An Irish Civil War Dugout

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Tormore Cave, County Sligo
Archaeology, History, Memory

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and James Bonsall

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Foreword

Michael MacDonagh

Chief Archaeologist, National Monuments Service

The Decade of Centenaries recently passed has been a period of awakening and reflection, of examining events a century ago that shaped the independent state which emerged from them. The landscape of Ireland, with its then small population living in close-knit communities, was the stage for many episodes and events, at times brutal. The recollection of certain events from that period has at times been challenging. The Civil War looms large in that regard.

It has been a mark of maturity in recent years to face those historical, though at times inconvenient, truths and to avail of scholarly research to capture the voices and memories of the last witnesses of the period. However, until quite recently much of the materiality of that period has been neglected. This has, of course, not been universally the case, and all will be familiar with the major heritage sites of the revolutionary period which the State has maintained and provided access to. But it is fair to say that the many sites located across the country associated with specific events of the period, some nationally significant and some of more local interest but nevertheless important, are only now beginning to receive the full attention they deserve.

Reasons for such neglect may be complex, and some may argue that in at least some cases there is a link to societal and indeed emotive wishes to keep lids shut, so to speak, and familial connections hidden. Perhaps just as important has been a lack of awareness of what exists in terms of material remains associated with the revolutionary period and appreciation of what such remains can yield, through scholarly study and public awareness, in terms of understanding the realities – both good and bad – of such a relatively recent period.

Whatever the reasons, the major advances of the last few decades in inventorying our archaeological and architectural heritage largely excluded these sites, leaving them little known outside of local memory, and so vulnerable to disappearing from public knowledge as the generations passed and memories faded and were lost.

There can be no protection or management of heritage sites without identification. So, while the relevant heritage legislation – contrary to what may sometimes have been assumed – never excluded revolutionary era sites from the possibility of protection, in reality it was little used other than in regard to some major sites as already noted.

Reversing this is no easy task. The opening up as a result of major public investment of key archive collections over the last decade can only go so far to remediate loss of local knowledge and tradition, and even where such tradition survives, accurately matching it with physical locations requires careful research. The sites in question are often ephemeral in nature and not necessarily physically obvious, secreted in remote or overlooked places in the landscape – mountain, glen, river and roadside. And so it was with Tormore Cave.

However, the methods of archaeological survey and excavation developed and fine-tuned in regard to sites of earlier eras are now demonstrated to have major potential for the revolutionary era. This first dedicated archaeological excavation of a Civil War dugout is a fascinating exploration of the mundane at a time that was anything but. The results bring home the reality of conflict, and how ordinary participants lived through it, in a direct and tangible way that cannot be otherwise achieved. We see the tactics and methods of civil conflict directly before us, not just as a theory or something to be inferred indirectly from documents. We see them located in the physical landscape of our own times – a landscape which in this case was remote and isolated then, and is still now, but which this project demonstrates was nevertheless central to historic events. The excavated artefacts and remains tell of hardship for those who inhabited the cave for weeks, of personal sacrifice and of community support.

Most compelling in this wonderful publication is the interweaving of the excavation and scientific analysis with the memories and folklore of survivors and witnesses. In undertaking this project and research, and the exemplary manner in which it was carried out, the project team has ensured that the voices of those who have spent their

lives dedicated to preserving evidence of that period, both tangible and intangible, and of Tormore Cave and stories around it in particular, have been heard.

The National Monuments Service was pleased to be able to support the *Tormore Cave Project*. But important as support from central government is for such projects and will be in the future, it is most important to draw attention to, and credit, the high-level of community engagement achieved. This project has embedded itself locally at a strong level, and this has been crucial to its success – this is indeed an example for others to follow.

It is incumbent on us all, inspired by this project, to continue to explore this period of history, to identify places and record the voices. New legislation in the form of the Historic and Archaeological Heritage and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023 conclusively removes any scope for misunderstandings about the importance in public policy of later heritage, and will provide a comprehensive legal framework for the protection of sites such as Tormore Cave just as much as sites of earlier periods. It is the hope that communities will be empowered to better understand their locality and the role of their landscape in this fascinating period of Irish history.

List of contributors

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Glossary

Anglo-Irish Treaty was the result of negotiations between the Dáil and British government. It was concluded on 6 December 1921 as an outcome of peace talks following the War of Independence. The Treaty was ratified by Dáil Éireann on 7 January 1922, and subsequently by the House of Commons of Southern Ireland and by both Houses of the British parliament. Under the Treaty, Ireland would leave the United Kingdom in December 1922 and become the Irish Free State, a self-governed dominion of the Britain Empire. The Treaty allowed for the six counties of Northern Ireland to opt out of the Free State, which it did.

Anti-Treaty was a term used to describe those who refused to accept the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty.

Auxiliaries, or 'Auxies', was the name given to the Auxiliary Division, which was formed in July 1920 to support the RIC. While recruitment, as with the Black and Tans, was predominantly drawn from former First World War British combatants, the Auxiliaries were a separate division within the RIC and were not constables. They acted as a supplementary military unit formed to specifically engage with the IRA. While the Black and Tans are remembered in memory as being particularly aggressive to the civic population, the Auxiliaries were equally responsible for many severe reprisal attacks, including the burning of Cork City in 1920.

Black and Tans was the informal, and somewhat derogatory, name for new RIC constables (primarily ex-servicemen) recruited from 1920 onwards. They were usually distinguished from previous RIC recruits by their irregular uniform and lack of discipline. Of the 7,684 Black and Tans in Ireland, the overwhelming majority were unemployed, Protestant, 'battle-hardened ex-servicemen' from England, Scotland and Wales who had fought in the First World War, but many were also recruited from Ireland.[1] The nickname derived from the improvised dark green (almost black) RIC uniform mixed with the British Army khaki. Active during the War of Independence, the Black and Tans were loathed and feared in equal measure by the Irish population.

'the boys' was a commonly used phrase amongst the general public during the revolutionary period to refer to active IRA volunteers.

B-Specials were a British auxiliary police force of the Ulster Special Constabulary, formed in 1920 until disbandment in 1970.

Bureau of Military History (BMH) was established in 1947 to assemble material on the struggle for Irish independence from 1913 onwards. Over the next ten years, more than 1,700 witness statements (WS), 300 sets of contemporary documents and 200 photographs were gathered.

The **Civic Guard** was formed on 22 February 1922 during the Truce period, and continued until 8 August 1923 when it was renamed An Garda Síochána. The Civic Guard was the unarmed policing body that replaced the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) in the Free State; in Northern Ireland the RIC was replaced by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). In County Sligo, eighteen members of the Civic Guard moved into the former No. 2 RIC Barracks on Wine Street in Sligo town on 19 October 1922, with a further contingent deployed to Ballymote. By January 1923, the Civic Guard occupied only two stations in the county (Sligo town and Ballymote), the lowest number of operational stations in any county of the Irish Free State.[2]

The **Civil War** was fought between pro-Treaty National Army troops and anti-Treaty IRA between 28 June 1922 and 24 May 1923. It is known in Irish as *Cogadh na gCarad*, which translates literally as 'the War of Friends'.

Cumann na mBan ('the Women's Association') was the Irish Republican women's paramilitary organisation established in 1914. Cumann na mBan members were active during the War of Independence, the majority of whom took the anti-Treaty side during the Civil War.

Dáil Éireann is the lower house of the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament).

Free State Army – see National Army.

[1] Herlihy 2021: 6, 8, 290

[2] O'Connor 2022

An Garda Síochána – see Civic Guard.

