féin offices in which several members were arrested and in which Michael Collins had a narrow escape.[187] The raid was conducted under the newly implemented suppression laws,[188] but Hoey had been a long-standing enemy of nationalism; he was one of the detectives responsible for identifying the ring-leaders of the 1916 Rising in Richmond Barracks after the surrender.[189] Mick McDonnell, James Slattery and Tom Ennis were ordered to eliminate Hoey. The attacks on G Division continued, and on 10 November, Detective Wharton was shot at Cuffe Street close to St. Stephen's Green; he survived the attack although he spent a considerable time in hospital. Paddy Daly of the Squad ASU was responsible for this shooting.[190]

Within weeks of the Downing Street meeting, another murder took place in the centre of Dublin when Detective Johnny Barton of G Division was shot dead at College Green. Coincidentally, Barton, like the recently deceased Hoey, was another detective who identified the 1916 leaders in Richmond Barracks following the surrender. Almost one third of the G Division detectives were assassinated in the space of a few months, completely undermining the DMP Intelligence unit. Meanwhile, the authorities at Dublin Castle seemed almost powerless to act. In desperation, French established a select committee to report to him on intelligence matters. It consisted of Smyth, now the acting head of the RIC, Allen Bell, a Resident Magistrate, and Sir John J. Taylor, the Assistant Undersecretary.[191] The committee made the recommendation that the Sinn Féin organisation should be infiltrated by spies and that its leaders should be assassinated. However, French had barely had time to consider their report when he too became the victim of an assassination attempt. On 19 December, members of the Squad, with their ranks swelled by the addition of Dan Breen, Seán Treacy, and Seumas Robinson, of Soloheadbeg fame, travelled by bicycle to Ashtown in County Dublin to ambush French on his return from his country home in Roscommon. French's party planned to alight at the train station in Ashtown adjacent to Dublin's Phoenix Park, where they would be met by an armed escort, and then travel by car to the Vice-Regal Lodge. There were three cars in the convoy and it was anticipated that French would travel in the second car.[192] However, fortunately for French, he travelled in the first car and escaped the barrage of grenades and gunfire unscathed. The attackers

[187] Séamus Ua Caomhanaigh (James Kavanagh), BMH WS889, pp. 103-5.
[188] For details on the suppression of Sinn Féin, Dáil Éireann and the Irish Volunteers, see Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland*, p. 285.
[189] Robert Holland, BMH WS280, p. 47.
[190] Paddy Daly, BMH WS387, pp. 12-3.
[191] Ryle Dwyer, *The Squad*, p. 70.
[192] See BMH Witness Statements from Seumas Robinson, WS156 & WS1721; Michael McDonnell WS225; Joe Leonard, WS547; Paddy Daly, WS387, Vinnie Byrne, WS423.

were not so lucky; Martin Savage, who had only volunteered to participate in the ambush the night before, was killed by the returning gunfire from French's military escort. Dan Breen suffered a serious leg wound and was lucky to escape. He was brought to the home of the Malones in Grantham Street in Dublin to recover from his injuries.[193]

Conclusion

Both Kennedy O'Byrne and Flannery Woods suffered military raids on their family homes on several occasions but neither of them were ever placed under arrest or imprisoned for their activities during the War of Independence. The key question is why they were chosen by Michael Collins to assume the roles he allocated them and why he felt that those roles could be better fulfilled outside the formal Cumann na mBan organisation. Is it because he believed that their social standing would give them a veneer of protection from the authorities in Dublin Castle? Or was it because women of their class were less likely to be subjected to search and harassment from the military? As demonstrated earlier, men attached to GHQ were also asked to cut all overt ties to the Sinn Féin organisation and Irish Volunteer companies so there appears to have been a protocol in place to ensure that those on intelligence work were not openly associated with any proclaimed organisations. However, there is clearly a class bias in the recruitment process of women in urban areas as these tend to come almost exclusively from the middle and professional classes. Unfortunately, none of the women stated what the recruitment process was; nonetheless they all came from similar nationalist backgrounds usually with a family history of Fenianism or membership of nationalist or cultural nationalist organisations. Perhaps the obvious explanation is the most likely – they were respectable women with social standing and they had access to motor transportation (a rarity in that era), but most importantly they were women of means who had a nationalist pedigree and they could be trusted with arms, cash, and most importantly – secrets.

Access to safe housing was one of the foremost needs of those engaged in the War of Independence and to address this a wide variety of urban safe houses were established during 1919. Generally, the homes chosen were those of nationalist sympathisers, usually women, who could be trusted to conduct their business without attracting unwanted attention from the police or military. It appears to be the case that

[193] Seumas Robinson, BMH WS156.

more salubrious homes and locations were chosen for the elite of the nationalist movement - Dáil members and senior members of the IRA and IRB. For these individuals every precaution was taken to ensure their safety. The homes they stayed in normally had multiple entrances and exits to facilitate a speedy escape if necessary. Additionally, they frequently had structural modifications to provide a safe hiding place for arms, documents or people. The women who provided these facilities had a wide network of medical support to call upon in the case of any illness or injury to their charges. In contrast, safe houses used by the working class or lower middle-class IRA Volunteer tended to be in locations that reflected their position in society. Consequently, multiple entrances and exits were less common and building modifications unlikely, although hiding places were often created in gardens and outhouses. However, almost all the safe houses established in 1919 were managed by capable women, many of whom had nursing and arms training through the Cumann na mBan organisation. The fact that many of them were instructed to cut their ties with Cumann na mBan is revealing, although less attention appears to be paid to this idea the further one moves down the class structure. The ability to manage and maintain arms dumps is common to almost all the women, as is the ability to conceal documents and dispatches. While those at the upper end of the class structure frequently used their position in society as a shield against the police and military, women at the lower end of the social structure used their wits and frequently bluffed their way through military checks and searches.[194] Most of the women who assumed these duties did so on the understanding that they were now members of the IRA; both Moira Kennedy O'Byrne and Áine Malone considered themselves to have been transferred from Cumann na mBan to IRA or ASU duties. Women who worked on intelligence duty in post-offices, military barracks and even Dublin Castle thought likewise. In some ways it signalled the end of the notion that the main outlet for nationalist women was the Cumann na mBan organisation; those who transitioned across to the IRA would remain there until the end of the struggle.

The end of 1919, and particularly the abortive ambush on Lord French, brought about a sea-change in the British attitude to the Irish situation. The attack on French, declares Hopkinson, 'succeeded in frightening British opinion out of its post-First World War apathy over Ireland'.[195] From the beginning of 1920, they would implement a

[194] See Áine Malone's account of a military search that took place in a tram on which she was travelling. Concealed in her clothing were two revolvers, but she remained calm and escaped without a search. Áine FitzGerald (née Malone), Military Service Pensions Collection, File Ref. MSP34REF39275.
[195] Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence*, p. 28.

series of counter-insurgency measures which would bring the War of Independence to the door of almost every family in Ireland. Many of these measures would require new strategies from women working with the IRA as the conflict evolved.

Chapter 4

Coercion and Countermeasures - 1920

I was consulted by and discussed with the Brigade Officers all activities to be undertaken. I organised transport, arranged for motor cars, collected information, read maps and fought actively in ambushes. [1]

Introduction

This chapter will examine the countermeasures taken in 1920 by the British administration in response to the developing War of Independence in Ireland. Declining to acknowledge that there was a guerrilla war underway against British rule, the administration in Dublin Castle referred to the unfolding events as the 'Emergency'.[2] It was perhaps easier to discuss emergency conditions than to admit that the situation in Ireland had become unmanageable. Nonetheless, organisational and personnel changes in both civil and military administration were introduced in early 1920 to address the situation. The old regime in Dublin Castle was swept aside and a new team of civil servants was appointed from London; simultaneously, a new General Officer Commanding (GOC), Nevil Macready, was introduced to lead the military response to events.[3] The appointment of a new Chief Secretary, Hamar Greenwood, to oversee the political aspect completed the administrative changes.[4] However, one of the biggest challenges posed to women working with IRA intelligence in 1920 was the establishment of a counter-intelligence department in Dublin Castle under a new Chief of Police. Using archival material from both the military and police, this chapter will discuss these changes and analyse their impact on the civil population in general and the protagonists of the War of Independence in particular. It will also consider how the introduction of additional militarised police in the form of both the 'Black and Tans' and the Auxiliary Division were met by women at the forefront of the conflict. The increase in military searches and raids posed new challenges to the providers of safe housing

[1] Typewritten statement from Linda MacWhinney (née Kearns), MSP application form, p. 16, 24 January 1935, MPSC34REF1307.
[2] The use of the word 'Emergency' to refer to current conditions is used in correspondence to and from Dublin Castle from around August 1920. See for example letter from A.P. Wakenfield to the Under Secretary, Dublin Castle, 26 August 1920, T14/109, TNA.
[3] Keith Jeffery, 'Macready, Sir (Cecil Frederick) Nevil', *Dictionary of Irish Biography.* (http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a5290).
[4] Eunan O'Halpin, 'Greenwood, Sir Hamar Baron Greenwood of Llanbister', *Dictionary of Irish Biography.* (http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a3610).

and to those storing important documents, arms and equipment. It was a particularly difficult time for women responsible for the care of young children and elderly relatives. The experiences of those who endured multiple raids and the novel - and sometimes unconventional – ways in which they responded to them will also be considered.

The introduction of female police from England, specifically recruited for searching duty, posed further challenges for women on IRA duty, as concealment of items on their person or inside clothing was now no longer possible. The reaction to this, in both the national press and in the publications utilised by the IRA for propaganda purposes, will be discussed. Notes from contemporaneous diaries published in Mary Allen's *The Pioneer Policewoman* help to illuminate the role of women searchers from their perspective.[5] Confronted with searches, raids, curfews and coercive measures, women working for IRA intelligence had to find newer and more innovative methods to gain and disseminate information. This chapter will discuss how this was addressed and will demonstrate that the Department of Labour, on behalf of the IRA, supplied domestic staff to work for senior civil servants inside the Castle. The women who were hired for these positions effectively facilitated the IRA's efforts to obtain information from the centre of the British administration. In addition, Peg Flanagan, a waitress who was known and trusted by IRA Intelligence, was approached by IRA GHQ to open a café on Parkgate Street in Dublin. The West End Café, adjacent to Military GHQ, RIC HQ, and the Royal Barracks, became the centre of intelligence information, arms purchase, and intrigue. It was used almost exclusively by members of the police and military who found a warm welcome there from the women who ran the establishment. The operation of this café as an intelligence centre provided the IRA with pertinent and timely information about raids on several occasions.

Some women who were already working with IRA Intelligence took on a more active role in 1920 – some became attached to ASUs and were involved in planning and executing raids on barracks and ambushes on the RIC. As imprisonment was the inevitable consequence for those who were captured and court martialled whilst on active service, the circumstances surrounding the arrest and imprisonment of several female IRA members will be analysed. This chapter will discuss the experience of two women – Linda Kearns and Eithne Coyle – who spent part of 1920 working with ASUs in Sligo and Roscommon, respectively. Both women were involved in several engagements with the IRA before they were captured. Using MSP files, records and testimony given at their courts martial, and their personal papers, it will examine their

[5] Allen, *The Pioneer Policewoman*.

motives and experiences. Finally, the case of Eileen McGrane will be discussed, focussing on her arrest following the seizure of a large quantity of IRA Intelligence files at her Dublin flat on 31 December 1920. McGrane, even though Michael Collins used a room at her flat as a depository for sensitive GHQ paperwork, had never formally cut her ties with Cumann na mBan. This chapter will ask if this exposed a weakness within the republican movement; was it feasible to be a member of Cumann na mBan and the IRA at the same time? One woman certainly appeared to have bridged that gap. Máire Comerford - who was never arrested during the War of Independence - played an integral part in IRA activities in Dublin during 1920. She organised safe houses and was a close confidante of many prominent IRA members; both male and female. Her role and her position within the IRA and/or Cumann na mBan will be examined to ascertain if she was a member of both groups simultaneously.

Coercion and Countermeasures

1920 was the year in which the British finally shook off their lethargy regarding events in Ireland; however, this awakening was slow in coming and at the start of that year the IRA were in the stronger position. The paralysis of the RIC, particularly in rural areas, enabled the IRA to strike at the heart of the British administration in Ireland. The decrease in RIC numbers due to both a failure to stem the haemorrhage of resignations from the force on the one hand, and the inability to recruit new members on the other, contributed considerably to this paralysis.[6] The RIC boycott was recognised by the British government as the biggest challenge the force faced, noting that it was not just the RIC affected 'but that their relatives and friends are subjected to a very systematic form of terrorism and boycot [*sic*]' [7]. It effectively restricted their ability to function even in such mundane matters as issuing summonses, collecting fines and taxes and reporting on any suspicious activities in their immediate area. That, coupled with the evacuation and abandonment of many RIC barracks in rural areas throughout the country, effectively handed civil power over to the IRA police and the Sinn Féin courts. Additionally, the RIC's ability to gather intelligence was restricted by both their absence from smaller towns and villages and the continuing boycott.[8] Many of the abandoned RIC barracks were subsequently burned by the IRA and their empty shells

[6] Leeson, *The Black & Tans*, pp. 21-2.
[7] Cabinet Memorandum, 'Appreciation of the Political Situation in Ireland', Walter H. Long, 11 November 1919, p.4. CAB 24/92/101, TNA.
[8] Report on the Intelligence Branch of the Chief of Police from May 1920 to July 1921, p.10. CO904/156B, TNA.

stood as a stark testimony to the rapidly changing times. Forced to move into larger, more secure barracks in towns and cities, a considerable part of the countryside was now free of the presence of local constabulary giving the IRA free rein in these areas.

The response of the British government to the recent events in Ireland, particularly the attempt on the life of Lord French in December 1919, was to shore up the membership of the RIC with new recruits hired mainly from soldiers demobilised from the British army after the end of the 1914-1918 war.[9] Many were attracted to prospect of police work in Ireland to escape unemployment but most signed up for the high rates of pay and the prospect of a pensionable job.[10] The first of these new recruits arrived in late March 1920 and were very quickly dubbed 'Black and Tans' due to the mixture of khaki, black, and RIC dark green that comprised their hastily assembled uniforms. After a short period of training they were dispersed to police barracks throughout the country. Leeson's research indicates that new recruits were allocated in accordance with the need in each province with the most disturbed areas given the most manpower.[11] Police numbers were boosted again in August 1920 when, following another recruitment campaign, the Auxiliary Division RIC arrived in Ireland. New recruits had answered an advertisement for ex-officers to apply to join a '*Corps d'élite*' in the RIC. These were young men – the average age was twenty - many of whom were also enticed by the generous rates of pay and allowances.[12] Again, after a short stint of training, they were placed in areas in which the IRA was considered to be most active.

In Dublin, a military curfew was introduced on 23 February 1920 which operated from midnight until 5am. Anybody found on the streets without a valid permit during curfew hours was placed under arrest. The *Evening Herald* was scathing in its response to the curfew announcement:

> The rights of a free Press have been taken away, so has the right of public meeting. The right to personal freedom and to trial by jury has also been trampled under foot. As if these "strong measures" were not sufficient, it is now decreed by "Authority" that the citizens of Dublin shall live under a regime of Von Bissingism of the brand which Englishmen were so much addicted to denouncing during the German occupation of Belgium.[13]

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[9] 90% were ex-Servicemen. See Leeson, *The Black & Tans*, p.70.
[10] For details of pay, conditions and training see Leeson's *The Black and Tans* pp. 77-80.
[11] Leeson, *The Black and Tans*, pp.80-1.
[12] Paul O'Brien, *Havoc: The Auxiliaries in Ireland's War of Independence* (Cork, 2017), p. 30.
[13] *Evening Herald*, 24 February 1920, p. 2

The article reflected the resentment felt by the general populace against these new measures and rather than defeating the citizens of Dublin, it is possible that such coercive methods merely created more sympathy for those who took arms to oppose them. Most citizens had their lives disrupted in some way by the curfew. Post office workers refused to deliver telegrams that arrived after 11.30 at night for fear that they would be caught outdoors after curfew. Public transport stopped in time to ensure that drivers could return home before the curfew. At a special meeting in City Hall to discuss the developing situation, a report was put to the members of Dublin Corporation suggesting that all night-time street cleansing should cease. It was proposed that the Corporation should refuse permission for employees to seek permits to be out during curfew hours.[14] It also recommended that public lighting should be extinguished at 11.30 at night so that members of the police and military would have to provide their own lighting if they required it. Alderman McDonagh described the motion as 'the answer the Dublin Corporation was making to the British Government Order imposing martial law in Dublin'.[15] After some discussion, the report was adopted by thirty-seven votes to eleven. Kathleen Clarke and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington were among those who voted in its favour. Effectively, Dublin Corporation had agreed a stance of passive non-cooperation with the military authority.

Military Raids

The additional police and military numbers coupled with the implementation of the ROIA in August that year led to a sharp increase in the number of raids on the homes of those suspected to have a connection with the IRA or Sinn Féin. The Act, 'a triumph for the hard-liners' in the Liberal and Conservative coalition, was meant to address the break-down in the judicial system in Ireland.[16] It allowed for the suspension of civil courts and their replacement by courts martial as well as the introduction of military inquiries in place of inquests. It also allowed for arrest and detention without charge and gave provision for the death penalty for those found guilty of murder. It was, as Hopkinson described, a 'halfway house towards martial law'.[17] Other historians were more scathing of its intentions and impact; Macardle argued that the Act allowed the

[14] *Irish Independent*, 24 February 1920, p. 5.
[15] *Freeman's Journal*, 24 February 1920, p. 3.
[16] Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence*, p.65.
[17] Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence*, p.66.

military forces to act outside the law, stating that 'their campaign of terror had been categorically legalised'.[18]

These new circumstances greatly increased the risks for all of those on active military service but particularly for women. While their male counterparts in the IRA may have been able to go 'on the run', women often had additional responsibilities that kept them at home. Some had young children, others were caring for elderly relatives, many were managing safe houses for Dáil members, Sinn Féin personnel or IRA men on the run. People under suspicion of participation in advanced nationalist affairs had their homes searched frequently. Kate O'Callaghan, whose husband, the former Limerick Lord Mayor, Michael O'Callaghan, was shot dead by armed and masked men in their home in March 1921, described a typical search or raid:

> A search means carpets pulled up, presses, wardrobes, cupboards and beds pulled out and ransacked, writing desks rifled, private letters read aloud and commented on, jeering questions put to an unarmed man, the humiliation of the women of the house standing for hours in their night clothes and hastily-donned dressing gowns.[19]

The fear and dread of these raids was worse for those with young children. Celia Collins, who successfully looked after the 'republican post office' on Parnell Street during 1919, came under suspicion in 1920. Her husband, Maurice, was arrested on 31 December 1919 and interned in Wormwood Scrubs prison until May 1920, when he was released after a twenty-one day hunger-strike.[20] During his absence in early spring of 1920, Celia gave birth to a baby boy and with the help of her brother and sisters she managed to keep the family business open. Following her husband's release from internment, their home became the target of multiple raids by Auxiliaries from late that year until the Truce – 'two or 3 times every night they used to raid us there'.[21] When her husband went on the run again – this time on the instructions of IRA GHQ - Celia and her sister, Anne Goodwin, took over responsibility for the management of IRA business on the premises. Fionán Lynch, who was on the staff of IRA GHQ at that time, stated that despite the constant raids, the women 'carried on the job of receiving communications and delivering them… Mick Collins had absolute

[18] Macardle, *The Irish Republic*, pp. 380-1.
[19] Kate O'Callaghan, BMH WS688, p. 9.
[20] Sworn statement of Maurice Collins to MSP Advisory Board, 8 March 1937, p. 4, MSP34REF20059.
[21] Sworn evidence of Celia Collins to MSP Board, 29 May 1946, p. 7, MSP34REF60813.

confidence in these two ladies'.[22] Seán Boylan, the Commanding Officer of the 1st Eastern Division, IRA, confirmed to the MSP Board that the women were 'very active workers with the IRA'.[23] Celia was now the sole bread-winner, consequently she had no choice but to continue with her business. Nonetheless, the threat of constant raids, disruption and looting in addition to the physical intimidation she was subjected to by 'members of the Black and Tans', took its toll on her health.[24] On medical advice she vacated the premises at night and stayed with other sympathisers; however she returned every morning to open up and conduct her business.[25] The *Irish Independent* reported on one raid which took place in December 1920. The report stated that the raid took place during curfew hours and noted that nobody was living on the premises at the time. It stated: 'When Mrs. Collins went to the shop yesterday morning she found D.M.P. guarding the place. Both hall and shop door had been apparently smashed in and the place generally searched'.[26] It noted that the premises were raided again that day at 10am. Other publications carried reports of frequent raids on Celia Collins's shop through the months of November and December 1920.[27] Women were often the target of late-night raids. Kathleen Clarke left Dublin after a series of raids on her home in late 1920.[28] She took her children to visit her family in Limerick in the hope that they might find safety and security there, but that was not the case:

> I arrived on a Saturday, and that night there was a raid on my mother's house, a military raid. On Monday night there was a Black and Tan raid, and raids also on Tuesday and Friday night… I gave up trying to dodge raids after that.[29]

There were many complaints by women about the behaviour of the raiding parties. Some claimed that they were guilty of the theft of money and valuables, others that they indulged in wanton destruction of their homes and premises. Additionally, there were claims that some of the police and military were responsible for assaults –

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[22] Letter from Fionán Lynch to MSP Board re Mrs Celia Collins, 31 January 1946, MSP34REF60813.
[23] Letter from Seán Boylan to the MSP Board re Mrs Celia Collins, 27 May 1946, MSP34REF60813.
[24] Celia Collins, MSP34REF60813. 'I was threatened to be shot on refusing to give information and identify Michael Collins' photograph.' She attributes the nightly raids to 'Black and Tans', but the likelihood is that these raids were conducted by members of the Auxiliaries and/or military. Contemporaneous newspaper reports describe the raiders as either 'military' or 'Crown Forces'.
[25] Application to the Minister for Defence for a Service Certificate, p. 14, Celia Collins, MSP34REF60813.
[26] *Irish Independent*, 13 December 1920, p.6.
[27] See the *Freeman's Journal*, 3 November 1920, p.6 and 14 December, p.3; *Evening Herald*, 7 December 1920, p.1.
[28] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, pp. 238-242.
[29] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, p. 242.

including sexual assaults – upon women; incidents of this nature will be discussed in Chapter 5. Not every charge levelled against the raiding parties can be dismissed as mere IRA propaganda, although undoubtedly such cases existed. There were incidents of theft reported by loyalists as well as by IRA sympathisers following raids. General Nevil Macready, the British Military Commander in Ireland, endeavoured to investigate claims of 'outrages [that] were the work of British Subalterns and ex-soldiers and police, etc.' in late 1920.[30] In response to his enquiry into the matter he received a report from Captain J.W.E. Poynting of the King's Own Scottish Borderers detailing a litany of complaints that had been received about 'the conduct of Auxiliaries in Drogheda'.[31] The report includes a sworn statement from William Duffner, a jeweller who had premises at 29 Shop Street in Drogheda, about two separate incidents of looting on his property on both 18 and 25 November.[32] Poynting also refers to incidents involving men from Gormanstown Camp, the RIC training camp for British recruits, in which they were 'said to have held up people coming out of a cinema and relieved them of money and valuables'.[33] The occupants of Gormanstown Camp had acquired a particularly bad reputation in light of events that had occurred in nearby Balbriggan in September 1920. A particularly violent reprisal followed the shooting of an RIC head constable in the town, in which, according to Leeson:

> A mob of police including Black and Tans attacked Balbriggan, killing two men, looting and burning four public houses, destroying a hosiery factory, and damaging or destroying 49 private houses.[34]

Both local and national newspapers were scathing in their assessment of the behaviour of the military and police in the seaside town. The *Drogheda Independent* referred to the perpetrators as 'drink-maddened savages' and drew comparisons with 'Belgian towns that had been wrecked by the Germans'.[35] Meanwhile the *Sunday Independent*[36] discussed the response of General Macready to the incident which had also drawn the attention of the British Press and the *Irish Bulletin*.[37] Macready, who hated Ireland - 'How on earth anyone lives in this dirty country who isn't obliged to is

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[30] Letter from Macready to Sir John Anderson, 18 December 1920. CO904/188, TNA.
[31] Report from Captain Poynting to Macready, 29 December 1920. CO904/188, TNA.
[32] Statement of William, Joseph and Ed Duffner (undated) relating to raids acts of looting in November 1920; submitted as part of a report from Poynting to Macready, 29 December 1920. CO904/188, TNA.
[33] Report from Captain Poynting to Macready, 29 December 1920. CO904/188, TNA.
[34] Leeson, *the Black & Tans*, pp. 25-6.
[35] *Drogheda Independent*, 25 September 1920, p. 2.
[36] *Sunday Independent*, 26 September 1920, p. 5.
[37] The *Irish Bulletin*, published by Dáil Éireann's publicity department since November 1919, consistently highlighted atrocities and reprisals for which the military or police were responsible.

beyond my comprehension'[38] - acknowledged that reprisals occurred, suggesting that it was a natural reaction from the troops when one of their officers was killed.[39] Nor was Balbriggan the only place to fall foul of the round of reprisals and counter-reprisals that became commonplace throughout the country from mid-1920 – towns in Tipperary, Limerick, Cork, Clare, Longford, Sligo and elsewhere shared similar experiences.[40]

Hiding Places

As the frequency of raids and the intensity of searches on homes and offices increased, so did the need for safe housing. Some premises previously considered safe now had to be abandoned, usually after the seizure of documents elsewhere had revealed their location. The homes of people openly associated with proscribed organisations such as Cumann na mBan and Sinn Féin were accustomed to regular raids, however, others who had remained undetected thus far now found themselves in danger. Eily O'Hanrahan, who as well as running a message and despatch centre had a 'veritable arsenal' in her home, fell under suspicion during the summer of 1920.[41] In a BMH witness statement, she pinpoints the first raid to the day on which she received a particular despatch from a post office clerk whom she knew. The woman, who worked at Phibsborough post office adjacent to the O'Hanrahan shop, brought a coded message that had been sent from that post office to 'all the police barracks in Ireland'.[42] It is possible that the clerk was followed to O'Hanrahan's shop or was already under observation, as 'On that night we had the worst raids we ever had – two in succession – which lasted all night long till 6 a.m.'[43] O'Hanrahan reported that everything was removed from the premises including all their stock; 'they practically ruined us'. All the stock may have been removed from their premises, but luckily the hiding place for the arms dump – which was on the roof – remained undetected. O'Hanrahan reported that the weapons cache was constantly in use. She handed guns out to her contacts when requested and placed them back in hiding after use. Sometimes she had to deliver the arms to the site of an ambush herself; occasionally she had to collect them afterwards, and when required she brought guns to and from the graveyard to enable a salute to

[38] Letter from Macready to Anderson, 10 January 1921, p. 3, CO904/188, TNA.
[39] *Freeman's Journal*, 25 September 1920, p. 5.
[40] For a list of towns that experienced military/police reprisals in 1920, see Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence*, p. 80.
[41] Letter from Eily O'Hanrahan O'Reilly to Frank Aiken, TD, 22 March 1938, MSP34REF17180.
[42] Supplementary Statement of Eily O'Hanrahan O'Reilly, BMH WS415, p. 1.
[43] Eily O'Hanrahan O'Reilly, BMH WS270, p. 17.

be fired at a funerals.[44] O'Hanrahan could not specify which funerals she attended with arms, only that they occurred during the 'Black and Tan period' (1920-21).[45] However, O'Hanrahan was only one of many women who carried weapons around the city for their male IRA colleagues.[46] In Cork city, Nan Phelan provided a similar service, at one time carrying 6 grenades to an ambush at Barrack Street.[47] When Tom Barry was in the Mercy Home in Cork recovering from wounds received at the Kilmichael ambush,[48] she smuggled a revolver and thirty rounds of ammunition in to him.[49] The ambush occurred on 28 November 1920 and resulted in the deaths of seventeen members of the Auxiliaries.[50] Phelan appeared to be one of the main arms couriers in Cork according to Pat Collins, the O/C of G Company, 2nd Battalion. He said that in addition to her intelligence work:

> It was usual for Mrs. Phelan to move those arms, bombs, etc. to selected positions previous to ambushes, and to receive and store same again after different actions.[51]

Prior to the introduction of women searchers by the police and military in the summer of 1920, females stood a better chance of escaping a physical search of their person than their male colleagues. Nonetheless, women storing or carrying IRA arms and despatches did so at great personal risk; to minimise this risk, two things were required. Firstly; safe, secure, almost undetectable hiding places - these were constructed by Batt O'Connor (as referred to in Chapter 3) in the homes of Mary Flannery Woods, Celia Collins, Moira Kennedy O'Byrne and many others. Secondly, the IRA needed advance warning of any planned raids on the homes of their members. As this information could only come from the police and military, they needed to ensure that their people working inside the various barracks and in Dublin Castle itself had a safe method of giving advance warning of raids. Both Ned Broy and David Neligan

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[44] Sworn statement made before Advisory Committee by Mrs Eily O'Hanrahan O'Reilly, 30 March 1938, p. 6, MSP34REF17180.
[45] Sworn statement made before Advisory Committee by Mrs Eily O'Hanrahan O'Reilly, 30 March 1938, p. 6, MSP34REF17180.
[46] For accounts of arms carrying and retrieval see sworn statement of Áine Fitzgerald (née Malone), 23 February 1937, p. 2, MSP34REF39275, (she took the weapon after the shooting of Detective Hoey); p. 4, (she collected the weapons dumped at the back of 22 Mount Street following 'Bloody Sunday' shootings); p. 6, (taking guns from arms dumps and bringing them to Abbey Street for the Squad).
[47] Letter from D. O'Donovan to MSP Board re Nan Phelan, 2 March 1939, MSPC34REF57668.
[48] 17 members of the ADRIC were killed at Kilmichael on 28 November 1920 during an ambush by members of the flying column operating out of West Cork.
[49] Letter from Tom Barry to MSP Board re Nan Phelan, 26 February 1939, MSPC34REF57668.
[50] McGarry 'Revolution, 1916-1923', *The Cambridge History of Ireland*, p. 285.
[51] Letter from Pat Collins to MSP Board re Nan Phelan, undated but probably February 1939, MPSC34REF57668.

from the DMP detective division were working for IRA Intelligence, and routinely supplied information about proposed raids and arrests when they were aware of such. Additionally, Neligan revealed that probably half a dozen others within the DMP were actively assisting IRA Intelligence.[52] However, with the arrival of the Black and Tans and later the Auxiliary Division, new and more innovative ways were needed to ascertain the locations of planned raids.

