

An Irish Civil War Dugout: Tormore Cave, County Sligo

Archaeology, History, Memory

Marion Dowd, Robert Mulraney
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.

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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 suppressing 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	N – north
BMH – Bureau of Military History	NFCS – National Folklore Collection Schools
BMH WS – Bureau of Military History Witness Statement	NMI – National Museum of Ireland
E – east	NMS – National Monuments Service
FSA – Free State Army, founded 1922	OC – Officer Commanding
GHQ – General Headquarters	QM – Quartermaster
GOC – General Officer Commanding	RIC – Royal Irish Constabulary
HQ – Headquarters	S – south
IRA – Irish Republican Army (<i>Óglaigh na hÉireann</i>)	SMR – Sites and Monuments Record
IRB – Irish Republican Brotherhood	TD – Teachta Dála
km – kilometre	W – west
m – metre	WS – Witness Statement
MSPC – Military Service Pensions Collection	

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 'Benbulbin', 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 Bulbin.

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 *1 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.

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT

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 yet¹

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

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT

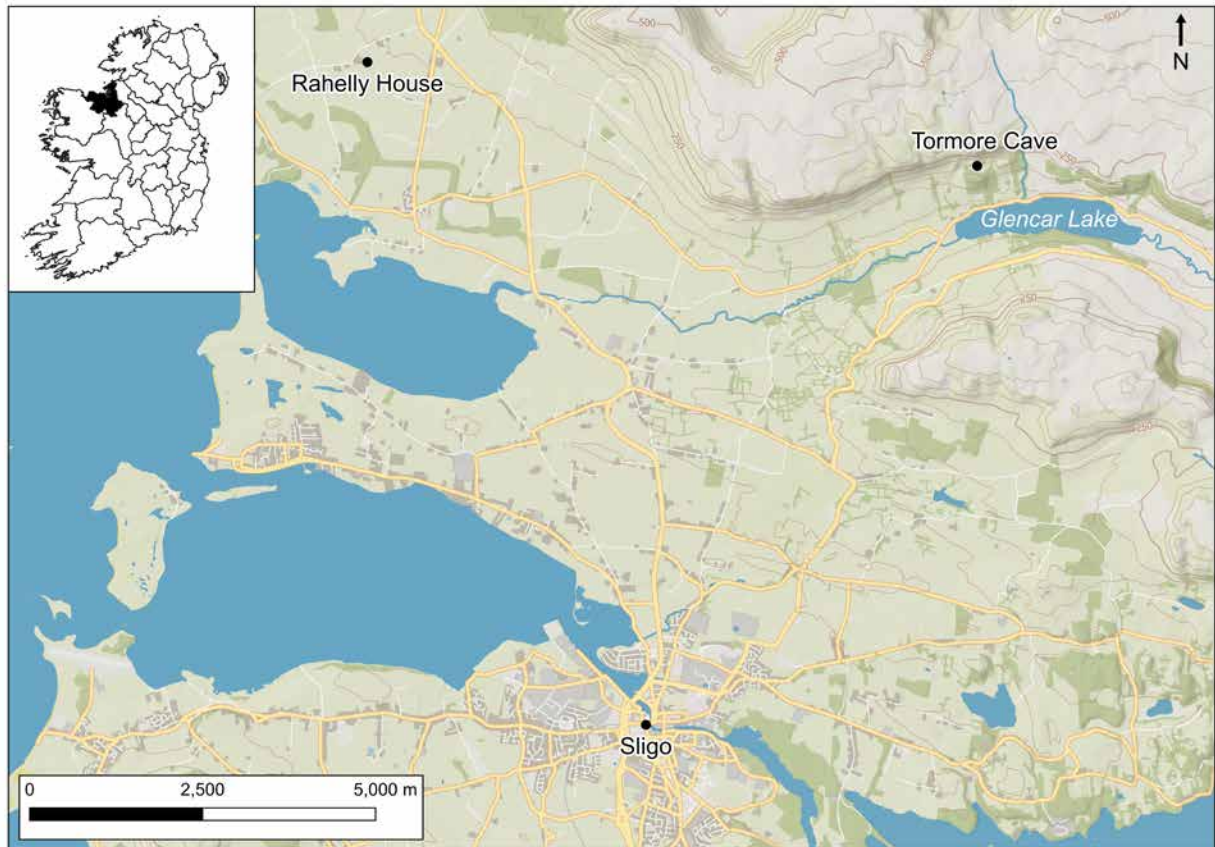


Figure 1.1 Location of Tormore Cave relative to Sligo town and the IRA base at Rahelly House (James Bonsall).

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).

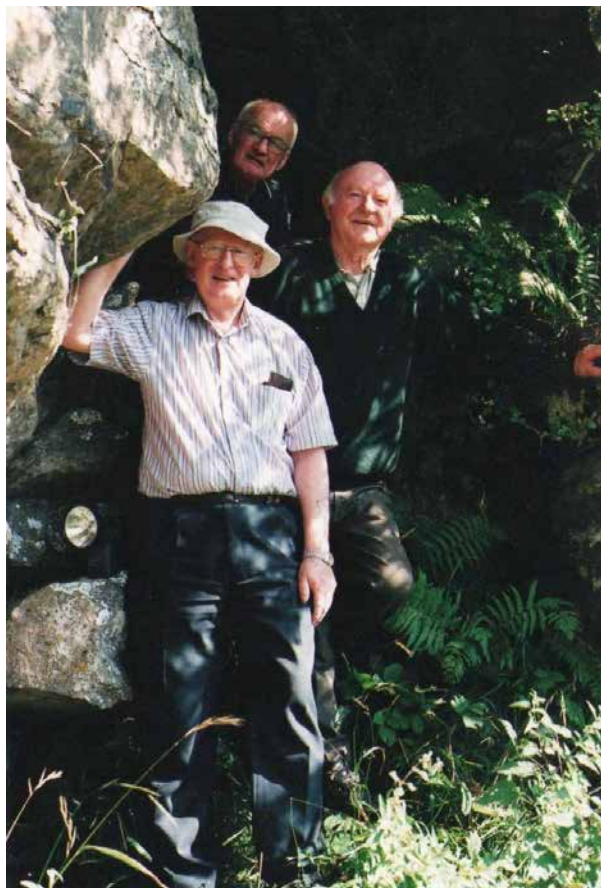


Figure 1.3 Des Gilhawley (front), Chris Branley (middle) and Seán Smith (back) at Tormore Cave in September 2004 on a visit with Joe McGowan, who took the photograph (Des Gilhawley).

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 Benwisquin 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; Fíona 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

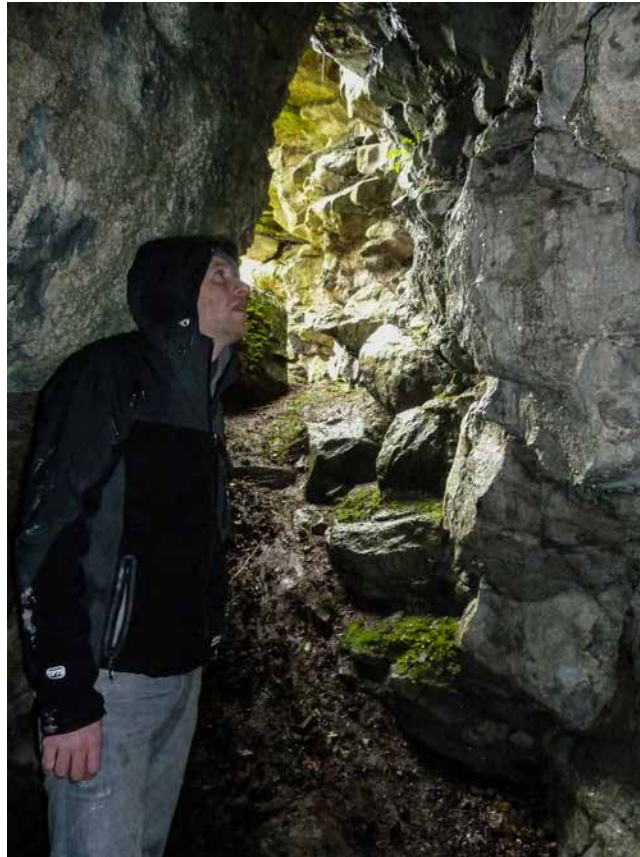


Figure 1.5 Tormore Cave in May 2013 (Marion Dowd). Excavations in 2022 revealed a series of stone steps concealed by the slope of clay pictured here extending from the entrance to the cave floor below.

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.

Chapter 2

Landscape setting of Tormore Cave

*Their loyal allies, the hills*¹

Dorothy Macardle

In 1924, Dorothy Macardle recounted an expression she had heard in County Kerry as to how the IRA perceived the mountains during the Civil War: 'their loyal allies, the hills'. The mountains of North Sligo were similarly fundamental to the success of IRA guerrilla warfare. Tormore Cave is situated high in the Dartry Mountains, approximately 10km northeast of Sligo town and 600m north of Glencar Lake, in North Sligo close to the border with County Leitrim.² Here, the IRA operated from the remote mountains of Benwisken and Benbulbin, as well as the valleys of Glencar, Gleniff and Glenade within the Dartry range (Figures 2.1 and 2.2). The geographical setting of Tormore Cave is presented in this chapter to fully appreciate the guerrilla knowledge of this upland terrain and the manner in which it was exploited.

Geology of the Dartry Mountain range

The valleys and mountains of North Sligo and North Leitrim, as we know them today, are the products of the creative destruction of ice. The Dartry Mountains once existed as part of a single, vast upland karst plateau. This monolithic landscape covered an extensive area of the northwest of Ireland, including today's peaks of Knocknarea to the southwest; Benbulbin, Slievemore and Truskmore in North Sligo; Thur and Doagh to the east, in County Leitrim; Slieve Anierin in South Leitrim; and the uplands of Belmore and Cuilcagh in the eastern part of County Fermanagh. At the end of the Pleistocene geological epoch, as glaciers retreated towards the sea, mountain peaks were separated from one another as glaciers cut deep valleys through the upland plateau. Today, such valleys dominate the locality, forming scenic spots such as the Glencar Valley and the Glenade Valley.³ This 'parcelling' of the landscape created a terrain in which mountains could be accessed relatively easily from population centres in the valleys below. The advantages offered by such a landscape for guerrilla warfare were well known and

well exploited by the IRA during the revolutionary period.

The Dartry Mountain range today remains an extensive upland area that is vaguely defined. It is generally accepted to include the peaks and plateaus encompassed within the former medieval *túatha* (political territory) of Dartry and the adjacent Carbury, extending for 35km east to west and 8km north to south. Benbulbin Mountain is located at the western extent of the range. Its sheer cliff face rises above Sligo town and it is the region's most identifiable geographic feature. The Dartry range includes other distinctive peaks, such as the high points of Truskmore (647m), Tievebaun (611m) and the distinctively angular Benwisken (514m). Southeast of these high points, the mountains become lower, opening towards the Glenade Valley, Glencar Valley and Manorhamilton town. The Dartrys then rise again to the northeast of the Glenade Valley, into an area of vast and remote open moorland with its indistinct and largely unnamed peaks (Figure 2.3). In common with many of the neighbouring mountain ranges, the Dartrys are composed almost entirely (90%) of sedimentary bedrock.⁴ The dominant sedimentary rocks here are the alternating bands of shale, sandstone and the Glencar Limestone Formation, overlain by the less variable Dartry Limestone Formation. Today, these two limestone formations are exposed and clearly visible on the north face of Benbulbin Mountain (Figure 2.4).⁵

One of the defining landscape features of the Dartry Mountains, and prominent at Tormore, is the presence of slip canyons, also known as slip gullies and slip valleys. These distinctive geological features were created following the retreat of ice and the carving of U-shaped valleys. The removal of the glacial mass

¹ Macardle 1924: 44

² ITM 573812 844103; 145m O.D. above sea level; Tormore townland, Drumcliff parish, Carbury barony

³ Jones 2000: 10

⁴ MacDermot *et al.* 1996: 1

⁵ The line between the upper Dartry limestone, a hard blue-grey limestone, and the lower Glencar limestone, formed of alternating limestone and shale bands, can be observed as the difference between the smooth slopes of the underlying Glencar formation contrasting with the jagged and eerie 'teeth' of the overlying Dartry limestones.

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT

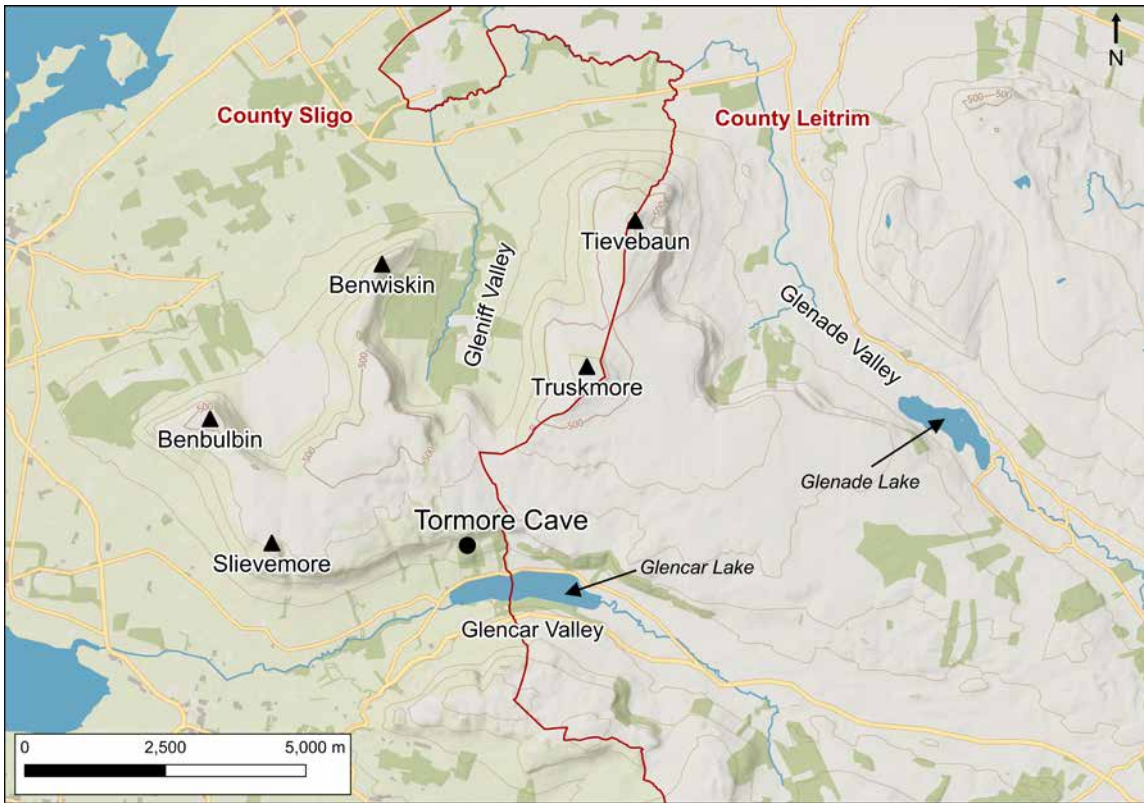


Figure 2.1 Principal mountains, valleys and lakes of relevance to the Tormore Cave Project (James Bonsall).

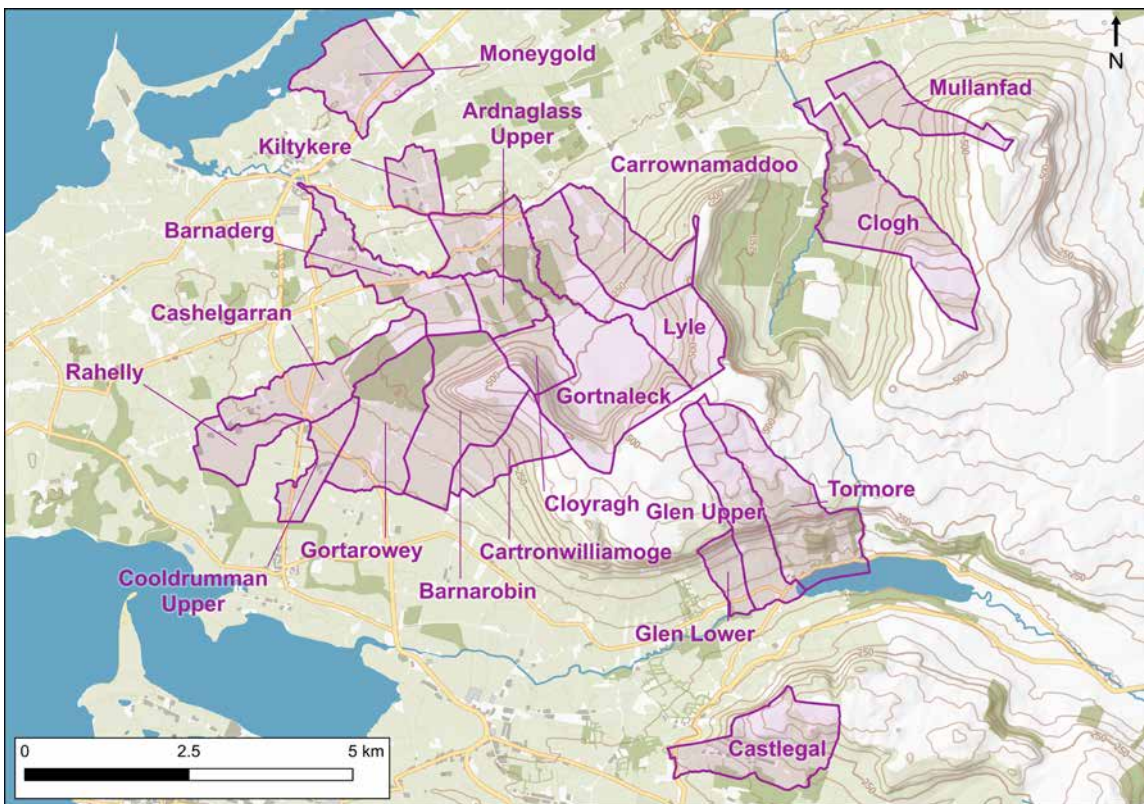


Figure 2.2 Locations of the principal villages and townlands relevant to events associated with Tormore Cave (James Bonsall).



Figure 2.3 Principal peaks of the Dartry Mountains (Robert Mulraney and James Bonsall).

meant that the valley walls now lacked the supportive ‘buttress’ of ice. This caused enormous land slips along valley edges, forming distinctive slip canyons with sheer cliff faces and narrow rubble floors. Essentially, these are valleys that exist within valleys. The best examples can be seen at Eagle’s Rock in County Leitrim and *Annagh Ré Mhór* in County Sligo.

Tormore Cave is located within the Swiss Valley, a slip canyon which is considerably wider and larger than other local examples (Figures 2.5, 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8). On approach from the County Leitrim border, which defines its eastern limit, the Swiss Valley runs for approximately 1km to the southwest. On the northern side, the vertical cliffs of *na Carraige* (‘the rocks’) rise precipitously to over 150m in height (Figure 2.9). On the south side, two 50m high hummocks run parallel to the cliffs. The valley floor is extremely rough, with shattered boulders and scree covered by a superficial layer of heath. According to local narrative, in September 1922 when Tormore Cave on the northern side of the Swiss Valley was occupied by the IRA, National Army soldiers were positioned on the hillock on the opposite (southern) side of the valley,

not realising that the cave was directly opposite. The National Army had set up position on the hillock with the intention of firing down on any Republicans who might pass along the valley floor.⁶

Tormore townland

Tormore townland, covering an area of 2.7km², is fully contained within County Sligo.⁷ Part of the eastern boundary of the townland also acts as the boundary between County Sligo and County Leitrim (Figure 2.10). The name of the townland hints at the suitability of this landscape for guerrilla warfare. ‘Tormore’ is an anglicisation of *an tor mór*, the large rocky height or ‘tower’.⁸ In the 1920s, and for decades afterwards, those who lived in Tormore used the spelling *Thurmore*, which phonetically references the pronunciation of *tor mór*. The Irish name for the townland captures the karstic nature of this wild terrain, dominated

⁶ Gene O’Carroll pers. comm. to M. Dowd and J. Bonsall, 27.01.2023 (as related to him by Chris Branley)

⁷ Irish Townlands, <<https://www.townlands.ie/>>

⁸ Ó Dónaill 1977

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT



Figure 2.4 The north face of Benbulbin Mountain, showing the stark contrast between the two predominant geological formations in the area: the Upper Dartry Limestone Formation and the Lower Glencar Limestone Formation (Robert Mulraney).

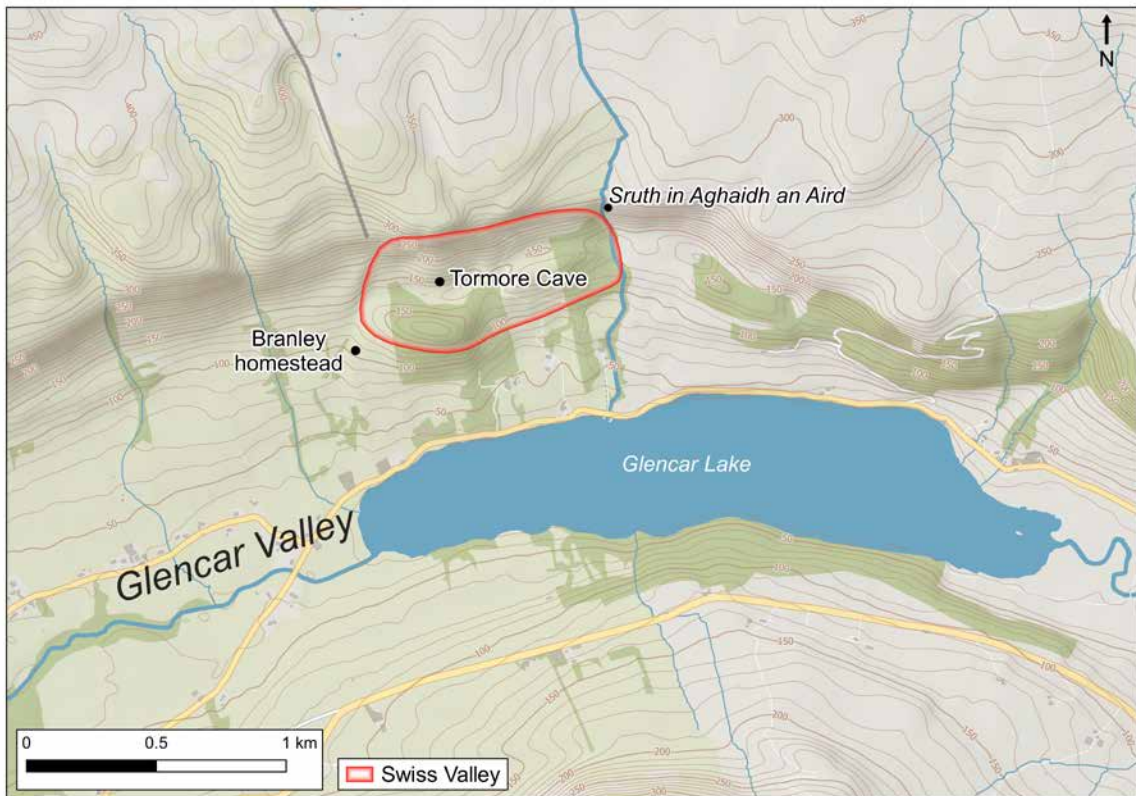


Figure 2.5 Location of Tormore Cave within the Swiss Valley as defined by the Geological Survey of Ireland (James Bonsall).

