

Jimmy Wren – Book Launch

Speech by Ciarán Holahan (grandson of Patrick Hugh Holohan, Four Courts and Magazine Fort Garrisons)

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Cobblestone Pub, Smithfield, Dublin

Thanks very much Una and Nial for your introduction and for all your efforts into making this day happen. I also would like to thank David Kilmartin who has been tireless in his efforts to help Jimmy get this great book finished. But most of all, I want to thank Jimmy Wren for all the hard work, love and dedication he put into this fantastic new book. Jimmy deserves so much of our thanks for putting this together. On behalf of all the relatives here, thank you Jimmy.

I was asked to give a small speech on the occasion of this launch that would provide an overview, a snapshot, of the momentous events in 1916 which happened around these very streets. This overview should take around about ten minutes and what I aim to do is to give a chronology of the week while picking out some of the key events to try to bring to life what it must have been like for the men and women in the Four Courts and Mendicity Garrisons. I'll be drawing on witness statements from the Military Archives and things that particularly struck me in the books and articles I've read and I hope you find them as interesting as I did. Of course, it won't be possible to mention all those involved, but I will be mentioning some of those who were, and my apologies to those I haven't mentioned. But that's the fantastic thing about Jimmy's book – every man and woman who fought in this area for the freedom we now enjoy is acknowledged and remembered in this wonderful book.

Before I start into a chronology of the week's events I want to say a bit about the background to the Rising. In terms of the men involved most in this area were members of the Irish Volunteers founded in 1913, some including my grandfather and granduncle were members of Na Fianna Eireann which they joined as young boys and then trained with the Irish Volunteers as they got older. Then of course we have the women of Cumann na mBan who played a pivotal role in carrying messages, providing cooked food, tending field hospitals such as the one setup in the Father Matthew Hall and in some cases using arms alongside their male comrades. While the Rising also involved members of the Irish Citizen Army and Hibernian Rifles, they were mainly involved in the fighting in City Hall, GPO and O'Connell Street area, so by and large those in the Four Courts and Mendicity Garrisons came from the 1st Battalion of the Irish Volunteers under Cmdt Ned Daly. The 1st Battalion was comprised of six companies in 1916.

Ignatius Callender

The Irish Volunteers and Irish Citizen Army consisted of men in every walk of life: labourers, messengers, drivers of carts, civil servants, doctors, solicitors, bank clerks, company directors, professors, merchants, etc., etc., all drilling, route marching, manoeuvring side by side, all inspired with the same idea - namely to try to break the chain of English slavery that held Ireland so tightly for so long. They were a grand lot of fellows. I doubt if any country in the whole world ever possessed a Voluntary Army like the Irish Volunteers or the Irish Citizen Army of Easter Week, 1916.

In the time before the Rising, these men were involved in training in arms, drilling, marches, lectures on soldiering and history. As Paul O'Brien put it – when others may have been out having a drink of a weekend, these men and women were training, practising shooting in places such as the basement of 41 Parnell Square where there was a shooting range. As Easter Week drew closer many of them sensed a rebellion was on the cards and they eagerly awaited orders to mobilise. The month before the Rising on St Patrick's Day, Dame Street and College Green were brought to a standstill when around 1500 men were lined up for inspection by Eoin McNeill. It is estimated around 6,000 volunteers paraded nationally. In the days before the Rising many men would have heard rumours. James J. Brennan of the Mendicity Garrison met Sean Heuston on Holy Thursday with some other men and was told to buy as much provisions as he could in Lawlor's shop in Fownes Street in Temple Bar – when he got there the place was full with other Volunteers also buying equipment and provisions. Some men would have been sworn into the IRB in the years, months and weeks before the Rising and given the date of rebellion. There was a sense that something was in the air.

And this came after other events such as the Howth Gun Running in 1914 and Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa's funeral in 1915. There was a war going on in Europe and at home there was a growing sense of nationalism and the Celtic Revival in the arts and literature helped make many realise that the Irish people's destiny lay apart from Imperial Britain. This background brings us to Easter Week.