Restaurants, cafés and canteens

The previous chapter discussed the contribution made to IRA Intelligence by Annie Brennan through the auspices of her friend Robert Collins, who managed the canteen in Dublin Castle which was frequented by the Auxiliaries. As the information contributed by Brennan was regarded as highly significant, it is possible that cafés and restaurants frequented by the military were considered to be fruitful places to seek information. A letter from Frank Thornton of GHQ Intelligence confirms that this was indeed the case:

> In early 1920 it became apparent that we should secure some definite receiving station in or around Parkgate Street for the collection of intelligence information from British Military Head-quarters R.I.C. Depot and Kingsbridge Railway Station. On instructions from the late Michael Collins, Miss O'Flanagan [*sic*] opened a Café in Parkgate Street known as the West-End Café.[53]

Peg Flanagan (1892-1963) was a confidante of some of the most prominent members of the separatist movement including Michael Collins, Harry Boland, Piaras Béaslaí, Alec McCabe, and others. She first met them when they began to frequent the Red Bank restaurant in Dublin where she worked as a waitress.[54] Flanagan's future husband, Dinny O'Callaghan, was a member of the IRB and was acquainted with the men, so they knew that she could be trusted. In 1920, on what Liam Tobin, the Deputy Director of Intelligence, described as 'the urgent entreaties of Michael Collins', she opened up the West End Café at 40 Parkgate Street.[55] Flanagan, although officially still a member of Cumann na mBan, quickly gained the confidence – and the custom – of rank and file members of the British military from nearby GHQ and also from the police

[52] David Neligan, BMH WS380, p. 11.
[53] Letter from Frank Thornton to MSP Board re Margaret O'Callaghan (née Flanagan), 23 January 1939, MSP34REF20537.
[54] Margaret O'Callaghan (Peg Flanagan), BMH WS747, p. 1.
[55] Letter from Liam Tobin to the MSP Board re Margaret O'Callaghan (née Flanagan), 23 January 1939, MSP34REF20537.

at the RIC depot in the Phoenix Park.[56] Flanagan explained that her popularity with the forces was probably because she offered them credit and was friendly towards them. In turn, they spoke openly in front of her and provided her with a variety of information. Some of it referred to Sergeant Igoe,[57] an RIC man with a fearsome reputation who assembled a group of detectives in Dublin to hunt down members of the Squad:

> If there was going to be a raid and where prisoners were and the names of Igoe and men who were wanted by the boys and where they were and all that kind of thing.[58]

The most important information that she secured during the period she owned the West End Café was probably the advance information about raids. She also provided the IRA with details of where arrested men were held - information that she secured from soldiers on guard at Arbour Hill prison or on duty at the various military barracks in the vicinity.[59] Barney Mellows testified that if it were not for 'her astuteness and ability to probe for information' that there would have been many more arrests.[60] However, she did not always have to probe them for information; Flanagan also revealed that some Black and Tans were *willingly* passing information on to the IRA through her.[61] It appears that these men were acting as agents for the IRA. Notes made by the MSP Board following an interview with Flanagan reveal that 'Some of the Tans, who were agents for the I.R.A. Intelligence Department, called at the Café and left messages to be cleared'.[62] To ensure security and secrecy for these men she arranged for meetings between members of IRA GHQ and the Black and Tans to be held in a private room at the back of the café.

One of the most startling pieces of information that she received was the advance warning of the military attack on Croke Park on 'Bloody Sunday', 21 November 1920. Flanagan stated that 'the Tans told me they were going to shoot every man in Croke Park that Sunday'; they assumed that the gunmen who shot the

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[56] Summary of evidence given by Mrs Margaret O'Callaghan (née Flanagan) to MSP Board, 27 January 1939, p. 1, MSP34REF20537.
[57] See 'The Igoe Gang' in Edward J. Kelliher, BMH WS477, p. 5. Also, James Harpur, BMH WS536, pp. 11-13.
[58] Sworn statement made before Advisory Committee by Mrs Margaret O'Callaghan (née Flanagan), 27 January 1939, p. 3, MSP34REF20537.
[59] Margaret O'Callaghan (Peg Flanagan), BMH WS747, p. 4.
[60] Letter from Barney Mellows to MSP Board re Margaret O'Callaghan (née Flanagan), 23 January 1939, MSP34REF20537.
[61] Summary of evidence given by Mrs Margaret O'Callaghan (née Flanagan) to MSP Board, 27 January 1939, p. 1, MSP34REF20537.
[62] Notes taken by MSP Board following an interview with Mrs Margaret O'Callaghan (née Flanagan), 27 January 1939, p. 1, MSP34REF20537.

members of the British military earlier that morning would be at the match and they planned to take their revenge.[63] Her testimony regarding Croke Park was confirmed in a letter by Seán Ó Conaill who recalled that he visited the café before noon that day and Flanagan passed the warning on to him.[64] He described her service and assistance as 'invaluable'. Barney Mellows also paid tribute to her work stating that she was 'the connecting link between Parkgate GHQ and our GHQ' and was effectively the go-between that facilitated the information flow.[65] Frank Thornton described her work as 'one of the most important carried out by Intelligence during the War' and stressed that 'it was not alone important, but highly dangerous'.[66] Despite references and commendations from revolutionary luminaries like Frank Thornton, Piaras Béaslaí, Liam Tobin and Alec McCabe, Flanagan was only awarded a pension at Grade E.[67] Her service was recognised as a member of Cumann na mBan rather than the IRA, and this may have affected the value placed upon it by the MSP Board. Additionally, Flanagan self-identified as a member of Cumann na mBan albeit one who performed intelligence duty and consequently never sought rank which may have improved her award. Flanagan's BMH witness statement reveals that in addition to intelligence, she became involved in arms procurement.[68] The impecunious Black and Tans sometimes traded their guns for credit at the café and she, in turn, passed these on to the IRA. The arms frequently found their way to Tipperary through the ingenuity of Máire (Mollie) Gleeson who worked at the West End Café. Gleeson, according to her close friends Áine and Éilis Ní Ríain, played a key role in the acquisition of information from the military.[69] Éilis Ní Ríain verified in a BMH witness statement that a prior warning of the attack on Croke Park was received at the café; she stated that an 'Auxie' called Jimmy Arnott gave Gleeson the information earlier that morning.[70] Ní Ríain complimented

[63] Sworn statement made before Advisory Committee by Mrs Margaret O'Callaghan (née Peg Flanagan), 27 January 1939, p. 5, MSP34REF20537.
[64] Letter from Seán Ó Conaill to MSP Board re Margaret O'Callaghan (née Flanagan), 25 January 1939, MSP34REF20537.
[65] Letter from Barney Mellows to MSP Board re Margaret O'Callaghan (née Flanagan), 23 January 1939, MSP34REF20537.
[66] Letter from Frank Thornton to MSP Board re Margaret O'Callaghan (née Flanagan), 23 January 1939, MSP34REF20537.
[67] Service Certificate issued to Margaret O'Callaghan (née Flanagan), 25 August 1942, File 34E6926 in MSP34REF20537.
[68] Margaret O'Callaghan (Peg Flanagan), BMH WS747, p. 4.
[69] See 'Tribute to the late Máire Gleeson' in Éilis Bean Uí Chonaill (Ní Ríain), BMH WS568; Áine Ní Ríain, BMH WS887, p. 14.
[70] Éilis Bean Uí Chonaill (Ní Ríain), BMH WS568, p. 52. Also see Áine Ní Ríain, BMH WS887, p. 15, where Jimmy Arnott is named as one of the Black and Tans on good terms with Mollie Gleeson.

Gleeson's skilled methods of gaining relevant and important information from the members of the military that she befriended, commenting:

> Her Black and Tan customer would tell her of an order issued for a proposed raid; she would immediately pass on the information, and perhaps documents, arms, or even lives would be saved.[71]

The importance of advance warning of raids and arrests for IRA Intelligence cannot be underestimated. Nonetheless, while information on proposed military activity was vital, an understanding of the political thinking inside the heart of the Castle administration was also needed.

The Castle

1920 was also notable for the change of personnel that took place within the administration in Dublin Castle. The tensions and rivalries that existed within the old regime in the Castle are explored in detail in Martin Maguire's work on the subject.[72] He points out that the administration had been regarded as dysfunctional for some time and that a report by Warren Fisher, the head of the civil service, was damning in its assessment of the attitude and ability of the senior administration staff therein.[73] Maguire also provides an insightful analysis of the dynamics of power inside Dublin Castle commenting that the transfer of power to the new Undersecretary, John Anderson,[74] and to his team of English civil servants 'is recognised as crucial to the history of the Irish administration in the period of revolution'.[75] Indeed, the introduction of new personnel brought about a change in approach to the Irish situation with the Assistant Undersecretary, Alfred (Andy) Cope, taking a conciliatory attitude towards Sinn Féin which, arguably, eventually led to the Truce in July 1921.[76] Hopkinson suggests that Cope's brief – in addition to his administrative position – was 'to establish links with Sinn Féin'.[77] Cope's position with the Castle administration is still the subject of much speculation. On the one hand it is acknowledged that he was the primary

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[71] 'Tribute to the late Máire Gleeson' in Éilis Bean Uí Chonaill (Ní Ríain), BMH WS568.
[72] Martin Maguire, *The civil service and the revolution in Ireland, 1912-38: 'Shaking the blood-stained hand of Mr Collins'* (Manchester, 2008), pp.69-75.
[73] Maguire, *The civil service and the revolution in Ireland*, p.71.
[74] Patrick Maume, 'Anderson, John 1st Viscount Waverley', *Dictionary of Irish Biography.* (http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a0153).
[75] Maguire, *The civil service and the revolution in Ireland*, p.72.
[76] Pauric J. Dempsey and Richard Hawkins, 'Cope, Sir Alfred William ('Andy')', *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. (http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a2028).
[77] Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence*, p. 62.

agent of change in the British government's approach towards Sinn Féin – a view supported by Diarmaid Ferriter.[78] On the other hand, he was viewed with suspicion by many of his colleagues inside the Castle – particularly by those in the intelligence community – because of the clandestine meetings he later held with Sinn Féin leaders.[79] Cope's motives remain open to speculation as he declined during his lifetime to comment on his time in Ireland. When invited to contribute a statement to the BMH, he demurred, stating 'Ireland has too many histories; she deserves a rest'.[80]

Ian MacPherson, the Chief Secretary, was replaced by Sir Hamar Greenwood, a Canadian by birth. MacPherson accepted being relieved of his duties with gratitude as he is reputed to have lived in terror of assassination during his final days in Ireland.[81] Greenwood, the MP for Sunderland, seemed to have many of the credentials required for the position of Chief Secretary.[82] He was generally regarded as fearless, he was an advocate for Dominion Home Rule based on the Canadian experience and he would do Lloyd George's bidding. However, tensions began to emerge between the civil and the military sides of the administration which are evident in some of the correspondence between John Anderson and Nevil Macready.[83] The most obvious bone of contention between the parties is delayed response – or sometimes the lack of response – from the military to the civil administration on matters pertaining to courts martial or military courts of enquiry.[84] There are several incidents referred to in the correspondence where a prompt reply was required from the military to enable Greenwood to address questions in the House of Commons. Frequently, the Chief Secretary found himself in the embarrassing position of being unable to provide an adequate reply as he had no briefing on the matter(s) due to the tardiness of the military. The appointment of Ormonde de l'Épée Winter as Assistant Chief of Police and effectively head of the secret service in Ireland was particularly important as it

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[78] Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (London, 2005), p. 237.
[79] See Geoffrey Sloan 'Hide seek and negotiate: Alfred Cope and counterintelligence in Ireland 1919-1921' in *Intelligence and National Security*, May 2017, pp. 176-195 (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317225226_Hide_seek_and_negotiate_Alfred_Cope_and_counter_intelligence_in_Ireland_1919-1921)
[80] Alfred Cope, BMH WS469.
[81] Patrick M. Geoghegan, 'MacPherson, (James) Ian 1st Baron Strathcarron', *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. (http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a5289).
[82] Sir Hamar Greenwood (1870-1948) was appointed Chief Secretary to Ireland in April 1920, See Roy Maclaren, *Empire and Ireland, The Transatlantic Career of the Canadian Imperialist Hamar Greenwood, 1870-1948*, (Montreal, 2015), p. 127.
[83] Sir John Anderson, Miscellaneous Correspondence with General Macready, CO 904/188, TNA.
[84] See for example letter from Anderson to Macready re slow response from the military to questions put to them from Dublin Castle, 28 October 1920, also Macready to Anderson 16 and 17 February 1922. CO 904/188, TNA.

signalled that the new administration would take a serious approach to intelligence and counter-intelligence.[85] Other additions to the Castle staff included Sir Geoffrey Whiskard who was appointed as Assistant Secretary to Greenwood, and Mark Sturgis, a senior civil servant who acted as Assistant Undersecretary along with Cope. The new staff was allocated living quarters inside the confines of Dublin Castle and domestic staff was recruited to tend to their daily housekeeping requirements.

Unknown to the new incumbents of the Castle administration, at least two of their domestic staff were recruited through the efforts of IRA GHQ Intelligence.[86] Lily O'Brennan and Éilis Ní Ríain were both employed by Countess Markievicz's Department of Labour based in the newly acquired offices on Dublin's North Frederick Street. Ní Ríain had previously worked with Michael Collins' finance department and described herself as 'closely associated with the Intelligence Section of the Post Office' as well as 'one of the links between both of these sections and G.H.Q. from about 1918'.[87] O'Brennan, as discussed previously, had been part of Collins' intelligence network for some years. Another female member of IRA GHQ, Moira Kennedy O'Byrne, also took up employment with the labour department.[88] It has not been possible to ascertain if Markievicz was aware that her employees were also providing services to Collins, or if it would have caused her any concern had she known. The Department of Labour functioned on several different levels. It established arbitration boards to settle disputes between employers and employees and established an employment bureau to find work for those who found themselves unemployed due to their political views. In January 1921, the department became the main coordinating body of the Dáil-imposed 'Belfast Boycott' – which was, as Laffan states, 'an understandable reaction to the discrimination and attacks suffered by the nationalist majority in the north-east'.[89] Opinions with regard to the success or otherwise of the department are mixed. Arthur Mitchell says of Markievicz: 'As Minister for Labour, she made no effort to establish standards for employment or anything of the sort'.[90] However, one of her most recent biographers, Lindie Naughton, hints that Markievicz's

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[85] Patrick Long, 'Winter, Sir Ormonde de l'Épée', *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. (http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a9096).
[86] Áine Ní Ríain, BMH WS887, p. 15.
[87] Éilis Bean Uí Chonaill (Ní Ríain), BMH WS568, p. 42.
[88] Éilis Bean Uí Chonaill (Ní Ríain), BMH WS568, p. 47.
[89] Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland*, pp. 231-2.
[90] Arthur Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government in Ireland: Dáil Éireann 1919-1922* (Dublin, 1995), p. 162.

department may have been underfunded and argues that despite her hard work, there was 'a general lack of interest in labour matters'.[91]

Shortly after the new regime settled into Dublin Castle, O'Brennan received a message from Collins asking: 'Could you get a reliable parlour-maid for Mr. Alfred Cope in Dublin Castle? She must be young and good-looking; the matter is very urgent'.[92] Ní Ríain and O'Brennan located a suitable candidate – a former parlour-maid who was now working in Maurice and Celia Collins' shop. The young woman was described as 'sympathetic' although she was not a member of any nationalist organisation. Having ascertained that she would accept the position, she was moved into the Castle and commenced work for Cope. Arrangements were made 'by the Intelligence Department' whereby three 'friends' of hers – Áine Ní Ríain, Áine Malone and Máire Gleeson – would visit her regularly.[93] The visits were arranged to coincide with the times that prisoners were exercised in the Castle yard. The three women would then attempt to identify the prisoners as well as report back to GHQ about any other matters that came to their attention during the visit. Additionally, the woman who was appointed to clean the apartments of the Assistant Chief Secretary, Geoffrey Whiskard, also reported 'anything of interest that she heard or overheard while she was working with Colonel Whiskard'.[94] There is nothing in any MSP files or BMH witness statements to explain the lack of security in the recruitment process for domestic staff in Dublin Castle. Evidently, it was so lax that it allowed IRA GHQ to fill its vacancies. It is also important to note that although the Ó Ríain sisters were both involved to some degree with IRA Intelligence, neither of them resigned from their membership of Cumann na mBan. This may denote some degree of laxity on behalf of IRA intelligence too. It is possible that the women regarded themselves as seconded temporarily to the IRA and so retained their membership of the women's organisation, nonetheless, it appears to be unusual given the risks that they undertook.

Security in Dublin Castle was tightened considerably later in 1920, particularly after F Company of the Auxiliary Division took up quarters there. Winter realised that he needed to consider the introduction of counter-intelligence measures to address the number of attacks and ambushes on both the military and the police. His solution was to establish a central office of intelligence linked with local centres who would send all

[91] Naughton, *Markievicz*, p. 223.
[92] Éilis Bean Uí Chonaill (Ní Ríain), BMH WS568, p. 44.
[93] Éilis Bean Uí Chonaill (Ní Ríain), BMH WS568, p. 45.
[94] Áine Ní Ríain, BMH WS887, p. 15.

relevant information and captured documents back to headquarters.[95] There, information was cross-referenced, scrutinised and used to target specific locations for raids.[96] His approach was lauded at first, with Mark Sturgis describing him as a 'marvel'.[97] Later, the perception of Winter's ability diminished somewhat; in correspondence in early 1921, Nevil Macready - although conceding that Winter was 'a born sleuth' - expressed doubts about his methods and organisational skills.[98] Winter moved to address the lack of intelligence coming from the RIC and consequently encouraged local police to recruit informers who were paid in accordance with the quality of the information they supplied.[99] Through this approach, he stated, 'many excellent results were obtained' including accurate information pertaining to the perpetrators of an IRA ambush in rural Sligo in October 1920.[100] The informer to whom Winter referred was reporting to John Russell, the RIC District Inspector in Sligo.[101] From Russell's contacts, the RIC received damning information about Linda Kearns, her associates and her activities with the 3rd Western Division, IRA, in Sligo.

Linda Kearns – Active Service

Kearns was active in Sligo from August 1920, during which time she 'took active part in ambushes, raids for arms and the burning of barracks'.[102] While she did not state in her pension application the locations at which she was present, the barracks at Bunninadden were evacuated on 6 September 1920 and burned by the IRA soon afterwards. The Ballisodare barracks were evacuated a week later, 13 September, and burned within hours, while Castlebaldwin barracks suffered the same fate on 20 September. In a BMH witness statement, she reported that in October 1920 she drove petrol containers to the attempted burning of the RIC barracks at Dromore West.[103] However, as the building was constructed of stone, the attempt failed. As the owner of

[95] Report on the Intelligence Branch of the Chief of Police from May 1920 to July 1921, p. 12. CO904/156B, TNA.
[96] Report on the Intelligence Branch of the Chief of Police from May 1920 to July 1921, p. 15. CO904/156B, TNA.
[97] Hopkinson, *The Last Days of Dublin Castle,* p. 32.
[98] Letter from Macready to Anderson, 8 April 1921, CO904/188/2, TNA.
[99] Report on the Intelligence Branch of the Chief of Police from May 1920 to July 1921, p. 31. CO904/156B, TNA.
[100] Report on the Intelligence Branch of the Chief of Police from May 1920 to July 1921, p. 31. CO904/156B, TNA.
[101] Report from Thomas Neylon, County Inspector, RIC Sligo, 21 November 1920, CO904/44/3, TNA.
[102] Linda MacWhinney (née Kearns), MSP application form, p. 6, 24 January 1935, MSP34REF1307.
[103] Linda Kearns, BMH WS404, p. 4.

a motor car with a valid driving permit, she had a leading role in transporting guns and ammunition to and from the site of ambushes. In a BMH witness statement, she recalled driving arms between various locations including Chaffpool and Grange – both places were the sites of RIC fatalities during ambushes.[104] On 30 September 1920, DI Joseph Brady was killed at the Chaffpool ambush led by Frank Carty, while on 25 October at Moneygold, near Grange, four RIC men from the Cliffoney barracks were killed and two seriously wounded. Kearns admitted to planning and participating in this ambush.[105] An account of the incident in the *Irish Independent* indicated that a significant amount of planning was involved in the attack in which several weapons were taken from the RIC personnel by their attackers.[106] Kearns admitted in her testimony to the MSP Board that she and Jimmy Devins organised this ambush and that she 'took back the stuff' (presumably the captured weapons, ammunition and equipment) in her car afterwards.[107] During her extended visit to Sligo, she was staying at the home of her sister Annie and brother-in-law John Mulligan at Lisconny, not far from Collooney, on the main Dublin to Sligo road. Kearns' arrival in Sligo coincided with an increase in IRA operations in what had, prior to this, been a particularly quiet county. Michael Farry, in his work on Sligo during this period, notes that 'The first sniping at barracks took place in August at Castlebaldwin and Tubbercurry', which coincides with Kearns's presence there.[108] Furthermore, he states that the months August to November were 'the most disturbed in the county'.[109] The RIC expressed concerns about the increased IRA activity in their area too. In a confidential report in October, the County Inspector lamented that 'this county has been in a very disturbed state for some months past'.[110] Frank Carty, Alec McCabe, Billy Pilkington and Jimmy Devins were the most prominent among the IRA leaders in Sligo with whom Kearns had contact. The Harp and Shamrock Hotel on Stephen Street in Sligo was the meeting place for active republicans in the town and was normally where she met with

[104] Linda Kearns, BMH WS404, pp. 3-4.
[105] Sworn statement of Mrs Linda MacWhinney (née Kearns) made before Advisory Committee, p. 3, 4 November 1935, MSP34REF1307.
[106] *Irish Independent*, 27 October 1920, p. 6. The article also refers to unconfirmed reports of reprisals in the Cliffoney area following the ambush.
[107] Sworn statement of Mrs Linda MacWhinney (née Kearns) made before Advisory Committee, 4 November 1935, p. 3. MSP34REF1307.
[108] Michael Farry, *The Irish Revolution 1912-23, Sligo* (Dublin, 2012), p. 55.
[109] Farry, *The Irish Revolution*, p. 58.
[110] Inspector General's and County Inspector's Monthly Confidential Reports, Oct-Dec 1920, CI Neylon, Sligo to RIC, Dublin Castle, 31 October 1920, CO904/113, TNA.

them.[111] Her MSP application states that she was 'consulted by and discussed with the Brigade Officers all activities to be undertaken'.[112]

Kearns was lucky in all her assignments to date; if she encountered any police or military roadblocks, she always succeeded in escaping detection by presenting herself as an upper middle-class woman. It proved to be an excellent ruse, as she wore expensive clothes and jewellery and always drove the car herself.[113] In her diaries edited by Smithson she confesses that she had become somewhat complacent by having fooled the authorities for so long:

> I had become more or less case-hardened, and if not reckless, at least somewhat impervious to danger. And so I had grown to regard my arrest as a rather unlikely contingent, indeed I had begun to hardly think about it at all.[114]

This was to prove her downfall as subsequent events would prove. Her luck finally ran out on the night of 20 November 1920 when she was travelling to a planned ambush. It is not clear exactly where the proposed ambush or attack was to take place, but her expected presence at the 'stunt' is referred to multiple times in the Sligo Brigade Activity Reports (BARs).[115] It involved an 'ambush on tans which was called off by General Pilkington owing to Nurse Linda Kearns car taken with the guns'.[116] Jimmy Devins, Eugene Gilbride and Andy Conway were in the car with her, along with all the arms and equipment seized at the Moneygold ambush. At 11.30pm as they motored south from Sligo towards the Carrowroe crossroads, they encountered a police and military road-block and were forced to stop.