LANDSCAPE SETTING OF TORMORE CAVE



Figure 2.6 The Swiss Valley from west, photographed between 1900 and 1939, as it would have appeared during the occupation of Tormore Cave (The Swiss Valley, facing east, photographed by Eason & Son; courtesy of the National Library of Ireland).



Figure 2.7 An overview of the Glencar Valley, facing west, with Glencar Lake partially visible to the left, and the smaller Swiss Valley to the right, running between the cliff face and the hummocks in the centre of the photo (Robert Mulraney).

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT



Figure 2.8 The Swiss Valley in Tormore townland, as seen from the west, showing the terracing and scree slopes known as na Carraige ('the rocks')⁹ (James Bonsall).



Figure 2.9 The Swiss Valley as seen from above. Note the location of Tormore Cave (lower circle) and the 'pyramid' rock (upper circle) (James Bonsall).

⁹ Niamh Mac Cabe pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 05.12.2023

by craggy cliffs, rock towers, scree slopes and caves. The townland extends from northwest to southeast, running perpendicularly through the east-west aligned Glencar Valley. When assessing its topography, Tormore townland thus reads as a ‘cross section’ through this mountain and valley landscape. At the southeast end, the townland includes part of Glencar Lake at the valley bottom, before rising steadily to areas of lowland pasture. Over the past 200 years, the vast majority of settlement in Tormore has concentrated in this portion of the townland where the land was most suitable for farming. On the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1838, almost all households in Tormore are located within 600m of the lake on relatively low-lying, albeit undulating, pastureland (Figure 2.10). During the revolutionary period, many of these homesteads operated as safe houses to IRA men on the run.

Moving further north and up to higher ground, the mound-like hillock at the southern edge of the Swiss Valley is encountered. Here, the ground is poor and nowadays is under forest plantation. This side of the Swiss Valley demarcates the boundary between the settled lower mountain slopes and the inhospitable uplands (Figure 2.11). In 1922, prior to the forestry

development, this area was very exposed. For covert movement, the IRA would likely have travelled along the floor of the Swiss Valley, located immediately north. The Swiss Valley is an area of exceptional wild beauty, but the terrain is extremely rough underfoot. There can be no doubt that this served as a deterrent, and National Army soldiers passing through the valley would have been wary of walking into a site of potential ambush. On the northern side of the Swiss Valley, the cliff face known as *na Carraige* rises up to the mountain plateau; Tormore Cave is located within this scree face (Figure 2.12).

Despite the sharpness of the cliff faces, the southern flanks of the Dartry Mountain range contain numerous gullies that, though exposed, provide access to the plateau above. One such mountain gully in Tormore townland is called *na Staighre* (‘the stairs’) (Figure 2.13). The Irish name appropriately captures the ‘staircase’ nature of the path that leads from the floor of the Swiss Valley up to the plateau overhead where peat bogs and open commonage dominate. The safe houses scattered along the base of the Glencar Valley are located close to the base of various gullies, which provide rapid access to both the Swiss Valley with the Tormore dugout and/or the upland plateau overhead.

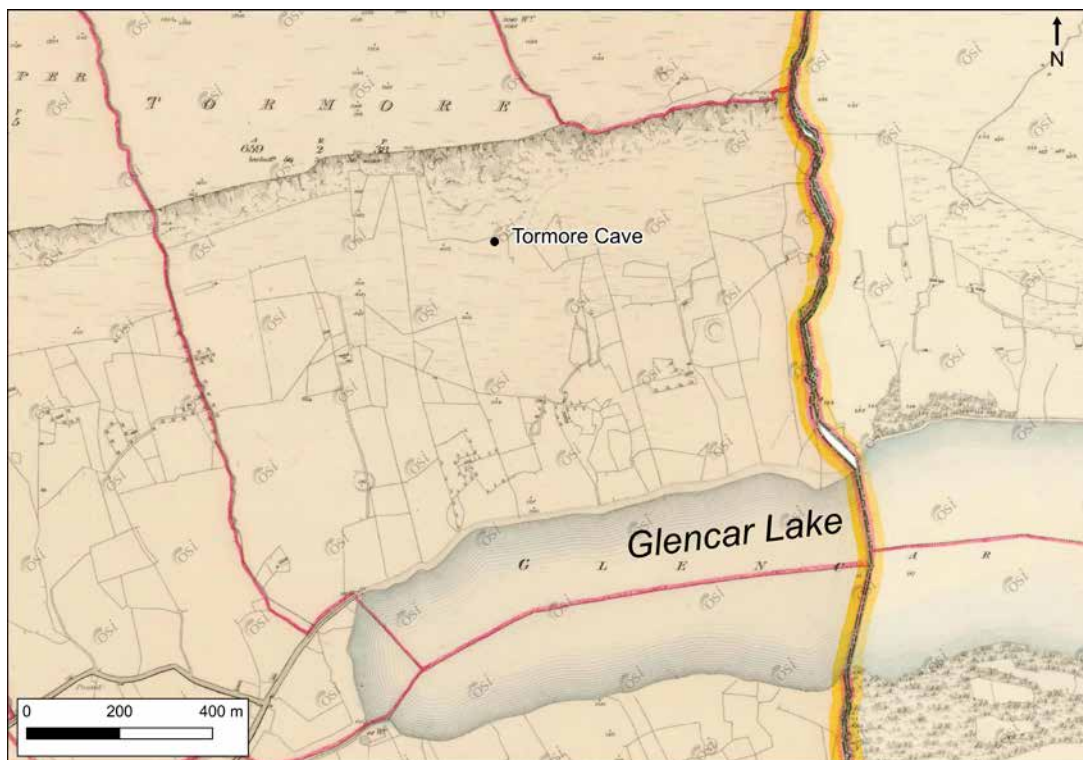


Figure 2.10 Location of Tormore Cave in the southern part of Tormore townland on the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1838. The red line indicates the townland boundary; the yellow line demarcates the boundary between County Sligo to the left and County Leitrim to the right (© Tailte Éireann/Government of Ireland. Copyright Permit No. MP 003123).

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT



Figure 2.11 The Swiss Valley, from the east, showing rough ground and exposed limestone rock facies (Robert Mulraney).



Figure 2.12 The area known as 'na Carrage' is located at a higher elevation, immediately north of Tormore Cave. While very difficult to traverse, it is likely the Tormore Cave men made use of the complex terrain for mounting look-out and defensive stations (Robert Mulraney).

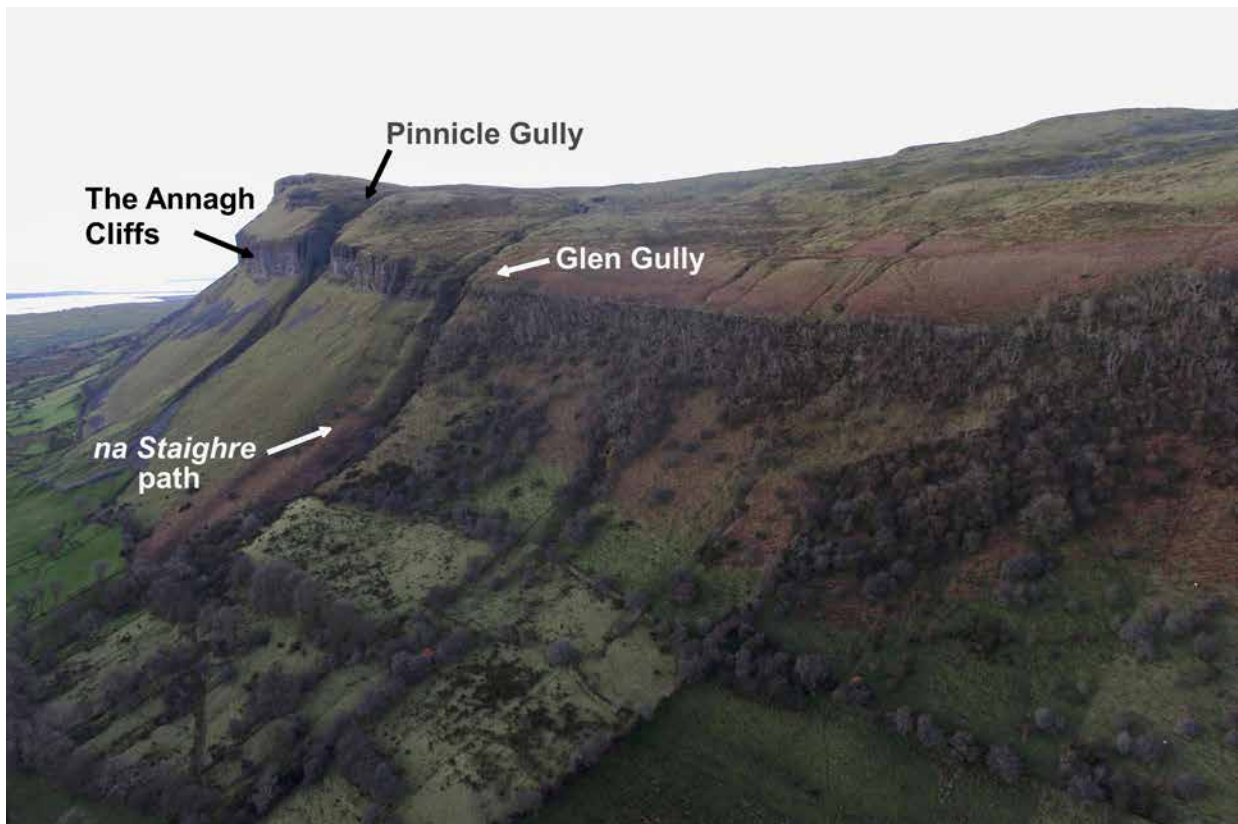


Figure 2.13 The principal gullies used by the IRA as access routes from the Glencar Valley to the mountain plateau (James Bonsall).

Crucially, the Branley homestead and the Swiss Valley are located near the base of *na Staighre* gully. These gullies allowed the IRA, either retreating or staging an attack, to quickly disappear into the mountains (Figures 2.13, 2.14 and 2.15). From the summit, various towns and villages within the I North Sligo Brigade region could be easily accessed. The distances were lengthy, but flying columns were accustomed to travelling great distances on foot. The uplands of the western Dartry plateau are almost entirely covered in blanket bog. Though wet and inhospitable, this terrain is flat and relatively easy to negotiate. Numerous booley huts and shelters are located in this upland portion of Tormore townland, associated with sheep grazing in the 19th century or earlier. The presence of such huts testifies to the fact that, though relatively inhospitable, the Dartry uplands were indeed accessible for the community living below. The sheer cliff face, which looks out over the Glencar Valley, runs west to King's Gully where it is split and then continues west to Benbulbin peak. It is locally known as 'The Cliffs of Annagh' or 'Ballynagalliagh' (Figures 2.13 and 2.16). Despite its adverse appearance, the cliff is skirted by a firm green path, the result of numerous generations of farmers using the same line of access to move across the mountain.

Formation of Tormore Cave

Caves are generally defined as natural cavities in rock that are large enough for a human to fit into.¹⁰ They are most prevalent in limestone due to its high content of calcium carbonate. A basic mineral, calcium carbonate dissolves in mildly acidic water such as rain and surface water. The limestones of the Dartry Limestone Formation are particularly pure and have a high concentration of calcium carbonate, which makes it well-suited to cave formation. In contrast, the lower Glencar Limestone Formation contains a high quantity of muds and shales, making it less suited to cave formation.¹¹ Prior to glacial activity, additional sedimentary layers of sandstone and shale capped the Dartry Mountains.¹² Now largely eroded, they remain only in small exposures at Truskmore and Largy, but play a vital role in cave formation. This 'cap' of impenetrable rock on Truskmore's summit functions

¹⁰ The definition of a cave varies according to scientific discipline and cultural approaches. The simple definition employed here is that most commonly used by speleologists and archaeologists and is supported by *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

¹¹ MacDermot *et al.* 1996; Oswald 1955; Tratman 1957

¹² MacDermot *et al.* 1996: 72



Figure 2.14 Pinnacle Gully, an example of one of the many parallel gullies that run from the Dartry Mountain plateau to the Glencar Valley. These steep passes were used by the IRA to move large numbers of men across the mountain, most notably in September 1922 (Robert Mulraney).

to channel and direct water downhill, concentrating and focusing contact on the exposed limestone beds. The continual flow of ‘dissolving’ acidic water over the limestone beds causes rapid dissolution. Cave formation advances as the stream sinks underground through inherent faults and cracks within the bedrock.

Tormore Cave was formed in the superior Dartry Limestone Formation. Mountain run-off, finding pre-existing faults in the bedrock, expanded and widened the fault crack. Eventually the stream sank underground, forming the ‘sink entrance’.¹³ As the water progressed horizontally and vertically through the Dartry limestone, it created a phreatic

¹³ A distinction must be made between the *sink entrance* (at the north-eastern end) and the *cave entrance* (at the southwestern end) of Tormore Cave. The former describes the route through which water entered during the process of speleogenesis; the latter describes the larger passage cavity through which a person can gain access.

(fully submerged) cave passage. At the 180m contour line, the subterranean watercourse made contact with the underlying and inferior Glencar Limestone Formation. At this point, cave development most likely continued largely on the horizontal plane, along the boundary between the two limestone formations. Cave development continued for a considerable period of time. This ceased abruptly, however, with the dramatic removal of the land mass by the retreating glaciers. With the shaping of Glencar Valley and the formation of slip canyons, the vast majority of Tormore Cave was removed and cast into the Swiss Valley. Consequently, today’s entrance to the cave, at its southwestern extent, has a very abrupt profile within the cutaway cliff, where numerous collapsed boulders have tumbled into the valley floor below. It is also evident that this collapse caused the cave to be dramatically cast backwards and upwards (see cave profile, Figure 5.2). As a result, the original lower downstream section of the cave is now tilted higher than the sink inlet (see Appendix 5).¹⁴

Entering the cave



Figure 2.15 Climbing up to the entrance of Tormore Cave (Robert Mulraney).

¹⁴ John G. Kelly pers. comm. to R. Mulraney, 26.11.2022



Figure 2.16 The cliffs of Ballynagalliagh (Robert Mulraney).

Tormore Cave is almost entirely concealed from view when walking along the floor of the Swiss Valley located about 20m beneath the cave entrance. Accessing the cave involves a difficult scramble up a relatively steep rocky cliff known locally as *na Carraige* ('the rocks'), named for the abundant loose scree and rubble (Figures 2.16 and 2.17).

At the top of the scree slope is Tormore Cave. Entering the cave, one squeezes past a large prominent boulder that obscures the entrance (Figures 2.18 and 2.19). On closer inspection, this upright boulder seems at odds with the numerous other boulders of similar size that lie scattered at the base of the scree slope. Today's cave entrance is the point at which the cave originally collapsed during glacial activity, thus forming its portal-like cavity. Beyond the entrance, the cave passage slopes suddenly downwards onto a flat floor. The walls of the cave taper inwards slightly but it is relatively comfortable and feels like a quiet space, protected from the inclement mountain weather outside.

After 7m, the passage suddenly drops down to a lower level. Here, the cave is darker, further from the light zone, and the walls are covered in white moonmilk

calcite.¹⁵ There is a gentle flow of water down the cave walls and generally, this section of the cave passage feels colder and wetter. The cave floor is uneven and covered in boulders. The only way forward is through another dip and a small cavity. Climbing through the constricted opening, the space becomes more unpleasant and involves a tight crawl over saturated mud with numerous boulders impeding access. After a further 5.5m, beyond a tight squeeze around a large boulder, the passage gets narrower. The roof lowers and then takes a 45° turn left, from where it begins to rise steeply upwards. Crawling up this muddy slope becomes difficult due to the movement of loose rock and wet mud. The floor is covered in bat excrement and the ceiling drips heavily. A cold influx of air can be felt as one approaches the end. Just before closing down, the cave opens up into a slightly rounded, though small, chamber. It offers just enough space to turn one's body around. This is the original cave entrance and the draft of air demonstrates its 'inlet' nature. The inlet itself is now relatively dry and calcite has sealed off the cavity,

¹⁵ 'Moonmilk' is a cave deposit, formed by the precipitation of calcite minerals from limestone. Unlike stalagmites, however, it has a high moisture content and its formation is influenced by the presence of microbial activity. It has a texture that is wet and chalky to touch.



Figure 2.17 The cave is entered via a narrow gap between the natural cave wall and the intentionally placed Entrance Boulder (Robert Mulraney).

where the water initially sank. This would originally have represented the highest point of the cave but is now below the current entrance due to the rip caused when the valley formed.

Returning to the front of the cave and back outside, a narrow ledge (approximately 1.5m wide) outside the entrance runs for 10m to the west (Figure 2.20). This ledge represents the floor of the original cave. The ledge provides access to a second cave, Tormore West Cave.¹⁶ This smaller cavern likely represents another inlet into a larger cave system, of which both caves were originally part of. The entrance to Tormore West Cave is 1-2m above the ledge and requires a climb up the cliff face. Tormore West Cave is considerably more exposed on the cliff face compared to Tormore Cave. Progressing into Tormore West Cave reveals two branches: one to the immediate west, which runs for 4m, and one to the north which, after 2.5m running east, turns sharply north for 5m. The passage to the left (west) consists of a higher and lower level. It is very tight but is just about possible to climb into. The passage to the right (east) is exceptionally tight and is not possible to pass through comfortably. It is quite

plausible that Tormore West Cave was used by the IRA in September 1922 to store provisions, arms and ammunition, and to accommodate a small number of men, perhaps on sentry duty. Though small, Tormore West Cave could accommodate two or three people at a time. It would have been an ideal spot from which to observe the surrounding landscape.

Originally, there were expansive views from the entrance of Tormore Cave to the east, west and south, including views over Glencar Lake (Figure 2.21). These vistas are now completely obscured by forestry that was planted in 1986 on the southern slopes of the Swiss Valley, immediately opposite the cave. Hundreds of deciduous Japanese larch saplings were planted in the shape of an enormous trinity knot or *triquetra*, surrounded by evergreen Sitka spruce.¹⁷ Now, some 25 years later, the contrasting colour of the larch against the spruce creates a striking landmark along the Glencar Valley (Figure 2.22).

The nearest natural water source to Tormore Cave is a stream known as *Sruth in Aghaidh an Aird* located 750m to the east.¹⁸ This stream drains a plateau on the

¹⁶ The name 'Tormore Cave' describes the principal cave. 'Tormore West Cave' refers to the adjacent smaller segment of cave passage. Both names are attributed to the authors.

¹⁷ Mac Cabe 2018

¹⁸ *Sruth in Aghaidh an Aird* is the correct name. In very recent years, however, it has become known as the 'Devil's Chimney', particularly



Figure 2.18 South-facing section of Tormore Cave, derived from the orthorectified photogrammetric model (Liamóg Roche and Robert Mulraney). This sectional perspective shows, to the west ('left'), the hill slope leading to the cave entrance and progressing into the flat constructed surface of Area 1. From here, the ground slopes downwards along the loose boulder floor of Area 2. A tight constriction and continued dip lead to Area 3. At the east ('right'), the cave rises suddenly towards the (above-ground) surface.



Figure 2.19 Orthorectified plan of excavation area (Area 1) at pre-excavation stage (Liamóg Roche and Robert Mulraney).



Figure 2.20 The exposed ledge which links Tormore Cave with the fragmentary Tormore West Cave (which is located just out of shot and is not visible without a short climb). The men in refuge most likely made use of this area when the weather was less inclement and the immediate threat of a National Army approach less pressing (Robert Mulraney).

southwestern flanks of Truskmore Mountain and forms part of the eastern boundary of Tormore townland, as well as acting as the boundary between counties Sligo and Leitrim (Figure 2.10). *Sruth in Aghaidh an Aird*, ‘the stream against the height’, is named for the fact that in high winds, rather than flowing over the cliff, the stream is dramatically blown outwards, upwards and back over the mountain summit (Figure 2.23). The stream continues to be well known locally and would also have provided an important navigational landmark for IRA men not intimately familiar with the immediate local landscape. It may also have been

used as a water supply when the cave was occupied in September and October 1922.

The inhabitants of Tormore townland

The Griffith’s Valuation (Ireland’s primary valuation of property published between 1847 and 1864) documents that in the mid-19th century, the entire townland of Tormore was owned by Sir Gilbert King, 3rd Baronet of Charlestown, who also owned vast tracts of land across County Sligo, including Benbulbin Mountain, Slievemore and parts of Glencar Lake.¹⁹ Fifteen

in tourist literature.

¹⁹ Griffith’s Valuation of Ireland (2003)

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Figure 2.21 As this photo from the mid-1980s illustrates, originally there were expansive views from the entrance of Tormore Cave, including to the east, which is not visible today due to forestry plantations (Joe McGowan).



Figure 2.22 Location of Tormore Cave in 2021, relative to the trinity knot forestry planted by the Mac Cabe family in 1986 (James Bonsall).



Figure 2.23 To the right is Sruth in Aghaidh an Aird, blowing back over the mountain in high winds. The arrow marks the location of Tormore Cave 750m to the southwest of the stream (Robert Mulraney).

households in Tormore townland leased land from King. The largest plots of leased land, which provided the highest incomes to King, were occupied by women. Bridget Cummins was the economic occupier of more than 91 acres of land (including Tormore Cave), a house and offices, with a rateable value (expected annual income) of £33 pounds. Catherine Branley occupied 49 acres of land, a house and offices, worth £24 and 10 shillings. The remaining plots in Tormore townland were leased by John Rooney, Bryan Hart, James Scanlan, Patrick Langan, John Gonnely and Robert Cummins, amounting to between 11 acres and 24 acres of land each, valued at between £4 and £16 and 15 shillings. These family names are important as some of their descendants played a role in the story of Tormore Cave as a Civil War dugout.

The 1901 census recorded 59 people living in Tormore townland, spread across nine households. Most of the names seen in the Griffith's Valuation reappear, though the Rooney family name is absent. Spelling variants of the earlier Cummins, Gonnely, Hart and Scanlan surnames were documented: Cummins, Gonley, Harte and Scanlon. The Branley and Langan families continued to live at Tormore, and a new family, the Gilmartins, also lived there by 1901. There were three

separate households bearing the Cummins family name. The occupations of all nine heads of household were listed as 'farmer' (in the case of Michael Gilmartin, 'farmer and gamekeeper') and all occupants were Roman Catholic.²⁰

The 1911 census noted a decline in the population of Tormore townland, with 41 inhabitants across eight households. The familiar names of Branly (a spelling variant), Cummins (and its variant, Commins), Gonley, Harte and Scanlan appear, in addition to Rose Jordan (a female boarder and national schoolteacher in the Cummins household); Thomas Rooney (a farmer's servant and brother of Winifred Cummins); and Mary Ellen Mitchell (granddaughter of Thady Branly). Three different households were occupied by Cummins/Commins. All heads of household in Tormore were again listed as 'farmer', and all were Roman Catholic families.²¹

By the 1930s, an account penned by schoolboy Michael Commins for the National Folklore Collection documented that there were sixteen families living

²⁰ Census of Ireland 1901, Tormore townland

²¹ Census of Ireland 1911, Tormore townland

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in 'Thurmore', totalling 82 people. He collected folklore from Sarah Branley, a woman who had played a major role in the success of the Tormore Cave dugout in the early 1920s (see Chapter 10). Michael Commins described the land in Tormore townland as 'mountainous and boggy but can grow good crops.'²²

The occupancy of Tormore gradually declined over the 20th century. The current population of the townland

stands at approximately eighteen people.²³ Some of the present inhabitants of Tormore townland have heard of the cave dugout but do not know its exact location; other people had never heard of it prior to the *Tormore Cave Project*.