Easter Monday

I'm sure all of us here are familiar with Eoin McNeill's countermanding order so I'll skip now to Easter Monday when orders went out to mobilise. Dublin was enjoying a holiday and many workers were enjoying a day off or traveling to Fairyhouse for the races. But for the Volunteers serious work was afoot.

Sean Heuston and his men reported to Liberty Hall around 11am to receive his orders from James Connolly and then marched down along the south quays to the Mendicity where they entered around noon. An RIC policeman kept some onlookers back as they forced their way in. This may have been the same "peeler" that Paddy Joe Stephenson recalls warning the men they might be arrested and to stop playing soldiers, a warning shot was fired and this convinced the policeman the men were serious and he ran off. Meanwhile Cmdt Daly, across the Liffey had gathered his men at Blackhall Street, usually the battalion would have numbered about 400 but only 130 turned up initially this grew to around 330 by the end of the week as comrades heard of the rebellion.

Liam O'Carroll, Four Courts

I don't know how, or when I got these orders on Easter Monday morning but I have a hazy recollection of being called out of bed between 8 and 9 a.m. to receive orders from a messenger, and I paraded in Columcille Hall in Blackhall Street before twelve o'clock, with full equipment and iron rations. I remember that anyway. "A", "C", "D", "F" and "G" Companies paraded in the hall. I think these were the only Companies that paraded there. We were all in the hall; and we were addressed by Commandant Daly who announced that, "as from twelve o'clock to-day, the Irish Republic is proclaimed". He then read out a document, which I believe to have been a copy of the

At the Magazine Fort a group of Fianna and Volunteers led by Paddy Daly (and including by grandfather and granduncle) gained control of the Fort. They did this by a ruse – kicking about a football close to the gates of the fort until they kicked it over the gates and in asking for it back overpowered the sentries. They lit explosives near the armoury and while the explosion was not as spectacular as hoped it was heard along the quays and a pall of smoke hung over the Phoenix Park for two days until the fire brigade extinguished the fire. Cmdt Daly who is acknowledged as one of the best strategists of the Rising was busy organising his men to build barricades around his area of command, commandeering furniture and anything they could get their hands on such as building materials from the building site to replace the tenements that had collapsed on Church Street in 1913 and coaches from Moore's Coach factory on N Brunswick Street, milk floats and hand carts etc. Men took up positions in windows overseeing the barricades ready for the inevitable arrival of British forces. Reilly's pub on the corner of N King Street (now the Tap pub) was taken over and commanded by Lieut Jack Shouldice while his brother Frank, an expert sniper, was positioned in the Malt House Tower on Beresford Street.

Daly's original plan was to setup HQ in the North Dublin Union but that was not possible so he setup in St Johns Convent (now Carmichael House) on North Brunswick Street. This was after he had marched his men down Red Cow Lane the very street we are on now.

The overall plan was to defend the central GPO HQ from British Troops coming from the north and the west – from the Royal, Marlboro and Richmond Barracks and arriving on train from Kingsbridge and Broadstone train stations.

The first contacts with the enemy occurred at the Mendicity around 12:30 and at Chancery Lane as troops came from the east and west along the quays. Lancers came from the east and were fired upon and took up a position in the Medical Mission on Chancery Lane where they remained for most of the week. The Royal Dublin Fusiliers marched from the Royal Barracks and are fired upon by Sean Heuston's men in the Mendicity. They took cover in side streets and start returning fire the beginning of what would be a fierce onslaught on the twenty-three men who held the Mendicity.

By nightfall the ranks of the 1st battalion in the Four Courts had increased as men heard of the rebellion. Local people who could not get back to their homes took refuge in the Richmond Hospital. Volunteer Ignatius Callender, Joseph Reynolds of the Fianna and Catherine Rooney risked their lives running messages to keep communications with the GPO open. Edward Costello is the first casualty from the Volunteers after being shot by sniper fire. Volunteers take turns on sentry duty and try to get some sleep.