Accounts of events surrounding their capture differ – in her witness statement Kearns claimed in that she had been guided through back-streets out of Sligo by a volunteer named Feeney when she encountered the roadblock. However, Gilbride claimed that Kearns insisted on taking a direct route through Sligo town although a plan was already in place to travel via back roads.[117] The route Gilbride states she took passed two military barracks – an action which carried a considerable amount of risk;

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[111] Linda Kearns, BMH WS404, p. 3.
[112] Linda MacWhinney (née Kearns), MSP application form, p. 16, MSP34REF1307.
[113] In Smithson's work, Kearns recounted that during 1918 she passed herself off at a military road-block as a WAAC driver on leave from the front in France and now holidaying in the west of Ireland. In her witness statement she details the quality of clothing and jewellery she wore upon the time of her arrest which was removed from her and never returned.
[114] Smithson, *In Times of Peril*, p. 8.
[115] Statement from John McGloin, John Rooney and William Kelly re E Coy, 2nd Battalion, No 1 Sligo Brigade, 3rd Western Division, 2 December 1936, p. 30, MA/MSPC/A/29.
[116] Letter from Owen Healy, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Western Division, 28 June 1939, MA/MSPC/A/32.
[117] Ernie O'Malley papers, Interview with Eugene Gilbride, P17B/137, UCDA.

but Kearns, by her own admission, had become reckless and she and her companions would now pay the price. In her witness statement she insisted that she was prepared to run through the road-block but was stopped by Devins; however, in Smithson's work she stated simply that 'I stopped the car'. The Smithson account described their captors as 'savage and undisciplined men... drunk, shouting and talking together'; the officer in charge of the RIC and Black and Tans 'seemed to have absolutely no control over his men, while the officer in charge of the Khaki-clad lot appeared afraid to give them an order'. Her witness statement is more concise, simply stating that the military personnel were 'wild with drink and started firing all around'.[118] The contrast in accounts may be attributed to the time in which they were written. In 1922 when the Smithson work was published, it may have been deemed necessary for propaganda purposes to portray a negative image of British forces in Ireland; thus, they are labelled 'savage and undisciplined' in contrast to the Volunteers who behaved with 'courage and coolness'.[119] The demeanour of her companions during this encounter was not mentioned in Kearns' more recent witness statement when it carried no propaganda value. There is no detail about her capture or arrest in her MSP file; it merely refers to the fact that it happened. However, the military and police files on this event are far more informative. In a detailed report written the day after her arrest, the County Inspector, Thomas Neylon, revealed that the arrests of Kearns and her colleagues were not due to luck – they were due to intelligence.[120] On 19 November, District Inspector Russell 'got secret and specific information' about the movement of the arms stolen at Moneygold and reported the matter to Neylon. Together they planned their response with 'the matter to be kept a dead secret and no display of police activity to be made in the town'.[121] Consequently, the trap was set, and Kearns and her companions drove straight into it.

Following her capture, Kearns was separated from the group and either put into her car and driven away by three men back to Sligo barracks or ordered to drive the car herself whilst accompanied by two members of the military – the accounts differ on this aspect of the event.[122] Her companions were bundled into a lorry which already held prisoners picked up by the military earlier that night as part of the same intelligence operation; among them were Joe McDevitt, Dr Peter Conlon, Martin Flynn,

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[118] Linda Kearns, BMH WS404, p. 6.
[119] Smithson, *In Times of Peril*, p. 9.
[120] Report to the Inspector General from T. Neylon, 21 November 1920, p. 1, CO904/44/3, TNA.
[121] Report to the Inspector General from T. Neylon, 21 November 1920, p. 1, CO904/44/3, TNA.
[122] The contemporary account and BMH accounts are at variance on this matter. The suggestion that Kearns was driven to the barracks by the military is in Smithson's account, Kearns' own account states that she drove her car to the barracks accompanied by Auxiliaries.

Thomas Cawley, and John Farrell.[123] All of those captured that evening were brought to the barracks in Sligo. There, the arms and ammunition found in Kearns' car were identified as those taken in the Cliffoney ambush and her fate was sealed. In her witness statement she recalled having the opportunity to speak briefly with Devins and Conway. Between them they concocted a story that she had merely picked up the men along the roadside to offer them a lift home but that all the arms and ammunition belonged to her. Devins pointed out to her that possession of arms alone was tantamount to a death sentence, but Kearns claimed that she persuaded them to go along with this form of defence in the belief that the British would not execute a woman.[124] Although she endured a succession of beatings for failing to respond to their interrogation methods – one of which resulted in broken and damaged teeth - Kearns stuck to her story.[125] Both the Smithson account and the BMH account relate the same sequence of events in the barracks that night but the Smithson account includes graphic details of beatings, theft (of Kearns' personal belongings and jewellery and of cheques from Dr Conlon which he was forced to endorse at gunpoint) and of the amount of drink consumed by her captors. The BMH account omitted the more lurid details of her captors' behaviour but reiterated the psychological torture and the beatings she personally endured.[126]

Initially, her captors were puzzled by the presence of Kearns among the haul of prominent IRA activists and immediately ordered a search of her Dublin home and a report on her general character.[127] The responding report from the DMP showed that nothing was found at her home and that they had only basic information on her background and career.[128] Another report sent to 'O' (Ormonde Winter), stated that 'she is said to be a member of Cumann na mBan but has not been prominent in the movement'.[129] Kearns was not a member of Cumann na mBan, although she had once lectured to branches of the organisation on first-aid. However, it is interesting to note

[123] Report to the Inspector General from T. Neylon, 21 November 1920, p. 2, CO904/44/3, TNA.
[124] Linda Kearns MacWhinney, BMH WS 404, p. 6.
[125] Report from Dan Doolan, dental surgeon, to Governor of Mountjoy, 21 September 1921. Kearns availed of dental treatment there to remedy the damage to her teeth that resulted from an assault following her arrest. CO904/44/9, TNA.
[126] Both accounts are consistent in the statement that Kearns was led to believe that those who had accompanied her on the mission that evening had been taken out into the yard and shot. Shots were fired but it appears to be in an attempt to break her resolve; her companions were beaten but not shot.
[127] Request from County Inspector's Office, RIC Sligo to DMP, 21 November 1920. CO/904/44/3, TNA.
[128] Report re Linda Kearns from DMP to RIC Crime Special Branch, 8 December 1920. CO/904/44/3, TNA.
[129] Report from RIC Office, Dublin Castle, Crime Department – Special Branch to 'O', 8 December 1920, CO/904/44/3, TNA.

that she had been so discreet in her movements since the 1916 Rising that she had never come to the attention of the police or military. The large cache of weapons and equipment found in her car, mostly the property of the RIC, included haversacks, a police pouch, police belts and a handcuff case.[130] CI Neylon also stated 'that a most remarkable mask identified as having been worn at the murders of the Cliffoney police was also found in the motor car driven by Belinda Kearns on 20.11.20'.[131] While there is no proof that the mask was worn by Kearns - although she admitted in her MSP application to have participated in the ambush – it is noteworthy that many of the attackers at Moneygold were subsequently identified, which may indicate that they were unmasked; Kearns was never identified as being present. Whatever Kearns' role was that day at Moneygold is still open to conjecture, however, the part she played on the night of their arrest on 20 November is now a matter of record. Andy Conway, one of those arrested and subsequently Court Martialled with Kearns wrote in a letter to the MSP Board in 1935:

> I know she was an active officer of the staff of the Third Western Division. I cannot say what rank she held, but I'm certain I took orders from her, and I know she was in charge of us on the night of the 20th November 1920, when we were arrested.[132]

That claim was also borne out by Eugene Gilbride who stated that 'Seamus Devins, Andrew Conway and myself were under her command on the night of our arrest'.[133] Devins, the third man in the car that night, was killed during the Civil War and made no written comment on the matter prior to that. If Kearns was indeed the senior officer that night – and the evidence supports that argument – then she may have been one of the most senior women active with the IRA during the War of Independence. Conway and Gilbride had no reason to make false statements to the MSP Board; in fact, it may have been more to their advantage for pension purposes, had they suggested that they were the senior officers at that time, not Kearns.[134]

The RIC and their intelligence officers at Dublin Castle suspected that they had captured some very senior members of the IRA, but initially thought that the guns were

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[130] Evidence of 2nd Witness, Head Constable T. Murphy, RIC Sligo at Field General Court Martial (FGCM) of Linda Kearns, 11 March 1921, CO/904/44/3, TNA.
[131] Report to the Inspector General from T. Neylon, 21 November 1920, p. 3, CO904/44/3, TNA.
[132] Letter from Captain Andy Conway to MSP Board, 28 September 1935, MSP34REF1307.
[133] Letter from Eugene Gilbride to MSP Board, undated but probably September 1935, MSP34REF1307.
[134] Conway's MSP application shows that he was only interviewed by the Advisory Board in December 1935, 3 months after he wrote the letter conceding that he was taking orders from Kearns on the night of their arrest. See Andrew Conway, MSP34REF16258.

being transported to Dublin for the attacks that took place on the following day, Bloody Sunday, 21 November 1920.[135] The suspicion that Kearns and her associates were involved with this caused a delay of over two months in processing the charges against them. The events of 21 November in which fourteen people were assassinated by the 'Squad' rocked Dublin Castle. According to Mark Sturgis, two of those killed were civilians, two were Auxiliaries and ten were either secret service or courts martial agents.[136] 'Mistakes were made', as Anne Dolan so succinctly put it, and some of those killed were not the spies that their assassins understood them to be.[137] Furthermore, one senior member of MI5, Major George Charles Peevor, who only commenced work in Dublin Castle 'on special service' in early November, avoided the attention of the 'Squad' entirely.[138] Peevor, reporting to Major Drake at MI5 during the 1914-18 war, was a prosecutor at several spy trials in Britain.[139] His late appointment to the position in Ireland is probably what saved him. The attacks earlier in the day led to reprisal shootings at Croke Park that afternoon which left another fourteen dead and many wounded. Having established that Kearns and those arrested with her had nothing to do with the events in Dublin, she was kept on remand in Armagh Jail until the Field General Court Martial (FGCM) was ready to proceed. The trial took place in Belfast in March 1921. She had a separate defence lawyer to the prisoners arrested with her in Sligo. She speculated that the lawyer had been sent by Michael Collins and Diarmuid O'Hegarty as 'the Dublin people wanted to keep me unknown and not identified with the movement'.[140] She was found guilty and sentenced to ten years' penal servitude. Devins, Conway and Gilbride were each given a fourteen-year sentence.

The Donegal Gunwoman[141]

Eithne Coyle (1897-1985) spent most of 1919 and 1920 in counties Longford and Roscommon, ostensibly as an organiser for the Gaelic League. This provided what she described as 'reasonably good cover for my movements' and allowed her to move

[135] Toppin to Whiskard, 28 January 1921, CO904/44/3, TNA.
[136] Hopkinson, *Last Days of Dublin Castle*, p. 76.
[137] Dolan, 'Killing and Bloody Sunday', p. 791.
[138] Letter from A.P. Waterfield to Under Secretary, Dublin Castle re salary and allowances of Major G.C. Peevor, 3 December 1920, TI4/109, TNA.
[139] Chris Northcott, *MI5 at War 1909-1918: How MI5 Foiled the Spies of the Kaiser in the First World War*, (Tunbridge Wells, 2015), p. 108.
[140] Linda Kearns MacWhinney, BMH WS 404, p. 10.
[141] See letter from Denis O'Boyle to MSP Board re Eithne Coyle, 9 April 1945, p. 3. She was known by this nickname due to the number of times she held up the Belfast to Donegal train at gunpoint during the Belfast Boycott campaign, MSP34REF60256.

freely about the countryside.[142] Coyle, a native of Falcarragh in Donegal, joined Cumann na mBan in 1918 and actively participated in the anti-conscription campaign that year.[143] Following her appointment as an organiser by the Gaelic League, she moved to Longford in 1919 and within a month was 'in the confidence of the I.R.A. leaders'.[144] Under cover of Gaelic League activities, she facilitated meetings for IRA leaders and established and organised Cumann na mBan branches. Coyle stressed that she was not in receipt of any salary from the Gaelic League; her work for that organisation was voluntary. However, her living expenses were provided for by the IRA and Cumann na mBan in acknowledgement of the fact that her activities on their behalf were the primary purpose for her presence there.[145] Her courier and intelligence work frequently brought her into adjoining counties where she became acquainted with Pat Madden, the O/C of the South Roscommon Battalion. In late 1919, she was approached by the Roscommon men, including the priest Father Michael O'Flanagan, to arrange a transfer from Longford into Roscommon to continue her work there. During Coyle's time in Longford, she encountered no difficulties with either the military or the RIC, but that was not the case in neighbouring Roscommon. Almost immediately, it became apparent that she was under suspicion as her neighbours had several visits from the local District Inspector warning them not to associate with Coyle or to attend her Irish classes. 'The police activities made my work very difficult and hazardous – my house being raided and being stopped and questioned were frequent occurrences'.[146] Despite the attention of the RIC, Coyle continued to work closely with the IRA, both as a courier – of despatches and arms - and as an intelligence agent. In July 1920, the house where she stayed was burned down by a mixed party of military and police, but Coyle remained undeterred. She had a talent for drawing and journalism and put both to good use on behalf of the IRA. Firstly, she contacted the *Irish World* newspaper in New York and became a regular contributor to this publication providing 'details of police atrocities, and statements from the victims of those atrocities.'[147] Secondly, from various scouting expeditions, she began to prepare 'sketches, plans and maps of various barracks, places, and buildings' which were used

[142] Additional statement supplied by Eithne Coyle O'Donnell to MSP Board, 14 May 1945, p. 1, MSP34REF60256.
[143] Draft manuscript of memoirs, undated, Eithne Coyle O'Donnell Papers, P61/2, UCDA.
[144] Additional statement supplied by Eithne Coyle O'Donnell to MSP Board, 14 May 1945, p. 2, MSP34REF60256.
[145] Sworn evidence of Eithne Coyle O'Donnell to MSP Board, 24 July 1945, p. 1, MSP34REF60256.
[146] Additional statement supplied by Eithne Coyle O'Donnell to MSP Board, 14 May 1945, p. 2, MSP34REF60256.
[147] Additional statement supplied by Eithne Coyle O'Donnell to MSP Board, 14 May 1945, p. 3, MSP34REF60256.

by the IRA in the successful capture of Beechwood RIC barracks at Easter 1920.[148] Coyle used various ruses to get inside the barracks and other places of detention. Frequently, she visited prisoners taking careful note of the layout and construction of the buildings during her time there.[149] Additionally, she noted all movements of police and military and reported these back to the IRA along with details of their regular routes and the times it took to travel them.[150] Her sketches and maps were used by the IRA in the ambush at Four Mile House on 12 October 1920 in which four members of the RIC were killed. The *Irish Independent* reported from the military enquiry held into the deaths of the policemen at which it was stated that between one hundred and one hundred and fifty attackers took part in the ambush.[151] The number of IRA volunteers at this attack appears to be overstated by the military. In fact, one of those who took part at Four Mile House, Frank Simons, stated that only forty men took part in it, and expressed the opinion that the endeavour was a partial failure as 'we captured nothing and only succeeded in using up some of our valuable ammunition'.[152] Following that ambush, the house in which Coyle was staying was raided again by police and military. They demanded that Coyle give them the names of those involved in the ambush, stating that she was seen leaving the scene. She later told the MSP Board that she was indeed close to the scene of the ambush; she waited nearby with first-aid material in the event that the IRA suffered any injuries.[153] However, Coyle was not a mere observer, or a first-aider; earlier, she had moved mines from an arms dump at her house to a location close to the ambush.[154] She also admitted to the MSP Board that the IRA used her house regularly and that she 'used to keep revolvers and ammunition' there.[155] It was more due to luck than design that the arms were removed before the military raid took place. Coyle refused to give any information to the military although she was 'roughly treated' and states that the house only escaped intact because she told them it was owned by 'a good loyalist'.[156] Actually, this house had been

[148] Additional statement supplied by Eithne Coyle O'Donnell to MSP Board, 14 May 1945, p. 3, MSP34REF60256.
[149] Eithne Coyle O'Donnell Papers, undated, p. 3, P61-2, UCDA.
[150] Sworn evidence of Eithne Coyle O'Donnell to MSP Board, 24 July 1945, p. 1, MSP34REF60256.
[151] *Irish Independent*, 14 October 1920, p. 5.
[152] Frank Simons, BMH WS770, pp. 11-13.
[153] Sworn evidence of Eithne Coyle O'Donnell to MSP Board, 24 July 1945, p. 1, MSP34REF60256.
[154] Sworn evidence of Eithne Coyle O'Donnell to MSP Board, 24 July 1945, p. 1, MSP34REF60256.
[155] Sworn evidence of Eithne Coyle O'Donnell to MSP Board, 24 July 1945, p. 1, MSP34REF60256.
[156] Additional statement supplied by Eithne Coyle O'Donnell to MSP Board, 14 May 1945, p. 3, MSP34REF60256.

commandeered by the IRA for Coyle's use; the previous house she stayed in had also been supplied by the IRA, but that may have been owned by one of their number.[157]

Coyle appeared to have thrown caution to the wind as she continued to work with the Roscommon IRA as a courier and an intelligence officer although she was, by now, known to the police and military. She also remained at the same house and stored highly sensitive documents there even though it was subjected to numerous raids. The final raid on the house took place on New Year's Eve 1920. A number of police and military arrived at her door – Coyle estimated about twenty-five members were in the party that thoroughly searched her home. They found a variety of incriminating documents including sketches of RIC and military barracks, which she stated were related to planned attacks on barracks, and copies of articles which were published in the *Irish World*.[158] She was subsequently arrested, charged, tried under FGCM, and sentenced to three years' imprisonment, later reduced to one year. In the application submitted to the MSP Board in 1945, Coyle claimed that she was entitled to the rank of Commandant 'by virtue of the position and the responsibilities held by me, I am entitled to, and do claim the rank of Commandant'.[159] Her claim to this rank was chiefly based on her service during the Civil War when she was 'placed in charge of all branches and District Councils of Cumann na mBan', with sixty-three branches and about twelve hundred members under her control.[160] Coyle was awarded a pension at Grade D, which she accepted although she noted in the letter of acceptance that she thought her service merited a Grade C.[161]

Cumann na mBan or IRA? – Máire Comerford

Almost everybody associated with Máire Comerford (1893-1982) during the War of Independence – male and female - expressed some degree of astonishment and admiration at her exploits. She is variously described as an 'intelligence agent all through the War of Independence'[162] and 'one of the most daring and reliable of all the

[157] Additional statement supplied by Eithne Coyle O'Donnell to MSP Board, 14 May 1945, p. 10, MSP34REF60256.
[158] Sworn evidence of Eithne Coyle O'Donnell to MSP Board, 24 July 1945, p. 2, MSP34REF60256.
[159] Additional statement supplied by Eithne Coyle O'Donnell to MSP Board, 14 May 1945, p. 10, MSP34REF60256.
[160] Letter from Coyle O'Donnell to Oscar Traynor, 15 May 1945, MSP34REF60256.
[161] Letter from Coyle O'Donnell to MSP Board, 13 December 1945, MSP34REF60256.
[162] Letter from Myles P. Breen to MSP Board re Máire Comerford, 10 July 1945, p. 2, MSP34REF60668.

despatch carriers'[163] as well as one who 'was continually on active service for the I.R.A.'[164] Sources for her activities during this period include both her unpublished memoirs and her MSP application as well as the frequent references to her in numerous BMH witness statements.[165] Comerford came from a middle-class family that lived in a degree of genteel poverty in county Wexford. Her mother, a widow, had found it difficult to manage financially after the death of her husband, yet she ensured that all her children received a good education. Máire was sent to several boarding schools, including one at Farnborough in Hampshire that was 'patronised by some of the oldest families of the English Catholic aristocracy'.[166] Her brothers were educated closer to home at Mount Saint Benedict, the boarding school for boys founded by the republican priest and separatist, John Francis Sweetman.[167] Upon completion of her education at the Farnborough convent, she attended a secretarial college in London where she became proficient at typing and shorthand. Later, she returned to Wexford where she became assistant honorary secretary to the United Irishwomen, a non-political group founded in 1910. The founders of this group, were, as Leeann Lane points out, 'willing to work to improve rural Ireland in respect to health, education, family, and community development'.[168] The organisation was affiliated to the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (IAOS), founded by Horace Plunkett[169] in 1894.[170] Comerford asserted that it later changed its name to the Irish Countrywomen's Association due to the perception that it was a subsidiary of the United Irishmen.[171] However, the name change did not occur until 1935 'due to political issues', and perhaps took place to avoid confusion with the United Ireland Party (the alternative name by which Fine Gael was known). [172]

Comerford was in Dublin visiting a relative during the 1916 Rising and the events she witnessed that week had a profound effect on her. Her sympathies were with the separatists, so she later joined Cumann na mBan after meeting with Elizabeth

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[163] Letter from Frank Gallagher to MSP Board re Máire Comerford, 9 July 1945, MSP34REF60668.
[164] Letter from Lily O'Brennan to MSP Board re Máire Comerford, 25 June 1945, p. 1, MSP34REF60668.
[165] Máire Comerford Papers, LA18, UCDA; MSP application made on 30 June 1945, MSP34REF60668.
[166] Unpublished memoir, Máire Comerford Papers, undated, LA18/4, p. 6, UCDA.
[167] Mark Tierney, 'Sweetman, John Francis', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. (http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a8407).
[168] Leeann Lane, 'Female Emigration and the Cooperative Movement in the Writings of George Russell', *New Hibernia Review*, 8:4 (2004), p. 86.
[169] Trevor West, 'Plunkett, Sir Horace Curzon', *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. (http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a7385).
[170] Lane, 'Female Emigration and the Cooperative Movement in the Writings of George Russell', p. 98.
[171] Unpublished memoir, undated, Máire Comerford Papers, LA18/6, p. 8, UCDA.
[172] https://www.ica.ie/about-us/brief-history/

Bloxham, a suffragist and one of the founder members of Cumann na mBan. Bloxham came to Courtown in County Wexford to organise new branches and stayed in the Comerford home.[173] Comerford took over the work and subsequently established several new branches of Cumann na mBan in north Wexford. She took part in all national activities including fundraising for prisoners and appears to have gained the trust of the local IRA, and Seán Etchingham in particular, from early 1919.[174] In early 1920 she brought Etchingham and Liam Mellows to the home of Mary Flannery Woods where they remained for most of the War of Independence. Comerford was nothing if not versatile – she could drive, ride a horse and handle a boat, and she used all these talents on behalf of the IRA in Wexford. 'Received information as to crashed British plane on Croghan. Rode on horseback, over ten miles for the purpose of destroying same. Located plane surrounded by enemy forces'.[175] Her application for an MSP demonstrates that she was equally active before the commencement of the War of Independence. During the period April 1918 to March 1919, she stated that while attempting to locate arms which she was told were dumped by a submarine near Courtown, she 'searched the coast by boat from south of the Rooney Rock to Castletown, for about ten days but failed to locate the land mark'.[176] Denis Allen, who gave evidence on Comerford's behalf to the MSP Board, recalled her earlier activities in Wexford vividly as 'she was the first lady around that part of the country that rode a horse astride'.[177]

Comerford moved to Dublin in the summer of 1919 and went to work as secretary to the historian Alice Stopford Green (1847-1929) at her home at St Stephen's Green. Her work there consisted of taking notes at lectures at the National University on her employer's behalf and undertaking research at the National Library.[178] Although Stopford Green was a nationalist, she was not, as Murphy points out, 'a supporter of armed rebellion'.[179] Consequently, although Comerford could – and did – conduct some of her nationalist activities with the knowledge of Stopford Green, some, by their very nature, had to be kept secret. For example, meetings with Michael Collins, Desmond Fitzgerald, Arthur Griffith and other prominent separatists were held in

[173] Unpublished memoir, undated, Máire Comerford Papers, LA18/9, p. 3, UCDA.
[174] See statement from Máire Comerford to MSP Board, 18 July 1945, pp. 1-3, MSP34REF60668.
[175] Statement from Máire Comerford to MSP Board, 18 July 1945, pp. 1-2, MSP34REF60668.
[176] Statement from Máire Comerford to MSP Board, 18 July 1945, p. 2, MSP34REF60668.
[177] Sworn evidence given before the Referee and Advisory Committee of MSP Board by Denis Allen in the case of Máire Comerford, 31 December 1945, p. 4. MSP34REF60668.
[178] Unpublished memoir, undated, Máire Comerford Papers, LA18/16, p. 2, UCDA
[179] William Murphy, 'Green, Alice Sophia Amelia Stopford', *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. (http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a3602).

Stopford Green's home at the owner's behest. On the other hand, Comerford had a hiding place constructed at the back of the house – and at the house next door – which she thought it prudent to keep secret. 'Had secret dump built, without Mrs Green's knowledge. Dump also in the garden next door. Used them… for storage of arms and documents'.[180] She had a second hiding place constructed inside the house, in the room she used as an office, by Batt O'Connor.[181] Comerford also made good use of the extensive contacts, foreign journalists and distinguished visitors she encountered at Stopford Green's to disseminate IRA propaganda, particularly the *Irish Bulletin*. Additionally, some of the more sensitive items held by *Bulletin* staff were given to Comerford to safely store in her dump, particularly 'dangerous papers and photographs of people who had been tortured'.[182] The American Consul to Ireland, Frederick Dumont, was one of many visitors to Stopford Green that Comerford kept 'supplied with day to day material to illustrate prevalent conditions here'.[183] As the publication and distribution of propaganda was of such importance to the IRA during this period, her work was of significant value. She acknowledged the power of propaganda and recognised how much it threatened the British position. She commented on how they particularly dreaded the articles written by Dorothy Macardle about Black and Tan outrages, 'as much, if not more than an IRA column in the field'.[184] Robert Brennan, who was with the Dáil's Department of Publicity at this time, acknowledged the quality of the contacts that Comerford cultivated:

> She was able to make valuable contacts with foreign publicists and influential personages from abroad. She frequently conducted such people to meet me at various secret rendezvous. I entrusted her with many important commissions in connection with my work in the Publicity Department. I commissioned her to make personal investigations of some of the atrocities committed by the Black & Tans and other British forces in the country. This was arduous & dangerous work and it was carried out with dispatch & efficiency.[185]

Despite all the precautions taken by Comerford, the house at St Stephen's Green was occasionally the target of Auxiliary raids in late 1920 and up to the Truce in

[180] Statement furnished by Máire Comerford to MSP Board in connection with her claim, 18 July 1945, p. 2, MSP34REF60668.
[181] Unpublished memoir, undated, Máire Comerford Papers, LA18/18, p. 2, UCDA.
[182] Statement furnished by Máire Comerford to MSP Board in connection with her claim, 18 July 1945, p. 4, MSP34REF60668.
[183] Statement furnished by Máire Comerford to MSP Board in connection with her claim, 18 July 1945, p. 6, MSP34REF60668.
[184] Unpublished memoir, undated, Máire Comerford Papers, LA18/23, p. 10, UCDA.
[185] Letter from Robert Brennan to MSP Board re Máire Comerford, 9 August 1945, pp. 1-2, MSP34REF60668.