²² NFCS 0157: 135-6

²³ Central Statistics Office

History of cave exploration in the region

Despite antiquarian interest in caves in the late 17th century, caving as an explorative and scientific discipline did not occur in Ireland until the arrival of French speleologist Eduard Martel in 1895. Martel did not visit County Sligo but his descriptions, drawings and surveys of caves in County Fermanagh and throughout the country led to the development of Irish speleology.¹ Following the Frenchman's visit, this was initiated largely by British exploration groups. In the early 1950s, groups such as the *Yorkshire Ramblers Club* and the *Craven Pothole Club* made numerous trips to counties Sligo and Leitrim to document the geology and caves of the region.² By the 1970s, locally active caving clubs such as the *Irish Caving Club* and the *Irish Speleological Association* made occasional visits to the caves of Sligo and Leitrim.³ In the late 1970s, however, interest in the area began to wane in favour of counties Clare, Cork, Cavan and Fermanagh, where new caves and bigger systems could more easily be discovered. Over these three decades (1950s-1970s), however, many dozens of caves and potholes were identified, described and occasionally surveyed in Sligo and Leitrim, albeit in a disjointed and sometimes haphazard way.⁴ One site that entirely escaped attention was Tormore Cave (Figure 2.24).

It was not until the 2010s that Irish cavers returned to the Dartry Mountains with a view to categorically identify and document all known and unknown caves. In 2014, the *Shannon Group* carried out an extensive survey of caves and karst features in Largy townland, 7km to the northeast of Tormore. This was followed by multiple excursions focused on extending the region's largest cave, Teampall Shetric, to 1.1km in horizontal length, as well as documenting numerous potholes west of Largy.⁵ In 2020, the *Shannon Group* returned to document 172 caves and karst features in the area of Gorteenaguinnell townland, of which 110 had not previously been recorded.⁶ The westernmost of these caves lies just 4km east of Tormore Cave. During this time, one cave in Gorteenaguinnell, *Poll na Spideog*, was identified as being a potential Civil War era dugout. Concurrent with this exploration, the *Breifne Caving Club* was (and continues to be) active in the area around the south Truskmore massif, surveying previously undocumented or poorly documented caves 1-2km northeast of Tormore. Despite the enormous number of hours and days invested in the search for caves in the Dartry Mountains, Tormore Cave remained undiscovered by speleologists. This is no coincidence as the cave entrance was modified by the IRA in the 1920s to hide its presence in the landscape. Its existence was a closely guarded secret, part of a living landscape where the memory of parents, grandparents and family is still revered (Figure 2.24).



Figure 2.24 Standing inside Tormore Cave in Area 1 (Robert Mulraney).

¹ Martel 1897

² Anon. 1952; Anon. 1958; Lloyd 1957; Stembridge 1954

³ Barry 2021: 6

⁴ Jones *et al.* 1997: 9

⁵ Barry and Kennedy 2013; Barry and Read 2014; Barry and Kennedy 2016

⁶ Barry 2021: 3

History

Chapter 3

Sligo in 1921-1923 and the historical context of the 'Glencar hideout'

*Irishmen prepared to destroy each other, brother versus brother*¹

J.J. Jennings

Tormore Cave was first utilised by the IRA during the War of Independence (21 January 1919–11 July 1921). Though details are scant, at that time the cave provided safe shelter for men on the run. Chris Branley, who was born and raised in the safe house associated with the cave, recalled in 2012: 'During the Tan times they [the IRA] were here on numerous occasions. They had a place on the hill where they could see all the country happening. And then they would retreat here [the cave]. This was the bolthole.'² It was during the Civil War (28 June 1922–24 May 1923), however, that the potential of Tormore Cave as a dugout was fully realised. By this time substantial construction works had taken place to make the cave interior more habitable and fit for purpose. These modifications most likely took place during the Truce period (11 July 1921–27 June 1922). To better understand why Tormore Cave was important and how it functioned during the Civil War, it is necessary to explore the political and historic context of Sligo town and North Sligo in late 1921 and 1922. Our focus here is specifically on events that featured the men and women known to have been associated with the cave. For a more comprehensive account of the revolutionary period across County Sligo, the reader is directed to the work of historian Michael Farry.³

County Sligo during the Truce period (11 July 1921–27 June 1922)

County Sligo played a relatively minor part in the War of Independence. As a consequence, the IRA in the west and northwest of Ireland lacked the organisation and training of divisions elsewhere in the country. Furthermore, the principal IRA leaders in County Sligo had avoided imprisonment following the 1916 Rising, thus missing out on the 'university

of rebellion' that was the internment camp.⁴ County Sligo's relative inactivity was openly criticised by IRA GHQ.⁵ Throughout the first half of 1921, IRA Director of Intelligence, Michael Collins, repeatedly complained about the inefficiency of both the OC, Billy Pilkington, and the Intelligence Officer, Robert George Bradshaw, of the I Sligo Brigade.⁶ In March 1921, Pilkington visited GHQ where he was 'given a dressing down by Collins'.⁷ In one account, 'Billy was in Dublin ... and he had a dispute with Mick Collins. Collins had told him that he was no good and Billy didn't like that.'⁸ IRA Chief of Staff, Richard Mulcahy, suggested that if Pilkington could not raise the level of activity in the area, he should resign. This ultimatum appears to have led Pilkington to apologise for 'my faults, my shortcomings, my incapacities'.⁹ County Sligo took on a much more significant role during the Civil War, which Richard Mulcahy considered was due to a desire by leadership to atone for earlier inactivity.¹⁰ Tom Heavey of the 4th Western Division IRA in Mayo, noted 'we had not yet advanced our tactics as far as they had in Tipperary and Cork, but we were taking note of them.'¹¹

An uneasy truce came into effect on 11 July 1921, marking the end of the War of Independence. IRA men who had been on the run could return to their homes and communities, and those who had been passive Republicans could now safely voice their support.¹² The summer and autumn of 1921 experienced exceptionally fine weather during which time the IRA in County

¹ Jennings 1989: 44

² Chris Branley, video and audio recording 2012

³ Farry 1992; Farry 2000; Farry 2012; Farry 2017

⁴ Farry 2000: 15

⁵ Farry 2000: 2

⁶ Farry 2000: 14, 22

⁷ Farry 2000: 14

⁸ Tom Deignan, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133; Jack Brennan, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

⁹ Farry 2000: 14-5

¹⁰ Hopkinson 1988: 42

¹¹ McEoin 1980: 427

¹² Farry 2000: 17

IRA formation and structure

The Irish Republican Army (IRA) was established in 1919, composed of the more militant members of the Irish Volunteers organisation. Despite being primarily a guerrilla force, the IRA borrowed its command structure from that of the British Army. The chain of command began with the smallest unit, a *Company*, usually established at a townland or parish level. A number of companies, typically four or five, were grouped into a *Battalion*, which was usually defined by electoral districts or a geographical region. The 2nd Battalion, for instance, covered rural North Sligo. Battalions, in turn, were grouped into *Brigades*. The number of brigades in a division varied. Brigades sometimes united regions across county boundaries, such as the V East Mayo Brigade which included parts of counties Mayo, Sligo and Roscommon.

Many brigades had one or more Active Service Unit (ASU) or ‘flying column’. Members of an ASU were typically drawn from various battalions, men who were on the run and could not remain at a stationary address. Members of flying columns could be identified, according to Dan Breen, ‘not only by the rifle and revolver which he usually carried, and by the trench-coat, bandolier and leggings which were part of his regular outfit, but also by the razor and toothbrush which he sported after the manner of a fountain-pen clasped to his breast-pocket.’¹ As of July 1921, at the end of the War of Independence, the Sligo Brigade ASU could, in principle, muster almost 200 men. These were drawn somewhat disproportionately from across its sub-structure, with 77 men from the Sligo town Company of the 1st Battalion (Sligo Town), and 41 men from the entire 2nd Battalion (North Sligo).² During the early days of the Civil War, Billy Pilkington made use of the ASU to lead a series of raids along the newly established border with Northern Ireland, such as on 6 April 1922 when the ASU was deployed from Sligo town to Kiltyclogher, County Leitrim under his brother, Lieutenant Joseph Pilkington, where they ‘were doing very active work’.³



Figure 3.1 The geographical extent of the 1st North Sligo Brigade area, showing the location of its constituent battalions during the Civil War (James Bonsall).

¹ Breen 1924: 171

² MA/MSPC/RO/303A

³ MA/MSPC/A/29

The IRA fielded 65 brigades across Ireland. Until September 1921, there were eight active brigades in County Sligo. During the Truce period, the brigades were organised into a new top-tier *Division* group, with sixteen divisions created across Ireland. This was an attempt by General Headquarters (GHQ) to regroup the less well active and poorly organised brigades into the command of superior neighbouring brigades. The eight County Sligo brigades were re-formed under the new structure into five brigades of the 3rd Western Division (Figures 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3). Billy Pilkington, who had been Officer Commanding of the Sligo I Brigade, now became Officer Commanding of the 3rd Western Division, a role of national significance. Teachta Dála (TD) Seamus Devins took on the role of Officer Commanding of the I North Sligo Brigade, the brigade most closely associated with Tormore Cave.

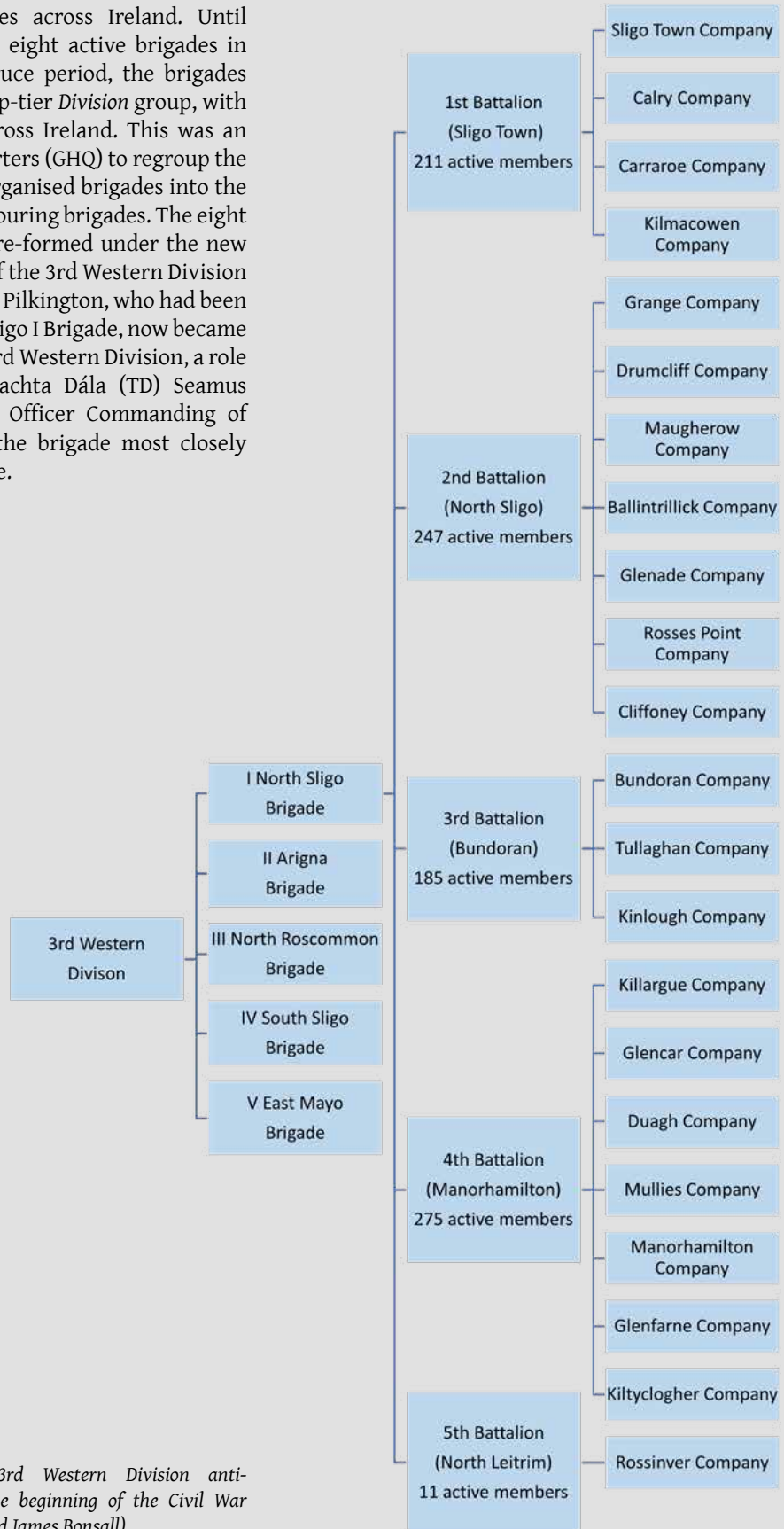


Figure 3.2 Structure of the 3rd Western Division anti-Treaty IRA on 1 July 1922, at the beginning of the Civil War (Robert Mulraney and James Bonsall).

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Figure 3.3 Top: Members of the 1st Battalion (Sligo Town), 1 North Sligo Brigade at a training camp in Castlegal townland on Cope's Mountain in 1922 (Tadhg Kilgannon Collection, Local Studies & Archive, Sligo County Library).¹³ Indicated is Jack 'Trooper' McHugh who sheltered in Tormore Cave that year, as identified by his son Danny McHugh. Sean Carroll, Jack Maguire, Jim Keaveney and Paddy Connolly also feature in this image.¹⁴ Bottom: the location of the 1920s training camp a century later (James Bonsall).

¹³ Locally, and in some publications (e.g., McGowan 2021: 119), the camp was believed to have been in Lugnagall townland, but fieldwork by J. Bonsall in 2022 led to the identification of the precise location of the camp, in Castlegal townland on the lower slopes of Cope's Mountain.

¹⁴ *The Sligo Champion Sesquicentenary 1836-1986*

Sligo attracted large numbers of new recruits.¹⁵ At least sixteen 'rebel camps' were scattered through the county, each catering for between 25 and 120 men, who took part in military training, public parading, drilling and the construction of dugouts. These camps created a sense of professionalism and camaraderie between recruits (Figure 3.3). Notwithstanding, in August 1921 an inspection of Coolaney camp, 15km southwest of Sligo town, concluded that the 'officers appeared to be very raw and lacking in training', rifles were in a very neglected condition, and the general standard of the officers was low.¹⁶ In September 1921, Ernie O'Malley, OC of the 2nd Southern Division, wrote to Liam Lynch, OC of the 1st Southern Division, asking: 'Have you sent an officer to the West? If not, I think it advisable that you do so; as they are so much out of touch that it is essential that they should be brought into touch with recent developments and thoughts.'¹⁷

In October 1921, Brian MacNeill and Tom Burke, two officers from IRA GHQ, were sent to inspect the Sligo Brigade prior to setting up a divisional structure. Burke reported that the district was 'very poorly armed and prepared for war'.¹⁸ He described Billy Pilkington as a 'promising type' and a 'good militarist', while Seamus Devins was noted as 'means business ... he might possibly need a little steadying influence'.¹⁹ The 3rd Western Division, formed in October 1921, incorporated five brigades: I North Sligo Brigade, II Arigna Brigade, III North Roscommon Brigade, IV South Sligo Brigade and V East Mayo Brigade. In his report to GHQ, Burke recommended that divisional staff be drawn 'almost exclusively' from the members of the I North Sligo Brigade, despite the potential to cause friction with neighbouring brigades.²⁰ Billy Pilkington was appointed divisional General Officer Commanding; Brian MacNeill was brought in from GHQ to take up the role of divisional Adjutant; Seamus Devins was appointed Officer Commandant of the I North Sligo Brigade; and Frank Carty became Officer Commanding of the IV South Sligo Brigade (Figure 3.4).

By the end of 1921, the IRA in County Sligo had grown in strength and was in a position of dominance and control.²¹ A training regime had been established, a divisional structure had been created, and discipline showed no signs of disintegration.²² The IRA regarded

itself as the supreme authority in the county and had no hesitation dictating to the County Council. A Sligo RIC inspector complained that Republicans were 'becoming bolder and more aggressive every day'.²³ Levies, taxes, rates and collections were imposed on the local population and business premises to raise funds for the purchase of weapons and other supplies.²⁴ Businesses unsympathetic to the IRA were sometimes looted.²⁵ The most prominent IRA leaders became honoured guests at public events, recipients of laudatory addresses, and the subject of poems published in local newspapers.²⁶ The Catholic Church, however, was generally unsupportive and sometimes even disapproving, something many Republicans were 'sore' about.²⁷

Anglo-Irish Treaty (6 December 1921)

Following intensive peace talks and negotiations, the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed in London on 6 December 1921. Under the Treaty, the 26 counties of Southern Ireland would leave the United Kingdom in December 1922 to become *Saorstát* or the 'Irish Free State', a self-governing dominion of the British Empire, while the six counties of Northern Ireland could choose to opt out of the Free State. Dáil Éireann (Irish Parliament) was summoned to accept or reject this proposal. At a meeting of Sligo Corporation on 29 December 1921, a motion was passed with 14 votes in favour of the Anglo-Irish Treaty and 5 votes against; the national vote was 64 in favour, 57 against and 3 abstentions.²⁸ The Treaty was ratified by Dáil Éireann on 7 January 1922, and subsequently by both houses of the British Parliament. As the weeks passed, divisions across the country began to split along pro-Treaty and anti-Treaty lines. The IRA in Mayo, West Galway and Sligo was predominantly anti-Treaty, with relatively small numbers becoming pro-Treaty. The former OC of the Sligo Brigade, Jeremiah Joseph (J.J.) 'Ginger' O'Connell, was 'dumbfounded' to learn that his successor, OC Billy Pilkington, and the Sligo IRA opposed the Treaty.²⁹ On 10 January 1922, divisional officers from across the country met to formulate an anti-Treaty policy of opposition. Pilkington advocated for the formation of an independent HQ.³⁰ On 18 January 1922, anti-Treaty officers met with the Minister of Defence, Richard

¹⁵ Farry 2012: 81

¹⁶ Farry 2000: 31

¹⁷ Hopkinson 1988: 158

¹⁸ Letter from T. Burke to GHQ, Collins Papers, IE/MA/CP/04/31

¹⁹ Letter from T. Burke to GHQ, Collins Papers, IE/MA/CP/04/31

²⁰ Letter from T. Burke to GHQ, Collins Papers, IE/MA/CP/04/31

²¹ Farry 2012: 87

²² Farry 2000: 35

²³ Farry 2000: 26, 33

²⁴ Farry 2012: 86

²⁵ Farry 2000: 33

²⁶ Farry 2012: 81

²⁷ Farry 2000: 33-4; Plunkett Doherty pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 08.02.2022

²⁸ Farry 2000: 39

²⁹ Farry 2000: 38

³⁰ Farry 2000: 38

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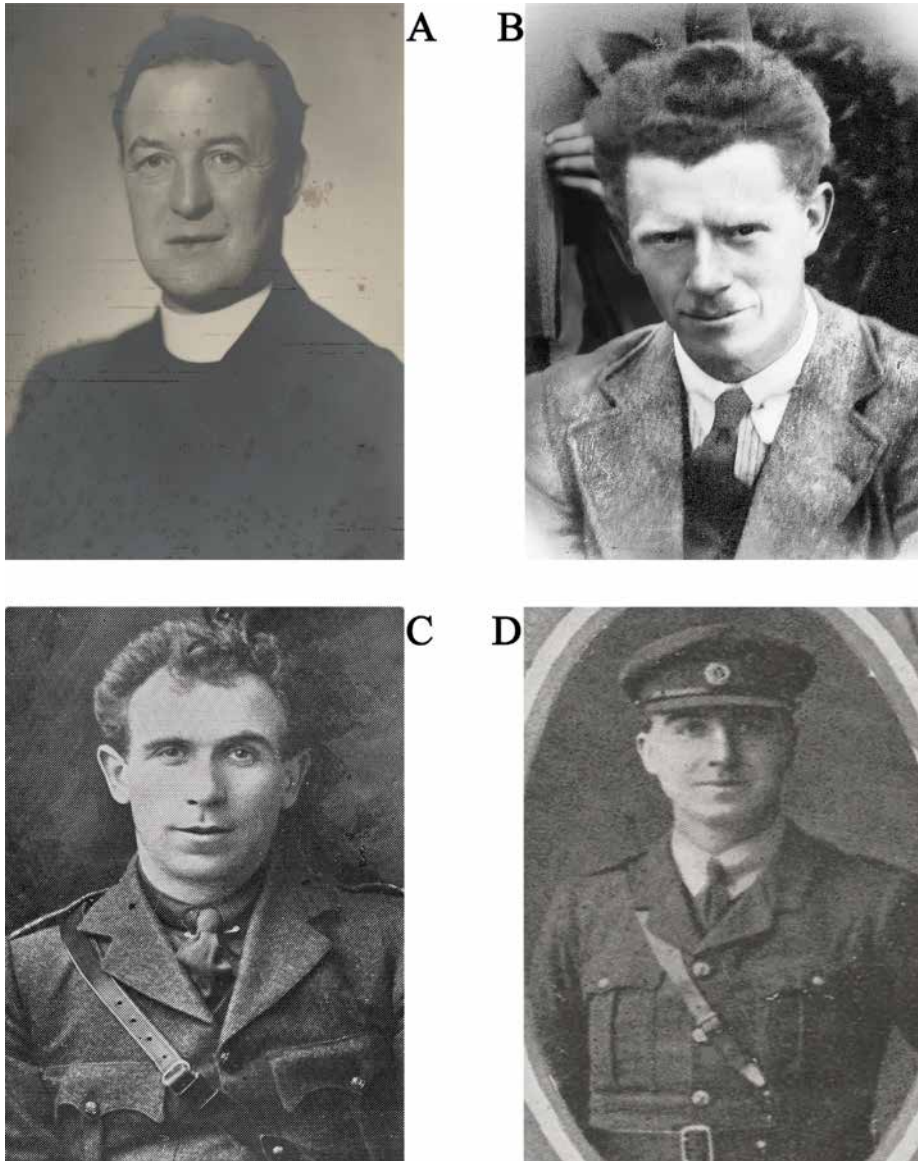


Figure 3.4 Senior Republican figures in County Sligo in 1922: a. Divisional Officer Commanding Billy Pilkington (Valerie Harrington); b. Divisional Adjutant Brian MacNeill (UCD School of History and Archives, Europe - CC BY-NC-SA); c. Officer Commanding of the I North Sligo Brigade Seamus Devins (Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland); d. Officer Commanding of the IV South Sligo Brigade Frank Carty (Kilgannon 1926). Pilkington hid in Tormore Cave during the War of Independence and Civil War. MacNeill and Devins were likely attempting to reach the cave when they were shot dead by the National Army on Slievemore Mountain on 20 September 1922. Carty was highly active in South Sligo and remained on the run at the end of the Civil War.