Easter Tuesday

On Tuesday Cmdt Daly moves his HQ to Fr Mathew Hall on Church Street and orders an attack on Broadstone Station led by Dinny O'Callaghan. Eamon Martin is wounded and the attack is abandoned due to the strength of British fire.

The Mendicity is now under heavy machine gun fire from Queen Street Bridge and Arran Quay. A small detachment of men under Lieut Dick Coleman joins the Mendicity bringing their numbers to twenty six.

James Crenigan

through a lot of back yards. We crossed the Liffey at the bridge west of Capel Street Bridge and thence by further back streets and eventually arrived through the back way into the Mendicity Institute. From the time we left the G.P.O. we were nearly always under fire but we got there without any casualties.

We were posted at the windows on both floors, front and back. There was practically no protection in the windows and certainly no sand-bags. Sniping and volley firing was continuous at British troops on the North Quays and coming from the Royal Barracks

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There was no relief - you just slept at your post when you got a chance, and food was usually brought to us at the windows.

The night time is ominously quiet as the British forces surround Heuston's men.

Easter Wednesday

On Wednesday Daly orders the Linenhall Barracks to be taken.

A number of unarmed men are taken prisoner and the barracks is set on fire to prevent it being used by British Forces. Oils and flammable goods made a huge fire with fumes and black smoke that burned for four days and lit up the area as bright as day during the night. Sniper fire came from British troops on nearby rooftops, Smithfield and as far as Dublin Castle.

On Wednesday, the Mendicity Institution is taken by British Forces after an unbelievably heroic defence by Sean Heuston.

Thomas Peppard

On Wednesday the Institute was heavily attacked from all sides. The enemy were able to get close up on us and to use hand grenades against us. One hand grenade entered the room where we were and Volunteer Staines tried to pick it up and throw it out again. Before Staines got to the grenade it exploded, wounding him severely. It was soon apparent that we could not hold out much longer or else we would all die in the attempt of doing so. Commandant Heuston now decided to evacuate the place

Richard Balfe

On the Wednesday morning it opened up with machine gun fire and we were completely surrounded. There was a laneway of escape. We sent out word by Stephenson and McLoughlin to know if we could retreat but no reply came back. Our ammunition and supplies were now exhausted. We came then under severe grenade and machine gun fire. During this attack Willie Staines and myself were wounded by a bomb. Heuston bandaged Staines who was wounded in the head. I had lost complete use of my arms and legs but was fully conscious. Heuston ordered the surrender and put out a white sheet as a flag but we were immediately attacked again. Eventually the British accepted the surrender but shot one of the men in the process, namely Peter Wilson of Swords. Being injured at this time I was left behind when the Company surrendered as I was thought to be dead. I am not familiar with what subsequently

In James Brennan's account in the Capuchin Annual he recalls how the British were infuriated when they saw that only twenty-three men and held them off for so long and inflicted so many casualties. The men were marched to the Royal barracks with their hands raised and held behind their heads.

At the south end of Daly's command, Peadar Clancy and Tom Smart run across the Liffey Bridge with fuel cans to set fire to houses on southside of Liffey to prevent the British establishing a base.

Easter Thursday

On Thursday, Volunteers at the Church Street Bridge barricade prevent British Forces moving along the quays.

British Forces are now organising themselves with their massive reinforcements and, significantly, the use of Armoured Cars begins.

Easter Friday

On Friday, British Forces establish their base at Bolton Street College and start to move west along North King Street.

On North King Street: Thomas Sheerin, William Murphy, John Williamson and John Dwan occupy Langans.

In Reilly's, Jack Shouldice & Maurice Collins command a small unit that included Edward Delamare, Patrick & Michael O'Flanagan

The British begin to use Armoured Cars to continually ferry 10-15 troops each time to houses on North King Street in an attempt to get to Church Street. Infuriated with the losses they had suffered, on late Friday evening and early Saturday morning, the British troops broke into the homes of the locals and shot or bayoneted 15 civilian men whom they accused of being rebels in what is known as the North King Street Massacre. This event, and the sham of the subsequent enquiry, was significant in terms of support for the Easter Rising in the following weeks.