July 1921. None of her concealed documents, arms or ammunition were ever located by searchers, although her office was frequently the repository for seditious literature dropped off by Desmond Fitzgerald, Robert Barton and others before they went home for the night.[186] She later claimed that studying the behaviour of the military during a search was a useful exercise and 'helped me to be a good hider'.[187] Stopford Green, who had her own copies of what would be regarded as seditious literature, found creative ways to conceal these during unexpected raids. Comerford described how Stopford Green stood outside her bedroom door while a military search of the house was underway:

> The fullness of figure, from which I quickly turned my eyes, was not due to corpulence but to a whole file of the *Irish Bulletin* which she saved from capture that night.[188]

The officer who conducted that raid later recognised Stopford Green when he raided a meeting at the home of Erskine Childers which she attended. When he pointed out that he knew her, she turned to Comerford and said, 'He knows us, even when we are dressed'.[189]

Although Comerford was initially in awe of some of the more distinguished visitors to Stopford Green's home, she later became more cautious in their presence as she distrusted some of them. Lord and Lady French, Lord Glenavy (Hugh Campbell), Crompton Llewellyn Davies and John Chartres (whom she suspected of being a British spy) were among those about whom she later expressed reservations:[190]

> I mistook Mrs Green, and most of her friends for Irish Republicans giving their allegiance to Dáil Éireann. It never dawned on me that there could possibly be two opinions regarding the absolute right of our new government to uphold the supremacy of the Irish people in Ireland. I had no eyes to see the wheels within wheels.[191]

Her belief, when she wrote her memoirs in the mid-twentieth century, that Stopford Green's distinguished visitors may have been British spies intensified. However, her

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[186] Unpublished memoir, undated, Máire Comerford Papers, LA18/18, p. 2, UCDA.
[187] Unpublished memoir, undated, Máire Comerford Papers, LA18/18, p. 2, UCDA.
[188] Unpublished memoir, undated, Máire Comerford Papers, LA18/23, p. 3, UCDA.
[189] Unpublished memoir, undated, Máire Comerford Papers, LA18/23, p. 3, UCDA.
[190] Although there is no evidence to support the allegation, Chartres was suspected by some republicans of being a spy. See Pauric J. Dempsey, Richard Hawkins, 'Chartres, John Smith', *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. (http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a1625).
[191] Unpublished memoir, undated, Máire Comerford Papers, LA18/16, p. 11, UCDA.

suspicions of Stopford Green may have been coloured by subsequent events – the women took opposing sides in the Civil War and never renewed their friendship.

Comerford frequently assisted Lily O'Brennan to hide men who needed a safe refuge for the night and she became part of the network of women who managed safe housing for men on the run.[192] She acknowledged that she worked for the IRA, recalling in her unpublished memoirs that escorting escaped IRA man, Patrick Fleming 'was my first assignment for the Volunteers in Dublin'.[193] Men out alone after dark were more likely to be stopped and searched than a courting couple, so she accepted the curious gender reversal role of protecting IRA men and walking them home at night as part of her duties. Moira Kennedy O'Byrne referred to Comerford as one of the women who was transferred from Cumann na mBan to the IRA, yet according to the latter's MSP application, she retained a connection with the Central Branch in Dublin and its routine work.[194] This continuing connection with Cumann na mBan is not something that was perceived by the other women with whom she was closely connected. Flannery Woods, for example, discussing Comerford's work during this period, says, 'She used come in the early morning, and at all hours of the day and night; I presumed she was on military work'.[195] Éilis Ní Ríain stated that 'she was, to my knowledge called upon by I.R.A. officers to remove dumps and firearms and perform other important duties such as the removal of wounded men to safe houses after ambushes, etc.'[196] Frank Gallagher described her as 'an I.R.A. despatch rider' and stated that he knew her propaganda work was undertaken on behalf of the IRA.[197] While it must be acknowledged that duties such as these could have been, and had been, performed by members of Cumann na mBan, Comerford was also integrally involved in establishing a safe house for Michael Collins. This was the property at St Mary's Road in Ballsbridge that Flannery Woods procured and at which Comerford's mother acted as housekeeper. (See Chapter 3). Typically, work of this nature was undertaken by those who had severed their connections with Cumann na mBan, yet Comerford was adamant in her evidence to the MSP Board that she was a member of the Dublin District Council during this period. Furthermore, she states that she spent several weeks in Leitrim organising and establishing Cumann na mBan branches there. Her

[192] Unpublished memoir, undated, Máire Comerford Papers, LA18/17, p. 15, UCDA.
[193] Unpublished memoir, undated, Máire Comerford Papers, LA18/18, p. 9, UCDA.
[194] Statement from Máire Comerford to MSP Board, 18 July 1945, pp. 2-3, MSP34REF60668.
[195] Sworn evidence of Mary Flannery Woods to MSP Board re Máire Comerford, 13 December 1945, MSP34REF60668.
[196] Letter from Éilis Ní Ríain to MSP Board re Máire Comerford, 11 July 1945, pp. 1-2, MSP34REF60668.
[197] Evidence of Frank Gallagher to MSP Board re Máire Comerford, 24 January 1946, MSP34REF60668.

unpublished memoirs also report a meeting with Seán Mitchell of the IRA's South Leitrim Brigade in late summer 1920.[198]

The possibility that she remained openly associated with Cumann na mBan although she was involved with assisting the IRA cannot be discounted. However, an explanation may be found in the testimony of Brigid O'Mullane, who stated that Comerford may have misremembered the dates. O'Mullane suggested that Comerford's service on the Cumann na mBan executive was post-truce and Éilis Ní Ríain concurred with this.[199] O'Mullane pointed out that Comerford sustained an injury that affected her memory and this may have contributed to the confusion surrounding the dates on which she assumed a senior role within Cumann na mBan.[200] Nonetheless, as most of the testimony regarding Comerford's activities during the War of Independence come from those with whom she worked closely during this period, it is possible to establish that she was, as stated by them, on IRA duty. Although Comerford was involved in conveying arms, despatches, and sick or wounded IRA volunteers to safe houses, she seemed to have avoided the attention of the police and military other than during what were probably routine raids. This gives further weight to the argument that she did not rekindle her relationship with Cumann na mBan until after the Truce. Her contribution to both the IRA and Cumann na mBan was acknowledged by the MSP Board and she was awarded a pension at Grade D.

Women Searchers

The activities of Kearns, Coyle and others emphasised the importance of the recruitment and retention of women searchers to assist the military and police. It became evident that women were supporting and participating in IRA activities, and this needed to be addressed by the authorities. Although the DMP had availed of the use of women patrols since 1915, their voluntary work was of a moral rather than a criminal or political nature. Senia Pašeta provides a very eloquent analysis on the debate surrounding the formation of the Irish Women Patrol (IWP) in both Dublin and

[198] Unpublished memoir, undated, Máire Comerford Papers, LA18/19, UCDA
[199] See sworn evidence of Mrs O'Connell (Éilis Ní Ríain), 14 December 1945 and sworn evidence of B. O'Mullane to MSP Board on behalf of Máire Comerford, 13 December 1945, MSP34REF60668.
[200] Comerford's bike turned over while she was travelling at speed towards an ambush. She sustained facial injuries in the fall and later recalled 'I was the only casualty'. Máire Comerford Papers, 'Visitors', LA18/23, p. 9. UCDA.

Belfast.[201] She points out that the views of its members were 'broad and complex' with a variety of opinions among them on how vice on the streets should be tackled.[202] At a special meeting of the National Council of Women in May 1919, several women who earlier volunteered with the IWP were awarded medals by Edgeworth-Johnstone, the Chief Commissioner of the DMP. A speech he made at the ceremony makes it clear that the patrols targeted the city's underbelly of prostitution rather than politics:

> These ladies had shown the greatest tact in dealing with young girls who, generally through high spirits, had placed themselves in jeopardy. They had also done a good deal of work in dealing with male degenerates.[203]

The work of the IWP, originally undertaken for the duration of the war, had resulted in the recruitment of three of its number into the ranks of the DMP.[204] These female constables were not uniformed, the DMP arguing that wearing civilian clothes enabled the female constables 'to detect shoplifters, profiteers, and other delinquents to whom the wearing of a uniform would prove a warning'.[205]

It is quite possible that had any of the DMP female officers offered their services to the Castle for political duty, that offer would have been declined. By 1920, both the Castle and the military distrusted the DMP, a fact which Hopkinson highlights with Macready's comments, 'The Dublin Metropolitan Police are, in my opinion, quite past redemption'.[206] Macready's opinion may have been based on the correct supposition that many members of the DMP were supplying information to the IRA as outlined earlier in this work.[207] The RIC did not have any female constables; two had been recruited in July 1917 for duties in a Dublin munitions factory – staffed almost entirely by women - but their employment was terminated when manufacturing of munitions ceased at the end of the war.[208] Clearly, any female police required for searching duty would have to be hired outside Ireland. Taking the matter in hand, Ormonde Winter approached Scotland Yard in June 1920 to request fifty trained policewomen for duty in Ireland. He was subsequently advised to approach the Women Police Service at Eccleston Square in London from where a small number of women police were

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[201] Senia Pašeta, 'Waging War on the Streets: The Irish Women Patrol, 1914-22' in *Irish Historical Studies*, 39:154 (2014), p. 250-271.
[202] Pašeta, 'Waging War', p. 263.
[203] *Freeman's Journal*, 9 May 1919, p. 9.
[204] *Irish Times*, 9 May 1919, p. 3.
[205] *Irish Times*, 29 March 1919, p. 6.
[206] Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence*, p. 48.
[207] For a full list of DMP constables and sergeants working in collusion with the IRA, see Frank Thornton, BMH WS615.
[208] Constables M. Fallon and M. Greeves are named in the 'List of original members of the Women Police Service: Dublin, RIC, July 1917', in Allen, *The Pioneer Policewoman*, p. 284.

recruited.[209] Female policing was still in its infancy in Britain, the first female members of the Metropolitan Police (other than the women patrols which were introduced during the 1914-1918 war) were only recruited in February 1919.[210] Consequently, their presence in Ireland raised a degree of curiosity. The *Freeman's Journal* reported their arrival in Dublin in July 1920 and interviewed one of their representatives about the nature of her duty. She stated that she 'had not yet received her instructions'.[211] Their senior officer, Chief Inspector Campbell, was equally coy with the reporter from the *Irish Independent*, stating that she did not know the nature of their duty or the length of their stay. However, when pressed to reveal from whom her instructions were issued, she ruled the question 'out of order'.[212]

These first women police recruits to Ireland were part of the Women's Auxiliary Service and received remuneration of £3 and 10 shillings per week with free accommodation.[213] Where no suitable quarters were available to accommodate them, they could avail of an allowance of 10 shillings per day in Dublin and 5 shillings per day elsewhere for the first twenty-one days of their stay.[214] These rates of pay compared very favourably with the salaries in London where after training, a female police constable could expect to earn £1 and 10 shillings per week with a 12 shilling war bonus.[215] They also compared favourably with those of an assistant clerk employed by the Local Government Board in Ireland, who received a mere £2 and 10 shillings per week.[216] A female wardress in an Irish prison could only expect to earn from £1 and 4 shillings to £1 and 14 shillings after ten years of service.[217] Nonetheless, the rate is exactly half of that approved for the Auxiliary Division, RIC in August 1920.[218] The generous pay and allowances attracted experienced policewomen from London. They came to Ireland wearing the same blue uniform that was in use by women police there. However, their duties in Ireland would differ considerably. They were aware that the

[209] Allen, *The Pioneer Policewoman*, p. 184.
[210] Louise A. Jackson, 'Care or Control? The Metropolitan Women Police and Child Welfare, 1919-1969', *The Historical Journal*, 46:3, (2003), p. 627.
[211] *Freeman's Journal*, 16 July 1920, p. 3.
[212] *Irish Independent*, 17 July 1920, p. 6.
[213] Letter from A.P. Waterfield, Treasury, Dublin Castle to Under Secretary, 8 September 1920, T14/109, TNA.
[214] Letter from A.P. Waterfield, Treasury, Dublin Castle to Under Secretary, 8 September 1920, T14/109, TNA.
[215] *Irish Times*, 29 March 1919, p. 6.
[216] Letter from HM Treasury to Under Secretary, Dublin Castle re salary of Fleming, Assistant Clerk, 2 July 1920, T14/109, TNA.
[217] Letter from A.P. Waterfield to Undersecretary, Dublin Castle, 30 November 1920, T14/109, TNA.
[218] Letter from A.P. Waterfield to Undersecretary, Dublin Castle, 23 August 1920, TI4/109, TNA.

remuneration was meant to compensate in some way for the dangers to which they may be exposed. One of their number, Mary S. Allen, later reflected:

> The duties of the Women's Auxiliary Service in Ireland were of a totally different nature to those undertaken in any other part of the country. What was practically a state of civil war was in existence there, and the dangers to which the police were exposed were not dissimilar to those confronting soldiers in a battle area.[219]

Although recruiting continued in London over the summer months, there never seemed to be enough female personnel to satisfy the requirements of the military and police. All-male raiding parties found themselves at a disadvantage without the wherewithal to search women suspects, many of whom they believed were concealing arms or documents on their person. Accounts of women searchers on duty were reported by the *Cork Examiner* shortly after their arrival in Ireland when a Mrs O'Brien, her daughter, and her maid were searched during a raid on their home in Parnell Place on 13 September.[220] There may have been a novelty factor to the introduction of female searchers initially, as many newspaper reports over the following months mentioned their presence on raids.[221] Some of the reports demonstrate the thoroughness with which the searches were conducted. In one case they refer to a five-hour search at the Iveagh Trust Buildings in Dublin where the women searchers 'minutely examined all females present… even their hair was raked'.[222] However, their work was not confined to the homes of Dublin's working class. Constables Rance and Chandler also accompanied the military to Earlsfort Terrace where they searched all the females at the National University.[223] Allen explained that British policewomen had been recruited to pit their wits against Irish females because 'the Irish women chosen by Sinn Féin for political work were proving themselves cleverer than the men'.[224] Indeed, there were many instances in which women had hoodwinked the military during raids and roadblocks. Kathleen Clarke recalled concealing a man on-the-run underneath a feather bed in which her 'sick' mother was lying; Linda Kearns related an incident whereby the military cheerfully waved her on while she drove a much-wanted Alec McCabe from Dublin to Sligo.[225]

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[219] Allen, *The Pioneer Policewoman*, p. 184.
[220] *Cork Examiner*, 13 September 1920, p.6.
[221] See for example, *Belfast Newsletter*, 12 October 1920, p. 6; *Irish Independent*, 13 November 1920, p. 7; *Freeman's Journal*, 28 January, p. 4.
[222] *Evening Herald*, 12 November 1920, p. 1.
[223] Allen, *The Pioneer Policewoman*, p. 190.
[224] Allen, *The Pioneer Policewoman*, p. 186.
[225] Clarke, *Revolutionary Woman*, pp. 243-4; Smithson, *In Times of Peril*, pp. 6-7.

The shortage of women searchers, at a time when it was deemed unacceptable for a male to search a female, considerably impeded the military. Nonetheless, if a woman refused to be searched in her home or on the street, police and military still had options. They could arrest the suspect and bring her to the nearest barracks at which female searchers could be accessed. Several women reported that they were brought to either the Bridewell or to Dublin Castle where women searchers were usually located.[226] Female searchers were also located at barracks in cities and larger towns outside Dublin including Limerick, Sligo, Belfast, Cork, Carlow and Tipperary.[227] There are many cases documented in which women claimed that the 'women' searchers who visited their homes were actually men. Bridget Doherty, a Cumann na mBan officer from Leitrim, was adamant that this was the case during a raid on her home. 'I was put into a room in my house where I was undressed almost naked by two female searchers. I am positive that one of the searchers was a man dressed up as a woman'.[228] Margaret Brady, from the same part of Leitrim had a similar experience during a raid on her home. She said that the raiders brought along two female searchers 'one of whom I believe was a man dressed as a woman'.[229] It is quite possible that some companies of the Auxiliary Division of the RIC (ADRIC) may have resorted to such tactics, and indeed, there is evidence showing that Major Adrian Hulse, the Commanding Officer of C Company, made just such a suggestion to his troops:

> Without the help of women searchers, the holding up of people and searching the males only is futile…. but I make the suggestion that carefully selected young men could be dressed as women for the duty.[230]

Hulse conceded in the memo that some degree of outrage could be expected to ensue should news of this subterfuge reach the public. He dismissed any concerns, however, remarking, 'All that is required is that muffs, handbags and coat pockets be searched, which would hardly offend the feelings of loyal women'.[231] Despite the tongue in cheek remarks, Hulse had to have been aware that 'loyal' women were unlikely to be involved with advanced nationalism. Meanwhile, Cumann na mBan women, like Doherty and

[226] See for example, Annie O'Brien (née Cooney), BMH WS805, p. 23; Mary Rigney, BMH WS752, pp. 10-2.
[227] Jeremiah Frewen, BMH WS930, p. 9; Mary Clancy, BMH WS806, p. 12; Bridget Ryan, BMH WS1573, pp. 3-4.
[228] Bridget Doherty, BMH WS1193, p. 4.
[229] Margaret Brady, BMH WS1267, p. 5.
[230] Memo from Major A. Hulse to GSC1, Dublin District, 28 March 1921, WO35/71, TNA.
[231] Memo from Major A. Hulse to GSC1, Dublin District, 28 March 1921, WO35/71, TNA.

Brady were engaged regularly in the movement of contraband past military forces. Doherty admitted:

> By reason of our sex we could get through very often with dispatches where men would not have a hope. The enemy did not always have lady searchers with them and then only in very limited numbers.[232]

Clearly, the introduction of female searchers posed a serious challenge to members of Cumann na mBan and women involved with the IRA. The searchers' duties were to assist 'in the search for firearms, military despatches, or any letters or papers likely to contain information useful to the Crown'.[233] Although Allen stated that they always treated those being searched with 'the utmost consideration', there were, nevertheless, several complaints by nationalist women about the behaviour and attitudes of women searchers.[234] Kate O'Callaghan, during a search of her home, reported that 'the manner of the senior woman searcher was insolent in the extreme'.[235] Additionally, the *Irish Bulletin* took the opportunity to expose what it viewed as a further outrage upon Irishwomen; under a heading 'Searching of women by women police', it stated:

> This sort of thing is carried on very extensively in different places and is regarded with the utmost horror and repugnance. In poor districts those affected are subjected to a close and sometimes very offensive and suggestive form of search… The whole of this matter is greatly aggravated by the widely-held belief that the women who engage in the unpleasant work are not such as one would choose to come into personal contact with.[236]

Unsurprisingly, the viewpoint of the women searchers differed from that of the *Irish Bulletin*, whose raison d'etre was to supply propaganda in favour of the nationalist cause. The searchers claimed that 'women rebels themselves rarely resented the presence of policewomen', and that they frequently 'showed relief when they saw the official uniform'.[237] The truth perhaps lies somewhere in the middle. There were inevitably raids that were terrifying experiences and others that were less unpleasant. Some of the more remarkable raids are discussed in Allen's work from diary excerpts of the searchers. Female Constable Chandler recalled one raid that was carried out at Cullenswood House, where Dick Mulcahy and his wife Min Ryan had a flat. She

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[232] Bridget Doherty, BMH WS1193, p. 5.
[233] Allen, *The Pioneer Policewoman*, p. 187.
[234] Allen, *The Pioneer Policewoman*, p. 187.
[235] Cáit O'Callaghan, BMH WS688, p. 18.
[236] *Irish Bulletin*, 8 July 1921, Vol. 5, No. 27, p. 2.
[237] Allen, *The Pioneer Policewoman*, p. 187.

appears astonished to discover that the house contained 'secret passages, sliding panels in wardrobes, etc.' constructed to conceal items.[238] The home of Áine Ceannt and Lily O'Brennan, adjacent to Cullenswood House, was raided on the same night. Although the Ceannts are not mentioned by name in the report, the account of the raid in Chandler's diary entry is consistent with Áine Ceannt's BMH witness statement.[239] The activities of female searchers, coupled with the increase in ADRIC raids and activities, led to some high-profile arrests including that of Frances Brady and Eileen McGrane.

Capture of GHQ Intelligence Documents

The arrest of Eileen McGrane (1895-1984) on New Year's Eve 1920 was an event of enormous significance for the administration at Dublin Castle. McGrane, who was Director of Publicity for Cumann na mBan at the time of her arrest, was living at 21 Dawson Street in Dublin. The daughter of a doctor from Killucan in Westmeath, she joined Cumann na mBan in 1917 when she was a student at UCD and later became a founder member of the University Branch. After she graduated, she moved north to take up a teaching post in Armagh. While there, she continued with her Cumann na mBan activities, which included organising branches, training and lecturing. Unfortunately, this came to the attention of her employers who did not approve of her political views.[240] Consequently, she was dismissed from her position and returned to Dublin. She was then approached by GHQ and agreed to work for them on a full-time basis – albeit without a salary, although her expenses were covered.[241] Much of her work for the IRA's GHQ consisted of the compilation and dissemination of material for propaganda purposes.[242] During this period, she also edited and published the Cumann na mBan journal, *Leabhar na mBan*.[243] Her flat was large and so she offered Michael Collins the use of a room there which was converted into an office. Consequently, as McGrane states, her flat became 'a repository for some of the most particular documents of GHQ IRA Intelligence Department'.[244] Collins had a key to the

[238] Allen, *The Pioneer Policewoman*, p. 191.
[239] Áine Ceannt, BMH WS264, p. 58; Allen, *The Pioneer Policewoman*, pp. 190-1.
[240] Letter from Eileen MacCarvill (née McGrane) to MSP Board, p. 1, 4 December 1941, MSP34REF21125.
[241] Letter from Eileen MacCarvill (née McGrane) to MSP Board, p. 2, 4 December 1941, MSP34REF21125.
[242] Eileen MacCarvill (née McGrane), MSP application, p. 6, 21 April 1936, MSP34REF21125.
[243] Letter from Eileen MacCarvill (née McGrane) to MSP Board, p. 5, 4 December 1941, MSP34REF21125.
[244] Letter from Eileen MacCarvill (née McGrane) to MSP Board, p. 7, 4 December 1941, MSP34REF21125.

flat and used it regularly for business although McGrane stressed that very few people were aware of its existence.[245] Occasionally, meetings were held there with Arthur Griffith or with Tom Cullen of GHQ, but the location of the flat was kept confidential as it harboured some of the most important documents in the possession of GHQ.

It seems unusual that McGrane was not encouraged to sever her connections with Cumann na mBan when she commenced providing services to IRA GHQ. Almost every other woman with who became involved with IRA intelligence during this period was asked to distance themselves from any overtly nationalist organisation or group. In the case of McGrane, it appears that none of the usual precautions were taken to prevent the GHQ documents in her custody from being compromised. She was Captain of the University Branch, a member of the executive, and the Director of Publicity at the time of her arrest, so her name would have been more widely known than a mere rank and file Cumann na mBan member. McGrane offered no explanation for this, neither in her BMH witness statement nor her application to the MSP Board.

McGrane was awarded a Grade D pension by the MSP Board, and although she initially accepted the grade, she disputed the length of service awarded by the Board.[246] They subsequently increased her award from 6 5/8 years to 7 5/24 years.[247] McGrane appealed the award again in 1947. In an affidavit to the MSP Board as part of this appeal, McGrane stated that she initially applied for an MSP on the strength of her Cumann na mBan service alone. However, in the 1947 appeal, she disclosed that her service from 1919 onwards was with GHQ. 'I was attached to the Intelligence Branch G.H.Q. Óglaigh na hÉireann. I had charge of the office in 21 Dawson Street'.[248] Perhaps she too recognised that there was a perception within the MSP Board that Cumann na mBan work was less valued for pension purposes than service given with the IRA, because her appeal focussed almost exclusively on her activities with GHQ. McGrane withdrew her second appeal before it could be heard by the MSP Board due to the death of her main witness, Gearóid O'Sullivan.

However, the information contained within the affidavit outlines her connection with IRA GHQ. In it, she related in more detail the circumstances surrounding the raid

[245] Sworn statement made before the Advisory Committee of the MSP Board by Eileen MacCarvill (née McGrane), 17 June 1920, MSP34REF21125.
[246] Letter from Eileen MacCarvill (née McGrane) to MSP Board, 4 December 1941, MSP34REF21125.
[247] Amended schedule of award issued from MSP Board to Eileen MacCarvill (née McGrane), 2 July 1942, MSP34REF21125.
[248] Declaration of Mrs Eileen MacCarvill (née McGrane) to MSP Board, 10 September 1947, MSP34REF21125.

on New Year's Eve, 1920.[249] During the raid, F Company of the Auxiliary Division, based in Dublin Castle, conducted a thorough search of her flat. The material they located there was a massive blow to the IRA. The affidavit to the MSP Board listed all the documentation that was captured in her flat that night. Among the items seized were lists of Cumann na mBan branches and the names of those serving with the organisation's executive. Files from the office of the Chief of Police at Dublin Castle and files with photographs and descriptions of the British officers who were shot on 21 November 1920 were also captured. Additionally, the haul contained documents that could identify Ned Broy's position as an agent for Collins.[250] Most importantly, however, one file captured that night contained the names of all IRA officers in the country. The value of this document to the British cannot be underestimated as it had the potential to give them the upper hand in the intelligence war and to enable them to conduct raids with pinpoint accuracy. This document provided them with the evidence required to arrest, intern or imprison key members of the IRA.