Irish Free State (*Saorstát Éireann*) was established by the Anglo-Irish Treaty and came into operation in December 1922, continuing until 1948, when a Republic was established under the Republic of Ireland Act, 1948.

Irish Republican Army (IRA) was a re-naming of the Irish Volunteers after the 1918 election and the founding of Dáil Éireann, though the term was used from 1916. The IRA fought against British colonial powers during the War of Independence. Following the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the IRA split along pro-Treaty and anti-Treaty lines. The pro-Treaty IRA became part of the army of the new Free State, known as the National Army, Government Forces, Free State Army and pejoratively as 'Regulars'. The anti-Treaty IRA were known as Republicans, Executive Forces, the IRA and pejoratively as 'Irregulars'. The Civil War was fought between the pro-Treaty National Army and the anti-Treaty IRA. In the decades following the War of Independence and Civil War, several new armed organisations became established under the name 'IRA', thus 'Old IRA' was adopted by original members to differentiate themselves from subsequent groups.

Irish Volunteers (*Óglaigh na hÉireann*) was a precursor to the IRA, a military organisation formed in November 1913 by nationalists in response to the establishment of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) in 1912. Eoin MacNeill was its first president. When the Irish Volunteers became the Irish Republican Army (IRA), both organisations retained the Irish version, *Óglaigh na hÉireann*, which translates as 'volunteers of Ireland'.

Military Service Pensions Collection (MSPC) was introduced in 1923 under government legislation to provide pensions to National Army soldiers who had been injured during the Civil War, and compensation to surviving relatives of soldiers who had been killed. Anti-Treaty IRA and Cumann na mBan members were excluded until the Military Pensions Act of 1934, which was introduced after Fianna Fáil had taken office. Less than 25% of applicants were awarded pensions.

National Army (also, Free State Army) was the official army of the Irish Free State from January 1922 until October 1924, and it supported the Anglo-Irish Treaty during the Civil War. The new government began recruiting to the National Army from February 1922. It primarily comprised IRA men who had fought in the War of Independence.

Pro-Treaty were those who accepted the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty.

'Round up' was a term used to describe a military strategy employed by the National Army during the Civil War (and previously by the British during the War of Independence) to capture Republicans in rural and isolated areas. Hundreds of troops would target an area and thoroughly search all houses and likely hiding places. A **sweep** was similar in objective but covered a much larger region and involved thousands of National Army soldiers.

Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC), an armed paramilitary police force operating in Ireland, was established in 1836 as the Irish Constabulary, with 'Royal' added in 1867 for its role in supressing the 1867 Fenian Rising. Until 1920, members of the RIC were typically Irish-born men, though its officers were primarily of English or Anglo-Irish stock. During the War of Independence, however, over 7,600 men known as Black and Tans were recruited from across the British Empire as well as from Ireland. The RIC, the Black and Tans and the Auxiliary Division were disbanded after the signing and ratification of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The RIC was replaced by the Civic Guard in 1922 and re-named An Garda Síochána in August 1923.

Safe house was the term used to describe the home of a family or individual sympathetic to the Republican cause, where IRA men could find shelter and be fed while living on the run. Safe houses were established in both urban and rural environments. Helping the IRA in this way put the occupants of safe houses in significant danger. Many safe houses were burnt and families subject to violent attack by British and, later, Free State forces.

Sligo's Noble Six was the name given to six IRA men who were shot dead by National Army troops on the mountains of North Sligo on 20 September 1922: Divisional Adjutant Brian MacNeill, Brigadier General Seamus Devins, Captain Harry Benson, Lieutenant Patrick Carroll, Volunteer Joseph Banks and Volunteer Thomas Langan. The term emerged in newspapers about one year after the killings. Initially it was used solely by Republicans, but within a decade had come to be more widely used regardless of political affiliation. Up to the present day, people in the region refer to the men as 'Sligo's Noble Six' (for detail on the meaning and development of the term, see Bonsall *et al.* 2022). In this book, for ease of reference we adopt the term Sligo's Noble Six rather than 'Sligo's Noble Six'.

Teachta Dála (TD) is a member of *Dáil Éireann*, the lower house of the Oireachtas, the Irish Parliament.

Truce period between the IRA and British Crown forces lasted for almost twelve months. It occurred from 12 July 1921 to 27 June 1922, between the cessation of the War of Independence and the beginning of the Civil War.

War of Independence was the war for Irish independence from Great Britain. It was fought by the IRA against the Crown forces (i.e., the British Army, RIC, Auxiliaries, Ulster Special Constabulary and the 'Black and Tans'), between 21 January 1919 and 11 July 1921, which ultimately led to the negotiation of the Anglo-Irish Treaty and the Truce Period. It is sometimes referred to as the Anglo-Irish War or the Tan War.

I North Sligo Brigade was a brigade division of the IRA. Similar to all IRA brigades, it underwent many structural changes over the course of the revolutionary period. On the eve of the Civil War, it consisted of five battalions and an Active Service Unit, accounting for 952 men. It was led by OC Seamus Devins and was governed under GOC Billy Pilkington's 3rd Western Division.

3rd Western Division was one of sixteen national divisions of the IRA. It comprised five brigades located across counties Donegal, Mayo, Roscommon, Leitrim and Sligo. On 1 July 1922, at the beginning of the Civil War, the 3rd Western Division had a strength of 6,802 men. It should be noted that the National Army, during the study period, also utilised a divisional system, thus there was also a 3rd Western Division of the National Army. Care has been taken to clearly differentiate between the opposing sides in the text, but it may still cause confusion.

Abbreviations

ASU – Active Service Unit

BMH – Bureau of Military History

BMH WS – Bureau of Military History Witness Statement

E – east

FSA – Free State Army, founded 1922

GHQ – General Headquarters

GOC – General Officer Commanding

HQ – Headquarters

IRA – Irish Republican Army (*Óglaigh na hÉireann*)

IRB – Irish Republican Brotherhood

km – kilometre

m – metre

MSPC – Military Service Pensions Collection

N – north

NFCS – National Folklore Collection Schools

NMI – National Museum of Ireland

NMS – National Monuments Service

OC – Officer Commanding

QM – Quartermaster

RIC – Royal Irish Constabulary

S – south

SMR – Sites and Monuments Record

TD – Teachta Dála

W – west

WS – Witness Statement

Note on terminology

Archaeology/History/Memory This book explores a cave in County Sligo, in the northwest of Ireland, that was used by the anti-Treaty IRA during the Civil War. We chose to adopt a multidisciplinary approach, using all available material about the cave, to build the most comprehensive understanding possible of its role in the turbulent events of 1922. The **archaeology** of the cave comprises modifications made to this natural limestone cavern as well as the artefacts and materials left behind by the occupants. **History** involves looking at all documentation related to the conflict in this region and to the occupants of the cave, that is, newspapers, contemporary military reports, personal letters and publications by historians and local historians. The **memory** component consists of memories and oral narratives of men and women involved in the conflict, that have been passed down through families and were relayed to us as second-hand or third-hand accounts. In several instances, audio recordings of the accounts of veterans were made available to us. In most cases, these three strands of information have served to complement one another, each providing a rich and distinct vein of insight. As Tomás Mac Conmara has highlighted, some academics have challenged the reliability of memory as subjective, biased and changeable, but historical sources can often be subject to the same criticisms.[1] In the case of Tormore Cave, without oral narratives the archaeological material would have been difficult to interpret, and the site has only appeared in historical publications in the last 20 years. Occasionally, there is a conflict between the information offered by the archaeology, history and memory related to Tormore Cave. We present all the information here and clarify inconsistencies where possible.