British Forces also move from the West into Smithfield in an attempt to reach Church Street.

Daly decides to move his HQ from Fr Matthew Hall to the Four Courts building itself on Friday.

Easter Saturday

On Friday night and Saturday morning, the fighting along North King Street is Relentless. The Irish forces decide to abandon Langan's Pub & barricade before daylight.

British Forces start mouse-holeing houses on N King Street to advance toward Reilly's fort.

At 9am, Reilly's is abandoned and Volunteers move south in a daring move. A group of Volunteers numbering 50-70 are now cut-off North of Reilly's fort and North King Street plan a counter-assault to take back Reilly's.

At 6pm on Saturday Nurse O'Farrell & Fr Columbus delivered

Pearse's surrender order to Edward Daly at the Four Courts. They surrendered their weapons and marched as an army of probably less than 200 to the Rotunda.

The Volunteers, cut off north of Reilly's Fort, did not know of the surrender. and are approached by Father Albert. The rebel force, now commanded by my grandfather Paddy Holahan after Capt Nicholas Laffan was injured wanted to see a written order from Pearse. A ceasefire, unique in Easter Week, was agreed that would last from 7:30pm Saturday until 10am Sunday to allow a surrender note from Pearse to be obtained. This is the note that was recently up for auction. On receiving the surrender note, my grandfather made the following speech:

"Fellow soldiers of the Irish Republican Army – I have just received a communication from General Pearse calling on us to surrender, and you will agree with me that this is the hardest task we have been called upon to perform during this eventful week, but we came into the fight for Irish Independence in obedience to the commands of our higher officers and now in obedience to their wishes we must surrender. I know, like myself, you would prefer to be with our comrades who have fallen in the fight. We, too, should rather die in this glorious struggle than submit to the enemy. The treatment you may expect in the future you may judge from the past."

Sunday 30 April 1916 - Patrick Hugh Holahan (also known as Paddy Holohan), commanding officer of the remaining 59 men of the Four Courts Garrison occupying North King Street. Paddy took over command of the men following the injury of Capt Nicholas Laffan.

The fighting in the Four Courts has ended. I want to take a moment now to remember those who gave their lives from the Four Courts and Mendicity Garrisons by reading out their names:

Peter Wilson
Thomas Allen
Edward Costello
John Cromien
John Dwan
Patrick Farrell
Sean Howard
Sean Hurley
Peter Manning
Patrick O'Flanagan
Philip Walsh

Commandant Edward Daly was executed on the 4th May.

Sean Heuston was executed on the 8th of May.

I'm going to finish up shortly with two quotes from the author James Stephens's account of the Rising which was written during the week's events and published later in 1916 but before I do, I once again want to thank Jimmy, for he can't be thanked enough for writing this wonderful book and for his drawings of our relatives which commemorates them so well. Thank you, Jimmy.

So, in conclusion here are two quotes from James Stephens's "Insurrection in Dublin" as he tried to make sense of the momentous event that was the Rising.

I believe that the world moves, and I believe that the weight of the rolling planet is going to bring freedom to Ireland. Indeed, I name this date as the first day of Irish freedom, and the knowledge forbids me mourn too deeply my friends who are dead.

It may not be worthy of mention, but the truth is, that Ireland is not cowed. She is excited a little. She is gay a little. She was not with the revolution, but in a few months she will be, and her heart which was withering will be warmed by the knowledge that men have thought her worth dying for.

We have an island that is called little. It is more than twenty times too spacious for our needs, and we will not have explored the last of it in our children's lifetime. We have more problems to resolve in our towns and cities than many generations of minds will get tired of striving with. Here is the world, and all that perplexes or delights the world is here also. Nothing is lost. Not even brave men. They have been used. From this day the great adventure opens for Ireland. The Volunteers are dead, and the call is now for volunteers.

Thank you.