The raiding party had more than enough evidence to arrest McGrane, but unfortunately for her, they also found several guns concealed in the bathroom – weapons about which she claimed she had no knowledge.[251] She was then brought to Dublin Castle where a woman searcher was summoned to conduct a thorough search of McGrane. The searcher, Constable Rance, later reported that McGrane was 'well dressed and very quiet'.[252] Throughout the night, she was closely questioned by Ormonde Winter and at 6am the following morning she was transferred to Mountjoy Prison. The arrest of McGrane and the importance of the items seized in her flat quickly came to the attention of senior personnel in the Castle. Mark Sturgis wrote in his diary that day:

> 'O' reports some very good stuff in the paper line plus revolvers, ammunition etc. captured last night together with the young lady herself who was in her bath at the time (let us hope she was suitably clad before her interview which lasted till 5 a.m. with the gallant 'O' himself) in a raid on her flat in Dawson Street – she is a friend – and I believe private secretary, to Michael Collins, called Eileen M'Grane [*sic*], an MA and teacher.[253]

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[249] Declaration of Mrs Eileen MacCarvill (née McGrane) to MSP Board, 10 September 1947, MSP34REF21125.
[250] List of documents captured on 31 December 1920 in Declaration of Mrs Eileen MacCarvill (née McGrane), to MSP Board, 10 September 1947, MSP34REF21125.
[251] Sworn statement made before the MSP Board Advisory Committee by Eileen MacCarvill (née McGrane), 17 June 1920, MSP34REF21125.
[252] Allen, *The Pioneer Policewoman*, p. 192.
[253] Hopkinson, *Last Days of Dublin Castle*, pp. 103-4.

The suggestion that McGrane was taking a bath at the time her home was raided is one that appears to have originated with the raiders themselves. However, it is possible that she was in the bathroom attempting to conceal the guns as that is where they were located. Neither McGrane's BMH statement nor her MSP application dwell on this matter, but Whiskard later wrote that '6 revolvers and a large quantity of dum-dum ammunition were found'.[254] The discovery of the guns turned out to be a godsend for Winter's department as it provided sufficient evidence to detain McGrane; meanwhile it was deemed expedient to remain silent about the existence of the tranche of documents seized. Consequently, she was charged with possession of the guns and ammunition only. Whiskard later explained that 'for obvious reasons' it was better to try her on possession of arms alone 'rather than to bring the documents into the case'.[255] A prosecution case against Ned Broy was being prepared during which it was hoped to use many of the documents seized in McGrane's flat as evidence against him.[256] Meanwhile, she waited in Mountjoy for details of the charges she would face under court martial.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the coercive measures introduced by the British administration in Ireland in 1920 and looked at how women managed the concealment of arms and documents in the face of an increasing number of raids and searches. The construction of hiding places behind walls and wardrobes by Batt O'Connor contributed greatly to the safety of these items. Additionally, the construction of arms dumps - often by women themselves and known only to them – facilitated IRA activities and provided safe storage for weapons before and after engagements. On many occasions, women brought the weapons to and from the places where they were used; Eily O'Hanrahan and Nan Phelan were particularly active in this regard. The provision of safe housing became more onerous as the number of men on the run increased in line with the number of military raids. Women continued to take responsibility for this.

[254] Whiskard to Hemming, 6 July 1921, CO904/44/14, TNA.
[255] Whiskard to Hemming, 6 July 1921, CO904/44/14, TNA.
[256] Broy was subsequently arrested on 17 February 1921. Although the evidence against him was damning, he maintained his innocence due to the possibility that the documents seized could have been typed by another member of the DMP, Sergeant McCarthy. As McCarthy could not be located (the IRA had him smuggled from Dublin to London and then onwards to the USA), Broy was eventually released from custody – in July 1921 – and dismissed from the force.

Female participation in IRA intelligence activities increased throughout 1920 with Peg Flanagan, Máire Gleeson and the Ní Ríain sisters prominent in the establishment of a network of women who ensured the timely distribution of information gleaned at the West End Café. The women who worked at the Department of Labour, including Lily O'Brennan and Moira Kennedy O'Byrne, reported regularly to IRA GHQ. They contrived to place women they could trust on to the domestic staff of key civil servants in Dublin Castle; this contributed to the flow of information about prisoners brought in and out of the Castle. Some women assumed a more active role – Kearns and Coyle became involved with ASUs and participated in planning attacks on barracks and police and military personnel. Kearns was regarded as a member of the Brigade staff in Sligo and acknowledged as an officer by members of the 3rd Western Division. While most women working with GHQ Intelligence severed any ties they once held with nationalist groups like Cumann na mBan, this was not always the case. Eileen McGrane continued with her Cumann na mBan activities despite her affiliation with IRA GHQ. It is not altogether clear if this was also the case with Máire Comerford as her account differs from those of her peers. Some women may have perceived themselves to be still within the fold of Cumann na mBan while they were effectively working for and with the IRA. Others, like Moira Kennedy O'Byrne, had a different perception. She was very clear that her service with Cumann na mBan ceased when her service with the IRA began. Linda Kearns was never a member of Cumann na mBan; all her activities were with, and on behalf of, the IRA. However, not all women saw things in such black and white terms. For some, like Lily O'Brennan, Cumann na mBan service sometimes overlapped with duties for GHQ Intelligence. Consequently, the position of women within both the IRA and Cumann na mBan requires a more nuanced appraisal and an acknowledgement that some overlap between both organisations occurred. Nonetheless, an obvious affiliation to Cumann na mBan, Sinn Féin, or any advanced separatist organisation was likely to draw the attention of the police or military. It appears that both for their own safety and for the safety of the IRA, active members were expected to be circumspect in their behaviour.

The Intelligence Department in Dublin Castle, organised by Winter, presented an ever-present danger to the IRA. Strategies devised by him ultimately led to the capture of Kearns and leading IRA men in Sligo. Later, armed with information in the documents captured in McGrane's flat, Winter was in a position to pursue those whose names were on the list of IRA leaders and Cumann na mBan executive members now in his possession. This placed leading members of both the IRA and Cumann na mBan

in immediate danger of arrest. Furthermore, he had evidence that exposed the DMP man, Ned Broy, as an IRA agent.

By the end of 1920, three of the most prominent women working for IRA GHQ had been arrested. The capture of Linda Kearns, Eithne Coyle and Eileen McGrane was significant for two reasons. Firstly, the arms and/or documents captured with them were a huge blow to the IRA. Secondly, it made the authorities aware that women were involved in republican activities to a far greater extent than they had previously suspected. This realisation perhaps made them more suspicious of women who previously may have escaped their attention. Indeed, the close attention paid by female searchers to their duty indicated that they almost expected Irishwomen to be complicit in the concealment of documents or arms. Certainly, an increasing number of republican women joined Kearns, Coyle and McGrane in jail during 1921. It may also explain in part why the military and police took a much more aggressive approach towards women for the remainder of the War of Independence. This will be explored in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5

Capture and Incarceration - 1921

I was sent by G.H.Q. to an I.R.A. training camp in Duckett's Grove, Carlow, where I underwent an intensive course in the use of arms and explosives, First Aid, and general military tactics. – Eithne Coyle.[1]

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the prison experience of women who were incarcerated for crimes of a political nature. Many of them took a belligerent stance towards the military courts that tried them and refused to recognise the legitimacy of the proceedings. It will consider the conditions under which women were held in prisons both in Ireland and England and their struggle for political status. Using documents from files kept by the British administration on female republican prisoners, it will evaluate the response of the prison authorities to the many complaints made by women about their treatment. These will be considered alongside accounts of imprisonment written by the women themselves to ascertain as far as possible the true nature of their conditions. It will also demonstrate that despite protestations to the contrary prior to sentencing, many of these women identified as advanced republicans while in jail. A military structure was evident among women in Mountjoy Jail in particular, with an acknowledged Commanding Officer in place among the prisoners. In early 1921, individual female republican prisoners were incarcerated in different prisons in both England and Ireland. This chapter will argue that they contrived to be moved into one prison – Mountjoy – where they could organise as a group. This enabled them to devise strategies to disrupt the prison routine and to plan escapes. The post-Truce escape of four female political prisoners from Mountjoy will be examined and the steps taken by prominent sympathisers outside to ensure their continued safety will be discussed.

While many female political prisoners alleged ill-treatment while incarcerated, jail was perhaps a safer place for republican women during the first part of 1921. There were many reports of ill-treatment of women by military forces throughout the country, particularly those perceived to hold republican sympathies. Such incidents were more prevalent in areas in which martial law had been proclaimed. Martial law, proclaimed in

[1] Eithne Coyle O'Donnell, Letter to MSP Board 'In amplification of Application Form', 15 May 1945, p. 6, MPSC34REF60256.

counties Cork, Limerick, Kerry, and Tipperary in December 1920, was extended to other Munster counties including Waterford in January 1921.[2] This suspended all civil powers and effectively placed the RIC under the military command of General Strickland's 6th Division, headquartered in Cork. It also granted additional powers to police and military including the imposition of curfews and the authority to raid and search premises without a warrant.[3]

Cases of enforced hair-cutting were common and frequently reported in both national and local newspapers. This chapter will examine some of these individual cases and will demonstrate that this form of punishment was used by both sides in the conflict. It was used by the police and military to punish women associated with republicanism, and by the IRA to punish women who associated with soldiers or members of the RIC. The topic of sexual violence at the hands of the police and military has been largely unexplored during this period. Focussing through the lens of an incident in Dungarvan, County Waterford, it will consider the response of the authorities to complaints of this nature. A close examination of this case will demonstrate the obstacles and difficulties that victims encountered when seeking justice and will argue that acts of sexual violence were not unknown in Ireland. Instead, where they did occur, they were either unreported or reported in such coded language as to blur the nature of the offence entirely. This section of the chapter will also argue that it was not reticence alone that prevented women from reporting acts of sexual violence to the police and military, but also intimidation and fear of reprisals.

The female members of the IRA discussed throughout this work were not direct victims of the acts of sexual violence, enforced hair-cutting or assaults. Nonetheless, the subject is pertinent as there was an ever-present threat of violence against any republican woman who fell into the hands of the police or military. An examination of incidents of assault and sexual assault serves to highlight the danger that existed for women after curfew when only the police and military were free to roam the streets. Female IRA members and women from Cumann na mBan frequently interviewed victims of assault and (with their consent) published accounts of their experiences in the *Irish Bulletin*. The importance of propaganda - and the *Irish Bulletin*'s role in spreading news of conditions in Ireland to the rest of the world - will be discussed in this chapter. By drawing on correspondence between Dublin Castle and the military, it

[2] For declaration of martial law in these counties see Hansard 5 (Commons) 135, Prime Minister's Announcement, cols 2601-16, 10 December 1920.
[3] For details of additional powers granted under Martial Law, see Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 214.

will also consider the British administration's response to what it perceived as the IRA's propaganda victories.

Incidents during this period cannot be viewed in isolation and must be considered within the wider context of the prevailing political climate. Therefore, events that followed the return of de Valera to Ireland in December 1920 will be explored. Focussing on the MacGarry family and their role in the provision of safe housing for him, it will suggest that the MacGarrys were perhaps in more danger than their guest. Moreover, documents from the correspondence between the administration at Dublin Castle and the military forces, concerning de Valera's presence in Ireland, raise questions about the likelihood of his imminent arrest. The content and implications of these documents will be analysed and their relation to tentative peace talks will be discussed.

Margaret MacGarry - 'Protecting' the Chief

The introduction of internment without trial in November 1920, implemented partly in response to the attacks on Bloody Sunday and partly because of the increased rate of IRA activity, led to a large increase in men on the run. The additional number of raids and searches that took place towards the end of 1920, and the subsequent number of charges brought against individuals, placed the prosecution service under pressure. From the point of view of the authorities, as William Murphy points out, 'internment was easier' than managing the large number of courts martial cases that could be processed under ROIA.[4] Many of those hoping to escape internment made their way to Dublin and led to a surge in demand for safe housing.

MacGarry, who was adept at securing accommodation in safe locations for IRA leaders, was instructed in late December to prepare Loughnavale, her house in Merrion, for some long-term guests. The large property, previously rented out to tenants, was now occupied by her husband and her daughter Maeve, who was recuperating from an illness. MacGarry's new guests at Loughnavale were de Valera and Kathleen O'Connell, his secretary. De Valera returned to Ireland in late December 1920 and stayed over the holiday period with his friends on Merrion Square, the Farnan family. Whilst there, he had a succession of meetings with Dáil Ministers including Collins, Brugha, Mulcahy, and Blythe.[5] Collins, meanwhile, arranged with MacGarry to

[4] Murphy, *Political Imprisonment,* p. 194.
[5] McCullagh, *De Valera: Rise*, pp. 190-1.

prepare Loughnavale for occupation and de Valera moved in with Maeve MacGarry as housekeeper. O'Connell, who had travelled back separately from the USA, joined them there and resumed her secretarial role. Loughnavale was the epitome of a safe house. It was secluded, set on its own grounds and had a gate-lodge at the end of the driveway. With Griffith in jail – he was interned following the events on Bloody Sunday – great care was taken to ensure de Valera's safety. MacGarry must have been aware that the risks that she took in harbouring de Valera in 1921 were much greater than those she faced in 1919 when he was a guest at her Fitzwilliam residence. However, she may have believed that with only members of GHQ privy to the details of de Valera's whereabouts, her role in the matter would remain secret. Unknown to MacGarry, de Valera was probably the most protected man in Ireland. His presence was known to almost every military and police division in Dublin. Instructions concerning de Valera were issued to the military and police in a document marked 'Secret & Urgent' as early as 2 January 1921 stating:

> The G.O.C. directs that the instructions with regard to no interference with DE VALERA be again impressed on all officers that may be in charge of raiding parties, patrols, escorts or other parties.[6]

The use of the word 'again' in the memo suggests that similar instructions were issued prior to 2 January, however, no copy of earlier instructions are contained within the files researched for this work. Correspondence between the Undersecretary, John Anderson, and the GOC, Nevil Macready, also demonstrates that the newly returned President was in no danger of arrest. In fact, rather than arrest him, the administration was chiefly concerned with his protection, as the following extract from a letter to Anderson shows:

> We have at present put an embargo on any interference with de Valera, and as you know, the proposed raid last night was stopped as a matter of policy. Presumably at the dinner last night, de Valera and his associates came to some conclusion as to their future policy. From indications now received, it looks as if that policy was going to be intensified outrage, but apart from that, I do not think either your Secret Service or my men can carry on indefinitely while de Valera is under the protection umbrella. To give him reasonable time to consult his

[6] Major Drew, General Staff, Dublin District to Brigadier General Commanding, 24th P. Infantry Brigade, 25th P. Infantry Brigade, 2 January 1921. Document was also copied to 'F' Coy ADRIC, 1 Coy ADRIC (through 24th Brigade), 5th Armoured Car Coy, Troops at Marlborough Barracks, 5th Brigade RGA, Troops at Ship Street, 'Q' Branch, 'A' Branch, RASC, CRE, APM, O/C Special Signal Corps, O/C Armoured Car Section, O/C Searchlights, WO35/71, TNA.

> colleagues and come to a decision is quite sound, but to extend the time may, and in my opinion will, run us into difficulty. For instance, it will very soon become known that we do not intend to arrest de Valera, and therefore bad men will take the opportunity of consorting with him in the hope of immunity.[7]

The question, of course, is whether de Valera was aware that he was under 'the protection umbrella' and therefore unlikely to be arrested. If he was indeed aware that the authorities did 'not intend to arrest' him, it appears that he did not inform those who took responsibility for his safety. Certainly, neither Collins nor MacGarry had any inkling that an official arrangement existed that would ensure de Valera remained free, otherwise they would not have gone to such extraordinary lengths to conceal his whereabouts. Furthermore, if the British administration in Ireland knew where de Valera was located, it follows that they also knew the names of those protecting him. This most certainly would expose MacGarry and her family as co-conspirators and may explain why her other properties became the target of successive raids and searches.

The other questions that arise from the Anderson and Macready correspondence are why de Valera was immune from arrest and who had given the orders to implement this policy. The only persons higher in the chain of command were Greenwood (Chief Secretary) and Lloyd George (Prime Minister). The explanation may be that tentative talks were underway between de Valera and the British, and that they were awaiting a response from him. Yet, the only publicly acknowledged peace moves underway in January were those involving Father Flanagan and Justice James O'Connor, from the Irish side, and some Dublin Castle officials from the British side.[8] It is clear from Macready's letter that whatever talks were taking place with de Valera were conducted at a very high level and with the utmost secrecy. He was anxious to have matters brought to a speedy resolution as he could not guarantee de Valera's safety if he was caught out where a raid was underway:

> …Firearms may go off with disastrous results to de Valera. Shortly, I am quite clear in my own mind that the immunity of de Valera should have a definite term, and personally I think he has been here quite long enough to make up his mind. It is quite impossible to carry out a repressive policy if we have one hand tied behind our back, and it means increased danger to those who are engaged in executive action.[9]

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[7] Letter from Macready to Anderson, marked 'Secret', 10 January 1921, pp. 1-2. CO904/188, TNA.
[8] McCullagh, *De Valera: Rise*, pp. 193.
[9] Letter from Macready to Anderson, marked 'Secret', 10 January 1921, p. 2, CO904/188, TNA.

John Anderson responded to Macready's letter the following day and acknowledged the difficulties presented by 'the enforced immunity of De Valera'.[10] He stated that he had discussed Macready's concerns with both Greenwood and Bonar Law and that he now awaited a decision from the Prime Minister. It has not been possible to ascertain Lloyd George's response as the Macready and Anderson correspondence does not refer to the matter again. However, de Valera's peace at Loughnavale was undisturbed until April 1921, when properties other owned by the MacGarry family were raided.

In April 1921, a large military raid took place at both city properties owned by the MacGarry family. During the operation, the entire Fitzwilliam Street and Fitzwilliam Square area was sealed off by the military. 'The whole street was full of Auxiliaries and armoured cars'.[11] The property at 31 Upper Fitzwilliam Street was thoroughly searched and the office occupied by Dáithí Ó Donnchadha at the back of the building was raided. Ó Donnchadha was not present at the time, but all documents and furniture were removed.[12] When the military burst through the back door of 5 Fitzwilliam Square, MacGarry just had time to place one important document inside her blouse before the search commenced.[13] There were so many soldiers in the house that she slipped out the front door unnoticed and went directly to Loughnavale to raise the alert. Documents relating to the ownership of Loughnavale were kept at the Fitzwilliam property, consequently MacGarry feared that its location was compromised as these papers were now in the hands of the military.[14] Cathal Brugha, Liam Mellows, Austin Stack and Michael Collins were at a meeting with de Valera when MacGarry arrived with the news.[15] It was agreed that Loughnavale was no longer safe so de Valera was dispatched once more to the Farnan home on Merrion Square. Meanwhile, O'Connell packed a suitcase for de Valera containing his papers and personal effects and dropped it at the home of Alice Wordsworth before returning quickly to Loughnavale. Wordsworth (née Stopford), was the niece of Alice Stopford Green and frequently accommodated men on the run at the behest of Máire Comerford.[16] Although her home on Leinster Road in Rathmines was adjacent to Portobello barracks, it was de Valera's next stop after his brief stay with the Farnans.[17]

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[10] Letter from Anderson to Macready, 11 January 1921, CO904/188, TNA.
[11] Maeve MacGarry, BMH WS826, p. 13.
[12] Maeve MacGarry, BMH WS826, p. 13.
[13] Kathleen O'Connell Papers, P155/217, UCDA.
[14] Kathleen O'Connell Papers, P155/217, UCDA.
[15] Kathleen O'Connell Papers, P155/217, UCDA.
[16] Mrs A.K. Wordsworth, BMH WS1242, p. 2.
[17] O'Connell's MSP file states that de Valera spent the intervening time between Loughnavale and Glenvar with the Farnan family. See MSP34REF60286. However, her draft memoirs show that she left his suitcase and paperwork with Alice Wordsworth. See Kathleen O'Connell

Back at Loughnavale, O'Connell and MacGarry spent the entire night burning any remaining documents in the garden.[18] When the house was raided, several days later, the only occupants were O'Connell, Maeve MacGarry and her father. 'The raid was an awful one, even worse than any I had previously experienced at No. 5', according to MacGarry.[19] The glass porch and doors were smashed, floorboards were lifted and anything of value was looted. Nothing of a suspicious nature was located other than a glove bearing de Valera's name.[20] MacGarry was closely questioned by the raiders but was not placed under arrest. Her father was taken away by lorry to Dublin Castle but as there was no evidence against him, he was released the next day. Both women were shaken by the intensity and brutality of the raid. O'Connell's diary for 10 April bears the laconic statement 'Loughnavale raided. Fearful experience'.[21] Following the events at Loughnavale, Margaret MacGarry was approached again by Collins to locate another suitable hiding place for de Valera. Glenvar, a large property in Blackrock, had come onto the market and MacGarry arranged to purchase it under the pseudonym Mrs McCarthy. Glenvar was an imposing property with a long tree-lined driveway. It was set back from the road and secluded with a small gate-lodge at the entrance. De Valera, O'Connell, and MacGarry took up residence there in May. Fianna officer Seán Harling and his mother occupied the gate-lodge, while Harling acted as messenger and courier.[22] While tentative peace moves continued behind the scenes throughout the first half of 1921, the policy of repression and coercion continued, and an increasing number of women began to occupy the jails.

Arrests and Courts Martial

Eithne Coyle had a circuitous route to her court martial as discussed in the previous chapter. She was brought to Roscommon barracks following her arrest and placed in a room that was usually used for storing petrol and paraffin. She was watched constantly by an armed Black and Tan who 'kept abusing me all of the time'.[23] Coyle was later removed from there and brought to Athlone barracks where she was placed in an ordinary cell. She later claimed that she had no privacy to dress or undress in the cell

Papers, L155/217. Additionally, Wordsworth, in her BMH witness statement emphasised that de Valera stayed at her home for a week after the Loughnavale raid. See Mrs A.K. Wordsworth, BMH WS1242.

[18] Kathleen O'Connell Papers, P155/217, UCDA.
[19] Maeve MacGarry, BMH WS826, p. 17.
[20] Maeve MacGarry, BMH WS826, pp. 17-19.
[21] Kathleen O'Connell Papers, Diary entry for 10 April 1921, P155/138, UCDA.
[22] Seán Harling, BMH WS935.
[23] Eithne Coyle O'Donnell Papers, P61/2, p. 4, UCDA.

as the military sentry kept her under constant surveillance.[24] She spent six weeks as the only female prisoner in Athlone, where male republican prisoners shared their food parcels with her. Although she conceded that she was never physically ill-treated after her arrest, she states that she was threatened several times by Black and Tans.[25] They told her that they would shoot her if she did not reveal the names of those with whom she was working in Roscommon. Coyle felt a sense of relief when in February 1921 she was transferred to the A wing of Mountjoy Jail, where female prisoners awaiting trial or court martial were held. On 28 February, she was taken to Kilmainham Courthouse where, during the FGCM proceedings, she responded to the charges in Irish. The *Irish Independent* reported that she 'read a newspaper while evidence was being given against her'.[26] Coyle maintained her cool demeanour throughout; she only spoke to the judge once – in Irish – to advise him that she refused to recognise the court.[27] One of the sergeants who gave evidence against her stated that she had only escaped suspicion up to her arrest because she was a woman.[28] However, her gender did not prevent the judge from passing a sentence of three years' penal servitude, later commuted to one year.[29] Coyle was brought back to Mountjoy to serve her sentence.

Eileen McGrane, in contrast, was moved directly to Mountjoy when her interrogation by Ormonde Winter finished in the early hours of 1 January 1921. There was a long delay before any formal proceedings commenced against her. It was anticipated that the documents captured in her flat would be used to bring charges against Ned Broy, and while this case was under preparation, McGrane remained in Mountjoy.[30] McGrane still considered herself to be on active service so in April she became involved with a plan to assist Thomas Traynor, one of the condemned prisoners, to escape. Traynor was sentenced to death for his part in the shooting of Cadet O'Farrell, a member of the Auxiliaries, during an ambush at Brunswick (now Pearse) Street on 14 March 1921.[31] McGrane managed to get a wax impression of the key that opened the gate between the male and female section of the prison smuggled out to Collins. This was to be used in the escape, but the plan was foiled when a raid on an office used by GHQ uncovered documents relating to the escape.[32] Her part in

[24] Eithne Coyle O'Donnell Papers, P61/2, p. 5, UCDA.
[25] Eithne Coyle O'Donnell, BMH WS750, p. 5.
[26] *Irish Independent*, 1 March 1921, p. 6. The report erroneously referred to her as Annie Coyle.
[27] Eithne Coyle O'Donnell, BMH WS750, p. 8.
[28] Eithne Coyle O'Donnell, BMH WS750, p. 8.
[29] *Irish Independent*, 14 March 1921, p. 4. She is still referred to as Annie Coyle in this report.
[30] Confidential Minute from H. Toppin to G. Whiskard, 4 April 1921, CO904/44/14, TNA.
[31] *Freeman's Journal*, 22 April 1921, p. 3.
[32] Sworn Declaration of Mrs Eileen MacCarvill (née McGrane) to the MSP Board, 10 September 1947, MSP34REF21125.

the plot was suspected, consequently she was kept under constant surveillance by Auxiliaries while she remained in the jail. This escapade may have encouraged the authorities to expedite her trial, as shortly afterwards, it was finally decided that the documents implicating Broy would be omitted from the charges against her. Her trial would therefore proceed based on charges of possession of arms and ammunition only. At the FGCM held on 12 May 1921, McGrane was found guilty and sentenced to four years' penal servitude. She was taken to Walton jail in Liverpool to serve her sentence.

Mary Rigney, a Cumann na mBan member, was arrested at her home in Clontarf on 30 January 1921. Rigney, an ordinary rank and file member of Cumann na mBan, was also the secretary of Sinn Féin's Árd Craobh. In November 1920, she was assigned to guard duty for Michael Collins at the Mespil Road office used by him in the home of Patricia Hoey.[33] Her duties were straightforward – she kept the premises under observation from a front window, screened callers, and cooked some meals for Collins when he was there. She had never attracted any attention from the military, so was surprised when they raided the house she shared with her sisters on a quiet Sunday afternoon. During the search, two revolvers and twenty-one rounds of ammunition were discovered in the attic. They had been left there some time previously by Bob Young, an IRA Volunteer. Rigney was taken to Dublin Castle where she was closely questioned about Cumann na mBan, her activities and her contacts, but she refused to talk.[34] Eventually she was removed to Mountjoy jail where she was held with other female prisoners until court martial documents were prepared. She was formally charged with possession of firearms and ammunition and tried by FGCM at the North Dublin Union barracks on 12 February 1921.[35] The *Irish Independent* reported that Rigney told the officer in charge of the raid, 'I am a Sinn Feiner, and I would help them in any way I could'.[36] She was found guilty and sentenced to two years' hard labour, commuted to nine months.

The number of prisoners held in the women's section of Mountjoy increased as 1921 wore on. May Bourke (see Chapter 3), was arrested on 15 March when copies of cypher codes in her handwriting were found in the possession of the IRA. Bourke, an IRA intelligence agent working in Kilfinane post office, tapped phones and passed on

[33] Mary Rigney, BMH WS752, p. 6.
[34] Mary Rigney, BMH WS752, p. 12.
[35] Prosecution of Mary Rigney: Possession of firearms, possession of ammunition, WO35/130/13, TNA.
[36] *Irish Independent*, 14 February 1921, p. 6.

military and police information to the East Limerick Brigade IRA Commandant.[37] She was held in Limerick until her trial on 26 May. The charges against her related to the captured documents only – she wisely remained silent on her other activities, which are outlined in full in her MSP application.[38] She was found guilty on all charges and was remanded for sentencing. A month later she was sentenced to two years' hard labour.[39] Bourke was transferred to Mountjoy and joined the growing population of female republicans there.