Mulcahy, at Banba Hall in Dublin. Pilkington, along with Ernie O'Malley (2nd Southern Division) and Seamus Donovan (IRA Director of Chemicals), stated their desire for a separation from GHQ.³¹

³¹ O'Malley 1978: 52-3

Dublin Castle was handed over to Michael Collins and a delegation of Provisional Government ministers on 16 January 1922. British military forces, Auxiliaries and the RIC subsequently withdrew from buildings they had previously occupied. The *Sligo Independent* and

West of Ireland Telegraph described the departure of the military from Sligo town as a 'big loss'.³² The Military Barracks to the north of Sligo town was taken over by the anti-Treaty IRA on 1 and 2 February 1922. The No. 1 Barracks on Albert Line (now Pearse Road) (Figure 3.5) and the No. 2 Barracks on Wine Street (Figure 3.6) were vacated by the RIC on 9 March and thereafter occupied by Republicans. The short period in which they were occupied ensured Republican control over Sligo town. However, the IRA were forced to evacuate on 1 and 2 July 1922 when the National Army descended on Sligo town. By 31 July 1921, only eight RIC barracks were functioning in County Sligo (before the outbreak of the War of Independence there had been 35 in the county).³³

In the months following the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, County Sligo experienced a period of chaos, lawlessness and instability, similar to the rest of the country. No police force was in operation and criminality increased significantly. Raids on houses, mail cars and businesses were frequent, and it was often not possible to distinguish between actions carried

out by the IRA to raise funds versus the activities of common criminals.³⁴ Billy Pilkington and Brian MacNeill attended the IRA Army Conventions held in the Mansion House, Dublin during March and April 1922. At these crucial meetings (the first IRA Army Conventions to take place since 1917), anti-Treaty members 'reaffirmed the IRA's loyalty to the Republic and repudiated their fealty to Dáil Éireann and the Provisional Government.'³⁵ It followed that the IRA would revert to its status as a volunteer army, relegate its loyalty to the Dáil government, and reorganise under leadership of an elected IRA Executive Council. The IRA was now split into two distinct organisations: the pro-Treaty Free State National Army under instruction from the Provisional Government, and the anti-Treaty IRA under the Executive Council, led by Chief of Staff Liam Lynch.³⁶

One of the men present at the March Convention was Martin Fallon, OC of the III North Roscommon Brigade. In early April 1922, Billy Pilkington and Brian MacNeill visited Boyle Barracks which, since British withdrawal, had functioned as the III North Roscommon Brigade



Figure 3.5 The anti-Treaty IRA took possession of the No. 1 Barracks on Pearse Road in Sligo town, now Sligo Garda Station, after it had been evacuated by the RIC during the Truce period (Marion Dowd).

³² Farry 2012: 91

³³ Herlihy 2021: 431

³⁴ Farry 2012: 92

³⁵ O'Donoghue 1954: 209; Borgonovo 2019

³⁶ The Army Conventions were re-initiated in 1922, for the first time since 1917, in response to acceptance of the Treaty. The purpose of the numerous Conventions was to reassert the allegiance of Volunteers to an Army Executive loyal to the Republic. The Executive would now be able to act independently of the Provisional Government, which had failed to achieve a 'Republic'.

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Figure 3.6 The No. 2 Barracks on Wine Street, now Burke's Pharmacy and Rogers & Lyons shoe shop; the latter is now closed down (Marion Dowd).

HQ and the divisional HQ of the 3rd Western Division. Fallon, who had earlier met with Seán MacEoin, 'sold out his HQ [to the Free State], and they made prisoners of Billy and McNeill [sic]; and they placed guard on the stairs.'³⁷ Pilkington and MacNeill were informed that the barracks would be taken over by the Free State. Nine members of the IRA divisional staff were held captive by 40 former comrades of the III North Roscommon Brigade who, armed with rifles with bayonets fixed, were uncertain of where their loyalties lay. Pilkington, MacNeill and their men eventually decided to rush the soldiers and, overpowering them in a scuffle, forced their surrender. Shots were fired at Pilkington, but the divisional command managed to telephone Tom Scanlon in Sligo town, who promptly brought the flying column to Boyle, along with reinforcements from the divisional area. Despite a serious case of 'mutiny', as Brian MacNeill later described it, no one was punished. Scanlon, recalling the story 30 years later, referred to Martin Fallon as a 'skunk'.³⁸ Fallon committed to the Free State side, while the III North Roscommon Brigade split into pro-Treaty and anti-Treaty factions.

Despite a widening schism between the IRA and the Provisional Government, a plan was proposed at national level for the National Army to exchange their British-supplied weapons for German arms owned by the IRA. The reasoning was that if the National Army decided to attack British forces in the six northern counties in pursuit of an all-island Republic, the IRA weapons could not be traced back to the National Army. Some believed this to be an elaborate ruse orchestrated by Michael Collins, Commander-in-Chief of the National Army, to decommission the IRA.³⁹ In County Sligo, 'shortly after ratification of the Treaty' a consignment of 'hundreds' of rifles, a number of machine guns and ammunition were brought to Cloonamahan, 13km south of Sligo town, by Richard Walsh, Inspection Officer with the Mayo IRA.⁴⁰ Walsh and his men took occupation of Cloonamahan House for temporary storage of the arms (Figure 3.7). Cloonamahan, by then a sanatorium, had been an IRA divisional training camp during the War of Independence.⁴¹ Billy Pilkington, Brian MacNeill and

³⁷ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, Pb17/137

³⁸ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, Pb17/133; *Roscommon Herald*, 08.04.1922

³⁹ Bonsall *et al.* 2022: 121

⁴⁰ Walsh claimed 800 rifles, Tom Scanlon claimed 100 or 200 rifles; BMH.WS0400, Richard Walsh

⁴¹ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

Seamus Devins provided protection and support to Walsh. After eight or nine days, a senior meeting of IRA officers (including Pilkington) took place in Sligo town. The officers returned to Cloonamahane with news that plans for the proposed exchange had been abandoned. The arms were returned by Walsh to the Military Barracks in Ballinrobe, County Mayo.⁴²

Despite interferences from the fledgling Free State, little time was wasted implementing a campaign on the border with Northern Ireland. While almost all of the IRA commanding officers in County Sligo remained on the Republican side, the greater divisional area saw many men switch allegiances to the Free State, especially in regions that were located on the fringes of the 3rd Western Division area. In the III North Roscommon Brigade, OC Martin Fallon and Lieutenant Jim Hunt went pro-Free State, while in South Sligo the Ballymote Battalion OC, 1916 veteran Alec McCabe, similarly turned Free State.

The 5th Battalion of the I North Sligo Brigade was based in a rural area of North Leitrim that ran across the border into Garrison, County Fermanagh and was composed of numerous companies. On the formation of the Northern Irish border it saw a mass exodus to the Free State side, with the result that only six men remained in the IRA's 5th Battalion under OC William Meehan.⁴³ With the battalion decimated, a flying column was mobilised for the border and Meehan, along with IRA men from the border town of Kiltyclogher, were sent to work there, occasionally reinforced by Lieutenant Joseph Pilkington, Captain Harry Benson and other senior figures from Sligo.⁴⁴

Little is known about this unit, but it was well-armed and could muster at least 30 armed men with relative ease. The unit had in their possession a state-of-the-art Thompson machine gun that had become available to the IRA immediately prior to the Truce period. This light but high-powered machine gun had been employed in attacks in Dublin. Sligo Republicans were amongst those who received training in its use at the Glenasmole training camp in the Dublin Mountains, held within weeks of the Truce being declared.⁴⁵ Harry Benson and Peadar Glynn were placed in charge of the machine gun. A sustained campaign of arson on border 'blockhouse' look-outs and custom posts got underway.

The unit began to intensify their border campaign, focusing attacks on the B-Specials. Formed in October 1920, the B-Specials (or Ulster Special Constabulary) were much hated by Republicans. Tom Scanlon noted how the B-Specials regularly infringed across the Free State border, making them particularly acute targets in an attempt to continue the war on the Crown forces: 'The Specials used to come across [the border] and throw their weight around, so we sent Mausers to our A.S.U. on the border.'⁴⁶ In April 1922, the IRA mounted a spectacular but brutal attack when they crossed the border, approached Garrison village and opened fire with the Thompson machine gun on seven B-Specials. Glencar Company Captain James McCann, present at the ambush, said 'We had an ambush for them [B-Specials]. We could not stick the way they used to carry on'.⁴⁷ One of the men injured, Constable Plumm, was abducted and removed from the scene. Shortly afterwards, the Kiltyclogher IRA reported that his body had been dumped at the border. The media noted that Plumm's remains had been 'savaged' with 'injuries too horrible to be referred to'.⁴⁸

The Griffith rally, April 1922

The IRA's uncontested control in Sligo town began to diminish from Easter Sunday, 16 April 1922, when a 'monster pro-Treaty meeting' addressed by the President of Dáil Éireann, Arthur Griffiths, was held in the town centre as part of the General Election campaign.⁴⁹ This followed from a similar meeting held by Michael Collins in Castlebar, County Mayo, which had received a 'stormy reception'.⁵⁰ On hearing of the proposed rally in support of the Treaty and the new Provisional Government, Billy Pilkington had issued a statement on 7 April banning all public meetings and demonstrations of a political nature within his divisional area 'in the best interests of the citizens' because, he believed, these would create conditions bordering on civil strife. Pilkington wrote, 'it is the duty of every citizen to endeavour by every means possible to preserve the peace of the country'.⁵¹ Griffith defied the order in the name of 'free speech'.⁵²

On the Thursday before the meeting, Seán MacEoin led a group of Free State army troops from Athlone to Sligo town, taking possession of the unguarded Sligo Gaol. On the day of the meeting, J.J. 'Ginger'

⁴² BMH.WS0400, Richard Walsh

⁴³ MSP34REF18722, William Meehan

⁴⁴ MA/MSPC/A/29

⁴⁵ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133; Francis Carty, BMH.WS1040 (as distinct from Frank Carty); BMH.WS0458, Sean Corr; Scuffil 2022

⁴⁶ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

⁴⁷ MSP34REF18169, James McCann

⁴⁸ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133; *Weekly Telegraph*, 15.04.1922

⁴⁹ Farry 2000: 58-9

⁵⁰ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 27.04.1922

⁵¹ *Irish Independent*, 08.04.1922

⁵² Kilgannon 1926: 77

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT

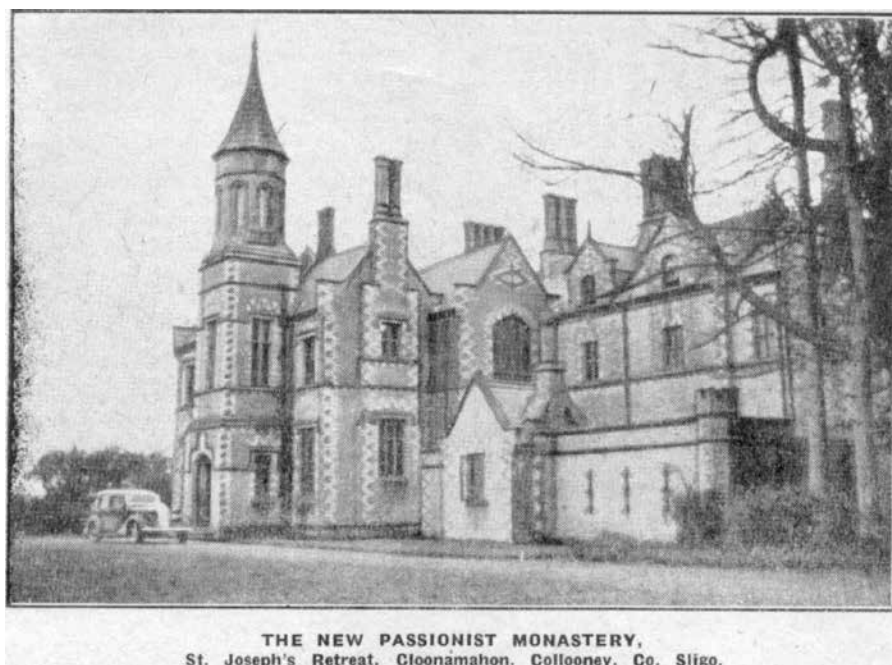


Figure 3.7 Cloonamahon House in 1944, before it was demolished to make way for a monastery and church (Passionist Congregation, St Patrick's Province). The house, built in 1856, served as an IRA training camp during the Truce period and was also occupied during the Civil War.

O'Connell joined MacEoin, along with Alec McCabe and Colonel Commander Tony Lawlor, with further reinforcements.⁵³ Hundreds of IRA men flooded the town, 'armed with shotguns, rifles and revolvers.'⁵⁴ The Republicans took over numerous buildings including Sligo Courthouse and Sligo Town Hall; the latter was the planned meeting place for Griffith's rally (Figures 3.8 and 3.9). Sligo town was reported to be 'almost in a stage of siege' with tensions running high.⁵⁵ First Aid stations had been set up by Cumann na mBan at various locations in the town in anticipation of an outbreak of violence.⁵⁶ Griffith arrived at the meeting with MacEoin in an armoured car named the *Ballinalee*, which set-up and trained its gun on the Post Office, which was occupied by Republicans. Griffith was well protected

and gave his speech from the back of a Crossley Tender lorry, manned by Lawlor.⁵⁷ Skirmishes broke out when National Army troops tried to enter Ramsey's Hotel. Fighting also took place at the Imperial Hotel on Bridge Street (Figure 3.10). Injuries were sustained on both sides and a number of National Army soldiers were captured.⁵⁸

With tension on both sides of the political divide rising, an escalation of violence appeared imminent. Tom Deignan claimed that the National Army 'brought over barrels of porter into the gaol and they got them [the prisoners] drunk.' They released the drunken prisoners and armed them with rifles, likely in an attempt to provoke a response. Such tactics seemed to work, with Deignan further noting that OC 'Jim [Seamus] Devins was out for fighting'.⁵⁹ However, at the last moment violence was avoided when Billy Pilkington, under instruction from IRA Chief of Staff Liam Lynch, ordered his troops to stand down in the interests of preventing bloodshed. Deignan continued: 'When they knew there was not going to be a fight they [the National Army] careered [around] with armoured cars; but the discipline of the lads held that day and only

⁵³ These four senior National Army figures would soon play a central role in Sligo's Civil War. O'Connell, OC of the Sligo Brigade prior to Billy Pilkington, was kidnapped in Dublin in June, an event which the Free State capitalised on to justify the attack on the Four Courts, prompting the beginning of the Civil War. Seán MacEoin oversaw the successful assault on the 3rd Western Division in September 1922, bringing troops to Sligo via Boyle. Tony Lawlor supported the assault by taking troops from Mayo to Sligo, culminating in the killing of Sligo's Noble Six on the mountains. McCabe, former OC of the Ballymote Battalion IRA, was stationed on the SS *Tartar* in Sligo Bay during that attack.

⁵⁴ Tom Deignan, UCDA O'MN, Pb17/133

⁵⁵ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 27.04.1922

⁵⁶ MSP34REF54764, Bea Kilgannon

⁵⁷ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 27.04.1922

⁵⁸ Tom Deignan, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133; *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 27.04.1922

⁵⁹ Tom Deignan, UCDA O'MN, Pb17/133

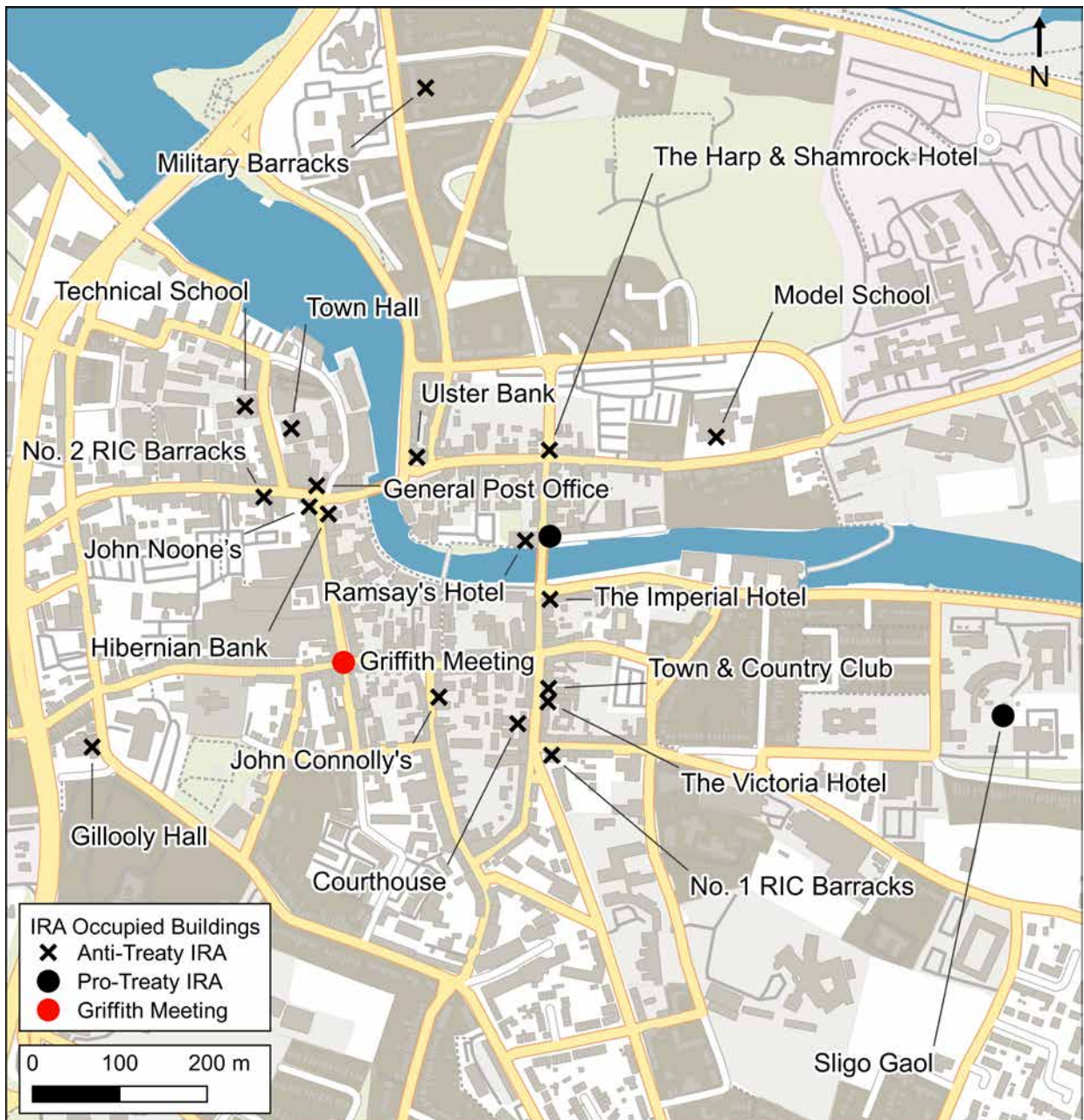


Figure 3.8 Positions taken by the anti-Treaty IRA and pro-Treaty IRA at the Arthur Griffith rally in Sligo town on 16 April 1922 (after Bonsall et al. 2022: 59).

under protest was it maintained.⁶⁰ The animosity and tensions that had already existed between Pilkington and Frank Carty, both senior anti-Treaty IRA leaders but with very different leadership styles, intensified after the Griffith rally.⁶¹ Carty called Pilkington's decision to stand down a 'flop', viewing it as an anti-

Treaty IRA 'tragedy' that gave pro-Treaty forces a foothold in Sligo town and county.⁶² The National Army had succeeded in occupying more posts in the town. By May, 'not a night has passed but rifle and revolver shots have been heard in Sligo [town] much to the terror of the citizens.'⁶³

⁶⁰ Tom Deignan, UCDA O'MN, Pb17/133

⁶¹ Hopkinson 1988: 76, 158

⁶² Farry 2000: 62; Farry 2012: 95

⁶³ Farry 2000: 62

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT



Figure 3.9 Arthur Griffith arrives in Sligo for the rally of 16 April 1922 (Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland).



Figure 3.10 The Imperial Hotel, on left, as it appeared prior to the Griffith rally (Photographed by Tadhg Kilgannon, courtesy of Adrian O'Neill).

Billy Pilkington, while not keen to engage with Irish forces, continued to maintain pressure on the border with Northern Ireland and, despite the arms exchange failure, took part in the joint Free State and IRA border attack in May and June 1922. Very little is recorded about his involvement, but he was mentioned briefly by Cork Republican Bill O'Sullivan. O'Sullivan noted the presence of Pilkington's troops, who briefly occupied Pettigo immediately prior to its shelling by British forces.⁶⁴ Things were developing rapidly in the south of the country, however, and the 'idealism' of an anti-Imperial war was soon to be replaced by the ever-burgeoning Civil War.

Sligo's Civil War (28 June 1922–24 May 1923)

The Civil War began on 28 June 1922 with the Provisional Government's attack on the Four Courts in Dublin, which was garrisoned by anti-Treaty forces. Fighting spread throughout the country. Initially, the course of the Civil War was determined by the occupation of abandoned British barracks. To establish its authority, the Provisional Government moved to expunge the IRA from barracks they were occupying. In turn, the IRA were concerned with taking over pro-Treaty controlled barracks in anti-Treaty areas.⁶⁵ On the eve of the Civil War, the anti-Treaty IRA had established a strong position in Sligo town and had taken over almost all the buildings that had been vacated by the British military and RIC. Anticipating an escalation of conflict, the 3rd Western Division evacuated its divisional documentation from their Truce period HQ in Boyle Barracks and relocated to divisional Assistant Adjutant Jack Brennan's house at Cloonacool in South Sligo (approximately 30km by road southwest of Sligo town). Divisional Adjutant Brian MacNeill set up a divisional HQ in a secret room in the Brennan home and regularly stayed there.⁶⁶

The brigades of the 3rd Western Division had greatly increased in strength and armaments since the War of Independence. According to divisional Quartermaster Charles Gildea, 'at the commencement of the Civil War everything was in good order with plenty of guns and plenty of ammunition, and we were anxious to see how it would work out.'⁶⁷ The division, however, had failed to develop clear lines of command or become a cohesive military unit. Internal disagreements were rife and there was no common strategy for dealing with the outbreak of hostilities. Conflict and tensions

within the County Sligo leadership became apparent in the immediate aftermath of the Four Courts attack and intensified in late Summer 1922. Initially, the divisional command of OC Billy Pilkington and Divisional Adjutant Brian MacNeill were reluctant to engage with National Army forces, preferring to focus on a campaign of attacks on the border with Northern Ireland. At the IRA Convention on 18 June 1922, the divisional command had sided with Tom Barry's motion to reignite the war with Britain by invading Northern Ireland. When the motion was defeated and the Four Courts attacked ten days later, some Republicans were 'shocked that Billy Pilkington wanted to go north to attack'.⁶⁸

On 1 July the IRA were forced to withdraw from Sligo's No. 1 RIC Barracks, which they had occupied since March. They burned the building (Figures 3.5 and 3.11) before joining their comrades in the Military Barracks, which had been appropriated in February. However, the following morning, 2 July, with the arrival of National Army troops, Republicans evacuated and burned the Military Barracks. Tom Scanlon, OC of the 1st Battalion (Sligo Town), later commented: 'We wouldn't attack the Free State. Our orders were to evacuate the town and to burn the barracks.'⁶⁹ This was a common tactic throughout the country; when a major confrontation appeared imminent, the IRA evacuated and burnt their garrisoned buildings.⁷⁰ National Army Commandant General Seán MacEoin, passing through Sligo on return from his honeymoon in Donegal, had to help put out the fire.⁷¹

That same day, Pilkington and MacNeill attended a divisional meeting in Sligo to discuss the Republican response to the attack on the Four Courts. They favoured sending all available men and arms to attack the border with Northern Ireland and the B-Specials. In contrast, Frank Carty, OC of the IV South Sligo Brigade, viewed the attack on the Four Courts as an initiation of war on the IRA and pushed for an immediate implementation of hostilities.⁷² Carty ignored Pilkington's divisional command and combined forces with the I West Mayo Brigade and II North Mayo Brigade of the 4th Western Division and the V East Mayo Brigade of the 3rd Western Division to form a temporary working group. In early July 1922, they initiated direct assaults on National Army garrisons at Collooney, Ballysadare, Gurteen and Markree Castle.⁷³ Carty later remarked, 'Divisional OC

⁶⁴ Billy O'Sullivan in Bielenberg *et al.* 2015: 63-4

⁶⁵ Hopkinson 1988: 142

⁶⁶ MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan

⁶⁷ MSP34REF30117, Charles Gildea

⁶⁸ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

⁶⁹ Hopkinson 1988: 159

⁷⁰ Hopkinson 1988: 129

⁷¹ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 08.07.1922

⁷² MSP34REF5687, Frank Carty; Farry 2000

⁷³ MSP34REF5687, Frank Carty; Farry 2000

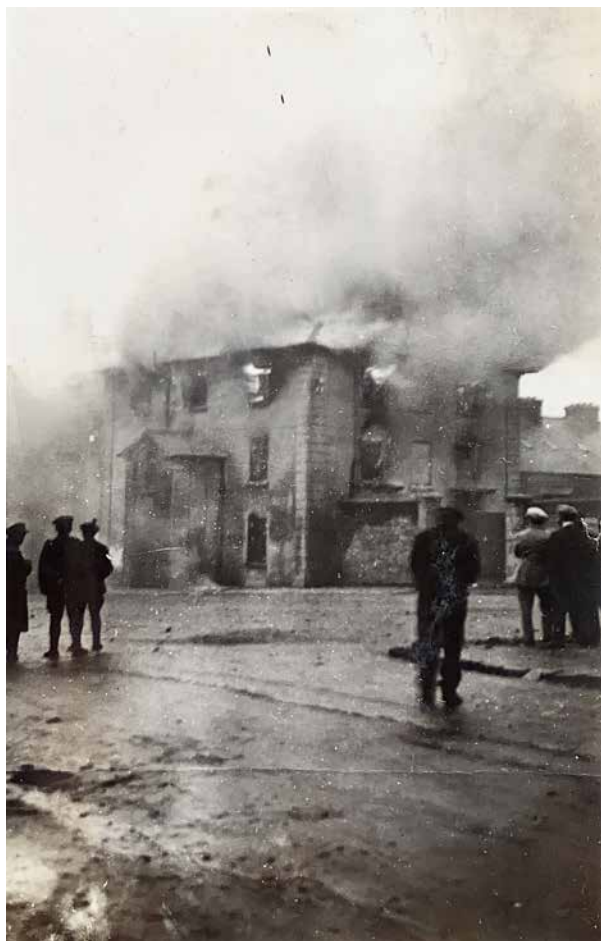


Figure 3.11 Sligo No. 1 Barracks (now Sligo Garda Station), set alight by the IRA on 1 July 1922 (Photographed by Tadhg Kilgannon, courtesy of Pádraig Kilgannon).