Hideout/dugout/cave in the context of this study, these three terms are somewhat interchangeable but there are also subtle differences. In the 1920s, the IRA occasionally used the term '**hideout**' to describe any place, built or natural, in which men or munitions could be concealed. The organisation utilised a wide variety of locations in urban and rural settings as hideouts including cellars, false rooms, industrial buildings, mines, souterrains, caves and dugouts. The term '**dugout**' was used to describe an underground chamber or room that had been deliberately constructed by the IRA during the War of Independence, Truce period or Civil War. The term typically describes an underground excavated chamber in which the walls were shuttered and the roof covered with corrugated sheeting or similar. This subterranean space (essentially an artificial cave) was then covered over with soil and vegetation, leaving no above-ground trace apart from the entrance opening. Despite a very definite construction style, the term 'dugout' would evolve during the period to describe many other forms of hideout. A **cave** is a naturally occurring underground space formed by chemical dissolution in limestone bedrock. Caves in limestone regions of Ireland range from small, isolated caverns to immense underground systems measuring many kilometres in length. In the 1920s, caves were sometimes appropriated by the IRA as 'ready-made' dugouts that did not require construction.

Personal names Throughout this book we defer to the name by which an individual was known in the 1920s, typically their preferred option. This sometimes differs from their official baptismal name as listed in the census returns and in other government documentation. In the case of General Officer Commanding Pilkington, his baptismal name was William Pilkington, and he is listed as such in the census returns of 1901 and 1911. During the War of Independence and Civil War, however, he was known as Billy to his comrades, friends and family. After his ordination as a priest in 1932, he chose to be known as Fr William Pilkington, but his family and friends in Sligo town called him Fr Billy. Some historical publications and archives list him as Liam Pilkington. In this book he is referred to as Billy Pilkington. Similarly, from childhood John Francis McHugh was known to family and friends as Jack. His involvement in the War of Independence and Civil War spanning more than five years earned him the nickname 'Trooper', which remained with him for the remainder of his life. His sons refer to him as 'Mac' or 'Trooper'. In this publication he is known as 'Trooper'.

Personal name variants Spelling variants of personal names, particularly surnames, are frequently listed in official documentation, such as the census returns, baptismal records and death certificates. In these instances, we give all variants in the first mention but subsequently revert to the spelling that appears to have been preferred by the individual during his or her lifetime. Some personal names appear in the English and Irish variant in publications, mirroring the trend during the revolutionary period for some people to

[1] Mac Conmara 2019: 15–16

adopt the Irish version of their name rather than the English given version. For consistency, here we have opted for Seán MacEoin rather than Sean McKeon.

Mountain names The mountains of relevance to this book are located in the Dartry range, encompassing the peaks of Benbulbin, Benwiskin, Truskmore and King's Mountain. The latter is also known as *Sliabh Mór* ('the Big Mountain'), anglicised as Slievemore, which is also a townland name. Hillwalkers often call the mountain 'King's Mountain', and the peak 'Slievemore'. Slievemore townland is located 1km west of Tormore townland, where the cave is located. In this book, we have opted for 'Slievemore' rather than 'King's Mountain'; all reference to 'Slievemore' here relates to the mountain rather than the townland. The events described in this book are locally and traditionally associated with the most prominent mountain north of Sligo town, Benbulbin. Nowadays, the preferred spelling is 'Benbulben', but we have opted for 'Benbulbin', the spelling variant found in all historical mapping and the version most commonly used in the locality until quite recently. Furthermore, this variant most closely reflects the Irish name for the mountain, *Binn Ghulbain* ('the Peak of Gulban', a mythological character), from which the anglicised name derives. In some texts, it appears as Binbulbin, Bin Bulbin and Ben Bulben.

Names of organisations Throughout the period covered in this book and beyond, the organisations involved have undergone many redesigns, reinventions and ideological changes. The pro-Treaty IRA became the Free State Army, the National Army and eventually, Óglaigh na hÉireann. Colloquially, and somewhat disparagingly, they were also known as 'Regulars', 'Freestaters' and 'Staters'. The anti-Treaty side generally retained use of the name 'IRA', 'Executive IRA' and 'Republicans' but were colloquially and pejoratively referred to as 'Irregulars'. Following their dissolution and after being banned, they became known as the 'Old IRA'.

Irish Republican Army hierarchy This book primarily concerns the area of Sligo town and North Sligo (the northern part of County Sligo). The IRA, as was present there from 1919 until September 1921, was the *Sligo Brigade*. During the Truce period, the Divisional Command hierarchy was organised, with the *3rd Western Division* covering County Sligo and segments of neighbouring counties. The *Sligo Brigade* now became *I North Sligo Brigade* under the *3rd Western Division*. IRA GHQ in Dublin decided that the *3rd Western Division* command would be drawn almost exclusively from Sligo Brigade members. This topic is detailed in Chapter 3, but it should be noted that depending on the date of events discussed, the text will refer to the *Sligo Brigade* or the *3rd Western Division*.

Timeline of principal events

14 December 1918 The General Election in Ireland leads to the defeat of the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP), with a landslide victory for Sinn Féin. While largely a result of the democratising effects of the Representation of the People Act 1918, which allowed for women over 30 and non-property-owning men the right to vote, this change in voting attitudes reflects growing dissatisfaction with almost 40 years of the IPP's unsuccessful campaign for Home Rule and an increasing desire for an Irish Republic following the 1916 Rising.

January 1919 Sinn Féin TDs form the first Dáil in Dublin and issue the Irish Declaration of Independence. Militant Republican elements within the Irish Volunteers regroup under the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and effectively become the state army for Dáil Éireann. IRA volunteers Dan Breen and Seán Treacy ambush and kill Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) constables Patrick O'Connell and James McDonnell at Soloheadbeg, County Tipperary. These events mark an unofficial beginning to the War of Independence, a guerrilla war fought between the IRA and the Crown forces (the British Army and the RIC, with the addition of two new supplementary units, the Auxiliaries and the 'Black and Tans', who were recruited to assist the RIC). There are over 10,000 volunteers in the IRA, but active numbers in the War of Independence are significantly less. Tormore Cave is used during the War of Independence as an IRA dugout for concealing men and munitions on an intermittent and short-term basis.

3 May 1921 The Government of Ireland Act 1920 sets out the partition of Ireland by which the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland divide Ireland into two self-governing polities: Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland.

11 July 1921 The War of Independence ends after two and a half years, signalled by a truce between the British Crown forces and Dáil Éireann. The IRA enters a period of ceasefire.

6 & 7 December 1921 The Truce is agreed on 6 December and the Anglo-Irish Treaty is signed by Michael Collins and the Irish delegation in London on 7 December. This agreement with the British government provides for the establishment of the Irish Free State within a year as a self-governing dominion, and the establishment of Northern Ireland, created by the Government of Ireland Act 1920. The Treaty amnesties the IRA of 1919-1921. In the following weeks, IRA prisoners are released from prison camps.

14 January 1922 A Provisional Government is set up and Ireland becomes a self-governing dominion of the British Empire. British troops begin immediate evacuation of the country.

25 January 1922 The transfer of barracks from the British to local IRA leaders, regardless of whether they are anti-Treaty or pro-Treaty, begins.

February 1922 onwards The IRA split. The pro-Treaty side, led by Michael Collins, becomes the National Army, the army of the Irish Free State, from 31 January 1922 until 1 October 1924. The anti-Treaty side is headed by Éamon de Valera, with Liam Lynch as the military leader.

28 June 1922 The Civil War begins when, under pressure from the British government, the Four Courts in Dublin, garrisoned by the IRA since 13 April 1922, is shelled by the National Army with armaments supplied by the British Army.