Aileen Keogh was matron of the boy's boarding school Mount Saint Benedict, near Gorey, County Wexford. She never joined Cumann na mBan, but she was an advanced nationalist and an associate of Máire Comerford. Although a Catholic, she came from a landed Protestant family and 'was red hot with patriotic fervour', as her friend Comerford stated.[40] Keogh cycled from Wexford to Dublin in 1916 during the Rising and repeated the feat for the funeral of Thomas Ashe. Of all the women who became involved in republican activities, there is a sense that Keogh was a *femme formidable*. Roy Foster provides a particularly colourful description:

> At the time of the Rising the terrifying Matron, Aileen Keogh, who cropped her hair, smoked cheroots and for relaxation felled large trees with an axe, cycled to Dublin, threw herself into the fray and was arrested; apparently her guarding officer was an old Mount St. Benedict boy who at the sight of her turned tail and fled.[41]

She regularly provided food and shelter to men from the Gorey company of the IRA, perhaps with the tacit approval of the head of the school, Father Sweetman, also an advanced nationalist.[42] Keogh's activities escaped the attention of the police and military until 1921. She was placed under arrest after a four-hour search by military at Mount Saint Benedict uncovered some items of interest in her possession.[43] She was moved to Waterford where she was charged and tried by court martial for possession of thirty-two rounds of ammunition, shot powder and seditious documents. Keogh refused to recognise the court, stating that unless she received orders from 'the Republican Government of Ireland not to keep ammunition and explosives', she

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[37] Daniel O'Shaughnessy, BMH WS435, p. 28.
[38] Sworn statement made before MSP Board Advisory Committee by Mary Bourke, 30 May 1940, pp. 1-2. MSPC34REF2569.
[39] *Freeman's Journal*, 22 June 1921, p. 4.
[40] Unpublished memoir, undated, Máire Comerford Papers, LA18/13, p. 3, UCDA.
[41] Foster, *Vivid Faces,* p. 43.
[42] Thomas Dwyer, BMH WS1198, p. 23.
[43] *Irish Independent*, 2 February 1921, p. 6.

considered she had every right to do so.[44] She was sentenced to two years' imprisonment, without hard labour, and moved to Mountjoy.[45]

Linda Kearns complained about the treatment she received following her arrest in November 1920. She claimed that she was repeatedly threatened while undergoing interrogation in Sligo barracks. One RIC man, she said, 'beat me about the head and chest and broke one of my front teeth'.[46] She was removed to Sligo Jail the following day and held there for several days before being transported with her fellow prisoners to the coast. From there they boarded a destroyer that brought them to Buncrana in Donegal. They were marched to Derry – a foot-march of several hours – and were met by a lorry that transported them for the last few miles to the jail in Derry. Kearns was astonished to find that her new abode was an all-male prison. She was housed in the hospital wing where she remained for several days until two wardresses were sent from Armagh to escort her to Belfast. She was reunited with her fellow prisoners from Sligo during the journey to Belfast, but upon arrival at the jail there - whilst the male prisoners were admitted - the prison governor refused to accept Kearns; Belfast gaol was another all-male prison. This would appear to be an extraordinary lack of foresight and planning on behalf of the British authorities considering her importance to them as a prisoner. She was subsequently taken to Victoria Barracks where the farcical situation continued, as she was handed over from one military officer to another, none of whom had any idea what to do with their female prisoner. Finally, she was placed back in the lorry and according to the Smithson account, was brought to the Bridewell to spend the night.[47] The next day, the wardresses who had accompanied her earlier returned. She was brought to the railway station, placed on a train and brought to Armagh Female Prison. Kearns remained in Armagh until 11 March 1921 when the long-awaited court martial took place in Belfast. A detailed case was prepared against her consisting of thirteen prosecution witnesses, all members of the police or military.[48] It appeared that the authorities were determined to get a conviction and make an example of her. The verdict was not handed down immediately, so she was returned to Armagh to await the decision. On 25 March, she was handed the verdict – the FGCM had decided that she was guilty on twenty-six different counts and sentenced her to ten years' penal servitude.

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[44] *Belfast Telegraph*, 10 February 1921, p. 5.
[45] *Irish Independent*, 11 February 1921, p. 5.
[46] Linda Kearns, BMH WS404, p. 7.
[47] Smithson, *In Times of Peril*, p. 13.
[48] Summary of evidence in the case of Linda Kearns, 11 March 1921, CO904/44/3, TNA.

Despite her wish to be allowed to serve out her sentence in Ireland, she was transferred to Walton prison in Liverpool in April. Kearns was dismayed to discover that she was to be treated as a normal convict and that no political status would be granted to her. Instead, she was imprisoned among 'Recidivists' – prisoners she described as 'the very worst type of criminal'.[49] Shortly thereafter, an organised effort to draw attention to what was perceived as her unjust incarceration commenced with numerous letters sent to the Prime Minister and the Lord Lieutenant on her behalf. The Irish Nurses' and Midwives' Union was one of many groups and individuals that campaigned for her release.[50] Maude Mac Callum, an Irish nurse based in London, 'of strong Unionist principles', appealed for a retrial for Kearns.[51] Meanwhile, inside the jail, she commenced her own campaign to improve the conditions under which she was held. She formally complained about the decline of her health, the food and the sanitary conditions. Her life brightened somewhat when Eileen McGrane was brought to Walton in May, although the prison authorities contrived to keep them apart. Nonetheless, they managed to speak on a few occasions.[52] However, instructions were sent from the Chief Secretary's office in August to transfer McGrane back to Mountjoy and arrangements were immediately made for an escort.[53] Kearns escalated her own efforts for a transfer after McGrane's removal to Ireland. She formally petitioned the Home Office outlining all her complaints and asking to be sent to Ireland 'that I may have the same privileges as the other girls undergoing sentences for the same cause'.[54] Those words indicate that Kearns had ceased to protest her innocence and was conceding that her imprisonment was due to her actions for a 'cause'. Marie Mortished of the Irish Nurses' and Midwives' Union also changed her approach in her letters to the Home Office. She now asked that Kearns be granted 'the conditions of political prisoners' and be moved to Dublin.[55] Although both the Deputy Governor and the Medical officer of Walton jail refuted her complaints, the Home Office relented, and arrangements were made to transfer Kearns to Mountjoy on 13 September 1921.[56]

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[49] Smithson, *In Times of Peril*, p. 19.
[50] Letters from M. Mortished, Irish Nurses' and Midwives' Union to Lloyd George and to the Lord Lieutenant, 13 April 1921, CO904/44/9, TNA.
[51] Letters from Maude MacCallum to Hamar Greenwood and to the Lord Lieutenant, 22 April 1921, CO904/44/9, TNA.
[52] Ó Duigneáin, *Linda Kearns*, p. 57.
[53] Letters from Colonel H. Toppin, Chief Secretary's Office to A.J. Wall, Prison Commission, Home Office, London, and to Deputy Inspector General, RIC, 8 August 1921, CO904/44/14, TNA.
[54] Petition to the Home Office from Linda Kearns, 19 August 1921, CO904/44/3, TNA.
[55] Letter from M. Mortished to the Home Office, 29 August 1921, CO904/44/9, TNA.
[56] Letter from Colonel H. Toppin to Deputy Inspector General RIC, 12 September 1921, CO904/44/9, TNA.

A military raid on the home of Frances Brady, who worked for IRA intelligence, led to her arrest on 3 June 1921. She was subsequently charged with possession of a revolver and of a document permitting her to recruit on behalf of the Irish Volunteers. At the court martial hearing in Kilmainham later that month, Brady refused to recognise the court, but pointed out to the prosecution that 'the Irish Volunteers no longer existed, their place having been taken by the I.R.A.'[57] She denied ownership of the revolver and the attaché case in which it was stored.[58] In all likelihood, the weapon was the property of Joe McGrath, who had escaped through a window when the military called. Brady worked with McGrath on the Belfast boycott campaign and a room in her house was occasionally used as an office. Her protestations of innocence were not accepted by the court and later that month she was sentenced to two years' imprisonment with hard labour. Brady was reported by the *Freeman's Journal* to be 'in good spirits' when visited in Mountjoy by a friend shortly after sentencing.[59] Undoubtedly she was among many friends in her present location too, as the number of republican women sharing the female wing of Mountjoy increased. The capture and subsequent imprisonment of Kearns, McGrane, Coyle, Keogh, Bourke, Brady was indicative that the British administration in Ireland were now aware that women were active participants in military activity.

Rape and Sexual Assault

Life may have been difficult for the women undergoing jail sentences, but perhaps Ireland's prisons were a safer place than some parts of the country placed under martial law. As far back as October 1920 there were reports in the *Irish Bulletin* of attacks on women suspected to be involved with republicanism.[60] These intensified during the early months of 1921, and mainly referred to shooting, burning, beating and enforced hair-cutting. Reports of rape were infrequent although they first began to emerge from the martial law area in 1921. The subject of sexual violence during Ireland's War of Independence has been a largely unexplored part of the nation's history for several reasons. Firstly, for those reasons outlined in Marie Coleman's recent work on the topic – predominantly the lack of available archival material – and secondly, because there is little data and few statistics on the subject as very few

[57] *Freeman's Journal*, 16 June 1921, p. 3.
[58] *Irish Independent*, 16 June 1921, p. 4.
[59] *Freeman's Journal*, 5 July 1921, p. 6.
[60] *Irish Bulletin*, 'The Precautionary Measures of the English Armed Forces – Four Weeks of War Upon Irish Women and Children', 16 November 1920, pp. 1-3.

incidents of rape or sexual violence were reported to the authorities.[61] Women who were victims of sexual violence tended not to leave memoirs or witness statements outlining their ordeals, so personal testimony is rare. However, the rape of Norah Healy, a pregnant married woman, at her home in Cork in April 1921 has been documented. Séamus Fitzgerald, the representative for Dáil Éireann publicity in Cork, stated that the attack was committed by 'Black and Tans.[62] Part of Fitzgerald's brief was to collect statements from victims of outrages and assaults for use within the pages of the *Irish Bulletin*. John Borgonovo, referring to the original affidavit submitted by Norah Healy and her husband, states that the men responsible for the attack were 'wearing police uniforms and white masks'.[63] He notes that Norah Healy's ordeal was the price she paid for successfully intervening to prevent her husband from being shot. He does not appear to have a republican connection; instead, as Linda Connolly points out, he served in the British army during the 1914-1918 war.[64] Although few cases of sexual assault are documented in detail, the diligence displayed by the British administration in Ireland in record-keeping has insured that at least one case is available to researchers. Full details of the case of Bridget Fahy, a Dungarvan woman who was the victim of a sexual assault, will be discussed later in this chapter.

Whilst it is impossible to estimate the percentage of unreported rape cases during Ireland's War of Independence, it is possible to ascertain that at least some, in addition to the Fahy case, had come to the attention of the RIC. For example, in June 1921, a report filed by the military refers to 'two armed and disguised men' who called to the home of Michael O'Regan, a retired farmer who lived near Cahirciveen in County Kerry. The men demanded money and upon meeting with a refusal 'attempted to criminally assault O'Regan's daughter Elizabeth, age 24, and his wife age 68'.[65] The *Kerry People* reported that the police subsequently took four men into custody, but does not carry any further report on the matter, or state if any trial took place.[66] The previous November, the RIC County Inspector for County Dublin recorded that a case of rape and robbery occurred near Rathcoole in Dublin.[67] The attack took place on an unmarried girl, and two men were subsequently arrested for the offence. There is no

[61] Coleman, 'Violence against Women during the Irish War of Independence', pp. 137-155.
[62] Séamus Fitzgerald, BMH WS173, p. 30.
[63] Borgonovo, *Spies, Informers and the 'Anti-Sinn Féin Society',* p. 108.
[64] Connolly, 'Towards a further understanding of the violence experienced by women in the Irish revolution', p. 20.
[65] Military Operations and Enquiries, C.R. No. 2/49719, 21 June 1921, WO35/89, TNA.
[66] *Kerry People*, 25 June 1921, p. 5.
[67] Confidential Monthly Report for November 1920, Part 1, 2 December 1920, CO904/113, TNA.

indication in the report if the assailants in this case were military or civilian and there is no account of the matter in the contemporary Dublin newspapers.

Although there may be a dearth of newspaper reports concerning cases of sexual violence, incidents were reported to the American Commission on Conditions in Ireland which are contained within their report published in 1921.[68] Its purpose was to ascertain 'for the American people the truth about conditions in Ireland'.[69] Observers from the Commission travelled to Ireland to collect evidence (and seek affidavits where appropriate) on the prevailing conditions in Ireland. Additionally, testimony was accepted from witnesses at Commission hearings in the USA. Women who were reluctant to report incidents to the police, mainly because members of the police and/or military were responsible for the attacks, gave sworn statements to the American Commission. Ellie Lane of Ballincollig, County Cork, gave details of a sexual assault that took place during a raid in September 1920. Lane, who was employed as a maid, was in bed when the house 'was forcibly entered and searched by armed, masked men'.[70] She fought off the attentions of one of the men who tried to force her into bed and who then exposed himself to her. Lane does not state if she ever reported the matter to the authorities. Daniel Francis Crowley was one of several former RIC men who gave evidence to the Commission about the behaviour of 'Black and Tans'. He described how they approached two 'innocent girls' from the town and that he believed that had he not been present to intervene, 'they would have been brutally assaulted'.[71]

The Brigid Fahy Case – Abbeyside, Dungarvan, County Waterford

On 3 April 1921, while Waterford was under martial law, Brigid Fahy became the victim of a violent assault in her home during curfew hours. The Fahys owned a public house on Sexton Street in the town. Her husband, Tomás, a prominent Gaelic Leaguer, was interned in Kilworth Camp, near Fermoy.[72] He was arrested in the general round-up of republicans that took place following an ambush on police a month earlier.[73] Fahy continued to run the business in his absence with the help of her maid, Bridget O'Neill.

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[68] Albert Coyle & American Commission on Conditions in Ireland, *Evidence on Conditions in Ireland*, (Washington, 1921).
[69] Coyle, *Evidence on Conditions in Ireland*, p. iii.
[70] Coyle, *Evidence on Conditions in Ireland*, pp. 750-1.
[71] Coyle, *Evidence on Conditions in Ireland*, p. 381.
[72] Fahy was first interned in Kilworth Camp, Fermoy and then moved to Spike Island. See WO35/144 and WO35/138, TNA. I am grateful to Pat McCarthy for the information on Fahy's internment history.
[73] The Burgery Ambush in Dungarvan resulted in the death of an RIC Sergeant and a Black and Tan Constable on 18/19 March 1921.

In a sworn statement, Fahy described how two men, who had been drinking in the bar earlier that evening, returned after closing time and demanded to be readmitted.[74] The women were apprehensive about allowing the men access to the premises, not only because they had earlier consumed a considerable amount of alcohol, but also because the taller of the two had behaved suggestively towards O'Neill earlier. When the demands for entry became persistent, Fahy unlocked the door and let them in. One of the men made his way upstairs into the room that O'Neill shared with Fahy's six-year-old son, while the other held Fahy at gunpoint. Hearing the screams of O'Neill and the cries of her child, she struggled with the gunman and ran into the bedroom where O'Neill was trying to fend off the other man. She was pursued there by the gunman who threatened to shoot her son if she did not comply with his wishes. 'They gave me three minutes to leave the child out of my arms before they would fire. The little child ran in terror from my arms back to the bedroom in darkness'.[75] She states that she fainted at this point and was later revived by O'Neill.

The language Fahy used in her statement was cautious and ambiguous in relation to the personal attacks on herself and on O'Neill. Her loss of consciousness provides a convenient curtain that can be drawn against the more lurid details of the attack. She did not clearly state that a rape took place, but the reader of her full statement can have no doubts about the sequence of events in Dungarvan that night. Furthermore, when her experience is discussed or dealt with by a variety of third parties – including the police and military – the seriousness of the assault is evident.[76] Although Fahy was vague about details of the assaults in her statement, she was very specific about the stock that was stolen by the men and she did not shirk from describing their acts of vandalism, so it appears that she was deliberately evasive or reticent about the personal attacks that took place:

> They took from my bar between three and four dozen stout, some whiskey, a box of Player's cigarettes and matches… Before leaving they used my hall as a lavatory for sitting and standing purposes.[77]

Reticence by women to describe a sexual assault in any detail is not unusual, and in many cases, euphemisms were used in place of the word 'rape'. In the few accounts of sexual assault and rape that are documented during this period, they refer

[74] Statement by Bridget Fahy, 22 April 1921, in Síghle Humphreys Papers, P106/1410, UCDA.
[75] Statement by Bridget Fahy, 22 April 1921, in Síghle Humphreys Papers, P106/1410, UCDA.
[76] Letter from Whiskard, Dublin Castle, to Deputy Adjutant General Parkgate GHQ, 6 July 1921, WO35/88B/5, TNA.
[77] Statement by Bridget Fahy, 22 April 1921, in Síghle Humphreys Papers, P106/1410, UCDA.

to an act of indecency, an outrage or an assault, but they rarely use the word 'rape'. The euphemism 'outrage' is more sanitised and perhaps suggests 'the contemporary sense and emphasis on moral outrage rather than an understanding of the devastation of sexual violation', as Earner-Byrne states.[78] Inevitably, this coy approach by newspapers to reporting cases of sexual violence tended to conceal the nature or the extent of the crime; or as Anthony Keating put it, it was 'wrapped in language that was so oblique that the detail and nature of the crime was barely discernible'.[79] However, when an incident is being discussed or written about by third parties, the same reticence is often lacking. For example, in a BMH witness statement which contained extracts from his contemporaneous notes and from a diary kept in spring 1921, George Berkeley[80] referred to what appears to be the Fahy case:

> In the evening I received a letter from Mrs. Corbally describing a case of rape in Ireland. A woman was raped, and when she made a complaint (to the authorities) her house was burnt as a reprisal.[81]

Although Berkeley does not mention Fahy by name, he received the letter during the week commencing 25 April 1921, which corresponds with the timeframe in which Fahy publicised her ordeal.

The matter came into the public domain by Fahy's determination to seek justice for the criminal acts that took place in her home and to bring the perpetrators to account. The day after the attack, she made a formal statement to the District Inspector and the Head Constable of the Dungarvan RIC, stressing that she could identify both men involved should she be given the opportunity to do so. Initially, it appeared as if her complaint had been taken seriously as she was asked to return to the barracks to identify the assailants from a line-up of several policemen. Separately and independently, both Fahy and O'Neill identified the taller of the two men who came to their home that night. Clearly, although perhaps naively, Fahy expected that she would be notified of impending legal proceedings, but a week passed by and nothing happened. Then 'acting on advice' (although she does not specify from whom), she

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[78] Lindsay Earner-Byrne, 'The Rape of Mary M.: A Microhistory of Sexual Violence and Moral Redemption in 1920s Ireland', in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 24, No. 1, January 2015, p. 84.
[79] Anthony Keating, 'Sexual Crime in the Irish Free State 1922-33: its nature, extent and reporting' in *Irish Studies Review*, 20:2, (July 2012), p. 146.
[80] George Berkeley (1870-1955), was a member of the London-based committee formed in 1914 to raise funds to arm the Irish Volunteers. He became a member of the Irish Dominion League in 1920 supporting Dominion Home Rule. See Biographical details in Berkeley Papers, Cork City Archives, PR12. (http://www.corkarchives.ie/media/PR12web.pdf)
[81] George F.H. Berkeley, BMH WS994, p. 123.

wrote to the District Inspector to ask for the name of the man that she and O'Neill had earlier identified.[82] Upon receipt of her letter, the Head Constable called to her residence to request an additional statement and assured her that she was safe from any future interference from any of the Crown Forces. However, his assurances were short lived, as at 2.30 a.m. the following morning, Fahy's home and business premises were broken into by masked and armed men and set alight. The women and the child escaped with their lives by jumping from a wall twelve feet in height into an adjoining yard. The buildings were completely destroyed by fire.

The Fahy case may partly explain why women, who were assaulted by members of the police or military, were so reluctant to report the matter to the authorities. When the authorities themselves were the perpetrators of criminal acts, little or no justice could be expected. The burning of Fahy's property appears to be a reprisal for her determined pursuit of those who invaded her home and assaulted her. Certainly, that is how the situation was perceived by Berkeley. Furthermore, this type of reprisal sent out a clear message to any other female who contemplated making a complaint to Dungarvan barracks about the behaviour of its inhabitants. The RIC in Dungarvan – or anywhere else in Munster, for that matter – behaved more like a military force than a police force. Martial law, as discussed earlier, was extended to Waterford in January 1921 and gave the military and police the authority to raid and search premises without a warrant.[83] Women, frequently alone as so many men were interned, imprisoned or on the run, had no choice but to open their door to late-night calls from military and police. Mostly, the calls were for raids or searches and there was no malicious intent, but sometimes, as this work will show, there were more sinister motives. It is possible that the military or police resorted to doling out their own form of punishment to women they suspected of involvement in republican activities. A court case required an arrest, charges, evidence and paperwork – a late night call might prove to be a more effective, and less onerous, deterrent.

Enforced Hair-Cutting

While incidents of rape and sexual violence are difficult to locate during this period, other acts of violence – for example, enforced hair-cutting – are on record. For many women, hair is an intrinsic part of their femininity, therefore an assault in which hair is

[82] Statement by Bridget Fahy, 22 April 1921, in Síghle Humphreys Papers, P106/1410, UCDA.
[83] For declaration of martial law in these counties see Hansard 5 (Commons) 135, Prime Minister's Announcement, cols 2601-16, 10 December 1920.

forcibly cut, can be viewed as sexual. Connolly has argued persuasively that enforced hair-cutting should be regarded as a form of sexual assault. 'Forcibly cutting hair is a bodily violation that involves unwanted physical contact/bodily touching between aggressors and victims, and is intrinsically sexual'.[84] Notwithstanding that assessment by Connolly, there was a perception that enforced hair-cutting, while causing pain and humiliation to the victim, was somehow a 'lesser' assault than rape. Consequently, while having one's hair forcibly cut was a public symbol of victimhood, it was not necessarily a symbol of impurity. Victims of forced hair-cutting did not carry the same degree of shame as those who had had their bodies violated by sexual violence or rape. There was no perception that they had been tainted, or, as Lindsay Earner-Byrne states, had become 'contaminated by rape'.[85] This may partly explain why many women came forward to complain to the authorities when they were the victim of an assault that involved enforced hair-cutting, but few women reported rape.

There are numerous cases of hair-cutting both by the IRA and by military and/or police, many of which were reported in national and provincial newspapers. Although this practice was used by both sides in the conflict, most official reports relate to incidents in which the IRA were the antagonists. Police reports for August and September 1920 show that breach of the RIC boycott, or fraternising with members of the military, appear to be the motives for this form of punishment. [86] Brian Hughes makes the point that this such an assault targeted women directly, and was used instead of shooting 'as the ultimate penalty for female defiance'.[87] Esther Tims from Longford and Annie Girley from Ardara in Donegal were victimised for reasons relating to the boycott, while two unnamed girls in Navan, County Meath, received the same treatment 'to prevent girls keeping the company of soldiers'.[88] Both the police and the IRA considered such attacks on women as 'outrages' and were quick to condemn them, notwithstanding that both parties participated in this form of assault. Veterans of the War of Independence told the BMH and the MSP Board of their involvement in raids, ambushes and attacks, but few confessed to involvement in an incident of enforced hair-cutting. However, one Galway man, Michael Higgins, admitted to participating in the enforced cutting of a girl's hair near Tuam, county Galway; although

[84] Connolly, 'Towards a further understanding of the violence experienced by women in the Irish Revolution', p. 7.
[85] Earner-Byrne, 'The Rape of Mary M.', p. 87.
[86] Daily Summaries of Reports on Outrages, Aug-Sept 1920, CO904/142, TNA.
[87] Brian Hughes, *Defying the IRA? Intimidation, coercion, and communities during the Irish Revolution*, (Liverpool, 2016), p. 140.
[88] *Freeman's Journal*, 10 May 1921, p. 5.

he is unable to state when this took place.[89] This punishment was inflicted upon her for informing the RIC about IRA activities. In the MSPC, Patrick Michael Ahern, a twenty-four-year-old 1st Lieutenant with the West Limerick Brigade of the IRA, admitted his participation in an enforced hair-cutting attack in Newcastle West. He claimed that he was the leader of a group of Volunteers who 'broke into houses of people who were giving information to R.I.C. some of whom were young girls'.[90] Ahern stated that the orders of his superior officers were 'not to shoot them but to cut off their hair which we did and made a good job of it and it was a good job for them as they got very well paid for it'.[91] This last comment may be in reference to newspaper reports of compensation paid to Annie O'Leary and Bridget Casey of Newcastle West for personal injuries and loss of income. Both women had their hair cut by armed men for 'being friendly with the military and police'.[92]

A trawl of the BMH witness statements and the MSP records shows that Patrick Ahern is one of few men who admit to participation in forced hair-cutting. Yet, because women victims reported the crime when it was inflicted on them by republican men – possibly because it was a very visible sign of their humiliation and was difficult to conceal – there are numerous recorded instances. Equally, it can be argued that there may have been an economic factor to the large number of hair-cutting incidents reported; in some cases quite large sums of money were paid out to victims in compensation. Two women from West Cork were awarded sums of £500 and £200, respectively, for having their hair cut short by 'Sinn Feiners'.[93]

As a counterbalance, there are also some reports of women attacked by military and/or police who have had their hair cut either as a punishment or a warning. However, these incidents are not recorded in the RIC's list of Daily and Weekly Summaries, presumably because, unlike Bridget Fahy, most victims did not complain about police crime to the police. Even Brigadier General Frank Crozier, the head of the ADRIC until February 1921, admitted in his autobiography that he 'did not trust the police to convict themselves', thereby conceding that the RIC regularly flouted the law they were supposed to uphold.[94] An article titled 'The Precautionary Measures of the

[89] Michael Higgins, BMH WS1247, p. 8.
[90] Letter from Patrick Michael Ahern to MSP Board, undated, but probably November 1934. MSP34REF652.
[91] Letter from Patrick Michael Ahern to MSP Board, undated, but probably November 1934. MSP34REF652.
[92] *Cork Examiner*, 23 October 1920, p.2. The article states that O'Leary, a schoolteacher, was awarded £400, while Casey was awarded £70.
[93] *Skibbereen Eagle*, 25 September 1920, p. 4.
[94] Brigadier-General F.P. Crozier, *Impressions and Recollections* (London, 1930), p. 259.