Pilkington was then very averse to the shedding of blood.⁷⁴ Pilkington and MacNeill soon realised that it would be impossible to avoid conflict with Irish troops and were quickly drawn into a defensive position following Carty's successes in South Sligo.

From this point onwards, the Sligo IRA reverted to guerrilla warfare. In a report dated 2 July, Brian MacNeill wrote: 'the tactics in this area will have to be altered to the guerrilla form' due to the expense of ammunition, the strength of the enemy post, and the increased effectiveness of ambushing the army when passing between posts.⁷⁵ North Sligo, reluctant to engage with National Army troops, would begin to carry out a number of small attacks, mainly centred on attempting to reclaim National Army barracks and garrisons in Sligo town and rural North Sligo.

⁷⁴ MSP34REF5687, Frank Carty

⁷⁵ Farry 2000: 77

The relative geographical isolation of County Sligo meant that it was not a government priority, and it took months for the National Army to confront Republican activity there.⁷⁶ As 1922 progressed, however, the National Army presence in Sligo town grew. After being forced out of Sligo town on 2 July 1922, the IRA relocated to Rahelly House, 13km to the northwest.⁷⁷ Rahelly was a 'handsome three-storey house ... in the Elizabethan style ... entered by a gateway with a lofty tower'. It had been built in 1844 on the Lissadell estate owned by the Gore-Booth family (Figure 3.12). The house had been occupied by James Alexander Cooper, land-agent of the Gore-Booths, from 1907 or 1908 until he departed to fight in the First World War.⁷⁸ During the Truce period, the RIC reported that on 29 August 1921, the IRA forced entry into Rahelly House after being refused the keys by Sir Josslyn Gore-Booth. They brought in bedding, 20 bed 'ticks' (large bags stuffed to make mattresses) and blankets that had been commandeered from St Columba's Lunatic Asylum (now the Clayton Hotel) on the northern limits of Sligo town.⁷⁹ Now, over ten months later and in the midst of the Civil War, Rahelly House became the primary operational base of the 3rd Western Division IRA under Billy Pilkington, and was associated primarily with the I North Sligo Brigade. Beatrice Keaveney reported that the IRA occupied Rahelly for about twelve months, presumably from the Truce period takeover in August 1921 until the evacuation of 18 September 1922.⁸⁰ In applications for Military Pensions, she and numerous members of Cumann na mBan record conveying dispatches, reporting to IRA leaders, and bringing food, arms and ammunition to Rahelly House.

Many volunteers were also stationed in tent camps on the mountains. Volunteer Andy Doocey recalled in 1986 that he had never stayed at Rahelly House but was based on the mountains at Castlegal (presumably the southern slopes of Cope's Mountain) with a group of about 20 men (Figure 3.3). They used to get meat from Rahelly House, 'scrounge around' for food, and exploited the plentiful supply of rabbits in the area.⁸¹ Though Rahelly House functioned as the IRA operational base, their secret divisional HQ continued to operate from Cloonacool.⁸²

⁷⁶ Farry 2012: 98

⁷⁷ Farry 2012: 99

⁷⁸ James 2004: 28; McTernan 2009: 421

⁷⁹ McGowan 1993: 128

⁸⁰ MSP34REF49786, Beatrice McMurray (née Keaveney)

⁸¹ Andy Doocey, audio recording 1986

⁸² MSP34REF38562, Martin Brennan



Figure 3.12 Rahelly House in 1915 (Bill Barber) and in 2004 (National Inventory of Architectural Heritage), operational base of the 3rd Western Division IRA from 2 July until 18 September 1922.

The Rockwood ambush and Tobernalt ambush, 13 July 1922

National Army numbers in Sligo town were reinforced on 5 July and received an additional boost with the arrival of the *Ballinalee* armoured car. One of just thirteen armour-plated Rolls-Royce cars left to the Free State by British forces, the *Ballinalee* featured a mounted machine gun turret.⁸³ Such vehicles were rare and invaluable to the new Free State and its deployment in Sligo was indicative of the difficulties the army faced in securing the region. Despite reinforcements, National Army troops continued to complain of their weak position in Sligo and the IRA occasionally re-took posts in the town.⁸⁴

On 13 July, the *Ballinalee* and a convoy of three or four lorries carrying about 35 National Army soldiers left Markree Castle at 6am for Sligo town. Taking a circuitous route to avoid observation, the convoy ran directly into a prepared ambush site in Correagh townland near Rockwood, a wooded area on the shores of Lough Gill.⁸⁵ This location was within the IV South Sligo Brigade area, but immediately adjacent to the I North Sligo Brigade area (Figure 3.13). Approximately 20 IRA men from the IV South Sligo Brigade, led by Frank Carty, were involved in the operation.⁸⁶ Sidney Gallagher, one of the soldiers in the National Army convoy, provided a first-hand account of the ambush, which lasted about an hour and a half.⁸⁷ Gallagher was travelling with troops in a Crossley Tender when they came under fire. Many of the troops dismounted and took cover in deep ditches on both sides of the road,⁸⁸ while Carty's men were at higher positions. The armoured car most likely offered the men in the ditches a good deal of cover.⁸⁹ After an hour of intense fighting, Commandant Patrick (Paddy) Callaghan (aged 40) and Sergeant John Farrell (aged 24), who had been in the lorry with Gallagher, were both dead. Commandant Seán Adair (aged 20) (Figure 3.14) and Private John (Jack) Sweeney (aged

17) were in the *Ballinalee* when it was attacked.⁹⁰ Adair was killed on the spot and Sweeney, also shot, would die two days later in Sligo County Infirmary (Figure 3.15). The driver of the *Ballinalee* was likely suffering an injury; he drove off towards Sligo, with a lorry of troops following. The remaining National Army soldiers continued to fight from the ditches and, according to Carty, put up a 'determined resistance' but, after another half an hour, with four deaths and numerous injuries, they surrendered. The bodies of those who died at the ambush site were apparently brought across Lough Gill by boat.⁹¹

Despite the casualties, the *Ballinalee* and an army lorry escaped towards Sligo town. After 2.5km, crossing into the I North Sligo Brigade region, the armoured car, possibly containing only its driver, was surrounded by a unit under Billy Pilkington. The unit had set up camp at, or near, Tobernalt holy well in Aghamore Near townland.⁹² A section of the road at Aghamore was blocked with stones preventing the armoured car from progressing. The two vehicles came under fire from the I North Sligo Brigade. Within 45 to 60 minutes, the occupants were forced to surrender and the *Ballinalee* was captured with no fatalities (Figure 3.16).⁹³ Over 30 National Army prisoners were brought to Castlebar that night, before being sent for imprisonment in Clew Bay, County Mayo.⁹⁴

There is uncertainty as to whether the double ambush was planned or was entirely fortuitous. Years later, IRA volunteer Andy Doocey recalled 'both happened to take place the same day, but we [Pilkington's unit] were not connected with it' [Carty's ambush].⁹⁵ However, in his witness statement years later, Frank Carty refers to spending the previous afternoon with Pilkington in Collooney. Carty stated that Pilkington told him not to take too many men for the ambush as that would risk leaving the Collooney garrison under-defended. It is quite plausible that a joint ambush was planned,

⁸³ Martin 2002

⁸⁴ Hopkinson 1988: 159

⁸⁵ The first attack, led by Frank Carty, took place in Correagh townland on the road skirting the side of a wood in Slishwood townland. This wood, now known simply as 'Slishwood', was formerly also known as 'Rock Wood', as annotated on the 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey mapping. The second attack, led by Billy Pilkington, took place close to Tobernalt holy well in Aghamore Near townland. The term 'Rockwood ambush' has come to refer to both ambushes, which have been conflated into a single event at a single location rather than two separate events.

⁸⁶ MSP34REF5687, Frank Carty; Andy Doocey, audio recording 1986

⁸⁷ McGowan 2021: 202-3

⁸⁸ A deep drainage ditch on the south side of the road is still visible today.

⁸⁹ MSP34REF5687, Frank Carty

⁹⁰ Several reports have listed his age at death as 15 or 16. John Sweeney's date of birth was 16 May 1905. We are grateful to Kieran Gillen for clarifying this point.

⁹¹ Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986

⁹² Declan Foley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 13.10.2022

⁹³ MSP34REF18708, Andrew Doocey; Andy Doocey, audio recording 1986; *The Fenian War*, 24.07.1922; Coyle 2008: 146-7; Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1976

⁹⁴ MSP34REF30117, Charles Gildea; W2D261, George Dowd. In George Dowd's pension claim, his father, Martin, stated his son was held on an island in Clew Bay. No such 'prison-island' is known to the authors, but it is possible that he mistook the location for the Rosmoney Coast Guard Station on Rosmoney Peninsula in Clew Bay. Colonel Joe Ring of the National Army landed on the peninsula in September 1922 and oversaw the release of approximately 100 prisoners held by the IRA.

⁹⁵ MSP34REF18708, Andrew Doocey

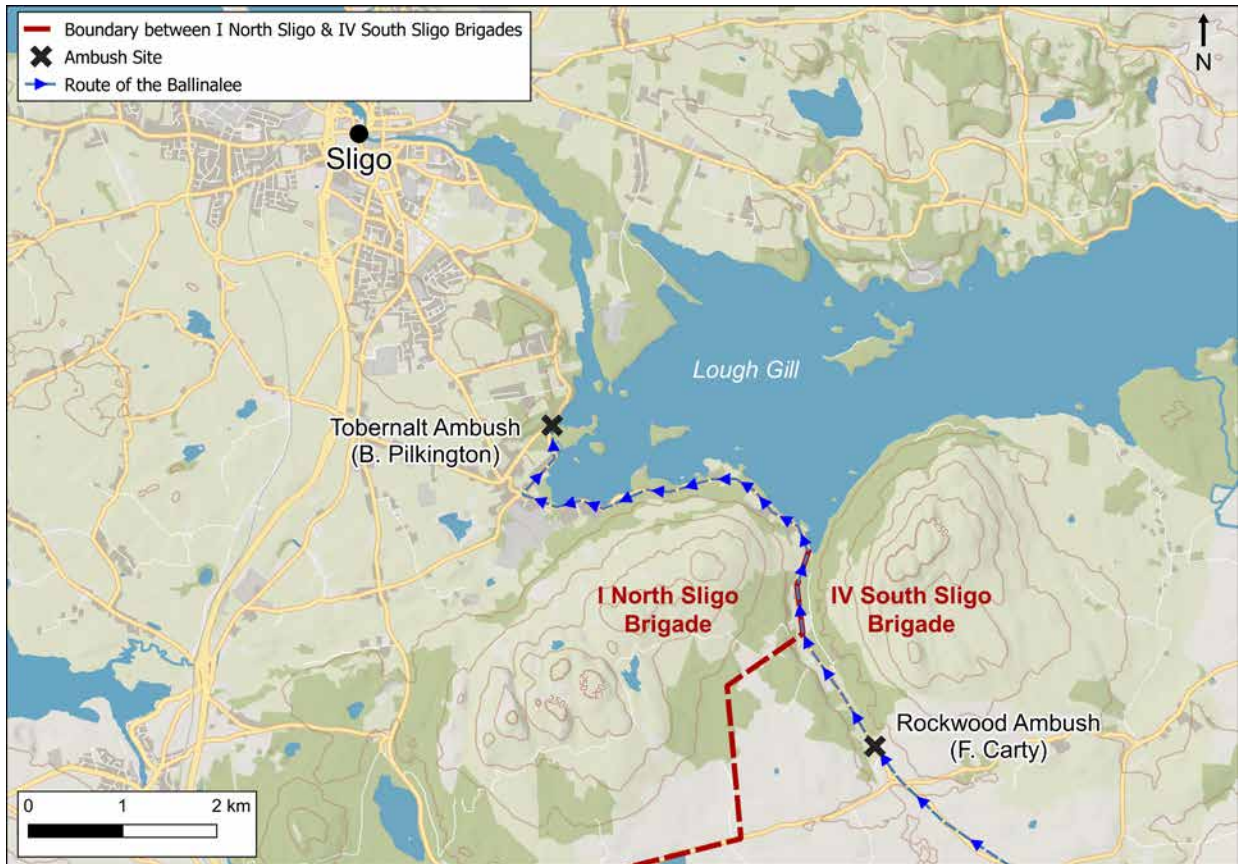


Figure 3.13 Map showing main events related to the Rockwood ambush and Tobernalt ambush (James Bonsall).

with Pilkington setting up the outpost at Tobernalt. At a distance of 10km from Collooney, and on the route back to Sligo, it offered an ideal plan to ensure the entrapment of the much sought-after armoured car.

In local memory, OC Billy Pilkington travelled across Lough Gill by boat either before or after the ambush.⁹⁶ Another anecdote relates to captured National Army soldier Sidney Gallagher. Gallagher, nicknamed 'Sergeant Side Looks' by the IRA, was well known in Sligo town.⁹⁷ IRA Volunteer Tom Gilmartin, a tailor from Church Hill, wanted to shoot him after he had been captured, but Billy Pilkington would not give the order stating: 'He's one of our own. Set him free.' Sidney fled towards Doorly Park. Months after the cessation of the war, Sidney Gallagher apparently took a rifle and went to St Michael's Marist Friary on Church Hill opposite Tom Gilmartin's house, where he laid in wait to exact revenge. A local priest intervened and convinced Gallagher to abandon his mission.⁹⁸

While representing an enormous victory for Sligo Republicans, and an equally embarrassing loss for the National Army, Commandant Seán Adair's death must surely have been poignant. While many National Army troops posted to Sligo were often from outside the region, Seán Adair, despite being from Lisburn, County Antrim, was well known to the Sligo men. Just one year earlier, on 4 May 1921, Adair was Quartermaster of the Scottish Brigade IRA. He was involved in the attempted rescue of Carty from a prison van, as the latter was conveyed to Duke Street Prison in Glasgow.⁹⁹ During the failed rescue attempt, a police inspector was killed and Adair was arrested. He was charged with a capital offence, but the prosecution failed. After imprisonment, Adair returned to Ireland and, upon joining the National Army, was posted to Sligo, in a territory that was beginning to increase the aggression of its attacks.¹⁰⁰

Seamus Devins, OC of the I North Sligo Brigade, triumphantly stormed into Sligo town the following

⁹⁶ Hugh Gallagher pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 24.03.2023

⁹⁷ Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986

⁹⁸ Declan Foley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 13.10.2022 and 02.11.2022

⁹⁹ *Glasgow Herald*, 05.08.1922

¹⁰⁰ W2D1, Sean Adair; William Pilkington, Dublin Castle files, WO 35/207/162



Figure 3.14 National Army Commandant Seán Adair (O'Daire/Adare) was killed during the IRA ambush led by Frank Carty at Rockwood on 13 July 1922 (Local Studies & Archive, Sligo County Library). A year earlier, on 4 May 1921, Adair was involved in the attempted rescue of Carty from a prison van as he was being conveyed to Duke Street Prison in Glasgow, Scotland.

day, 14 July, in the armoured car.¹⁰¹ In one account, the *Ballinalee* was driven by Christy McLynn accompanied by the gunner, Mattie Sherlock. It generated great commotion. Eyewitness Kathleen Carroll, then 12 or 13 years old, and her friend, Lizzie Keaveney, saw the armoured car coming down Teeling Street. There were 'sparks coming out' of it, which frightened the girls as they believed shots were being fired. Lizzie dropped to her knees and began to pray. Kathleen ran home to tell her brother, Lieutenant Paddy Carroll (one of Sligo's Noble Six, who was shot dead two months later). Paddy threw on his bandolier and rushed out onto the street.¹⁰² Republicans reported that National Army soldiers had been 'very offensive and obnoxious to the citizens'.¹⁰³ With Devins in the *Ballinalee*, the IRA came close to re-taking Sligo town when they routed National Army soldiers who retreated to the Courthouse and the Gaol. Members of Cumann na mBan came out into the streets

to render medical aid.¹⁰⁴ Devins offered an ultimatum to Martin Fallon, OC of the National Army garrison, but Fallon refused to surrender.¹⁰⁵ The IRA failed to capture the Courthouse garrison due to the intervention of the Bishop of Elphin (Figure 3.17). The bishop 'took himself hostage' in the Courthouse, forcing the IRA to stand down and retreat from the town.¹⁰⁶ A member of the Sligo Brigade anonymously reported to a Republican paper on the situation: 'Sligo is at present in the position of a beleaguered city – occupied to some extent by Slave State troops with Republican forces still inside the walls and a flying column all around the outside.'¹⁰⁷

The following day, 15 July, National Army Commandant General Seán MacEoin, together with 300-400 soldiers, captured Collooney and took 70 Republican prisoners, as well as confiscating arms, ammunition and bombs.¹⁰⁸ An 18-pounder field gun, which had been used for the shelling of the Four Courts in Dublin a few weeks previously, was deployed at Collooney.¹⁰⁹ According to Frank Carty, 'After the capture of Collooney we decided to evacuate the towns. From this time forward we operated in Columns.'¹¹⁰ There were now three main IRA groups operating in County Sligo. Frank Carty and 40-60 men were based in the Ox Mountains. The Arigna and Geevagh districts had about 150 men under Ned Bofin and Harold McBrien. Billy Pilkington and Seamus Devins had at least 120 men stationed at Rahelly House and in control of much of rural North Sligo.¹¹¹ They continued to maintain the divisional headquarters at Cloonacool, though on occasion it appears to have moved into Sligo town for short periods of time.

Attempts by the National Army to penetrate deeper into Republican territory occurred with the commandeering in mid-July of a local steam ship, the *Tartar*. The *Tartar* was built in Glasgow in 1896 as a fish carrier for the Clyde; it had since served as a ferry transporting flour, sugar, meal, pigs and cattle between Belmullet and Sligo.¹¹² The ship was commanded by Colonel Commandant Alec McCabe, former Commanding Officer of the Ballymote Battalion IRA, now in the National Army and in conflict with his former brigade comrades. In July, McCabe attempted to

¹⁰¹ Farry 2012: 99

¹⁰² Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986

¹⁰³ *The Fenian War*, 24.07.1922

¹⁰⁴ MSP34REF54896, Jennie O'Rorke (née Meldrum)

¹⁰⁵ Farry 2012: 99

¹⁰⁶ *The Fenian War*, 24.07.1922

¹⁰⁷ *The Fenian War*, 24.07.1922. 'Slave State' was a derogatory play on 'Free State'.

¹⁰⁸ MSP34REF5687, Frank Carty; Younger 1968: 356-7; Hopkinson 1988: 159; Farry 2000: 78

¹⁰⁹ Younger 1968: 356-7

¹¹⁰ *The Fenian War*, 24.07.1922

¹¹¹ Hopkinson 1988: 159; MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan

¹¹² Feehily 2013: 63; McGowan 2021: 206



Figure 3.15 Location of the Rockwood ambush in Correagh townland. Note memorial plaque to the right of the roadside (Marion Dowd). There are errors on the memorial: four (not six) National Army soldiers were killed at the Rockwood ambush on 13 July 1922 (not 12 July). James Byrne was not at Rockwood and had been killed ten days prior. On 3 July 1922, while on duty at Sligo Gaol, he died following an attack by the IRA. Joe Conlon died in 1963, with wounds sustained at the Rockwood ambush thought to be a contributing factor. These same errors are replicated on a memorial plaque erected in 1976 on Rockwood Parade in Sligo town.