2 July 1922 A divisional meeting is held in Sligo town to discuss the Republican response to the attack on the Four Courts. Among those attending are divisional OC Billy Pilkington and his adjutant, Brian MacNeill.

18 September 1922 The National Army captures the anti-Treaty IRA base, Rahelly House. The IRA disperses into the mountains.

20 September 1922 Six of the IRA men who had evacuated Rahelly House are shot dead by the National Army on the mountains north of Sligo town: Divisional Adjutant Brian MacNeill, Brigadier General Seamus Devins, Captain Harry Benson, Lieutenant Patrick Carroll, Volunteer Joseph Banks and Volunteer Thomas Langan. They later come to be known as 'Sligo's Noble Six'. Up to 34 of their IRA comrades reach the safety of Tormore Cave where they live for up to six weeks until the end of October 1922.

27 September 1922 The Army (Special Powers) Resolution, also known as the Public Safety Bill, is passed in Dáil Éireann, which allows for the imprisonment and execution for offences such as possession of arms or ammunition and attacks on National Army forces.

15 October 1922 The Army (Emergency Powers) Act takes effect. The Act allows for state execution of anyone caught carrying arms or ammunition.

6 December 1922 The Irish Free State (*Saorstát Éireann*) is established as a dominion of the British Commonwealth of Nations. It comprises 26 of the 32 counties of Ireland. The Free State remains in place until 29 December 1937 when de Valera's new constitution comes into being and the State takes the name 'Ireland', as a Republic.

24 May 1923 The Civil War ends. In County Sligo, the conflict led to 49 deaths: 22 National Army soldiers, 18 Republicans and 9 civilians, the majority occurring in July (13 fatalities) and September (11 fatalities) 1922.[1]

August 1923 and late 1924 The Free State declares a general amnesty for all acts committed during the Civil War.

1924 Anti-Treaty IRA prisoners are released.

1926 A faction led by Éamon de Valera leaves Sinn Féin and forms Fianna Fáil.

1931 The IRA and Cumann na mBan are declared illegal under the Constitution Act 1931 (Amendment No. 17).

[1] Farry 2012: 110; Gillen 2023

Introduction

Chapter 1

A Civil War dugout: archaeology, history, memory

The country isn't near settled yet[1]

John Cowell

In 1916, Ireland saw its most significant insurrection of a generation, involving open violent confrontation against the colonial British regime in Dublin. While it would become, in the following years, a major justification for Ireland's right to be a nation of independent status, and a catalyst for the recruitment of men and women to such a cause, from a military aspect it was finite in its ability and resources to engage the British State in direct combat. The Irish War of Independence (21 January 1919–11 July 1921) and the Irish Civil War (28 June 1922–24 May 1923) saw Republicans respond to this challenge by shifting to guerrilla warfare tactics. In terms of strength, training and armaments, the Irish Republican Army (hereafter, IRA) were inferior to their opposition, initially the British Crown forces and, in the latter conflict, the National Army of the new Irish Free State. In rural settings, guerrilla warfare was typically characterised by surprise attacks and ambushes on the police and military, followed by a rapid withdrawal of the IRA into the landscape. The success of the guerrilla approach was largely dependent on support from the wider community who provided safe houses and food to IRA men on the run. Community members could also furnish local knowledge as to the availability of secret locations in the landscape where the IRA could conceal themselves in dugouts for days, weeks or even months when required.

As the Civil War progressed from an initial conventional combat phase of open urban combat in the cities (late June–August 1922) to a rural guerrilla warfare phase (September 1922–April 1923), the identification and safeguarding of liminal spaces in the Irish landscape became increasingly important. Hundreds of dugouts were established throughout the country, particularly in remote, rural and often mountainous areas. Many of these involved digging out underground chambers, leading to the term 'dugout'. Others involved the appropriation of existing structures, including ruined buildings or archaeological monuments such as long-abandoned early medieval souterrains. Yet another form of hideout was the modification and preparation of naturally sheltered spaces, particularly caves. John Joe Rice, Officer Commanding (OC) of the II Kerry Brigade, recalled that dugouts were made, 'in bushes and caves, in the hills and in the mountains, in gables and banks and in places where there were no roads', as well as under reeks of turf and piles of manure.[2] The closely guarded information as to the location of specific dugouts and hideouts was maintained long after these sites had been abandoned, contributing to the ease with which they were lost, destroyed and forgotten. Many were deliberately or unknowingly demolished in the course of agricultural works and land reclamation. Others were abandoned, perhaps in a damaged state, became overgrown and eventually were subsumed back into the natural landscape. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that despite the profusion of dugouts and hideouts throughout the Irish landscape, and their key to the success of IRA warfare strategies between 1919 and 1923, until now these sites have received virtually no academic analysis.

This book presents the first detailed examination of an IRA dugout from the Irish revolutionary period (1912-1923). The site consists of a natural limestone cave within the Dartry Mountain range in North Sligo in the northwest of Ireland. We refer to it as 'Tormore Cave' based on the townland in which it is located, but in the 1920s it was known as 'the Glencar hideout' (Figures 1.1 and 1.2). For almost a century, not a single reference to this dugout existed in any published historical texts. Unpublished archives and records were similarly mute. The site was referred to vaguely in a report to IRA HQ penned by General Officer Commanding (GOC) Billy Pilkington on 8 December 1922 as 'a place north of Glencar Lake'.[3] Though not consigned to written records, knowledge of the dugout was preserved in local memory. The cave was closely associated with the Branley family home, a safe house

[1] According to Cowell (1990: 74), this was a common saying after the Civil War and was used through to the end of the 1920s.

[2] O'Shea 2022: 73

[3] Letter from Billy Pilkington to Liam Lynch, dated 08.12.1922. Archives Department, UCD