English Armed Forces: Four Weeks of War Upon Irish Women and Children' in the *Irish Bulletin* issue of 16 November 1920, listed five cases of forced hair-cutting that took place between 15 October and 1 November that year.[95] They occurred in Clare, Limerick, Tipperary, and Kerry and in each case were said to have been carried out by 'English Constabulary', in all likelihood the ADRIC or Black and Tans. All these incidents were carried in newspaper reports at the time of occurrence, so details were published in advance of the *Irish Bulletin* issue of 16 November 1921. Consequently, these reports cannot be dismissed as mere republican propaganda.[96]

Propaganda

The *Irish Bulletin* was probably the most effective means at the disposal of the Dáil to disseminate information about the prevailing conditions in Ireland. First published in 1919, it received information from all parts of the country concerning incidents that involved both the IRA and Crown Forces. When the IRA had secured what it perceived to be a victory, it was lauded in the *Bulletin*. When the police or military were involved in incidents of violence, burning, looting or reprisals, those too were highlighted in the next issue. Copies of the *Bulletin* were sent to newspapers both at home and abroad, distributed to all foreign correspondents based in Ireland and to public figures who may be sympathetic to the nationalist viewpoint. Sympathetic MPs, or those who wanted to pressurise Lloyd George's government, frequently asked questions in the House of Commons about incidents of violence involving the police and military. Sometimes, their information on these incidents came directly from the pages of the *Bulletin*. Jeremiah MacVeagh, the IPP MP for South Down, on many occasions drew attention to outrages and atrocities committed by Crown Forces.[97] In November 1920, he confronted Hamar Greenwood with a long list of incidents of brutality against women in which Black and Tans were involved.[98] The details of the attacks he outlined in the House of Commons were identical to those published a week earlier in the *Irish Bulletin*.[99] It appeared, to the British administration, as though MacVeagh's questions to the Chief Secretary were directed by the editors of the *Bulletin*. This demonstrates how successful this publication had become at disseminating news of British atrocities in

[95] *Irish Bulletin*, 16 November 1920.
[96] See *Cork Examiner*, 15 October 1920, p. 8; *Cork Examiner*, 25 October 1920, p. 8; *Cork Examiner*, 27 October 1920, p. 2; *Irish Independent*, 2 November 1920, p. 6; *Kerry People*, 6 November 1920, p. 3.
[97] Bridget Hourican, 'MacVeagh (MacVeigh), Jeremiah', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. (http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a5298).
[98] Hansard 5 (Commons) 135, Reprisals, cols 646-649, 25 November 1920.
[99] *Irish Bulletin*, 16 November 1920.

Ireland, and consequently how far Dublin Castle lagged in the propaganda war. Although newspapers did not dare to carry verbatim reports from the *Irish Bulletin*, they were at liberty to publish MacVeagh's comments as they had been mentioned in Parliament. The *Freeman's Journal* gleefully reported that MacVeagh had:

> mentioned 25 cases in which women were subjected to rough or violent treatment, there being allegations that in some cases girls' hair was cut off, and that in others women were taken or dragged in their night-clothes into the street.[100]

MacVeagh was not the only parliamentarian to put awkward questions to the Chief Secretary or the Prime Minister about the situation in Ireland. Joseph Kenworthy, Liberal MP for Hull Central, also used the information published in the *Bulletin* to draw attention to the growing number of reprisals undertaken by Crown Forces. Although both Greenwood and the Prime Minister defended the actions of the Black and Tans and the ADRIC in parliament, privately, the administration was aware that these groups were a problem. Macready wrote to General Tudor in November 1920 to complain about the indiscipline of his men and specifically mentioned their propensity to fire indiscriminately into the air to announce their arrival.[101] He felt that not only did it set a bad example to members of the army under his (Macready's) control, but it was also a threat to civilians. Clearly, he thought that bullets should be kept for more productive purposes – 'When there are rebels in sight I am all for killing as many as possible, but this sort of firing I refer to kills nobody'.[102]

The British administration, already acutely aware that they were losing the propaganda war, considered how best to respond. Macready raised concerns about the attitude of the Irish press as far back as October 1920 when, in a letter to the Undersecretary, he complained about a 'portion of the Press which is hostile to the Government'.[103] The letter stated that the police and military were being goaded by the publication of 'scandalous and lying statements' and 'the present Press campaign of abuse and misstatement of facts'.[104] He expressed the fear that he may not be able to 'avoid possible unfortunate incidents which may suddenly arise' if the situation was allowed to continue.[105] This appeared to be a veiled threat; it suggested that the police and military may take matters into their own hands if the press was not silenced. Basil

[100] *Freeman's Journal*, 27 November 1920, p. 4.
[101] Letter from Macready to John Anderson, 3 November 1920, CO904/188, TNA.
[102] Letter from Macready to John Anderson, 3 November 1920, CO904/188, TNA.
[103] Letter from Macready to Undersecretary, 12 October 1920, CO904/188, TNA.
[104] Letter from Macready to Undersecretary, 12 October 1920, CO904/188, TNA.
[105] Letter from Macready to Undersecretary, 12 October 1920, CO904/188, TNA.

Clarke, the British administration's press officer based in Dublin Castle, was perceived by the military to have failed to manage his propaganda brief. In March 1921, Macready wrote to Anderson again to outline complaints from General Strickland about the matter, stating 'Until this question of propaganda is properly tackled by someone far more able than Basil Clarke we shall never get [it] right'.[106] The *Irish Bulletin*, in particular, was the cause of much alarm behind the walls of Dublin Castle. Attempting to undermine the publication, the police even issued fake copies of the paper using the typewriter and copier seized in a raid on its offices. With the list of subscribers – also taken in the raid – copies of the fake *Bulletin* were dispatched to the usual recipients. However, the fakes were, as Ian Kenneally points out, easily detectable due to the number of errors they contained.[107] The *Bulletin* staff immediately located to different premises and procured replacement equipment; this enabled them to publish an issue denouncing British actions, thereby exposing the ruse.

MacVeagh was also the first to highlight the Brigid Fahy case to the general public. On 16 June 1921, he asked the Prime Minister about the 'looting and overtures and acts of indecency by Black and Tans' at Fahy's home and referred to the subsequent burning of the premises as a reprisal for formally identifying one of the perpetrators.[108] Although he received an evasive reply from Hamar Greenwood, who was responding in the absence of the PM, the mere fact that the question had been asked in parliament once again allowed newspapers to report on the matter. The *Irish Independent* carried an article the following day about the case, thereby bringing the Fahy case into the public domain.[109] The *Irish Bulletin*, in its issue of 8 July 1921 bore the headline 'The War on Women and Children' and reported events in the martial law areas.[110] It referred to the burnings at Abbeyside and 'Mrs. F… who escaped from her burning house through a back window with her little boy of six years'.[111] Another article in the same issue was titled 'Cases of rape and attempted rape' and made reference to Dungarvan, where 'the women were willing to give full particulars and had made sworn affidavits'.[112] The ability of the *Bulletin* to consistently publish details of cases which were known by the authorities to be true was a particular bone of contention. Macready's correspondence with Dublin Castle, as previously noted, makes it clear

[106] Letter from Macready to Anderson, marked 'Private and Personal', 7 March 1921, CO904/188, TNA.
[107] Ian Kenneally, *The Paper Wall: Newspapers and Propaganda in Ireland*, 1919-1921, (Cork, 2008), pp. 51-3.
[108] Hansard 5 (Commons), 143, cols 583-4 (16 June 1921).
[109] *Irish Independent*, 17 June 1921, p. 6.
[110] *Irish Bulletin*, 8 July 1921, p.1.
[111] *Irish Bulletin*, 8 July 1921, p.1.
[112] *Irish Bulletin*, 8 July 1921, p.2.

that he believed that Britain was losing the propaganda war in Ireland. However, the perception of people outside Ireland was a bigger worry. Newspapers in Britain, Europe, and the USA regularly carried articles about the behaviour of British troops in Ireland and this brought additional pressure on to the government. Oliver O'Hanlon, in his article on overseas press coverage of the Irish War of Independence, points out that the editors of European newspapers and periodicals took an avid interest in the prevailing situation in Ireland:

> Irish towns and villages, reduced to burned-out buildings and desolate urban landscapes, must surely have hit a raw nerve in Europe where the memories of the First World War and its destructive power were still fresh in the public [mind].[113]

Towards a Truce

Secret, behind-the-scenes peace moves were underway even as the conflict continued. Mark Sturgis contemplated the pros and cons of a truce in his diary entry of 7 May 1921 noting, 'A Truce means a big risk and we must take risks to accomplish anything'.[114] Unfortunately, those sitting at the Cabinet table did not share his view on the matter. A Cabinet meeting held on 12 May discussed a possible truce following recent meetings between de Valera and James Craig, but there was no majority support for the proposal. The Cabinet decided:

> That it would be a mistake for the government to take the initiative in any suspension of military activities in Ireland, and that the present policy in that country should be pursued.[115]

The 'present policy' was the intensification of raids and searches to locate IRA members and sympathisers and to continue with the military campaign. Effectively, the approach would involve less carrot and more stick. While the military men in Ireland – Macready and Tudor – wielded the stick, Anderson and Cope in Dublin Castle continued to seek more conciliatory methods to end the conflict. A speech by King George V at the opening of the Belfast parliament under the Government of Ireland Act (1920), appeared to hold out an olive branch. In its edition the following day, the

[113] Oliver O'Hanlon 'Press Coverage from Abroad', in John Crowley et al (eds) *Atlas of the Irish Revolution* (Cork, 2017), p. 482.
[114] Hopkinson, *The Last Days of Dublin Castle*, p. 174.
[115] Conclusions of Cabinet Meeting, 12 May 1921, CAB/23/25/23, TNA.

Freeman's Journal described it as 'being in remarkable contrast with the utterances of his Ministers'.[116] The King appealed:

> to all Irishmen to pause, to stretch out the hand of forbearance and conciliation, to forgive and to forget, and to join in making for the land which they love a new era of peace, contentment and goodwill'.[117]

The speech was the signal (or the excuse) for Lloyd George to revisit potential peace moves. Consequently, at the Cabinet meeting on 24 June, he suggested that an invitation should be extended to de Valera and Craig 'to discuss the situation and if possible, reach agreement'.[118]

Meanwhile, back in Ireland events gained a momentum of their own. While King George V was in Belfast making conciliatory moves, the military were moving into de Valera's safe house - Glenvar - to conduct a search. All the residents were taken by surprise. Margaret Macken, a sister-in-law of Dr Farnon, was present as she sometimes received Irish language lessons from de Valera. Maeve MacGarry, who went to the local shop for matches, returned to find soldiers with fixed bayonets outside the gate-lodge, and an armoured car parked outside the front door of the main house.[119] Inside de Valera and O'Connell watched as two officers searched through boxes of documents scattered on the floor. The discovery of letters addressed to 'the President', suggested to the troops that they may have located an important personage, but according to MacGarry, they did not know exactly who the man was. When questioned, she gave her name as Miss Hayden and de Valera told them his name was Mr Sankey – the pseudonyms under which they lived while at Glenvar.[120] The officer seemed sceptical of their stories and sent out for reinforcements. All the documents were placed into boxes for removal and de Valera, O'Connell and Macken were taken away in military lorries. MacGarry was left alone in the house wondering why she had not been taken and how their presence at Glenvar had been discovered. Milo MacGarry, her brother and an IRA Volunteer, offered an explanation in a BMH witness statement.[121] Local IRA Volunteers used the extensive grounds of Glenvar – an unoccupied house, they assumed – as a sorting office to censor mail taken in raids. Upon receipt of a report of suspicious activity in the vicinity of Glenvar, the military sent a patrol to investigate. In short, the discovery of de Valera's hide-out by this patrol was

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[116] *Freeman's Journal*, 23 June 1921, p. 3.
[117] *Freeman's Journal*, 23 June 1921, p. 3.
[118] Conclusions of Cabinet Meeting, 24 June 1921, p. 1, CAB23/26/8, TNA.
[119] Maeve MacGarry, BMH WS826, p. 22.
[120] Maeve MacGarry, BMH WS826, p. 22.
[121] Milo MacGarry, BMH WS356, pp. 11-12.

a simple accident. However, days earlier, instructions were issued by the office of the Chief of Police – Ormonde Winter's intelligence section - to raid Glenvar, but this raid was never carried out.[122] The document, dated 18 June, remarks that the property was purchased by a Mr McCarthy – they assumed McCarthy was male - (MacGarry's pseudonym) and notes that 'Men have been seen entering this place repeatedly, late in the evening on bicycles'.[123] The proposed raid was scheduled to take place at 9.45pm on the evening of 19 June. There appears to be no connection between this and the 'accidental' raid by the Wiltshire regiment that led to de Valera's arrest.

Macken was returned to Glenvar by military transport at about 2am, but O'Connell did not return until morning. She was described by Mrs Harling, the resident of the gate lodge, as being 'in a very bad state of nerves'.[124] MacGarry found her in a state of shock following the humiliation of being stripped naked by the military during her detention at the Bridewell.[125] O'Connell's account of the incident is succinct – she merely says she was 'bewildered and unhappy'.[126] There was no indication in either woman's account if female searchers were used. Shortly afterwards, de Valera arrived back from Portobello barracks where he was held overnight. According to the Sturgis diary entries, Cope notified Anderson and Greenwood that de Valera was in custody and they ordered his immediate release.[127] Much speculation followed in the daily papers as to the events surrounding his detention and speedy release. The *Irish Independent* explained it as 'another instance of the Government's desire to effect reconciliation'.[128] No reference was made to the women arrested with him. A more serious effort to establish peace talks commenced in London so it appeared that de Valera's freedom of movement was essential to ensure progress on this front. However, there is also the possibility that the 'protection umbrella' remained in place and his release was only affected when the true identity of 'Mr Sankey' was established. Now free from the possibility of arrest, he openly conducted business and political matters from an office in the Mansion House while continuing to reside at Glenvar. This time, the peace moves bore fruit, albeit after concessions were made by both sides. The British agreed to release prisoners who were perceived as important to any proposed settlement; consequently, Griffith, MacNeill, Staines, and Duggan were

[122] Requests from 'D' Branch, Chief of Police, Instructions issued 18 June 1921, WO35/87/1, TNA.
[123] Requests from 'D' Branch, Chief of Police, Instructions issued 18 June 1921, WO35/87/1, TNA.
[124] Maeve MacGarry, BMH WS826, p. 25.
[125] Maeve MacGarry, BMH WS826, p. 26.
[126] Kathleen O'Connell Papers, P155/138, UCDA
[127] Hopkinson, *The Last Days of Dublin Castle*, p. 174.
[128] *Irish Independent*, 25 June 1921, p. 4.

freed from Mountjoy. Although agreement was reached that a formal truce would take effect on 11 July 1921, most of the remaining political prisoners – including the women – remained in jail.

Escape from Mountjoy

The Truce, as Murphy points out, 'facilitated the political elite', with the release of TDs and prominent political persons.[129] Rank and file prisoners and internees had little hope of freedom in the immediate future. By September 1921, when McGrane and Kearns were transferred to Mountjoy, there was still no signal of clemency towards the penal servitude female prisoners. Kearns arrived at Mountjoy in a weakened state and was moved to the prison hospital where she was reunited with Eileen McGrane who was also in ill-health at the time. There were only nine other female political prisoners remaining, three of whom were young girls from Cork sentenced to penal servitude for life.[130] It was alleged that they were involved in an ambush that had taken place near their homes, but according to the witness statements of their contemporaries, they were completely innocent and had no affiliation to any separatist organisation.[131] Eithne Coyle, Aileen Keogh, May Bourke, Frances Brady and Mary Rigney, along with Kearns, McGrane and the three Cork girls were the last of the female political prisoners in Mountjoy in September 1921. Apart from the Cork prisoners, the remaining women were all advanced nationalists who worked with, or for, the IRA. Since the Truce was agreed security had relaxed somewhat, and the women could freely associate during exercise in the yard. Kearns and Coyle began to look for weaknesses in the prison system that could be exploited to their advantage, and to speculate on the possibility of escape. According to Coyle's account, there were several wardresses in Mountjoy who were sympathetic to the republican cause and were willing to carry correspondence in and out for the prisoners.[132] This gave them access to uncensored mail and enabled them to solicit the outside help which was an essential part of their escape plan. Furthermore, Mary Rigney, who was released in September, agreed to carry plans of the proposed escape to contacts outside.[133]

[129] Murphy, *Political Imprisonment*, pp. 217-9.
[130] These were Kate Crowley and Madge Cotter, both 19, and Lily Cotter aged 17.
[131] Linda Kearns MacWhinney, BMH WS 404.
[132] Eithne Coyle O'Donnell papers, P61, UCDA.
[133] Mary Rigney, BMH WS752, p. 12.

Kearns, McGrane and Brady all placed formal requests for private dental treatment to the governor.[134] Dan Doolin, who had a dental practice at Upper Fitzwilliam Street, attended to both McGrane and Kearns prior to their imprisonment. Although Brady was not a patient of his previously, he agreed to assess the needs of all three women. The report he submitted to the General Prisons Board recommended that the women should receive treatment in his surgery rather than inside the prison.[135] Colonel Toppin, from the Chief Secretary's Office, advised the Prisons Board that he would accede to this request on the condition that the prisoners were accompanied by a female wardress during each visit to the dentist.[136] When Kearns was advised of the conditions under which her treatment could proceed, she told the governor that she 'must first consult with Miss McGrane'.[137] The latter may have been consulted on the matter as she was the senior Cumann na mBan officer in the prison. She was later described as 'the Commandant of the women political prisoners in Mountjoy Jail', indicating that the women had organised themselves on military lines.[138] Coyle recalled that McGrane had an escape plan of her own, but it involved smuggling guns into the prison which would be used to hold up the military and wardresses.[139] When no progress was made on this more dramatic escape plan, Kearns and Coyle proceeded with theirs; McGrane and Brady decided not to participate.[140] As acting O/C, McGrane decreed that it would not be acceptable to have prison staff accompany them during any visits to the dental surgery, and Kearns, in turn, advised the governor. As a compromise, the women offered a written undertaking to return to the prison if they were allowed out for dental treatment unaccompanied. This was accepted by the prison authorities, who wryly noted that the attendance of a wardress 'would be of little use if the prisoners wish to escape'.[141]

Warm dental wax smuggled into Mountjoy in a thermos flask was used to take an impression of two of the keys required to make good their escape. The wax impressions were then smuggled out of the jail and in turn duplicate keys were smuggled back in. Mary Rigney recalled in a witness statement that her sister, Joe, arranged to visit Coyle in Mountjoy and on her request brought an empty attaché case

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[134] Letter to the General Prisons Board, Dublin Castle, from Linda Kearns, 19 September 1921, CO904/44/9, TNA.
[135] Reports from Dan Doolin to General Prisons Board, 21 September 1921, CO904/44/9, TNA.
[136] Letter from Colonel H. Toppin to General Prisons Board, 13 October 1921, CO904/44/9, TNA.
[137] Memo from Governor to General Prisons Board, 17 October 1921, CO904/44/9, TNA.
[138] *Freeman's Journal*, 1 November 1921, p. 5.
[139] Eithne Coyle O'Donnell, BMH WS750, p. 13.
[140] Ó Duigneáin, *Linda Kearns*, p. 61.
[141] Note from J. MacDermott to Under Secretary, 18 October 1921, CO904/44/9, TNA.

which she handed over to a friendly wardress.[142] The case, no longer empty, was handed back to her when the visit finished. Rigney rather naively assumed that it contained some souvenirs, but in all likelihood her sister carried wax impressions of the keys outside. Coyle's BMH witness statement confirmed that they were taken out of the prison by a visitor, although she does not state by whom.[143] A friend of Kearns, Josie O'Connor, coordinated the plan from the outside with the IRA and nationalist sympathisers. Kearns, Coyle, Keogh and Bourke would take part in the escape while the remaining female prisoners would create a diversion. Coyle was aware that prison staff traditionally held a small party in one of the cells around Halloween, so the date was set for 30 October. The prisoners planned to take advantage of the more relaxed atmosphere that prevailed over the weekend to make their escape.[144] They arranged a football match that evening when they had the freedom of the corridor in order to create a diversion and to make plenty of noise. Kearns, Coyle, Bourke and Keogh participated in the match to ensure that no suspicions were aroused. When the ball was kicked to the end of the corridor, the women quietly opened the door leading to the exercise yard. McGrane and the remaining women created enough noise to divert the attention of any wardress on duty. The escapees moved quickly and quietly into the exercise yard to a pre-arranged spot where, as a signal, Kearns threw a scent bottle over the wall. Immediately, a piece of lead attached to a string was thrown back; they pulled the string and a rope ladder emerged. It took a couple of attempts to pull the rope ladder free of the sharp rocks on the wall that snared it, but eventually it was ready be climbed. In a witness statement, Kearns says that it had been agreed that they would scale the rope in accordance with the length of their sentences – Kearns first as she was serving ten years, then Bourke, followed by Keogh and Coyle.[145] The rope proved difficult to climb as it continually swayed and twisted but all four eventually made it down to safety albeit with bleeding knuckles and skin flayed from their hands from the rope friction.[146]

The women now needed to get to safe houses quickly. It is perhaps indicative of the importance of Kearns and Coyle to the revolutionary movement that their escape was so well organised on the outside:

> Outside the wall I found Burke, a young fellow called Ryan, a brother of the priest in Dominick St., who had made the ladder of window cord. He had tested

[142] Mary Rigney, BMH WS752, p. 13.
[143] Eithne Coyle O'Donnell, BMH WS750, p. 9.
[144] Eithne Coyle O'Donnell papers, P61, UCDA.
[145] Linda Kearns MacWhinney, BMH WS404.
[146] Eithne Coyle O'Donnell papers, UCDA P61 and Linda Kearns MacWhinney, BMH WS 404.

it carefully before he let it out. Ryan was a friend of Mick Collins and must have been one of his squad because he had a motorbike belonging to them. I also found Nurse O'Connor, a great friend of mine and of surgeon St. John Gogarty. Ryan conducted me along the canal and over the bridge at Doyle's corner where I found Doctor Gogarty and Dr. McLaverty with two cars. I got into Gogarty's car and he had orders to wait for a second passenger. Ryan ran back and appeared in a minute with Miss Burke [*sic*] and we drove off. [147]

Coyle and Keogh were driven to Dr Pat McLaverty's home on Merrion Square while Kearns and Bourke were brought to stay with Gogarty's aunt on Earlsfort Terrace. Oliver St John Gogarty was an eminent surgeon, poet and playwright known for his wit and repartee; he was also a supporter of Sinn Féin during the War of Independence.[148] McLaverty and his wife, Rose, were also involved in the separatist movement. Dr Rose McLaverty was the bridesmaid at the wedding of IRB man Liam Clarke, and his wife Josephine Stallard. (See Chapter 1). The escapees were in safe houses and safe hands, but unfortunately, one of the men who helped to arrange the escape on the outside, Séamus Burke, was not to be trusted. The women remained in hiding as a nationwide hunt was launched for their recapture. National newspapers speculated on the circumstances of their escape, some of them making wild conjectures about how it was accomplished. The *Irish Independent*, colourfully described it as 'the most astonishing event recorded in the annals of prison breaking by Irish political captives'.[149] In an article published on the same day, headlined 'Four Women and a Rope', the *Irish Times* suggested that the women had received no outside help and had achieved their remarkable feat by their own ingenuity.[150] Unfortunately, that was not the case and the authorities suspected as much; consequently two wardresses from Mountjoy were arrested in connection with the escape.[151] Furthermore, there were repercussions for the remaining female political prisoners who suffered the loss of their privileges and were now under constant armed guard. Eileen McGrane led a hunger-strike in protest against the new conditions in general, and the armed Auxiliaries who were moved in to guard them in particular.[152] The strike was soon called-off, following an intervention by the IRA's liaison officer Michael Staines. The recalcitrant behaviour of McGrane, who was always militant and

[147] Linda Kearns MacWhinney, BMH WS 404.
[148] Patrick Maume, 'Gogarty, Oliver St John', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. (http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a3513).
[149] *Irish Independent*, 1 November 1921, p.5.
[150] *Irish Times*, 1 November 1921, p. 6.
[151] *Freeman's Journal*, 10 November 1921, p.5.
[152] *Southern Star*, 12 November 1921, p. 1.

sometimes abrasive, frustrated Staines and he foresaw further trouble from her.[153] Later, she would complain to Cumann na mBan that the escaped women had absconded without receiving permission from her and sought their court martial.[154] The charges were dismissed, largely because only one of the women – Coyle – was a member of Cumann na mBan and clarified matters. McGrane continued to cause disruption inside the prison. She complained that the Chief Wardress, McLynn, had 'persecuted' the prisoners and insisted on her removal, or she would 'do her in'.[155] Her threats were taken seriously and the Chief Secretary's office ordered that the prison board 'take all necessary steps for the protection of Miss McLynn'.[156] The authorities reacted quickly and arranged to have McGrane transferred back to Liverpool. However, she fell ill and was considered too sick to travel.[157] McGrane and the other female political prisoners remained in Mountjoy until 8 December 1921 when orders were issued for their release.[158]

Within a couple of hours of their escape, all four women were settled into their respective accommodations. Gogarty arrived back to the house at Earlsfort Terrace later that night with headed paper from the Shelbourne Hotel and suggested that Kearns submit a written application for the vacant position of matron at the Meath Hospital. Demonstrating the wit for which he was known, he suggested that she state in the application that she 'had a vast experience of British institutions'.[159] Kearns was happy to participate in his joke, particularly when she saw the Shelbourne Hotel raided the following day. Over the following days, both groups of women became aware that their whereabouts may be known to the authorities and that they would have to find alternative safe accommodation. Coyle and Keogh were out walking with Mrs McLaverty a few days after the escape when they met with Dr Paddy McCartan who advised them that they were being followed. Coyle states that on his advice they took a roundabout route to Maud Gonne McBride's house on St Stephen's Green where they met with Dorothy Macardle; she and Gonne McBride's maid agreed to exchange clothes with the escapees.[160] Macardle and the maid walked back to Merrion Square while Coyle and Keogh remained on with Gonne McBride. Later they had a visit from

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[153] Murphy, *Political Imprisonment*, p. 232.
[154] Eithne Coyle O'Donnell, BMH WS750, p. 13.
[155] Governor of Mountjoy Jail to Under Secretary, 18 November 1921, CO904/44/14, TNA.
[156] Colonel H. Toppin to G. Whiskard, 19 November 1921, CO904/44/14, TNA.
[157] Letter from Sergeant John J. Cochrane to CO of Depot, RIC, 19 November 1921, CO904/44/14, TNA.
[158] Letter from Colonel H. Toppin to Deputy Adjutant General, 8 December 1921, CO904/44/14, TNA.
[159] Linda Kearns MacWhinney, BMH WS 404, p. 17.
[160] Eithne Coyle O'Donnell papers, P61, UCDA.