Figure 3.16 The Ballinalee armoured car, re-named The Wild Rose of Lough Gill following its capture at the Tovernalt ambush. Seated atop the car is IRA volunteer Christy McLynn, as confirmed by his niece, Barbara McLynn. This photograph was taken some time between 13 July and 18 September 1922, probably at Rahelly House (Bea Kilgannon's Civil War Collection, courtesy of Pádraig Kilgannon).

land 200 soldiers at Raughley, northwest of Sligo town. His attempt was thwarted by a small group of local IRA men firing from the shore. After taking casualties, the steamer retreated and McCabe, as reported in an anti-Treaty newspaper of the day, stated to his superiors that he 'would need 2,000 men to effect [sic] a landing in this area'.¹¹³ As the weeks progressed, the garrison at Rahelly House continued to harass the *Tartar*, setting up attack parties armed with Lewis guns and stationing the *Ballinalee* at Rosses Point.¹¹⁴ Attacks on the steamer as it attempted to dock in Sligo town became more frequent. In one instance, the ship's engineer and crew were abducted and taken to Rahelly House just days before the evacuation and capture of the house.¹¹⁵

In North and South Sligo respectively, Seamus Devins' I North Sligo Brigade and Frank Carty's IV South Sligo Brigade continued to mount attacks on the National Army's garrison towns, successfully closing many roads to National Army advances. By the end of Summer

1922, the Sligo IRA controlled large parts of the countryside, while government troops were in control of the main towns.¹¹⁶ The IRA, however, continued to make many daring and successful raids on Sligo town. Often the *Ballinalee* was placed at the front or rear of an assault, allowing for a rapid attack and withdrawal. One such raid, on 4 August, saw the Ulster Bank garrison on Stephen Street come under attack (Figure 3.18). Eight men, including Fred Pilkington (brother of Billy Pilkington), Robert G. Bradshaw and Harry Benson, led by Billy Pilkington, in 'stockened feet' set a mine at the bank entrance. After detonation, they were quickly joined by a second group who rushed the bank and captured arms.¹¹⁷ The operation was documented in detail by *The Irish Times*:

Under cover of darkness ... they forced a door leading to a back hallway and, taking a ladder, got on to the parapet outside, and worked their way to the bathroom

¹¹³ *Poblacht na h-Éireann*, 24.08.1922

¹¹⁴ CW/OPS/02/01/05

¹¹⁵ CW/OPS/02/01/05

¹¹⁶ Farry 2000: 79

¹¹⁷ CW/OPS/02/01/05; *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 05.08.1922; *Poblacht na h-Éireann*, 24.08.1922



Figure 3.17 Most Rev. Dr. Bernard Coyne, Bishop of Elphin (seated in car, wearing a biretta) negotiating with Tom Scanlon (OC 1st Battalion Sligo Town) outside the Harp and Shamrock Hotel on Stephen Street in Sligo town on 14 July 1922 (Bea Kilgannon's Civil War Collection, courtesy of Pádraig Kilgannon).

window, which opened. Having got from the bathroom to the main stairway the remainder was easy. A mine was placed under the door, and in a few minutes, there was a terrible explosion. The door and the stone columns at the side of it were blown away, the stone buttresses at the side were damaged, and the heavy inner door leading to the bank premises was blown across the counter. The iron bannisters were shattered, and the walls and the ceiling in every room were damaged, not a single window remaining whole.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ *The Irish Times*, 05.08.1922

Depriving the National Army outpost of arms, the IRA retreat was covered by the *Ballinalee*, driven by Christy McLynn, who then launched a two-hour roving attack on National Army outposts at the Harp and Shamrock Hotel, Sligo Gaol and Sligo Courthouse.¹¹⁹ The National Army soldiers captured that night were returned to their comrades the following day. The Ulster Bank continued to be attacked by the IRA until its evacuation in late October 1922, as the National Army consolidated its forces.¹²⁰ A story passed down to the present day is that an IRA volunteer involved in one of the bank raids in Sligo received five Woodbine cigarettes as payment, though whether this relates to the Ulster Bank attacks or a different raid is not known.¹²¹

The Sligo IRA enjoyed enormous success with the strategic deployment of the *Ballinalee*, which they re-named *The Wild Rose of Lough Gill* (Figure 3.16). Ernie O'Malley commented that 'regular visits are made to Sligo town by the IRA accompanied by the 'Lough Gill' armoured car ... At the turn of the car the Free State troops disappear into cover.'¹²² A humorous anecdote still remembered about the *Ballinalee* is that the IRA painted the two sides of the vehicle a different colour to give the impression that they were in possession of two armoured cars.¹²³ It is unlikely that there is any truth to this story, but that the *Ballinalee* is still remembered and discussed a century later illustrates the impression this armoured car left on the residents of Sligo town. The sight of such a vehicle suddenly appearing in small towns throughout the northwest of Ireland must have generated consternation, surprise, shock and awe amongst the local population.

The *Ballinalee* was housed at Rahelly House and, from there, attacks were launched on barracks occupied by the National Army, including at Bundoran, Dromahair and Manorhamilton.¹²⁴ On 9 July 1922, prior to the capture of the *Ballinalee*, Billy Pilkington had led an assault on Manorhamilton Barracks, which was foiled by the local curate, Fr John Brady, who stood in front of the National Army garrison. One week later, Pilkington returned with the *Ballinalee* and met with significantly less resistance from the priest.¹²⁵ Shortly afterwards, Pilkington's unit captured Ballaghameehan Barracks on the Leitrim-Fermanagh county border. Such was the strength conferred by the armoured car that it was

¹¹⁹ CW/OPS/02/01/05

¹²⁰ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 23.09.1922; *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 28.10.1922

¹²¹ Declan Foley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 02.11.2022

¹²² Divisional HQ dispatches, UCDA, O'MN, P17a/119

¹²³ Declan Foley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 02.11.2022

¹²⁴ MA/MSPC/A/29

¹²⁵ McGarty 2020: 117



Figure 3.18 The National Army garrison in the Ulster Bank on Stephen Street in Sligo town was regularly attacked by the IRA through the summer of 1922 (Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland).

used at every opportunity possible, even for small-scale raids, such as when it was observed in August a few kilometres from Rahelly House accompanied by 40 men, who were raiding for ‘bread and bicycles’ in Drumcliff.¹²⁶ Army intelligence reports noted a ‘boast from [Brian] MacNeill: “We will take Tubbercurry with the *Ballinalee*”’.¹²⁷ On 4 September, Dromahair Barracks, garrisoned with 60 National Army soldiers, was taken by Pilkington, Devins and six others utilising the *Ballinalee* (Figure 3.19). Sixty rifles, a Lewis machine gun and a large quantity of ammunition were captured.¹²⁸ Seán MacEoin later complained to Richard Mulcahy that a failure to regularly pay the National Army troops had contributed to the surrender of the Dromahair garrison.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ CW/OPS/02/01/05

¹²⁷ CW/OPS/02/01/05

¹²⁸ Divisional HQ dispatches, UCDA, O’MN, P17a/119; MA/MSPC/A/29; CW/OPS/02/01/05

¹²⁹ Hopkins 1988: 216. Former Sligo Brigade IRA member James Travers of Dromahair, who sided with pro-Treaty forces, was Vice Brigadier for the North Leitrim National Army during the raid. Billy Pilkington, involved in the raid, would have been Travers’ Commander just months previously. It is quite likely that Pilkington, a respected and authoritative local figure, was key to the raid’s non-violent success. The National Army certainly believed this, removing Travers from his brigade area and relocating him to Athlone Custume Barracks. There, in April 1923, he witnessed the extrajudicial and indiscriminate killing of 3rd Western Division (V East Mayo Brigade) Volunteer Patrick Mulrennan by Colonel Tony Lawlor. Travers then ‘refused to wear the officer’s uniform’ and resigned his position (MSP34REF889, James Travers).

The rapid gains made by the Sligo IRA by deployment of the *Ballinalee*, and its shared use throughout the region, led to a temporary cohesion between brigades. The neighbouring 4th Western Division used the *Ballinalee* to temporarily capture Ballina immediately prior to the National Army attack on Rahelly House.¹³⁰ Frank Carty, now convinced that ‘the Divisional Staff had become committed to the war [with the Free State]’, wrote to Pilkington stating his intention to realign with the 3rd Western Division under Pilkington’s command.¹³¹ In an example of this renewed cooperation, the 3rd Western Division’s major push in September depended on the engagement of the I North Sligo and IV South Sligo brigades together with brigades from the 2nd Western Division. The intention was to dislodge existing National Army garrisons and disrupt the inflow of new troops into South Sligo. Westport had been reclaimed by the National Army and its port used to ferry troops into the area. Reinforcements had also been directed into Tubbercurry and Ballymote in South Sligo from the midland bases of Boyle and Athlone.

En route to Ballina from North Sligo, the *Ballinalee* was given to Carty to lead an assault on 9 September on the garrisoned barracks at Tubbercurry. Pilkington and MacNeill also took part in the assault, which involved 80 to 100 IRA men. National Army intelligence reported how well equipped the attackers were and

¹³⁰ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 23.09.1922

¹³¹ MSP34REF5687, Frank Carty



Figure 3.19 The former RIC Barracks in Dromahair, built circa 1840 (James Bonsall). The barracks was garrisoned by the National Army but was taken by Billy Pilkington on 4 September 1922.

that they possessed a prized Thompson gun; most likely belonging to the I North Sligo Brigade. A strong assault was carried out, during which the *Ballinalee* was used to transport and lay a mine. One National Army soldier, Michael McCaffery, was killed and a number of Republicans were injured. Carty, anticipating success, delivered a captured soldier, Harry Cosgrave, to the garrison bearing a white flag. He was sent with the intention that the garrison would make use of the flag to surrender. The soldier returned, delivering the message that the garrison refused to surrender to Carty. Enraged, Carty struck the soldier with the butt of his gun, slashing his face. After the protracted battle, the Republicans raided Tubbercurry for supplies, before retreating into the night.¹³²

There is little doubt that both warring sides were, in September 1922, entering a crucial phase of the conflict. The strengthening of the 3rd Western Division was noted in National Army intelligence reports of September 1922, which stated: 'People [are] afraid now to report anything and Irregulars [are] growing stronger daily.'¹³³ It was clear that the IRA in County Sligo were capable of mounting and sustaining a prolonged campaign. General Richard Mulcahy of the National Army appears to have put pressure on Major-

General Seán MacEoin to bring the Civil War in County Sligo to an end.¹³⁴ The State's response was to flood the region with troops, many of whom had been seasoned in successful campaigns in Cork and Limerick. Ernie O'Malley estimated that 1,500 to 2,000 National Army soldiers were sent to County Sligo, while Charles Gildea suggests 3,000 were present.¹³⁵ A contemporary newspaper reported:

it was evident in Sligo last week by the large influx of hardened and more experienced soldiers of the National Army that a huge military or war operation was brewing against the Irregulars in the northern portion of the county. This was confirmed on Saturday evening (16th September) by a route march of a large party of these troops with full war equipment.¹³⁶

This National Army sweep of Sligo was originally planned for August but had to be postponed due to lack of supplies.¹³⁷

¹³² *Roscommon Herald*, 16.09.1922; *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 16.09.1922; CW/OPS/02/01/05

¹³³ CW/OPS/02/01/05

¹³⁴ McDowell 2022: 28

¹³⁵ Divisional HQ dispatches, UCDA, O'MN, P17a/119; MA/MSPC/A/29

¹³⁶ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 23.09.1922

¹³⁷ Hopkinson 1988: 212

The strategy planned for September 1922 was for National Army troops to surround Republicans in North Sligo in a coordinated encircling attack by approaching from Finner Camp (Bundoran) to the north, Manorhamilton and Kiltyclogher (both held by the National Army) and Dromahair to the east, and Sligo town and Collooney to the south (Figure 3.20). The central garrison town of Athlone was the major base for an approach from the south towards Tubbercurry, led by Major-General Seán MacEoin. The majority of his troops were drawn from Longford and the Midlands, supplemented by a large reinforcement of men and military equipment from Ballina. The contingent had previously landed at the key Republican-held town of Westport on 24 July, in a sea assault led by Brigadier-General Joe Ring.¹³⁸

On 12 September, a fierce attack was made on Ballina, County Mayo by a joint force, 'several hundred strong', of Mayo and Sligo Republicans fronted by the *Ballinalee*.¹³⁹ It was reported that National Army troops, having been on duty late into the night in anticipation of an attack, were captured in the morning, asleep. Other unsuspecting members of the garrison were caught as they attended Mass. The attack, which forced the surrender of the garrison, was brutal and resulted in the death of two civilians, Connie Tynon and Malachy Geraghty. The post office, a number of garrisoned hotels and the workhouse in Ballina were attacked. Captured casualties were lodged in the workhouse. The town's banks were raided and a large quantity of guns (about 100 rifles), ammunition (20,000 rounds), cash, food and clothing were removed in commandeered lorries.

Despite the ferocity of the attack, National Army troops continued to pour into Westport and the Republican re-capture was short-lived.¹⁴⁰ This necessitated the separation of the 3rd and 4th Western Divisions, which retreated back to their respective territories. GOC Michael Kilroy of the 4th Western Division IRA and his men were escorted by the armoured car to Ballycastle, where they were pursued by National Army troops. Subsequently, the *Ballinalee* returned and aligned with the 3rd Western Division convoy and left for the Ox Mountains.¹⁴¹ Following the retreat, Brigadier-General Ring was to push from the west to meet with MacEoin in South Sligo.¹⁴² An indicator of the National Army mood was observed chalked onto a field gun: *From East*

to West. Up Dirty Dublin.¹⁴³ The slogan alluded to the recent defeat of the Dublin IRA and the similar fate that awaited County Sligo. Despite the fragmentation of Republican territory, National Army gains were bitterly won, with many soldiers killed in the following days. Kilroy's units, despite being on the retreat, killed six National Army soldiers in an ambush at Glenamoy in northwest Mayo.¹⁴⁴

The Battle of Lough Talt

The National Army were determined not to suffer further embarrassment following the IRA's capture of the *Ballinalee* at Rockwood. A second armoured car, the *Big Fella*, was brought to the region to put the *Ballinalee* out of action. The car was aptly named for Michael Collins who had been killed by Republican forces one month previous. The National Army was, at the time, in possession of just thirteen armoured Rolls-Royce cars, all of which had been inherited from the British government. The presence of two of these armoured cars in the Sligo campaign represented a costly investment and commitment of resources.¹⁴⁵ The *Big Fella*, under the command of General Tony Lawlor, arrived in Ballina from Athlone on 13 September. In what is one of the most colourful episodes of the Civil War, detailed in newspapers of the day with much fervour yet only summarised in historical accounts, the *Big Fella* came under continuous assault from the 3rd Western Division on its journey from east Mayo to Rahelly House (Figure 3.21). On their difficult journey through South Sligo, National Army troops endured a gauntlet of IRA flying column attacks from the many hills and ridges throughout the region, led by Billy Pilkington, Brian MacNeill and Martin Brennan.¹⁴⁶ Martin Brennan later recalled Billy Pilkington's command at Lough Talt: 'When they're preparing for a fight, go away; but follow them when they're not.'¹⁴⁷

In the meantime, on 13 September, Frank Carty was in Ballymote, an important hub where National Army troops were arriving to regroup and advance. Carty quickly launched an attack on the barracks.¹⁴⁸ It was

¹³⁸ Ó Flanagan 1987: 16

¹³⁹ *Freeman's Journal*, 14.09.1922

¹⁴⁰ *Irish Weekly and Ulster Examiner*, 23.09.1922

¹⁴¹ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 23.09.1922; *Ballymena Weekly Telegraph*, 23.09.1922

¹⁴² MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan

¹⁴³ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 23.09.1922

¹⁴⁴ *Drogheda Independent*, 23.09.1922; MSPC2D36, Edward Crabbe; MSPC2D353, Patrick Bray

¹⁴⁵ Following the Civil War, the *Big Fella* and the remains of the *Ballinalee* were put to minimal use by the Irish Army. Along with most of their counterparts, they were stripped of their armour plating, turrets and guns and auctioned in the 1950s as Rolls-Royce civilian cars. One was retained as a museum piece, Michael Collins's *Sliabh na mBan*. It was restored and is in full working order (Martin 2002).

¹⁴⁶ MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan; Martin Brennan, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

¹⁴⁷ Martin Brennan, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

¹⁴⁸ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 16.09.1922



Figure 3.20 The National Army descending on Sligo and Rahelly House (James Bonsall).

a failure and led to the death of IRA Lieutenant John Durcan, who was in command of the IV South Sligo Brigade's ASU. In his pension statement a decade later, Carty described how Pilkington and MacNeill 'directed' him to attack the garrison, in a tone wholly suggestive of laying the blame on the divisional command.¹⁴⁹ By this time, Carty and Pilkington's relations had become highly strained once more.

On 14 September at Drumsheen on the Sligo-Mayo border, the National Army were ambushed by an IRA flying column from both sides of the road. Brigadier-General Joe Ring (Figure 3.22) was killed, while General Tony Lawlor received a hand injury.¹⁵⁰ The killing of Ring came as a difficult blow, not only for his family but for the morale of the National Army. Ring had been a pioneer of the Volunteers, was active in 1916, and had been jailed in Frongoch Internment Camp in Wales. He was the only leading IRA officer in County Mayo to go pro-Treaty. Ring had been promoted to the position

of Assistant Commissioner of the Civic Guard prior to fighting in the West.¹⁵¹

Harassing actions and sniping continued into the following day, 15 September, at Windy Gap and Lough Talt in the Ox Mountains, forcing the *Big Fella* to temporarily retreat to Ballina.¹⁵² Ten kilometres east, at Mullany's Cross, *Ballinalee* driver Christy McLynn, stopping to rest, was no doubt exhausted from days of intense fighting. He was about 'to have tea, when he heard the armoured car coming on, [so] he jumped into the *Ballinalee*.'¹⁵³ McLynn attempted to scuttle the *Big Fella* as the two armoured cars came into direct engagement.¹⁵⁴ Finally, using the mounted Vickers gun, 'he shot the driver of *The Big Fella*. [The] armoured car swerved into a fence, and it stayed there.'¹⁵⁵ Sergeant

¹⁴⁹ MSP34REF5687, Frank Carty; 2RB372, John Durcan

¹⁵⁰ MPSC2D273, Michael Joseph Ring; *Larne Times*, 23.09.1922

¹⁵¹ Ó Flanagan 1987: 14

¹⁵² MSP34REF30117, Charles Gildea; Martin Brennan, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

¹⁵³ Martin Brennan, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

¹⁵⁴ Letter to General Lawlor, Civil War Ops Western Command, CW/OPS/02/01/05; MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan. The gun was almost certainly under the control of gunner Mattie Sherlock, and not McLynn.

¹⁵⁵ Martin Brennan, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133



Figure 3.21 Route of the Ballinalee from Ballina to Rahelly House in September 1922 (James Bonsall and Robert Mulraney).

Thomas Ingham, driver of the *Big Fella*, had been killed by a shot to the head, while General Lawlor was wounded, a second time, in the foot.¹⁵⁶ Despite their losses, the National Army pushed eastwards, with the intention of combining with General MacEoin's forces in Tubercurry. MacEoin, who had amassed a large contingent of soldiers supported by artillery, had also been delayed due to a number of harassing activities by Republicans in Athlone and Roscommon.¹⁵⁷ Lawlor eventually arrived to meet MacEoin in Boyle, though he too had been subjected to a series of IRA ambushes.¹⁵⁸ While Republicans had inflicted considerable casualties on National Army troops in these recent engagements, by the evening of 14 September, the Republicans found their positions untenable. OC Patrick Brennan led a rear-guard attack with the ASU on National Army troops. This allowed for the *Ballinalee*, preceded by Billy Pilkington and Brian MacNeill in a touring car, to return to the divisional HQ at Cloonacool. The National Army pursued and, the following day, they searched Cloonacool. However, they failed to locate

the IRA divisional staff HQ, which was operating from a secret room in Vice Adjutant Jack Brennan's house.¹⁵⁹ Pilkington and his men were perhaps conscious that, despite putting up a strong resistance in South Sligo, the next frontline of the battle would be at Rahelly House, their operational base.¹⁶⁰ It was discovered that the National Army had placed mines on the main routes leaving Collooney village. Divisional Vice Adjutant Jack Brennan aided Pilkington, MacNeill and driver Christy McLynn to find a careful retreat route by which they could return safely to Rahelly House.¹⁶¹

Prior to leaving for North Sligo, a divisional 'Council of War' was held at Cloonacool. Frank Carty did not attend. Carty had demobilised his column and his men had taken refuge in dugouts in the north-eastern area of the Ox Mountains. Carty subsequently claimed in his pension application that he remobilised his men after 72 hours but, despite this claim, no further activities associated with Frank Carty were noted in County Sligo

¹⁵⁶ MPSC2D392, Thomas Ingham; *Larne Times*, 23.09.1922

¹⁵⁷ MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan

¹⁵⁸ MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan

¹⁵⁹ MSP34REF30117, Charles Gildea; MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan; CW/OPS/02/01/05

¹⁶⁰ MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan

¹⁶¹ MSP34REF30117, Charles Gildea; MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan



Figure 3.22 Brigadier-General Joe Ring (circled) and National Army soldiers with the Big Fella armoured car, shortly before his death (Michael Ring).

until October 1922.¹⁶² Carty appears to have sent his ASU temporarily to the border. His column carried out an attack on a police patrol in Belcoo on 13 October and was probably responsible for a number of similar follow-up attacks in the area.¹⁶³ National Army intelligence considered Carty a significant threat and in one instance referred to him being 'very busy' at the end of October.¹⁶⁴ These attacks gave Carty the opportunity to demonstrate his authority and his autonomy from the divisional command at a time when his superior, OC Billy Pilkington, took refuge in Tormore Cave. At the same time, these attacks likely helped Pilkington and comrades billeted in the cave. By attacking border infrastructure located a great distance from Tormore Cave, Carty kept the National Army busy elsewhere, potentially temporarily relieving some of the pressure on those in hiding. Carty's earlier snubbing of the Council of War meeting was, according to QM Charles Gildea, an offence worthy of court-martialling and demonstrated that Carty was again deviating from

the chain of command. Carty, however, avoided the authorities for the remainder of the Civil War, despite being highly sought after.¹⁶⁵ In his absence, Gildea remained in the IV South Sligo Brigade area, effectively replacing Carty as the Commander of the brigade.