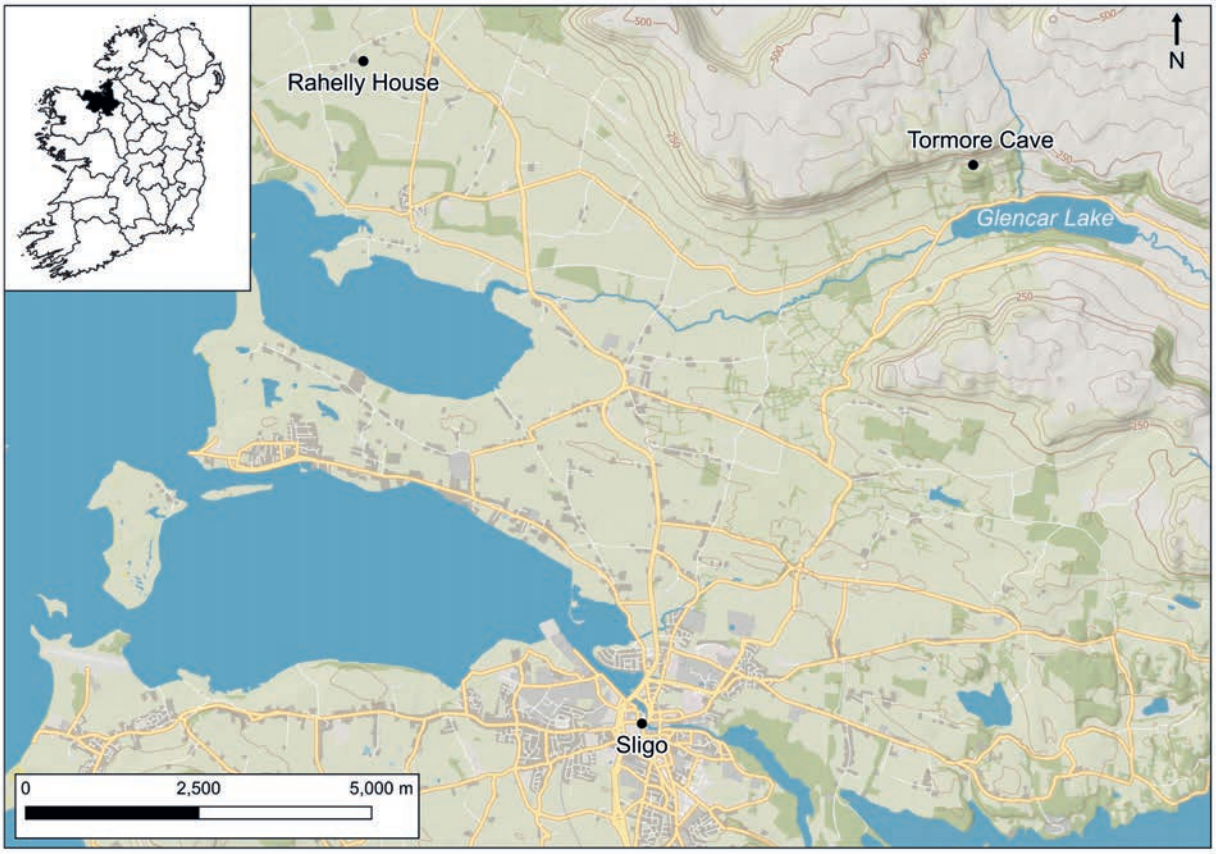

Figure 1.1 Location of Tormore Cave relative to Sligo town and the IRA base at Rahelly House (James Bonsall).

on the lower mountain slopes overlooking Glencar Lake and the dwelling closest to the cave. At least three of the Branley brothers were IRA volunteers, and their mother took an active role in hiding IRA men who were on the run in their home at Tormore. She also fed and tended to IRA men billeted in Tormore Cave, which was a ten-minute walk up the mountain from the Branley homestead. The cave dugout was used in both the War of Independence and Civil War, but knowledge of its location was swiftly lost, and the site rapidly fell into obscurity after its final usage in 1923. The children subsequently born into the Branley homestead had heard of the cave, but even they did not know where exactly it was situated. One of those children was Chris Branley.

Chris Branley died on 19 September 2018, 96 years after Tormore Cave was first occupied by a group of over 30 Republicans. The IRA had sought refuge in the cave for several weeks in September 1922 following a National Army sweep of North Sligo just three months into the Civil War. This was the longest and most intensive usage of the dugout. Chris's father, Paddy Branley, and Paddy's brothers, Dominic and Thady, had been active members of the IRA and were almost certainly responsible for first discovering the cave and realising its hideout potential. Chris was born in November 1927, four years after the end of the Civil War. He was a month shy of his eighth birthday when his father died, but Chris grew up hearing about the dugout from his mother, Maggie Branley, and his paternal grandmother, Sarah Branley. The Branleys farmed the land around the dugout and Chris traversed the Swiss Valley beneath the cave many times during his childhood. Though he searched for the cave on multiple occasions, his efforts were always in vain.

In September 1922, it was Billy Pilkington, GOC of the 3rd Western Division, who ordered the IRA evacuating the Rahelly House base in North Sligo to head for the Tormore Cave dugout located approximately 8.5km to the east, as the crow flies. A decade later, Pilkington was ordained a Redemptorist priest in England. On a return holiday to Sligo town in 1936, Fr Pilkington re-

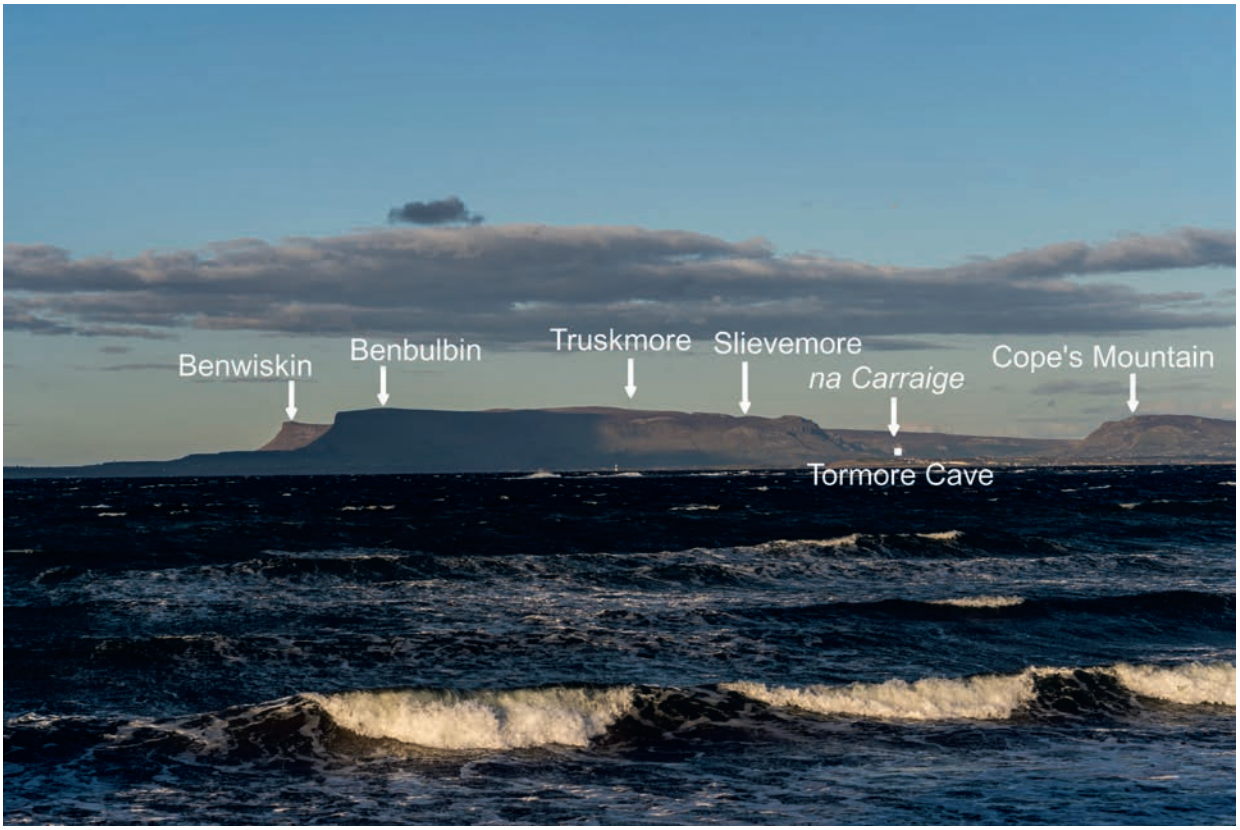

Figure 1.2 The western extent of the Dartry Mountains, as seen from the southwest, showing its principal peaks (Robert Mulraney and James Bonsall).

visited Tormore Cave bringing with him a fellow priest and introducing eight year old Chris Branley to the cave for the first time.[4] In 2012, Chris recalled:

> First time I discovered it was in 1936, when two men arrived dressed as priests to the house and had been in the IRA during the Tan time. And they promised God that they would become priests if they survived. And they arrived as two priests after father died in 1936. They came up here because one had spent time here with a broken shoulder – Fr Pilkington.[5]

From that point onwards, Chris Branley became the sole custodian of the Tormore Cave dugout and was key to keeping knowledge of its existence alive.