Séamus Burke, who had assisted in their escape from Mountjoy. He told them that they were no longer safe in the city but that he had secured accommodation for them in the Cross and Passion convent in Kilcullen, County Kildare.[161] Coyle agreed go, but Keogh insisted that she would take her chances back in Gorey where she felt she would be safer. Meanwhile, Kearns and Bourke were also visited by Séamus Burke who convinced Gogarty that they were in danger in their present lodgings and arranged to have them taken with Coyle to the convent in Kilcullen. Kearns explained that there was a reward offered for information leading to their recapture and, with a price on her head, she did not feel safe in the city.[162]

The women were in Kilcullen for about a week, when Ryan – another IRA man who assisted in the escape – arrived by motorbike. He carried a message from Michael Collins stating that Séamus Burke was an informer who was secretly working for the authorities in Dublin Castle.[163] Coyle, in her memoirs, alleged that Burke was a paid British spy whose plan was to position all the escapees in Kilcullen and then to have them arrested.[164] If Burke was indeed a spy, the promise of a reward may have placed him under additional pressure to deliver a coup to the authorities in Dublin Castle. Press coverage following the women's prison escape was embarrassing enough, but the events that followed during the month of November were excruciatingly so. Firstly, on 12 November, seven male political prisoners made their escape from Mountjoy by posing as Auxiliary cadets; they were pursued by genuine Auxiliaries but escaped through the warren of laneways around Berkeley Road church in Phibsborough.[165] Secondly, the remaining male political prisoners commenced a hunger strike to protest against the additional security measures to which they were subjected following the escape of their fellow prisoners.[166] Thirdly, on 22 November, the largest jail escape in the history of the conflict occurred. Incredibly, forty-seven male political prisoners made their escape through a tunnel from Kilkenny Jail.[167] In the light of these events, the recapture of Kearns and her fellow escapees would have provided some degree of respite to the British authorities, but before Séamus Burke could act they were hastily moved to safety.

The curate in Kilcullen, Father McAuliffe, contacted the local Volunteers to arrange yet another safe house for the women. They were subsequently brought to an IRA

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[161] Eithne Coyle O'Donnell, BMH WS750, pp. 11-12.
[162] Ó Duigneáin, *Linda Kearns*, p. 61.
[163] Linda Kearns MacWhinney, BMH WS 404.
[164] Eithne Coyle O'Donnell papers, P61, UCDA.
[165] *Sunday Independent*, 13 November 1921, p. 1.
[166] *Cork Examiner*, 15 November 1921, p. 5.
[167] *Cork Examiner*, 23 November 1921, p. 5.

training camp – Duckett's Grove in county Carlow – where they remained until the Treaty was signed. Duckett's Grove was a beautiful turreted Georgian mansion, which according to Kearns 'had some beautiful furniture in it, but the house was in a disorderly condition.'[168] It was abandoned by the last of its owners in 1916 and had fallen into a state of disrepair but it compared very favourably to Mountjoy. Women from local Cumann na mBan branches looked after the provision of food under the supervision of Brigid Ryan, the Quartermaster, who coordinated all supplies for the camp.[169] Training in different types of weapons - including the use of a Thompson machine gun - was provided by former US army officers, Irishmen by birth.[170] Photographs taken during the time they were at Duckett's Grove show the women in the ad-hoc uniform of the IRA – trench coats and caps – carrying rifles.[171] Another shows them at target practice, lying prone on the ground with rifles aimed. Yet another shows Kearns in full IRA officer uniform, complete with shirt, tie and badged cap. Similar IRA training camps were in operation all over the country, some of them specifically for divisional officers, others for rank and file members. When the IRA established a munitions factory employing thirty people in Carrickmore, County Limerick, it became clear that preparation for war continued even as talks for peace pressed on in London.[172] When war eventually recommenced, it was not with Britain. Instead it was a bloody civil war that emerged from a split resulting from the Treaty signed on 6 December 1921. Most of the women discussed in this work actively participated in that conflict on the republican or anti-Treaty side. The experience they gained during the War of Independence in matters of intelligence, propaganda work, provision of safe housing and even armed conflict would prove to be a double-edged sword. While they were an asset in a war with the British in which the full extent of their involvement was rarely suspected, that advantage was lost when they took arms against their former comrades who knew their capabilities.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the role that Margaret MacGarry and her daughter Maeve played in the provision of safe housing for de Valera following his return to Ireland from the USA in December 1920. Instructions issued to the military concerning his presence

[168] Linda Kearns MacWhinney, BMH WS 404.
[169] Summary of Sworn Evidence of Brigid Ryan (Née Brophy) to MSP Board, 15 January 1942, MSP34REF50141.
[170] Padraig Kane, BMH WS1572, p. 19.
[171] See photographs in Ó Duigneáin, *Linda Kearns.*
[172] William McCarthy, BMH WS1453, p. 21.

in Dublin may pose more questions than they answer, as they indicate that de Valera was immune from arrest. Arguably, he was the safest republican in the country in early 1921, but the MacGarrys were clearly unaware of this unique status. However, the correspondence between Anderson and Macready implies that de Valera may have known - the letters indicate that he was expected to revert to them with a decision on a matter which was unspecified. Nonetheless, there is no indication in the documents of how long the 'protection umbrella' lasted, or even if it endured up to the time of his eventual arrest in June 1921. Certainly, the speed with which he was released when his identity became known is curious given that the Cabinet decision to initiate formal peace talks only took place two days after his arrest. The question of de Valera's 'protection umbrella' is pertinent to this work because of the involvement of the MacGarry women in the matter of his safety. They were subjected to several raids and arrests on their city centre properties during the period de Valera was staying in Loughnavale and Glenvar. It is quite possible that anyone involved in the provision of safe housing for de Valera subsequently became known to the authorities, particularly if they were aware of his whereabouts. However, it must be acknowledged that Margaret MacGarry was complicit in becoming a person of interest. She was a successful Sinn Féin candidate in local elections, thereby attracting attention from both military and police. Fortunately, the women arrested during the military raid on Glenvar were swiftly released. Many other women involved in republican activities paid the price with long jail sentences.

The arrest and conviction of women prominent in intelligence gathering for the IRA is indicative that the British were now alert to the involvement of women in this activity. Raids on their homes and the seizure of arms and intelligence documents during searches reinforces this argument. Nonetheless, as Hopkinson points out, there were very few women imprisoned during this period; he notes that in April 1921, there were twenty-six women jailed, compared with four thousand men.[173] Most of the women discussed in this work avoided arrest even if their homes were occasionally raided and searched. This was not purely down to good luck – cautionary measures played a part. Ensuring that they showed no obvious connection with republican organisations contributed to their safety. This was no longer a concern for women convicted of political crimes, consequently, they pursued a policy of non-cooperation with prison authorities. In Mountjoy, they organised themselves along military lines, with Eileen McGrane – as the most senior Cumann na mBan officer present – as the Commanding Officer. Kearns, although a member of the IRA rather than Cumann na

[173] Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence*, p. 200.

mBan, nonetheless deferred to her. This mirrored the strategy undertaken by male political prisoners in jails and internment camps and underlined their claim for recognition as prisoners of war. Other strategies employed by women placed under arrest – refusal to recognise the courts or addressing the court in the Irish language – were also means by which to emphasise the political, rather than criminal nature of the charges against them. Women political prisoners, like their male counterparts, considered it their duty to escape and elicited outside help to do so. In the strange political climate that existed in late 1921, the IRA did not consider a jail escape to be a breach of the Truce. They conceded however, as Murphy explains, that assistance from outside the jail could be interpreted as a breach of the Truce terms.[174] Given the number of escapes that occurred in October and November 1921, little attention was paid by prisoners to this Jesuitical argument.

Incidents of sexual violence against women were largely unreported in print although cases began to emerge in the pages of the *Irish Bulletin* in early 1921. Nonetheless, it does not necessarily follow that few incidents took place – only that few incidents were reported. The reticence shown by Irish women to report crimes of a sexual nature may be more complex and nuanced than hitherto understood. The Bridget Fahy case was a salutary lesson for women who were sexually attacked by members of the police or military; it showed that they would not pursue or prosecute one of their own with any degree of enthusiasm. Furthermore, it demonstrated that they were prepared to intimidate and punish the victim to secure her silence on the matter. Fahy showed a remarkable strength of character to continue her pursuit of justice given the number of obstacles placed in her path. However, the men who were responsible for the violence in Abbeyside that night escaped without penalty, so justice was neither done, nor seen to be done. If the women of Ireland learned anything from Brigid Fahy's experience, it was that no good would come of making any official complaint about the behaviour of members of the police or military. Reticence alone does not explain the absence of documented cases of sexual violence during Ireland's War of Independence, fear of the consequences of making such a report may have been a factor that influenced the decision of whether to make an official complaint or to remain silent.

In contrast to the lack of publicity of sexual violence, cases of enforced hair-cutting were widely reported in newspapers. Such incidents were condemned by both sides in the conflict although it was a practice in which each participated. The police

[174] Murphy, *Political Imprisonment*, p. 232.

reports for the period record incidents carried out by the IRA, mainly as a punishment for fraternising with the police or military.[175] The absence of complaints in which members of the crown forces were the protagonists lends weight to the argument that women refrained from complaining to the police about the police. Nonetheless, reports of such incidents were published in the *Irish Bulletin* and national newspapers alluding to the involvement of police or military.[176] Whilst it can be argued that forcibly cutting a woman's hair is an attack on her femininity and therefore an assault of a sexual nature, many women came forward to report this crime. They may have done so because cropped hair was a very visible sign that they had endured the humiliation of such an attack, or perhaps because it was an assault for which they could seek compensation. Patrick Ahern's testimony about his participation in an assault on two women in which their hair was forcibly cut is unusual. Ahern was one of a group of men who carried out the attack, yet none of his comrades have referred to their involvement, perhaps their reticence indicates some degree of shame about their actions. However, Ahern justified his part in the assault by alluding to the victims' successful compensation claim, stating that they 'got very well paid for it'.[177]

The role of the *Irish Bulletin* was pivotal in the IRA's pursuit of victory in the propaganda war. Its circulation to newspapers home and abroad drew attention to conditions in Ireland under the British government's policy of coercion. Its propensity to focus on acts of outrage committed by troops infuriated Macready, as is evident by the nature of his correspondence on the matter. He was sharply critical of the action – or inaction, as he saw it – of Dublin Castle's press representative, Basil Clarke.[178] Although Clarke frequently addressed what he judged to be non-factual newspaper reports, by the time his refutation was published, the damage was already done. On one occasion, Clarke released a press statement about an ambush which the *Bulletin* immediately refuted, calling his report 'an invention from first to last'.[179] Moreover, the use of the *Irish Bulletin* by MPs in the House of Commons to gain information about incidents embarrassing to the government was a continuing problem. The Bridget Fahy case, for example, gained national attention due to the questions asked by MacVeagh on the matter in parliament. The *Bulletin* also raised concerns about the conditions endured by political prisoners in internment camps and jails. One issue focussed on female prisoners, noting that 'they are classed as criminals and convicts' although their

[175] See Daily Summaries of Reports on Outrages, Aug-Sept 1920, CO904/142, TNA.
[176] *Irish Bulletin*, 16 November 1920.
[177] Letter from Patrick Michael Ahern to MSP Board, undated, but probably November 1934, MSP34REF652.
[178] Macready to Anderson, 7 March 1921, CO904/188, TNA.
[179] *Irish Bulletin*, 16 June 1921, p. 1.

offence was merely to participate in the 'National Movement for Independence'.[180] The article referred to the number of untried women held in jails throughout the country and mentioned McGrane, who was more than three months in Mountjoy. It is perhaps significant that McGrane's FGCM was held shortly after the publication of this issue.

The high number of political prisoners that remained in custody after the Truce in July 1921 was unsurprising. The British government, as a gesture of goodwill, released Sinn Féin TDs and those who were deemed to be essential to any proposed peace talks. The remaining prisoners and internees saw no change in their status. Markievicz, as an elected TD, was the only female prisoner released. As the months passed and talks towards a peace settlement continued, some of the political prisoners took matters into their own hands. The escape of the women from Mountjoy was swiftly followed by two other successful escapes from Mountjoy and Kilkenny jails. The consequences for prisoners who remained behind were immediate – their freedom of movement was restricted, and armed guards patrolled the prisons. A sense of frustration became evident and a hunger strike ensued to have their privileges reinstated. Although this was short-lived, the IRA prison liaison officers were unsuccessful in fully satisfying the demands of the prisoners – a compromise with the General Prisons Board was the best that could be expected. Fortunately, the first of the mass prison releases swiftly followed the signing of the Treaty on 6 December 1921. McGrane, Brady and the remaining female political prisoners were released from Mountjoy on 8 December. The female escapees left their refuge at Duckett's Grove when news of the releases broke and returned to their normal lives. Prison was neither a deterrent nor a reform process for most of the women discussed in this chapter. They emerged from their respective experiences more radicalised, more militant and better trained in methods of warfare than they were prior to their incarceration.

[180] *Irish Bulletin*, 8 April 1921, p. 2.

Conclusion

This work has demonstrated that while the IRA was a predominantly male organisation, it was not 'exclusively male' as Peter Hart asserted.[1] While he acknowledged that 'the guerrillas required a constant support network of women, organized or informally active in their own homes, to survive', the role played by women within this revolution was more complex and diverse than Hart's work acknowledged.[2] Many women stepped outside the pre-defined gender roles of nurse, cook, and launderer and moved into the provision of intelligence work. Others kept arms dumps and moved weapons to different locations as they were required. A small number joined up with ASUs and participated in the planning and execution of raids and ambushes. Therefore, Hart's 'gender exclusivity' argument about membership of the Irish Volunteers and IRA is not sustainable.[3] Female involvement in republican campaigns increased rather than dissipated following the 1916 Rising, when few women participated in the conflict outside the confines of Cumann na mBan. The suggestion that 'For women, electoral or street politics were almost their only avenues of direct participation in the revolution' is simplistic at best.[4] While this comment acknowledges the contribution of many women, particularly those who campaigned during the series of by-elections in 1917 and the general election of 1918, it ignores the large cohort of women from Cumann na mBan who played an active role in the War of Independence. It ignores the (albeit) small number of women outlined in this work who participated in the IRA campaign during the conflict, and essentially, it contributes to the narrative that all women assumed passive or gendered roles during the revolution.

Nonetheless, it is important not to overstate the argument. As McCarthy points out, Cumann na mBan members represented only a tiny proportion of the nationalist population, therefore the women who stepped outside the confines of Cumann na mBan into the ranks of the IRA is tinier still.[5] However, their existence is evident in this work. Furthermore, McCarthy, while pointing to the contribution made by Cumann na mBan members to the Irish revolution - particularly with regard to intelligence work, despatch carrying, and moving weapons - acknowledges that this work was carried out

[1] Hart, *The IRA at War*, p. 16.
[2] Hart, *The IRA at War*, p. 16
[3] Hart, *The IRA at War*, p. 122.
[4] Hart, *The IRA at War*, p. 127.
[5] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, p. 229.

by women who 'were often, but by no means always, members of Cumann na mBan'.[6] McCarthy notes the grey areas; he understands the nuances and while pointing to the significance of Cumann na mBan's role in female militancy, he reminds the reader that this organisation was not the only division of the forces in which women served.[7] His work also utilises the records of the MSPC to determine the strength of Cumann na mBan during the War of Independence. However, documents from the MSPC were not available in 2002 when Hart posed his gender-exclusive argument about the IRA. The Irish Volunteers, and later the IRA, may have had all the outward appearances of 'Boys' Clubs',[8] but the MSP Board acknowledged as early as 1934 that there were women within the ranks of the IRA during the War of Independence.[9] The Military Service Pensions Act (1934) amended the 1924 Act to bring 'Cumann na mBan within the definition of the bodies already listed as constituting 'the Forces' and… to apply for military service pensions'.[10] With the influx of female applicants to the board under this amended act, it quickly became apparent that there were women who had served within 'the Forces' who were not members of Cumann na mBan. The Referee and Advisory Committee established to their satisfaction that many of these women were entitled to claim service as members of the IRA and their claims were acknowledged and processed on this basis. Despite this, the Service Certificates which were issued to many of these women still bore the stamp 'Cumann na mBan'. It appears as if there was a reluctance on the part of the MSP Board to concede that women served within what they may have assumed to be the all-male ranks of the IRA. Consequently, the participation of women during the revolution was often overlooked when the history of the conflict was written. Their contribution, where it was acknowledged, was usually in the context of the gendered roles of first-aider or cook. Fearghal McGarry noted recently that the usual narrative 'relegated their role to short features such as "How the Women Helped".'[11] He too, points to the subsequent difficulties females encountered in having their active participation in the revolution acknowledged.[12] Indeed, the evidence supporting female membership of the IRA was obscured in the decades that followed the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. It was hidden away in the files of the

[6] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, pp. 229-30.
[7] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, pp. 230-2.
[8] Hart, *The IRA at War*, p. 122.
[9] Letter from Secretary of Military Service Registration Board (MSRB) to Fahy, Finance Officer MSRB, 7 April 1934 re IRA membership of Margaret (Peg) Clancy, File 1RB1609 in MSP34REF1666.
[10] Patrick Brennan 'Origins, Scope and Content of the Collection', *Guide to the Military Service Pensions Collection*, p.23.
[11] McGarry 'Revolution, 1916-1923' in Thomas Bartlett (ed) *The Cambridge History of Ireland, Volume IV, 1880 to the Present,* (Cambridge, 2018), p .278.
[12] McGarry 'Revolution', *The Cambridge History of Ireland,* p .278.

MSPC and only gradually opened to public scrutiny from 2009. Yet the corroborative evidence for many of the claims made by women to the MSP Board has been available for some years. Sometimes it consisted of a mere paragraph or two in an unpublished memoir that lay within archival documents and appeared undeserving of much attention. Other times it was within the folders of arrest, trial and prison records in Colonial Office papers in the National Archives in London. Occasionally, it lay in plain sight in the contemporaneous diaries of Mark Sturgis or Ormonde Winter. It is only when all the evidence from all the sources is placed together that it becomes obvious that the women discussed in this work led extraordinary lives during Ireland's revolutionary years.

This raises an obvious question. If the experiences of these women were so extraordinary, why have they been obscured from view? Why is their history buried within the familiar narrative of female participation in the Irish revolution? The answers may be found by examining the roles ascribed to women in the early years of the Free State or in the fact that many republican women chose the anti-Treaty side in the Irish Civil War. McGarry provides one possible answer:

> The reluctance to acknowledge the active role of women formed part of a wider post-revolutionary dispensation that valued women as mothers rather than citizens.[13]

An examination of the position of women within Irish society in the post-revolutionary period is outside the scope of this work, although it presents an intriguing subject for further research. What is obvious, is that the role of women in Ireland's revolutionary years was reconstructed in the late 1920s and 1930s and presented in a more socially acceptable format. It continues to be viewed through the respectable lens of Cumann na mBan and consequently female participation in the IRA remains largely invisible. However, this alteration in perspective could not have occurred without the consent of the women involved. It appears – almost - as though they became complicit in their own anonymity. Their stories were rarely told in detail outside the confines of the MSP Board where they were assured of discretion and confidentiality. Even there, as outlined in the preceding chapters, they encountered difficulty in having their revolutionary past understood or even believed. Linda Kearns and Moira Kennedy O'Byrne insisted that the MSP Board acknowledge that their military service took place within the ranks of the IRA, not Cumann na mBan. MSP applications from other

[13] McGarry 'Revolution', *The Cambridge History of Ireland,* p .278.

women, who served within the IRA are stamped 'Cumann na mBan'. Some women with IRA service are filed away in the graveyard of the MSPC – the column designating the organisation in which they served is 'None'. An impression remains that the MSP Board could not quite bring themselves to acknowledge the uncomfortable existence of women within the ranks of the IRA.

The section within the MSP records denoting the organisation in which individual women served lists forty women who served with the IRA, fourteen of whom were recipients of a Grade D pension, and twenty-five of whom received a Grade E. One applicant, Johanna Dinneen, of Kilbrittain, county Cork, was refused a pension as the MSP Board deemed that in her case, the 'Act does not appear to apply'.[14] There is no obvious reason why Dinneen was refused a pension. She was a member of Cumann na mBan in 1916 and following her marriage in 1917, moved to Kilbrittain in county Cork. From then onwards her service was solely for the Irish Volunteers and the IRA, mainly by managing a safe house and catering for men on the run. The notes taken following her interview with the assessors of the MSP Board in Bandon Courthouse indicate that the assessors initially acknowledged that she 'rendered effective service in the way of catering for men on the run'.[15] Paradoxically, in 1950 she was issued with a service medal, effectively acknowledging pre-Truce service; albeit not in a monetary way.

Under the designation 'None', there are fifty-nine applicants listed, four of whom received a Grade D pension and twenty-eight of whom received a Grade E. There were twenty-seven applicants deemed to be ineligible and were consequently denied a pension. (See Appendix B, Table 2). Eight of the women discussed in this work are filed under the designation 'None'.[16] Arguably, the anomalies contained within the MSPC contribute to the concealment of the true nature of the role women played with the IRA. It is only by close examination of the documents contained within those files – the sworn statements, interviews, and letters confirming the individual's military service – that a true picture emerges. The character and the personality of the applicants often become apparent in the pages of the letters and supporting documentation sent into the MSP Board: Lily Mernin's anxiety as she seeks reassurance that the details within her application will remain confidential; Eily O'Hanrahan's quiet desperation as she

[14] Johanna Dinneen, Cork. See document denying MSP dated 9 July 1942, MSP34REF33672.
[15] Note made by assessors on the summary of sworn evidence of Johanna Dinneen, Bandon Courthouse, 20 February 1942, MSP34REF33672.
[16] Celia Collins, Margaret Pendy, Kathleen Brennan, Nan Phelan, Annie Barrett, Margaret Breen (née Frewen), Francis Brady Cooney and Annie Smith (née Brennan). All received a Grade E pension except Frances Brady Cooney, who received a Grade D.

reveals to the Board that she is struggling to keep a roof over her head, and Siobhán Creedon's anger and frustration at the failure of the Board to acknowledge the rank that she claimed in recognition of her role as an IRA intelligence officer. Also evident is May Bourke's resentment at the Grade E pension offered to her by the MSP Board. Pointing out that she was imprisoned because a coded police message in her handwriting was found in the possession of senior IRA officer, Daniel McCarthy, she wrote:

> Your findings I regard as a gross insult, after the hardships of prison, loss and disillusionment, which impaired my health, all of which I had to endure for the carelessness and neglect of an officer of the East Limerick Brigade and not through any fault of mine.[17]

The letters accompanying MSP applications are the only documents in which this degree of honesty is evident. Honesty about their roles during the War of Independence, honesty about the path their lives took since that conflict, and honesty about the disillusionment many of them felt about the failure of the State to acknowledge their experiences. These emotions are absent from the later BMH witness statements and the few memoirs (published and unpublished) still extant. By the time the BMH was established in 1947, they, perhaps, had grown accustomed to maintaining a degree of silence and secrecy about the activities during Ireland's revolutionary years. Most of the women discussed in the preceding pages made no statements to the BMH, the few who did, tended to be coy about the nature of their work. Mostly they projected their activities through an association with Cumann na mBan, although the statement left with the BMH by Moira Kennedy O'Byrne is refreshingly candid. Perhaps she is best placed to have the last words in this study. Discussing how she and Máire Comerford encountered Michael Collins in 1919, she says 'From that on we were recognised as belonging to the I.R.A.'[18]

[17] Letter from May Bourke to the Secretary of the MSP Board, 12 March 1942, MSP34REF2569.
[18] Moira Kennedy O'Byrne, BMH WS1029, p. 3.

Appendix A

Table 1:

Designations under which these IRA activists are filed within the records of the MSPC (IRA, Cumann na mBan, None, etc.) and the pension grade they were awarded.

Name	IRA	C na mB	None	Civilian	Pension Grade
Linda Kearns	√				D
Lily O'Brennan		√			D
Eily O'Hanrahan	√				E
Kathleen Brennan			√		E
Celia Collins			√		E
Nora Wallace	√				D
Sheila Wallace	√				D
Nan Phelan			√		E
Frances Brady			√		D
Mary Egan	√				D
Margaret Frewen			√		E
Marian Tobin	√				E
Siobhán Creedon	√				E
Annie Barrett			√		E
Margaret Pendy			√		E
May Bourke				√	E
Lily Mernin	√				E
Annie Brennan			√		E
Margaret MacGarry*	-	-	-	-	-
Moira Kennedy O'Byrne	√				D
Mary Flannery Woods		√			D
Bridget Malone		√			D
Áine Malone		√			D
Peg Flanagan		√			E
Eithne Coyle		√			D
Máire Comerford		√			D
Eileen McGrane		√			D
Mary Rigney		√			E
Aileen Keogh*	-	-	-	-	-
Peg Clancy	√				D

Those marked * did not apply to the MSP Board.

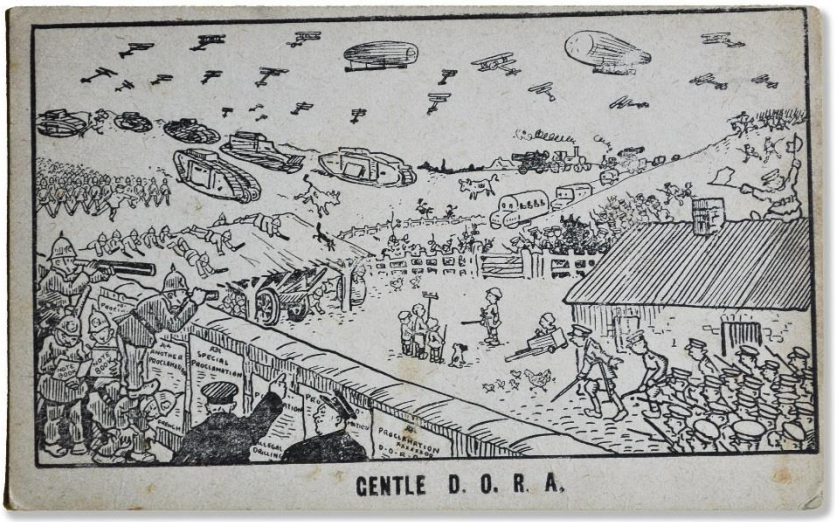
Table 2:

Number of female applicants filed as ‘IRA’ or ‘None’ in MSP records and the grade of pension awarded.

	IRA	None
No. of Applicants	40	59
Grade D	14	4
Grade E	25	28
No Pension Awarded	1	27

Appendix B

Depicted below are examples of the souvinir postcards sold in the post-1916 Rising period to fund-raise for National Aid as discussed in Chapter One. The first is a cartoon satirising the Defence of the Realm Act (1914). Another depicts General Maxwell haunted by the widows of the executed leaders of the Rising. Yet another, shows the mother figure of Ireland cradling her Sinn Féin child while she tells the figure depicted as John Redmond to return to his foster-mother (England).



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