The defence of North Sligo

Despite fierce resistance, the 3rd Western Division was losing territory. By 13 September companies of uniformed National Army soldiers were already moving through Sligo town.¹⁶⁶ The freeing-up of war-hardened troops, following successful battles in the south of the country, meant that the National Army could now afford to deploy large numbers of troops to Sligo, many of whom were highly experienced. Despite the precedence in the historical narrative of Civil War engagements in Dublin, Cork and Kerry, there was a heightened sense of urgency, even anxiety, to quickly suppress the 3rd and 4th Western Divisions. The apprehension that the conflict might simply shift north is demonstrated by the sheer quantity of resources

¹⁶² MSP34REF5687, Frank Carty

¹⁶³ William Pilkington, Dublin Castle files, WO 35/207/162; *Gloucestershire Echo*, 16.10.1922

¹⁶⁴ CW/OPS/02/01/05

¹⁶⁵ Frank Fagan pers. comm. to R. Mulraney, 08.06.2023

¹⁶⁶ *Roscommon Herald*, 23.09.1922

put into destroying the resistance there. The *Big Fella* armoured car arrived from the west, along with heavy artillery. The steam ship *Tartar* patrolled Sligo Bay to close a vital route that might allow the North Sligo IRA to connect with comrades in West Sligo and Mayo.¹⁶⁷ The National Army also sent a spotter aeroplane to County Sligo, most likely a 'Bristol Fighter' type. A small number of these planes were purchased from the British State and were highly valued. They were put to use in much the same way as British Crown forces had used them during the War of Independence, that is, for spotting guerilla movement in vast and open country terrain.¹⁶⁸ Army intelligence reports from mid-September further refer to the deployment of National Army flying columns/ASUs on the ground in North Sligo. These were most likely operating from Sligo town and made rapid assaults on Republican outposts in order to undermine them in advance of the primary assault on Rahelly. Their presence resulted in the IRA splitting their flying columns into smaller and more mobile units of four and five men. These smaller columns kept on the move, bedding down in dugouts and safe houses at night, while scouts kept look-out.¹⁶⁹

A number of National Army intelligence reports, including a detailed one penned by Lieutenant Eamoin Moran on 11 September 1922, reveal how well-armed and organised the North Sligo IRA were prior to the attack on Rahelly House. Moran wrote that 'about 120 men' were operating from Rahelly, with 25 to 40 men garrisoned at the building in possession of 'full field equipment'. He noted that 'rifles are plentiful and to spare, with four rifles to every man. Mauzers [*sic*] are being cast aside in preference to the Enfield, indicating I think a shortage of ammunition for the Mauzer [*sic*] type. They are supplied with one Thompson and one Lewis. Ammunition for Thompson is running out.'¹⁷⁰ Approximately 90 rifles, 70 revolvers, four machine guns, ammunition, fifteen motor cars, four lorries and an armoured car were available at Rahelly.¹⁷¹ Moran reported that the IRA stationed at Rahelly House were well-dressed and had plenty of food and cigarettes. Informants, who had been temporarily detained at the base, reported to the National Army on the high degree of routine and discipline maintained. It was noted that

every day the *Ballinalee* was 'driven to Rathcormac with a guard of not less than 30 men'.¹⁷²

Rahelly House was used as a training camp with units of 30 to 40 men each stationed at Drumcliff, Ballinfull, Lissadell, Maugherow and Raughley Point, and in the area between Rathcormac village and Benbulbin. These units, when travelling by foot, would break into smaller sections, allowing for quick and safe movement and broad patrol coverage. It was instructed that no man should leave his billet without his rifle. The stables of Lissadell House, located relatively close to Rahelly, were also occupied by the IRA and served as a workshop. Twenty Republicans 'with full equipment and kitchen utensils' occupied Rathcormac National School.¹⁷³ Another intelligence report remarked on how tightly closed North Sligo was under the Republican command:

The armoured car and small columns of ... men scatter and scout the whole area from Rahelly to Kinlough day and night. A close eye is kept on the coast and Verry signals [flares] are fired on the approach of all vessels to Sligo at night. All roads leading to Rahelly are mined and guarded at night.¹⁷⁴

At least two signallers were operating on Benbulbin Mountain. Dumps of large stones were laid along roadsides in preparation for setting up blockades. To keep the National Army in Sligo town on their guard and deprive them of sleep, each night 'a party of men from Rathcormac come to the hill overlooking the workhouse' to fire shots over Sligo town. Multiple dugouts existed in the North Sligo area and safe houses were in abundance in this part of the county (Figures 3.23 and 3.24). Lieutenant Moran particularly singled out houses in the Glencar Valley, which were 'almost continually occupied (4-6 to each house)', including 'Feeneys, Scanlons and Devins'.¹⁷⁵ Nicholson's was also a known safe house.¹⁷⁶ Despite the National Army's large *Tartar* steam ship patrolling Sligo Bay, Brian MacNeill had at his disposal a motorboat, most likely the *Rosses* passenger boat, which was reported as being 'commandeered by Irregulars' on 31 July 1922.¹⁷⁷ MacNeill had it mounted with two Lewis machine guns, making it capable of launching rapid assaults. In mid-September, National Army intelligence reported that

¹⁶⁷ CW/OPS/02/01/05

¹⁶⁸ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133; *Croydon Times*, 08.07.1922; *Langport & Somerton Herald*, 08.07.1922; Pádraig Óg Ó Ruairc pers. comm. to R. Mulraney, 26.08.2022

¹⁶⁹ CW/OPS/02/01/05

¹⁷⁰ 'Special Intelligence re Rahelly House' report, CW/OPS/02/01/05; Letter from Lieut. Eamoin Moran to Col. Comdt. Conroy, dated 11.09.1922, CW/OPS/02/01/05

¹⁷¹ *Óglaigh na h-Éireann*, Daily Intelligence Report, 04.08.1922; Civil War Ops Western Command, CW/OPS/02/01/05; Farry 2012: 100

¹⁷² 'Special Intelligence re Rahelly House' report, CW/OPS/02/01/05

¹⁷³ CW/OPS/02/01/05

¹⁷⁴ CW/OPS/02/01/05

¹⁷⁵ CW/OPS/02/01/05

¹⁷⁶ Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986

¹⁷⁷ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 05.08.1922

the motorboat was responsible for holding up one of its dispatch boats.¹⁷⁸

Despite the quality of the National Army's intelligence, another report noted that the occupiers of Rahelly House, unknowingly conversing with spies, 'were able to tell us of everything we did in Sligo and some of the things we intended to do!'¹⁷⁹ Many years later, a local account told how four or five days prior to the killing of the Noble Six, a small number of National Army soldiers billeted in the Glencar Valley area. During that time, they made contact with people loyal to their side and gathered intelligence on the IRA in the area.¹⁸⁰ The abundant detail of observations in the National Army reports, gathered from within enemy lines just days before the assault on Rahelly House, suggests that the local narrative may well have been correct.

On the days leading up to, and including, Monday 18 September, a cordon closed in around the territory held by the I North Sligo Brigade. Following the battle of Lough Talt, National Army reinforcements under General Lawlor and General MacEoin's Western Command poured into Sligo from the south and west. The National Army's 3rd Western Division worked alongside units from the 1st Midland Division and the 1st Northern Division. Attempts were made by the IRA to close, or at least delay, the infringement on its I North Sligo Brigade area, the last standing outpost of the 3rd Western Division. In the southeast of the divisional area, the flying column of the III North Roscommon Brigade attempted to slow the advances of the National Army's 3rd Western Division.¹⁸¹ Armed with a field gun, they harassed and delayed troops who were mobilising at Custume Barracks (Athlone), a central and crucial National Army hub.¹⁸² Separately, the Sligo, Leitrim and Northern Counties Railway Company was found to be implicit in moving National Army soldiers from Collooney to Dromahair, across the IRA frontline. That same day, 18 September, one of the trains was fired on by the IRA and derailed at Dromahair. Upon hearing that the train's occupants were cattle en route from Collooney fair to Enniskillen, and in need of food and water, the IRA allowed the cattle train to pass after which the IRA then derailed two empty carriages and pulled up the train tracks. The Republicans left immediately for Rahelly House, reportedly stating that

'so long as there was an Irishman living, so long would the war be carried on!'¹⁸³

In Manorhamilton, an attempt was made to disable the eastern approach of the 1st Midland Division towards Rahelly House.¹⁸⁴ The IRA intention had been to bomb Manorhamilton Barracks later that night (18 October), but a rapid daytime swoop by the National Army saw four IRA men arrested. A detailed written account of the plan of attack was found on one captive, leading to the arrest of ten others.¹⁸⁵ To the north, the 1st Northern Division under Commandant Sweeney made rapid progress from Finner Camp, seizing the villages of Kinlough and Tullaghan in north County Leitrim and arresting IRA men, in many cases without firing a shot.¹⁸⁶ Arrested men were sent to work clearing roadblocks and attempts were made to repair damaged bridges.¹⁸⁷ As many as 30 IRA men were also taken prisoner in Kiltyclogher village.¹⁸⁸

A note on sources relevant to the events of 18-20 September 1922

An attempt to unravel the events of the week beginning Monday 18 September 1922 is fraught with vague and often contradictory sources and accounts. This is not a coincidence. The extrajudicial killings of Sligo's Noble Six which took place on the mountain were not events that were open for consideration or discussion by the National Army and the Free State. The media of the day, which covered the activities of the *Ballinalee* with great colour and fanfare, and the killing of six IRA men with apocryphal pathos, did not dig deep in its reportage. Details of the events were remembered, however, by those present and those within the community where the events occurred. Despite many facts being ill-defined and imprecise, an approximate narrative of the week beginning 18 September can be outlined. Recent research into the killing of two of Sligo's Noble Six, Harry Benson and Tommy Langan,¹⁸⁹ drew on commonly reported anecdotes and first-hand accounts of those who lived in the area at the time. However, some first-hand accounts, though detailed, omitted key elements including crucial timings of events, due to the limited perspective of each source. Some fragmentary accounts, passed down in a casual manner, developed

¹⁷⁸ CW/RR/036

¹⁷⁹ CW/OPS/02/01/05

¹⁸⁰ Chris Branley, audio recording 2014

¹⁸¹ Farry 2012: 102

¹⁸² MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan

¹⁸³ *The Northern Whig and Belfast Post*, 20.09.1922

¹⁸⁴ Farry 2012: 102

¹⁸⁵ *The Northern Whig and Belfast Post*, 20.09.1922; *Frontier Sentinel*, 23.09.1922

¹⁸⁶ Farry 2012: 102

¹⁸⁷ Farry 2012: 102

¹⁸⁸ *Frontier Sentinel*, 23.09.1922; *Western Daily Press*, 21.09.1922

¹⁸⁹ Gilhawley 2021; McGowan 2021; Bonsall et al. 2022

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT

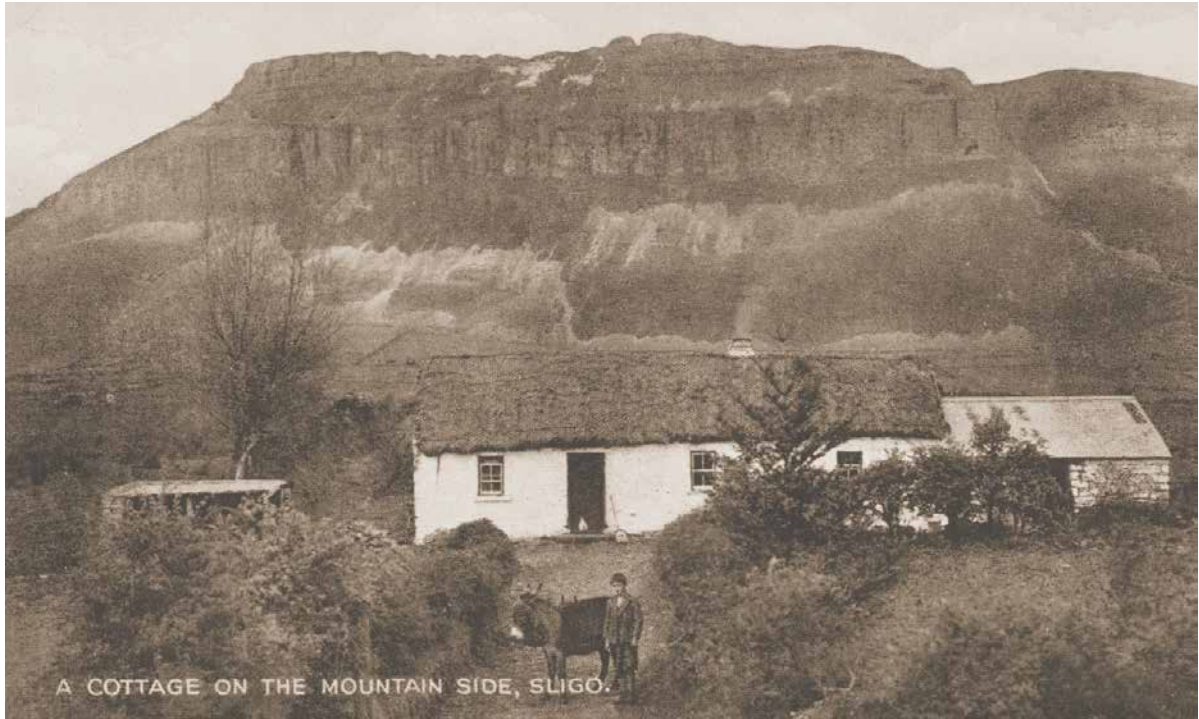


Figure 3.23 Scanlon's safe house in Cloonmull townland in the Glencar Valley (Historical Picture Archive).

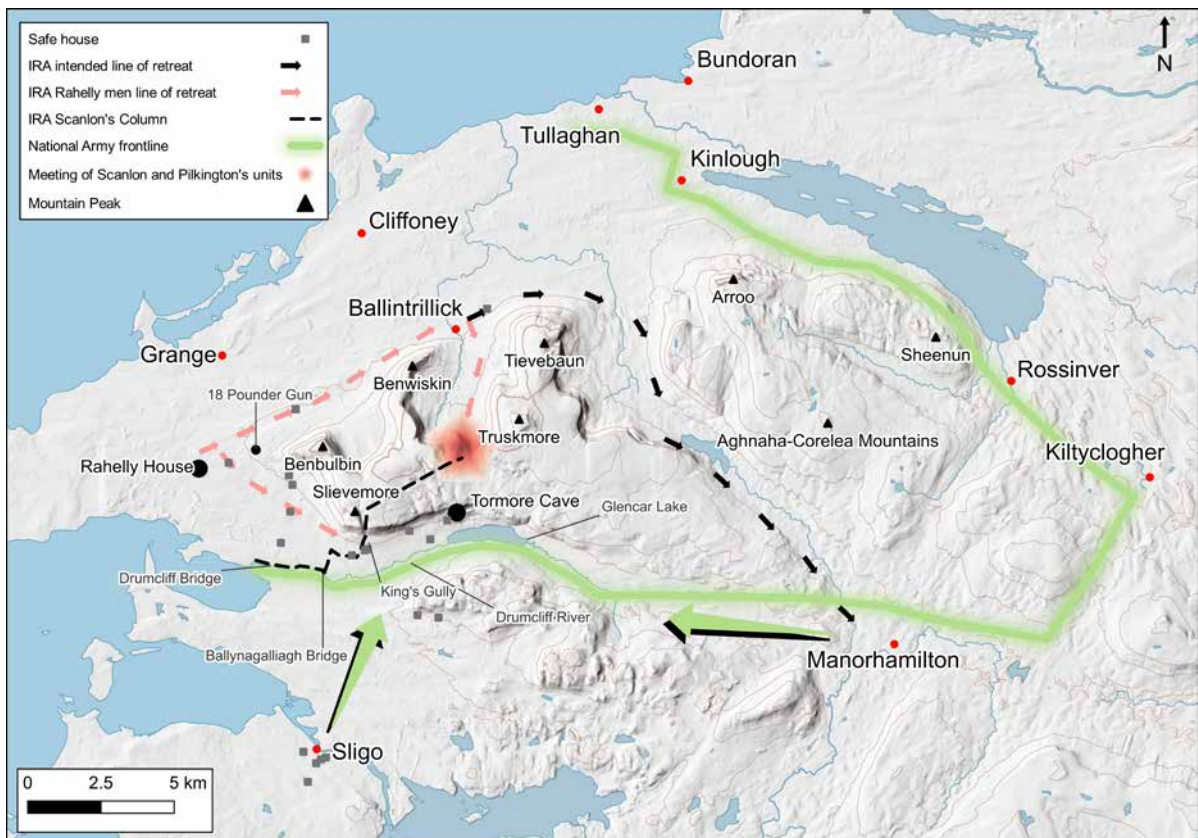


Figure 3.24 The evacuation of Rahelly House on Monday 18 September, showing the splitting of IRA units attempting to retreat across the Dartry Mountains to Manorhamilton. That night, IRA men would remain in safe houses in the Glencar Valley, while National Army troops closed in around the mountain range (Robert Mulroney and James Bonsall).

new but non-factual additions that were added to 'round-off', simply to make sense of the events.

Now, new details from our recent transcription of the diaries of Ernie O'Malley, held at UCD, have shed further light on the killing of Sligo's Noble Six. They include O'Malley's 1957 interview with Tom Scanlon, OC of the I North Sligo Brigade, which are assessed here for the first time.¹⁹⁰ Scanlon's evidence is crucial: he was a senior commander, aware of the overall plan of the evacuation from Rahelly House and the planned rendezvous, as well as being present on the mountains and interacting with other key personnel. Scanlon's account is more complete and differs from other narratives, suggesting that rather than being on the mountain overnight on 19 September for a few hours, Captain Harry Benson and Volunteer Tommy Langan actually evaded the National Army (likely having no contact with their IRA comrades) for up to 36 hours, from the night of 18 September. This ties in with other local narratives, which claimed that Benson and Langan stayed overnight in Tormore Cave the night prior to being apprehended. It was previously generally understood that the two men did not overnight on the mountain. The testimony of Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, who stayed in Tormore Cave, complements and adds crucial detail to Scanlon's account. Potentially suffering from severe exposure and tiredness, Benson and Langan were cut off from their comrades who, aware of their absence, tried to wait for them before continuing onwards into the Glencar Valley.

The Fall of Rahelly

Monday 18 September

On Monday 18 September, the National Army coordinated a final and decisive encircling attack on the North Sligo IRA.¹⁹¹ Given the considerable number of National Army troops closing in on North Sligo, the IRA never intended to defend Rahelly House. Having failed to take Manorhamilton, Pilkington sent an IRA column under Tom Scanlon from Rahelly to Drumcliff. Bridges along the Drumcliff River were demolished and roads barricaded in order to divert National Army troops to a defensive position held at Drumcliff Bridge. The defence served mainly as a delaying tactic, giving the men at Rahelly House sufficient time to coordinate a retreat, albeit a rushed retreat. Thereafter, the *Ballinalee* diverted to the north side of the Dartry

Mountains and made its way to Ballintrillick on the Sligo-Leitrim border.

The defensive position at Drumcliff Bridge was not expected to hold for long. Thus, the strategy was that Scanlon's men would beat a fighting retreat and ascend Benbulbin Mountain from the south side. Scanlon had sentries posted along the Benbulbin cliffs, from where they commanded a direct view onto Rahelly below. The signal men would inform Rahelly to evacuate when the National Army approached. This would allow for an orderly retreat to Ballintrillick on the north side of the mountain range.¹⁹² Scanlon and his men, holding the southern defence line, would eventually have to retreat across the Benbulbin plateau, descending in time to meet with the Rahelly men at Ballintrillick. The units would then progress together to Manorhamilton. The *Ballinalee*, also destined for Manorhamilton, was to form an advance attack on the National Army garrison there, helping to clear the way for the retreating IRA troops.¹⁹³ A retreat into the relatively safer area of rural North Leitrim would give enough time to rest and regroup. Tom Scanlon noted, however, that 'the plan misfired ... I was never sure of what caused the upset of the plans. We didn't take due consideration, I expect.' Unbeknownst to Scanlon, the National Army's intelligence suspected that the IRA intended to make use of certain safe houses in the area and that the intended retreat was to County Leitrim (Figure 3.24).

By the morning of Monday 18 September, the 3rd Western Division of the National Army was fully established in Sligo town under Major-General Seán MacEoin and Commandant-General Tony Lawlor. A strict curfew was set in place prohibiting everyone, including pedestrians, from entering or leaving the town. An advance guard was sent to Rahelly House and, by the afternoon, National Army roadblocks and outposts were established along potential IRA escape routes around the mountains. IRA Lieutenant John Smyth, active in the first stage of the defence of Rahelly House, described his part in defending at Drumcliff Bridge:

there was nothing practically between us [and the National Army] but the river. It might be 100 yards [91m] in some cases, across the river. We were on a footbridge there ... We retreated then [with the] *Ballinalee* covering after the retreating party.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ The new transcriptions were carried out by Pádraig Óg Ó Ruairc, Robert Mulraney and Tom Mulraney.

¹⁹¹ MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan

¹⁹² CW/OPS/02/01/05

¹⁹³ Hugh Gallagher, audio recording 15.12.2014

¹⁹⁴ MSP34REF49273, John Smyth

Drumcliff Bridge was badly damaged but not fully destroyed and the river was fordable due to low water levels. Scanlon employed the ASU's Munitions Officer Lieutenant Paddy Carroll (one of Sligo's Noble Six) to blow up a second bridge, most likely the small but strategic Ballynagalliagh Bridge further east on the Drumcliff River. A careful retreat was made. Carroll returned to Rahelly informing the men of the approach of troops and that it was now time to evacuate. Shortly afterwards, the National Army's *Big Fella* armoured car and an 18-pounder gun crossed at Drumcliff and made for Rahelly House. At the very last moment, as the men retreated for the mountains, Cumann na mBan, including member Annie Bee Gilbride, took part in recovering arms left behind at the house. The National Army closed in ten minutes after the last Cumann na mBan member had left Rahelly.¹⁹⁵

Fighting continued into the late evening. At Cliffoney, the *Ballinalee* held position, exchanging long distance fire for several hours, but it could not hold indefinitely and a retreat was made for Ballintrillick. National Army troops were continually sniped at as they approached Rahelly. Captain of the Glencar Company IRA, James McCann, recalled that he 'fired down to them off the rock' [i.e., from the slopes of Benbulbin].¹⁹⁶ With the arrival of soldiers sooner than anticipated, the last remaining IRA men at Rahelly House hastily retreated, leaving many supplies behind.¹⁹⁷ Volunteer Willie Devins later recalled that the IRA 'burned it before they left it'.¹⁹⁸ The house was also set on fire by the IRA in January 1923.¹⁹⁹ It was reported that the house and outhouses 'burned for three days and three nights', though whether this was in September 1922 or January 1923 is unclear.²⁰⁰ During the capture of Rahelly House, at least one National Army soldier was killed. Volunteer Andrew J. Walsh (aged 19) from Ballymote was 'accidentally shot while on military service' and killed by a gunshot wound to the head.²⁰¹

Many of the Rahelly men retreated towards the mountains, likely skirting the low flanks of Benbulbin. Progress to Ballintrillick, 12km away, could be made relatively quickly by this route. However, at least 70 men were cut off and forced to head to the south side

of Benbulbin where they came under heavy shelling from 18-pounder artillery.²⁰² This artillery, which had been used on the Four Courts, was an exceptionally heavy gun to use on predominantly pedestrian targets. It was set up in a forest, most likely today's secluded 'Benbulbin Forest Walk' in Gortarowey townland on the western slopes of Benbulbin, separating the north face of the mountain from the south face.²⁰³ The gun had an engraving that read *McEoin's Own Peace-Maker*.²⁰⁴ When considered together with the fact that the *Ballinalee* was named in reference to Seán MacEoin ('the blacksmith of Ballinalee'), it is hard to ignore the likelihood that the events of the following days were dictated as much by personal grievances as by 'national' ones.

Shelling of the retreating IRA men continued until nightfall, effectively splitting the group, with some making it to Ballintrillick and others forced to the south side of the mountains.²⁰⁵ Those retreating to the south took to Benbulbin and Slievemore, the westernmost peaks in the Dartry Mountain range. The multiple steep gullies and isolated plateaus of the mountains offered the only possible safe routes throughout the area.

The Ballintrillick area witnessed extended fighting between National Army troops and the IRA, which continued into Tuesday 19 September. Rahelly House was likely seized by the National Army on Monday night, but it was not reported with confidence until the following day.²⁰⁶ A large seizure of military vehicles, arms and equipment was made and dozens of arrests took place.²⁰⁷ Amongst the senior IRA members arrested were I North Sligo Brigade Vice OC James Keaveney and Divisional Intelligence Officer Robert G. Bradshaw. On the retreat from Rahelly House many more were arrested, including Andrew Doocey, E. Gunning, J. McEivilly, Higgins, Joseph Pilkington, Peadar Glynn, as well as others named as Mulligan, Melley, McGivney, Rooney, Fallon and Sweeney.²⁰⁸ These fourteen names are significant as they can be eliminated as potential occupants of Tormore Cave in the weeks that followed. Other IRA men who had not been stationed at Rahelly also fled to the mountains. John Gallagher left his

¹⁹⁵ MSP34REF41872, Annie Bee Gilbride

¹⁹⁶ MSP34REF18169, James McCann

¹⁹⁷ *Roscommon Herald*, 23.09.1922

¹⁹⁸ Willie Devins, audio recording 16.06.1986

¹⁹⁹ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 20.01.1923

²⁰⁰ McTernan 2009: 421

²⁰¹ W2D158; Andrew J. Walsh; *The Freeman's Journal*, 20.09.1922, reported that Walsh was 'taking food when the trigger of his rifle caught in the belt of his coat, and the bullet went through his body, killing him instantly.'