For decades, no one visited Tormore Cave or showed much interest in it, other than Chris Branley. There were years, even decades, when no one ever stepped inside the entrance. From the 1980s onwards, however, this indifference gradually began to lift as interested local people, typically sons of IRA veterans, asked Chris to take them to the cave. Local historian Joe McGowan, son of IRA volunteer Petie McGowan, first visited the dugout with Chris in 1982. On a subsequent trip in the 1980s, Joe recovered sherds of black-glazed pottery, additional sherds of the same vessel were retrieved during the 2022 excavations.[6] Danny McHugh, son of IRA volunteer Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, was brought to the cave by Chris in 1985. Danny recovered two fragments of a three-legged iron skillet pot, while further fragments of the same vessel were recovered during archaeological excavations in 2022. Similarly, when Chris again brought Joe McGowan, accompanied by local historian Des Gilhawley and Seán Smith, to the cave in 2004 (Figure 1.3), sherds of an earthenware dish were discovered.[7] Additional sherds of this same dish

[4] Chris Branley, audio recording 2008; Chris Branley, video and audio recording 2012

[5] Chris Branley, video and audio recording 2012

[6] Joe McGowan pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 20.02.2023 and 10.07.2023

[7] Des Gilhawley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 23.11.2021. On a visit to the cave on 08.09.2004, a pottery sherd was found on the cave floor; it was submitted by Des Gilhawley to the National Museum of Ireland on 13.01.2009 (NMI File IA/24/2009; NMI reg. no. 2009:2).

Figure 1.3 Des Gilhawley (front), Chris Branley (middle) and Seán Smith (back) at Tormore Cave in September 2004 on a visit with Joe McGowan, who took the photograph (Des Gilhawley).

were retrieved during the 2022 excavations. Gilhawley referred briefly to the cave in his study of the killing of six IRA men (Sligo's Noble Six) who were heading towards the dugout, work first published online in 2012 and appearing in print in 2021.[8] Tormore Cave was finally emerging from the shadows and beginning to receive the attention it deserved.

Visits to the Tormore Cave dugout continued to be occasional and sporadic. The current landowners have visited Tormore Cave on several occasions since the 1980s. In the course of our project, we have heard from four hillwalkers who each separately and unintentionally discovered the cave. One man followed a fox he had just shot into the cave; another man slept there overnight and referred to it as 'Dead Man's Cave'; a woman happened across the cave entirely by accident while hillwalking; another man found the cave while hillwalking, and it was also known to him as 'Dead Man's Cave'.[9]

Over the past two decades, Tormore Cave has become inextricably linked to six men who were killed on Slievemore and Benwiskin Mountain on 20 September 1922. On that day, local narrative tells that Divisional Adjutant Brian MacNeill, Brigadier General Seamus Devins, Captain Harry Benson, Lieutenant Patrick Carroll, Volunteer Joseph Banks and Volunteer Thomas Langan were en route to the cave, but never reached their destination. They were captured and shot dead in the uplands by the National Army in highly controversial circumstances.[10] The killing of these six Republicans, who later became known as 'Sligo's Noble Six', was the single greatest loss of life during Sligo's revolutionary period, one that sent shockwaves throughout the county that continue to reverberate to the present day. Though some of the six may have stayed in the Tormore Cave dugout prior to September 1922, they never stayed there as a group. Regardless, in local memory they have become closely associated with the cave: in recent years it has been referred to by many as the 'Noble Six Cave'. This may partly be due to a Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ) television documentary, *A Lost Son*, produced by Angela Sammon and first aired in 2012. The documentary followed the trajectory of Divisional Adjutant Brian MacNeill on the 90th anniversary of his death. Television viewers were guided by Chris Branley to Tormore Cave, where he spoke briefly about its importance as a dugout (Figure 1.4). The documentary succeeded in raising awareness of the site and generating wider local recognition of its existence. Interest in the cave has steadily gathered pace since.

The *Tormore Cave Project*

As three archaeologists, our relationship to Tormore Cave began in May 2013 when one of the authors (M. Dowd) was taken to the site by Jeremy Bird, husband of Chris Branley's niece, Dorothy (Figure 1.5). During that visit, animal bones were noted scattered over the cave floor along with occupation debris in the form of pottery sherds and glass shards. Eight years later, as the centenary of the main usage of the cave as an IRA dugout was approaching, Jeremy put forward the suggestion to archaeologically investigate the site. In

[8] Des Gilhawley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 18.10.2022; Gilhawley, D. 2021. 'Death on a Mountain' initially appeared online and as a post on www.sligoheritage.com. The online page was removed in 2021 when the account was reproduced in McGowan, J. 2021. *Even the Heather Bled*, 217-238.

[9] Joe Elliott pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 03.04.2022; Boris Achenbach pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 30.04.2022; Fióna Gallagher pers. comm. to J. Bonsall, 02.03.2022; Tony Cogan pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 21.06.2023.

[10] Bonsall *et al.* 2022

Figure 1.4 En route to Tormore Cave while filming the RTÉ documentary 'A Lost Son' in 2012, Chris Branley (21.11.1927–19.9.2018) points out the location of a War of Independence dump used to store arms and ammunition. It had been dug into a natural hillock located between the Branley safe house and the cave dugout (Angela Sammon, RTÉ).

follow-up discussions, ATU Sligo (then IT Sligo) agreed to provide funding to excavate the cave as part of the university's contribution to the centenary of Sligo's Civil War. The *Tormore Cave Project* was born.

Tormore Cave would be the first dedicated archaeological research excavation of any site from the Irish War of Independence or Civil War. Certainly, structures and artefacts from the revolutionary period had been inadvertently exposed and recorded in the course of numerous archaeological excavations, particularly in urban environments, but this was a by-product of the investigation of older post-medieval and medieval levels. Without doubt, thousands of buildings, structures and artefacts related to Ireland's revolutionary period have been routinely demolished, knowingly and unknowingly, in the course of modern development works. Today, this continues to such an extent that entire streetscapes, under consideration for redevelopment, remain with little or no protection as regards their revolutionary period attributes.

As Tormore Cave was to be the first archaeological excavation of an Irish Civil War site, we decided to consider it both in terms of contemporary archaeology (the physical and material remains of the 20th and 21st centuries) and conflict archaeology (the physical and material remains of battle sites and places of conflict). The historical sources, published and unpublished, provided virtually no information about the dugout, thus as archaeologists we sought to assess what an archaeological approach might reveal (Figure 1.6). In late 2021, we consulted with the National Monuments Service (NMS) who subsequently issued a licence to us to undertake a one-week excavation in the cave, using standard archaeological excavation and surveying techniques. The landowner was supportive of the *Tormore Cave Project* from the outset and provided permission to investigate the cave and facilitated temporary access. Following some delays due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the excavation took place over six days from 29 March to 3 April 2022 inclusive. Two archaeologists were on site for four days and three archaeologists for two days. A limited number of visitors were invited to the site that week. In the months that followed, post-excavation analyses of the various artefacts and ecofacts recovered during the excavation involved almost 20 specialists located across Ireland and the UK. Where the historical records had been silent, archaeological excavation provided

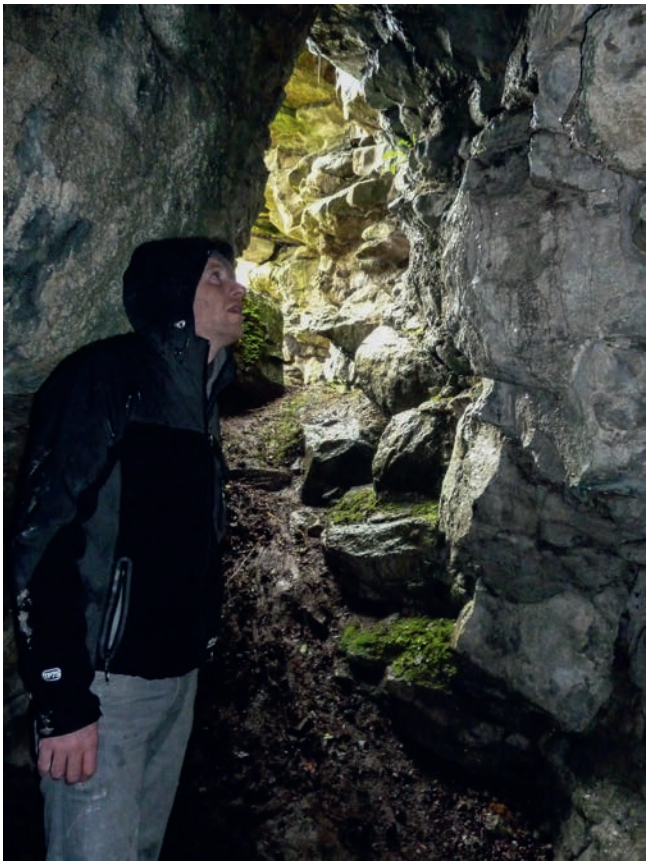

Figure 1.5 Tormore Cave in May 2013 (Marion Dowd). Excavations in 2022 revealed a series of stone steps concealed by the slope of clay pictured here extending from the entrance to the cave floor below.

rich dividends. But archaeological investigation did not provide the full picture.

Family narratives and memories

Archaeological excavations in 2022 revealed physical evidence that Tormore Cave had been methodically and extensively modified to make it fit for purpose as a dugout that would be occupied by IRA men involved in guerrilla warfare during the early 1920s. A complementary rich vein of information about the cave existed in local memory. We had never met Chris Branley but interviews in which he spoke of the cave had been recorded by local historian Joe McGowan in 2008 for the oral history collection, *Irish Life and Lore*; by documentary maker Angela Sammon in 2012 for the aforementioned television documentary, *A Lost Son*; and by journalist Niall Delaney in 2014 for a radio documentary, *Sligo's Noble Six*. Chris Branley had always been generous with his knowledge about the cave, and further stories were remembered by relatives of IRA veterans and interested locals who had spoken to Chris during his lifetime (Figure 1.7). Many of these stories were related to our investigation.

The information Chris Branley knew about Tormore Cave originated from members of his own family, specifically his mother, Maggie Branley, and paternal grandmother, Sarah Branley, as well as Billy Pilkington who had first taken him there in 1936. Chris was 13 years old when his grandmother died, and 65 years old when his mother passed away, thus giving him a lifetime of access to first-hand lived memories and family narratives about Tormore Cave and his family's involvement in Sligo's Civil War. Across the interviews recorded in 2008, 2012 and 2014, Chris variously mentioned that 30 men, 32 men, 33 men, 34 men and 36 men were billeted in Tormore Cave for 'weeks', 'six weeks' and 'six to eight weeks' in September and October 1922. In 2012, Chris recalled: 'The real pressure was on in September 1922 when they left Rahelly House. And they were all ordered to come here [the cave], safest place they believed they could be ... My mother always said there was 32

Figure 1.6 The Tormore Cave Project *team at the dugout entrance during archaeological excavations in March 2022. L to R: Marion Dowd, Robert Mulraney and James Bonsall (John P. Cassella).*

to 34 here. They had to bring some feeding because some of them didn't leave for a week after that day.'[11] The cave is small and, while it could have just about accommodated that number of men, it is difficult to envisage the entire number living there for such a long period. Chris Branley clarified: 'On the day in question [20 September 1922] there was 34-36 really here [in the cave]. After a couple of days when things quietened down, they started to go away. Some stayed on. They said some were here for six weeks.'[12]

From a review of various audio recordings and family narratives, at the outset of the *Tormore Cave Project* we had a list of seven men who were believed to have stayed in the cave in September and October 1922. We issued a call for further information, in the hope that memories about the cave dugout had been passed down to relatives of other IRA veterans. The call was aired on national television, online and in numerous regional newspapers in April 2022. Within a short period, the two-minute piece that had aired on national television had garnered almost 30,000 views on YouTube.[13] Approximately 20 relatives of veterans responded to the call for information; we were contacted by people from America, Britain and across Ireland. The majority were women who had heard about a cave dugout from a father or grandfather who had been active in the IRA in the locality in the 1920s. Detailed research into all of these possible occupants, as well as the seven names originally associated with the site, produced disappointing results. We had started the project with seven names, but our research revealed that only four men can be confidently identified as having occupied the cave during the period in question; a further four men (not part of the original list of seven) have been identified as probable or possible occupants. The identities of at least 20 other men who apparently sheltered in Tormore Cave in autumn 1922 remain elusive. Memory and family narratives were sometimes at odds with historical archives. In one case, for instance, a man who was said to have stayed in Tormore Cave in September 1922 was not a member of the IRA and was not even in the country at that time (see Chapter 9).

The *Tormore Cave Project* adopted a multi-disciplinary approach, seeking to extract as much information as possible about the site from all available resources: published and unpublished accounts and memoirs, contemporary military archives, documents and pension claims, published historical texts and recollections of local people and relatives of IRA veterans. These sources were used to contextualise and interpret the archaeological excavation data. Combined, the various strands of evidence present valuable insights into life on the run and the everyday conditions of guerrilla warfare during the Irish revolutionary period, a hitherto neglected aspect of historical research. Through Tormore Cave we gain the first detailed understanding of dugouts and the conditions endured by thousands of IRA men living on the run in 1920s Ireland. The four men known to have sheltered in Tormore Cave during the Civil War provide a microcosm of the experiences of thousands. One occupant was the most senior figure in the IRA in County Sligo at the time, has featured in multiple historical studies of the conflict, and was well known and highly regarded regionally and nationally. In stark contrast, the three other known occupants are almost invisible in historical publications, though their

[11] Chris Branley, video and audio recording 2012

[12] Chris Branley, video and audio recording 2012

[13] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FsFtK_Vkl_g>

involvement is recorded in archives held by the Bureau of Military History. Their families, however, did not forget the role they played in Ireland's difficult and divisive revolutionary period.

Local memories and family narratives provided a rich vein of information on another aspect of the Tormore Cave dugout that was also entirely invisible in the historical records: women. The success of the cave in terms of concealing such a large number of men for a relatively long period of time could not have been achieved without community support. Local people, predominately women, put themselves in grave danger by delivering food parcels and messages to the men in hiding, as well as tending to illnesses and ailments. Two women who lived close to the cave, and one woman who travelled from Sligo town, are remembered in numerous family narratives as having played a major role in safeguarding the survival of the men billeted in Tormore Cave. The central role of women in Ireland's revolutionary period has begun to be highlighted in recent years but has largely focused on military actions and members of Cumann na mBan (the Irish Republican women's paramilitary organisation, established in 1914). Two of the three women associated with Tormore Cave were not members of Cumann na mBan, but they were equally active and undertook dangerous work that could have led to serious, even fatal, consequences. These women have been overlooked entirely in all previous published works and are similarly invisible in the archives. Like so many civilian women, though ignored in official histories, they were not erased from family memory. We are particularly glad to have had the opportunity to shine a light on the hitherto largely neglected cohort of civilian women who chose to take an active role in Ireland's Civil War.

Project methodology

Historical research: published and unpublished sources

All published historical literature relevant to County Sligo's Civil War was consulted, both academic works and local history publications. The history of County Sligo's revolutionary period has been researched and documented by, amongst others, Tadgh Kilgannon, Michael Farry and Joe McGowan,[14] while also featuring in national accounts of the conflict.[15] While the Civil War in County Sligo has been explored in much detail by Michael Farry, it has not been exhaustively researched, and biographies of most of the key leaders have yet to be written. The Tormore dugout has not been mentioned in any publications, with two exceptions where it is briefly mentioned but not discussed.[16]

Numerous digitised archives were consulted, in particular the Bureau of Military History Witness Statements, Brigade Reports and Pension Applications. Pension Application files not yet digitised, and a large quantity of unpublished material curated by the Military Archives at Cathal Brugha Barracks in Dublin, were also consulted. This included contemporary Intelligence Files, National Army radio reports, IRA documents seized by the National Army, and Free State prisoner reports.

The 1901 and 1911 censuses of Ireland, official birth, marriage and death records, as well as local and regional newspapers from the 1910s and 1920s proved rich sources of information when compiling the biographies of those associated with the cave. Contemporary newspaper reports were likewise vital for shedding light on many of the ambushes and court cases of the day, documenting deaths and commemorations, and adding colour and opinion to events that might otherwise have been recorded in dry fashion in regimented military reports. In a similar capacity, much use was made of anti-Free State political newspapers as well as National Army newsletters and bulletins. Various other archives, held by the Military Archives, the National Library and the UK's National Archives, were likewise consulted in relation to the activities of the Sligo IRA. In writing the biographies of those involved, their contemporaries, through their own autobiographies, sometimes documented invaluable accounts of events and details about their comrades and friends. Ernie O'Malley's personal notebooks, held at University College Dublin, as well as his published books, proved of particular value. Significantly, however, Tormore Cave has not been mentioned in any of the unpublished archives that we have seen.

Archaeological excavation and survey

The primary archaeological objectives of the *Tormore Cave Project* were to document the cave and modifications made to it and record the material culture left behind by the Civil War occupants. We also sought to contextualise the dugout by mapping the revolutionary landscape in the immediate environs. A detailed topographical and archaeological survey of the cave was produced by R. Mulraney in advance of

[14] Kilgannon 1926; Farry 2000; Farry 2012; Farry 2017; McGowan 2021

[15] Younger 1968, Hopkinson 1988, and others

[16] Gilhawley 2021; Bonsall *et al.* 2022

Figure 1.7 Ger Daly with Chris Branley in 2017 (Ger Daly). Ger's grandfather, IRA volunteer Tom Daly from Belleek, County Fermanagh, had known the Branley family in the early 1920s and was familiar with Tormore Cave.

the archaeological excavation (see Appendix 4). The excavation, conducted over six days in March and April 2022, was directed by M. Dowd under archaeological excavation licence 22E0030, and with the permission of the landowner and the National Monuments Service.

Oral narratives

Memories and oral narratives that survived about the cave dugout and the men who sought refuge there in 1922 are included in this project. Several recordings of IRA veterans or relatives of veterans, made in 1976 and 1986 by Danny McHugh, were generously made available to us by Danny. Further, between 2021 and 2023, we conducted interviews with relatives and friends of the men and women who had been associated with the cave a century previously. Where possible, interviews were conducted in person. Some interviews were conducted by telephone or, where relatives lived in other countries or continents, via online video conferencing or by email. Each relative was spoken to on at least two occasions, in some cases dozens of times. This swiftly developed from a Sligo project to one with national and international connections.

Outcomes

The core aim of the *Tormore Cave Project* was to make our findings available to the general public, archaeologists, historians and any interested parties. This was achieved through coverage on national television and in national and regional radio; in regional newspapers and across multiple social media platforms; at academic conferences; via presentations to local community groups, commemoration groups and school children; and the publication of this book (see Appendix 14). The project has garnered enormous public interest, not least because it demonstrates a new way of exploring the recent past, through archaeological excavation. One of our aims was to demonstrate to non-archaeologists the wide variety of specialists that are involved in any archaeological project, including artefact specialists, conservators, zooarchaeologists and radiocarbon dating scientists, to name but a few. Tormore Cave is one of very few archaeological research excavations in Ireland that can be considered 'contemporary archaeology'. In this regard we hope the project stimulates other such projects by demonstrating the wealth of data and new insights that archaeological excavation of 'recent' sites can offer.

Perhaps one of the most rewarding aspects of the *Tormore Cave Project* was the meaningful interactions with relatives of the men who hid in the cave and the women who supported them. This was often a moving and powerful experience, one that is not usually encountered in an archaeological project; typically, an archaeological site is so old that no known relatives are currently identifiable. This project, we believe, has contributed to opening up conversations about Sligo's Civil War, a war that left a legacy of hurt and trauma that is only recently being addressed. This project has allowed people to speak openly about their memories, family narratives and their own feelings. We have listened, without judgement. We hope this book, and the other project outputs, reveal our deep respect for those who have shared their time and knowledge with us.

Structure of this book

The multi-disciplinary approach we adopted at the outset of the *Tormore Cave Project* is reflected in the structure of this book. The geological and geographical context of Tormore Cave is presented in Chapter 2 as a backdrop to the crucial role of rural landscapes in guerrilla warfare. Chapter 3 provides the historical detail of the events of Sligo's Civil War pertinent to Tormore Cave, thus focuses primarily on Sligo town and North Sligo. Tormore Cave functioned as a dugout; these hitherto largely neglected structures are explored in Chapter 4 using a combination of historical sources and archaeological fieldwork. The specificity of the cave dugout, as revealed through archaeological excavations in 2022, is detailed in Chapters 6 and 7. The people associated with the cave are presented in Chapters 8, 9 and 10, based on archival research, audio recordings and interviews with surviving family members. Chapter 11 culminates with an overview of the impacts and legacies of the Civil War as experienced by the families and individuals associated with Tormore Cave. Chapter 12 situates the *Tormore Cave Project* within the context of recent archaeological approaches to Ireland's revolutionary period.

At first glance, this book may appear to be a micro-study of a single place in a remote mountainous landscape in a county that was quieter than most during the revolutionary period. While that is true, we have also endeavoured to capture a broader regional perspective on the Civil War through the lens of Tormore Cave. The study focused on a single site to explore, in greater detail and frequently for the first time, some of the men and women, some of the events, some of the places, and some of the objects in Sligo town and North Sligo during the conflict. As archaeologists navigating material that would traditionally be considered the realm of the historian, we are aware of differences between the two disciplines in terms of research approaches, publication styles and conventions. Some historians choose not to speak to relatives of the individuals they research. In this project, family narratives and local memory have added substantially to the available historical and archaeological data and were a rich vein of insight that we felt could not be ignored. Also, while this is an academic book, it is also for the families of veterans and interested local people: we have consequently attempted to minimise, where possible, technical terms and impenetrable language.

Generally, archaeological publications tend to contain far more images than historical publications; indeed, some historians consider images irrelevant and indicative of a non-academic text. In this project, we felt images were paramount to capturing the nature of the dugout and its landscape setting. Many of the places associated with the Civil War have been entirely destroyed or are in an advanced state of decay. By including here images of modern buildings, the earlier biography of that particular site is revealed, while simultaneously documenting the heritage lost. Some buildings and artefacts from the Civil War period fortunately survive and are documented through photographs as a record of their current state of preservation. Many of these will likely be lost or demolished over the coming decades.

We have attempted to do our best by both disciplines, but this is not a typical history book nor a typical archaeology book, a factor that may irk some historians and some archaeologists. Ultimately, this is a book about people: people from the past and people from the present. Their photos are included wherever possible, as a reminder of that focus.