²⁰² *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 23.09.1922; Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

²⁰³ Some media reports of the day suggested that the men were in the forest when it was shelled from outside. Either way, the key factor is that the location of the forest was intentionally chosen by National Army forces to confuse and separate the Rahelly men.

²⁰⁴ *Roscommon Herald*, 23.09.1922

²⁰⁵ *Western Daily Press*, 21.09.1922

²⁰⁶ CW/OPS/02/01/05

²⁰⁷ *Kilgannon* 1926: 81

²⁰⁸ *The Irish Times*, 22.09.1922; *Sligo Independent and the West of Ireland Telegraph*, 23.09.1923

home at 6am on Wednesday 20 September. He and his comrade, Joe Gorman, climbed the western slopes of Tievebaun Mountain. They were forced to crawl on their stomachs through a natural ravine towards an area known as *Poll Glas* to avoid sniper fire from below. This snippet of information was the only thing John Gallagher ever told his son, Hugh, about his IRA activities during the revolutionary period.²⁰⁹

By the evening of Monday 18 September, Tom Scanlon and his men had reached the Slievemore Mountain plateau. The intention was to cross the plateau and descend the mountain on the north side at Ballintrillick. There they would meet with the larger body of men. Crossing the mountain, they soon met a Rahelly unit which had continued their retreat up the plateau upon discovering that Ballintrillick was no longer safe. This unit was led by Billy Pilkington and Seamus Devins.²¹⁰ The evacuation of Rahelly, while anticipated, was difficult to square with the sudden loss of 'safe' territory, a result of the rapid enclosing movements of the National Army. It is likely that word had reached Pilkington of the IRA failure to take Manorhamilton and the progress of National Army troops south from Finner Camp. With Manorhamilton closed off to them, temporarily at least, there were few options but to take to the relative safety of the mountains and the Glencar Valley, perhaps anticipating that the *Ballinalee* might yet push through to Manorhamilton.

Night of Monday 18 to early hours of Tuesday 19 September

With night closing in and the rain becoming heavy, Pilkington called for his men to cross the plateau, descend to the south side of the mountain, and billet in safe houses in the Glencar Valley.²¹¹ Here the Republicans had many civilian supporters who, at great personal risk, provided refuge in their family homes. Clusters of safe houses were available in Barnarobin, Lislahelly, Glen Upper and Tormore townlands, effectively running the length of the Glencar Valley. The families who offered safe houses included the Flanagans, Gilmartins, Smyths (two families), Branleys and O'Connors, amongst others.

On the night of the 18 September, many columns of IRA men, safe on the plateau, made their way down the south side of the mountains to billet in the Glencar Valley. The men were split between various safe houses,

many of which were a considerable distance from one another. Despite a distance of 4km between Barnarobin townland to the west and Tormore townland to the east, the IRA likely moved between both areas via the gullies on the southern flank of Slievemore. The gullies provided the only effective access between the mountain plateau and the safe houses in the valley below, allowing for discreet movement that avoided the National Army controlled road through the Glencar Valley. Many of the safe houses were located at a considerable height above the road giving an additional observational advantage. From the Glencar Valley, access to the mountain was via the Glen Upper Gully, which is in close proximity to Tormore Cave and the Branley homestead. In Lislahelly, where Seamus Devins stayed, access to the mountain top could be made via King's Gully, a relatively easy ascent but the most exposed and obvious one. From Barnarobin, where Jack 'Trooper' McHugh and Tom Scanlon stayed, access to the mountain top could be made via an unnamed gully, which leads into a narrow slip canyon.²¹² The rain remained heavy through the night and, as the men retired, they placed sentries around the safe houses to alert them of any approaching National Army troops.²¹³

That night, however, Captain Harry Benson and Volunteer Tommy Langan went missing. The two men had not billeted together; they were in separate houses belonging to two families of Smyths. Benson was in the same billet as his good friend, Jack 'Trooper' McHugh. The following day would see a pivotal change in fortunes for these two comrades and friends. Separated, Benson would be killed on the mountain and 'Trooper' would survive on the mountain, in Tormore Cave.

Details of events are varied and contradictory. It seems that a disturbance during the night provoked the billeted men into thinking that National Army troops had arrived into the area. Many IRA men, including 'Trooper' McHugh, went out to investigate. On their return, it was noted that Benson and Langan were missing.²¹⁴ 'Trooper' recalled near the end of his life: 'We went back to the house, we went back. Harry Benson was missing. We didn't know where the buckin' hell he went. It was an awful wet night. The water was coming down so we went up the mountain and up

²⁰⁹ Hugh Gallagher pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 03.03.2023

²¹⁰ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

²¹¹ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133; Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1976

²¹² Gilhewley (2021) notes the use of a tunnel at Barnarobin, constructed by the IRA to gain access to the plateau. It is unlikely, however, that a built structure existed; the story likely reflects a remembered route to the plateau via a 'tunnel-like' narrow natural gully.

²¹³ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133; Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1976

²¹⁴ Bonsall *et al.* 2022: 35

Benbulbin ... we couldn't get them.'²¹⁵ Tom Scanlon, in command and staying at a nearby safe house, recalled:

I fell in all the men [organised them in military formation] and I queried the boys in whose house he had been this night: [The] two of them went out at 2 o'clock [in the morning]. They found him [Benson] 300 yards up the mountain. Then we went out to find out that the lights were about and they couldn't find any way to get back in.²¹⁶

Scanlon's comments, married with those of 'Trooper', suggest that the missing men had also left their billets to investigate the disturbance. They may have sought higher ground to gain a vantage point but became cut-off from the men below when National Army troops used spotlights on the hill. Alternatively, the lights referred to might have been spotting lights from the spotter aeroplane that was in use in the area. Separated from their comrades and seemingly unable to descend, Benson and Langan appear to have proceeded up onto the Slievemore plateau.

It should be noted that accounts of the separation of Benson and Langan usually describe the events as occurring on the night of Tuesday 19 or the early morning hours of Wednesday 20 September. This would imply that the two men spent somewhere between eight and twelve hours overnight on the mountain before encountering the National Army. An analysis of the accounts of 'Trooper' McHugh and Tom Scanlon, along with events recorded by National Army intelligence, indicates that this was not the case.²¹⁷ It now appears that the two men ascended the mountain on either the night of Monday 18 or the early morning hours of Tuesday 19 September. They then spent somewhere between 32 and 36 hours on the mountains.

Tuesday 19 September

On the morning of Tuesday 19 September, the IRA men, scattered among various safe houses in the Glencar Valley, rose at 5am. Their intention was to ascend the mountain and cross the plateau to Ballintrillick to meet the *Ballinalee*. However, as morning broke, Captain Harry Benson and Volunteer Tommy Langan were still missing, and this news spread amongst their comrades.

With heavy rainfall and mist blanketing the mountain, the ability to push through the National Army cordon on foot was beginning to look uncertain. While billeted on the south side of the mountains, it was hoped that a break through enemy lines might yet be made by the *Ballinalee* at Ballintrillick on the north side, allowing for the disparate IRA groups to meet and regroup. The *Ballinalee* was to advance on Manorhamilton and clear a course of retreat through North Leitrim. This would allow for the men trapped on the mountains to descend along the retreat line and into Manorhamilton.²¹⁸ In attempting to lead an advance attack, the *Ballinalee* pushed quickly from its defensive position at Rahelly to attempt to lead the attack on Manorhamilton. The armoured car had long been singled out by the National Army as a prime target, not just as a military victory but as a means to undo the embarrassment of the car being in Republican hands. Thus, the *Big Fella* armoured car, with support troops, pursued the *Ballinalee* north of Benbulbin and east into isolated territory near Ballintrillick. At that time, the car was operated by a team of three: driver Christy McLynn, gunner Mattie Sherlock and assistant driver J. Maguire.²¹⁹

Hugh Gallagher, son of IRA volunteer John Gallagher, grew up hearing that the *Ballinalee* had been traversing a minor road north of Benbulbin Mountain en route to Manorhamilton.²²⁰ It got as far as Clogh townland where media reports of the day noted that the IRA intended to set an ambush for the troops pursuing them. However, in attempting to set the ambush, the IRA were surprised from the rear by National Army troops from Finner Camp who had established themselves in the area.²²¹ It appears that the Republicans had not expected the National Army to close in on them so rapidly. There was little space to manoeuvre, so the *Ballinalee* made for a quick retreat from Clogh but ran directly into the pursuing *Big Fella*. The armoured cars engaged in intense fighting, firing on and ramming one another, while 'the noise of the hard-pressed engines, machine guns and rifles sounded through the countryside.'²²² It was reported in contemporary media with great colour, albeit in error, that two National Army soldiers, clinging to the armour plating of the *Ballinalee* as it escaped,

²¹⁵ Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1976

²¹⁶ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

²¹⁷ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133; Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1976; CW/OPS/02/01/05

²¹⁸ The landscape afforded two retreating options they might choose from, depending upon how close the National Army would close in on their positions. Their first choice of route would likely have been via the Glenade Valley, along the base of the mountains. A second option would be to continue east along the mountain plateau, descending it near the village of Lurganboy, just outside Manorhamilton. The latter option would be much more difficult terrain but also much safer.

²¹⁹ CW/OPS/02/01/05

²²⁰ Hugh Gallagher pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 24.03.2023

²²¹ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 23.09.1922

²²² *Freeman's Journal*, 22.09.1922

managed to kill the driver. The National Army soldiers were shaken off but were uninjured. The *Big Fella* followed in pursuit.²²³ Hugh Gallagher described that the *Ballinalee* then retreated the route it had travelled. The car then turned left (south) onto a small lane in Carrownamaddoo townland that ends in a cul-de-sac (Figures 3.25 and 3.26). The *Ballinalee* drove about 850m up the lane. The occupants and driver disembarked and pushed or drove the armoured car into holly bushes. They stuffed a pillow doused in petrol into the barrel of the gun and set it on fire. Apparently, the intensity of the fire burned the stones of the adjacent drystone wall; the fire damage on the stones could be seen for decades afterwards.²²⁴

When the National Army troops closed in, they found the *Ballinalee* disabled and abandoned.²²⁵ There are contesting accounts as to the fate of the armoured car, including that it was destroyed by explosives or doused with petrol and set alight. IRA volunteer Willie Devins recalled in 1986 that a mine was put in the *Ballinalee*; it was 'blown up so the army couldn't recapture it. It was smashed up.'²²⁶ National Army reports offered differing opinions in the days that followed. Initial reports described, with an air of loss, how it had 'been blown to atoms by [an] 18-pound shell' but later suggested that only the engine had been destroyed.²²⁷ In a letter to General Tony Lawlor, it was reported that the retreat of the *Ballinalee* was due to the car's gunner being injured in combat. The correspondence further notes that the gunner later succumbed to his injuries, but this does not appear to be the case. Many combat injuries were sensationalised as deaths in contemporary media, and all three crew members of the vehicle survived.²²⁸ Reflecting pro- and anti-Treaty allegiances, the newspapers variously described the condition of the *Ballinalee* as it was towed into town as both 'blown to smithereens' or 'not too badly damaged'.²²⁹

The captured *Ballinalee* served as a National Army trophy, displayed prominently at Sligo Courthouse. There, in the centre of town, it became an 'object of much examination and comment from the public.'²³⁰ The citizens of Sligo must have held varied, yet emotive, opinions on seeing the vehicle and what it

represented in its now ruinous state. One eyewitness remembered seeing the *Ballinalee* hauled back into Sligo town by the National Army on Saturday 23 September, noting that by then the car was 'a wreck.'²³¹ En route to the Courthouse, towed past Ulster Bank, itself in ruins from the Republican's *Ballinalee*-led assault, National Army soldiers were in no doubt as to the significance of the out-of-service *Ballinalee*. Somewhat unusually, the car received an almost human send-off, with a volley of machine gun and rifle fire filling the air as it was dragged through the streets.²³² Despite contemporary military communications stating the car was salvageable, in the following years when State-owned armoured cars would be assigned registration numbers, the *Ballinalee* never received one, suggesting that the battle in Ballinrillick may well have been its last stand.²³³ Indeed, Martin Brennan stated some years later that the vehicle was removed to Dublin and 'the Staters never tried to recondition it again'.²³⁴ Ballinrillick local Hugh Gallagher once met Christy McLynn, driver of the *Ballinalee*. On hearing where Hugh was from, Christy wryly remarked, 'I drove a car down your way once.'²³⁵

With the *Ballinalee* defeated and the attempt to break through to Manorhamilton unsuccessful, the National Army cordon closed in around the mountain. Word was put out in the community that men escaping Rahelly should 'get behind the enemy lines [and] not go to the mountain.'²³⁶ It was, however, too late for the men who were trapped on the southern flanks of the mountain on the Glencar side. Billy Pilkington, who had overnighted in Glen Upper townland close to the Leitrim border, crossed the plateau to Barnarobin (Figure 3.26). On hearing that Benson and Langan were missing, he initially instructed his men to await their return. However, he was likely aware of the rapidity of the National Army's advances. After some time, and despite the confusion, Pilkington then instructed Tom Scanlon to advance his units from Barnarobin and cross the mountains to Glen Upper. From Barnarobin they possibly walked along the laneway to Lislahelly and then, crossing fields, progressed up to the mountain plateau via King's Gully. However, this route would have made them vulnerable to enemy troops. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a slip canyon, along the same fault line as the *Annagh Ré Mhór* slip canyon, was utilised by the men to move from the townland of

²²³ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 23.09.1922; *Freeman's Journal*, 22.09.1922

²²⁴ Hugh Gallagher, audio recording 15.12.2014; Hugh Gallagher pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 03.03.2023

²²⁵ *New Ross Standard*, 29.09.1923

²²⁶ Willie Devins, audio recording 1986

²²⁷ CW/OPS/02/01/05; Farry 2000: 84

²²⁸ CW/OPS/02/01/05

²²⁹ *Larne Times*, 30.09.1922; *Roscommon Herald*, 30.09.1922

²³⁰ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 30.09.1922

²³¹ Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986

²³² *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 30.09.1922

²³³ McCarthy and English 1975

²³⁴ Martin Brennan, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

²³⁵ Hugh Gallagher pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 03.03.2023

²³⁶ Hugh Gallagher audio recording, 2014.

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT

Barnarobin to the top of King's Gully.²³⁷ The weather showed no respite, worsening as the 70 or so men, in two units, climbed the steep inclines of the Benbulbin and Slievemore mountains.²³⁸ 'Trooper' McHugh recalled crossing the mountains: 'it was an awful buckin' wet day, we'd only a bit of bread [with us]'.²³⁹ The strain was beginning to show and, according to Tom Scanlon:

the men were so wet and so pitiable that we couldn't take them, as they were soaked, and we suggested that [one unit] would sleep all day and that night in a house at the foot of the mountain; and that on the following day they could cross to Glencar and there get word of us. The day after they followed us but it was still raining.²⁴⁰

One unit descended the mountain, most likely to Lislahelly, located between Barnarobin and Glencar. Scanlon took the second unit and crossed along the cliff face of the Ballynagalliagh headland, in extreme conditions: 'We crossed the mountain at Glencar Valley and that took us the whole day in rain and mist on the mountain. When we [were] over Glencar [Valley] we were soaked and we decided to go to the houses at the edge of the mountain.'²⁴¹ These safe houses likely included the Branley homestead, a particularly supportive safe house. Two or three Branley sons appear to have been present with the Rahelly units. Some of the men were in neighbouring Mrs Mitchell's house. Accessing these safe houses, including the Branley home, was possible by descending from the mountain plain via the gully known as *na Staighre*.²⁴²

²³⁷ Gilhawley 2021: 217-38; this narrow canyon was described as a

²⁴¹ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

²⁴² It is not clear why the men were split into two units, but it appears



Figure 3.25 The laneway in Carrownamaddoo townland where the Ballinalee was scuppered, apparently at the bend indicated (Marion Dowd).

'tunnel' by Gilhawley

²³⁸ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

²³⁹ Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1976

²⁴⁰ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

that the extreme weather played a significant role in hampering plans. It is also likely that the safe houses in Glencar simply could not accommodate all 70 men and thus they were dispersed amongst supportive houses in the valley.

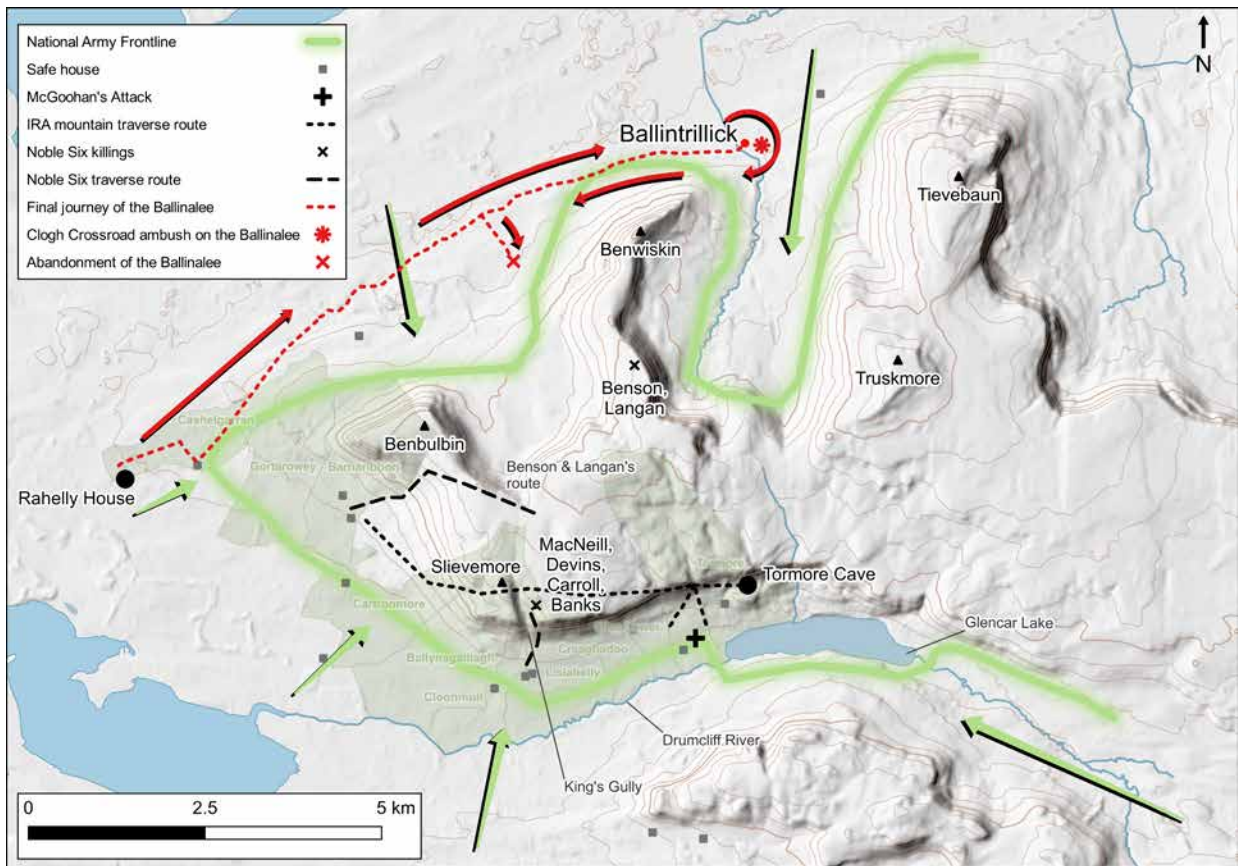


Figure 3.26 By Tuesday 19 September, National Army troops had entirely surrounded IRA units in the mountains. The Ballinalee unknowingly crossed the enemy frontline and was destroyed, while McGoohan's men were able to pierce into IRA safe house territory, launching an attack on already exhausted Republicans. This was followed on Wednesday 20 September by the killing of six IRA men on the plateau. The traverse route shows how the IRA used the mountain to move its columns between scattered safe houses and, ultimately, to the safety of Tormore Cave (Robert Mulraney and James Bonsall).

At the safe houses, the men were relieved to have the chance to rest, recover, eat, dry themselves and change their soaked clothing. They were now exhausted, having been kept alert and on the move in atrocious weather conditions; but they would get no quarter. 'Unfortunately,' Scanlon continued, 'the men were too wet and too cold and there was too much sympathy from the people (i.e., the hosts) [that] they felt secure and, eventually when they had taken off their clothes, the people said "we'll go out".'²⁴³ Such was the sympathy of the community that they were willing, not just to provide refuge, but to take part in sentry work. At that time, however, a unit of National Army troops under Captain Charles Edward McGoohan passed through Glencar:

We had only a meal over when we heard the machine gun at work. We were being sprayed by the Free Staters. Visibility

was bad and I got out of my house, which was near the wood, and the Free Staters trained their machine guns on us. They hit the delft on the dresser through the back doors and windows.²⁴⁴

In a National Army intelligence report of the day, it was stated that Republicans fired first on troops who were 'travelling in an open touring car ... [and] were sniped at from Glencar mountain.'²⁴⁵ The intelligence report, marked 'publicity', described a series of events in which the IRA, who apparently initiated the attack, were also subsequently surprised by McGoohan's men. This seems unlikely, especially given the tone of McHugh's and Scanlon's statements, which indicate that the Republicans were largely outnumbered and were too exhausted to engage in a fight, let alone initiate one. It is also highly unlikely that they would

²⁴³ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

²⁴⁴ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

²⁴⁵ CW/OPS/02/01/05

initiate fire from civilian safe houses. There was a quick dash from the houses. McHugh described how he had to escape out the front door of a small house, into the line of fire, as it had no back door. The patron, Mrs Mitchell, was under the table, while the bullets riddled her house.²⁴⁶ The National Army troops rounded on them and apprehended at least seventeen men. The remaining men rushed desperately up the sharp slope of the mountain under constant machine gun fire. Scanlon continued:

we retreated up the mountain and the Free State lined our men up on the road. Seventeen prisoners they had ... They fired over the heads of the prisoners. We remained up at the height until it was dark. They cut the ground in front of us with the machine guns. There was a misty haze but they were firing at us, and we could not see them at all, and we were at their mercy. The lads were soaked and they were without coats or hats. I had neither a coat nor a hat and only one legging. We daren't come down to the nearest house. We made the lads link up arms and even then we lost a man. We sent scouts out to find out what had attacked us. The whole Free State army was below, they said. Thousands of them! The [spotter] plane was back with them, so we did not know what to do, or where we stood.²⁴⁷

Once they had made themselves safe, a council was held on the mountain, at which Billy Pilkington was present. Scanlon suggested that he and his men would attempt to break the cordon around the base of the mountains to return some of his men back to the local area, in Grange.²⁴⁸ Pilkington agreed on condition that Scanlon did not take the Lewis machine gun. Despite being well-equipped the previous day, a large quantity of weapons and ammunition were abandoned in the flight from Rahelly. That night, under cover of darkness, Scanlon and his men descended the southern slopes of the mountains. Anticipating a difficult fight, they fixed bayonets, but they found an uneasy silence in the valley. To their surprise, the National Army had retreated from the Glencar Valley. Many in the IRA column returned to their home area in Grange by

foot, a long and precarious journey through the night. Others, however, decided to stay in the mountains with Pilkington's men. They returned in the early morning hours of Wednesday 20 September, to billet close to King's Gully, either in Barnarobin or Lislahelly townland. It is unclear where Pilkington and his men stayed that night. It is quite possible that they headed directly for Tormore Cave, but Scanlon's testimony suggests they billeted in the Glencar Valley. The group might also have split, due to its large numbers, with some spending the night in the cave. However, it is likely that with the valley below quiet, they returned to their billets, perhaps lulled into a false sense of security that the worst had passed.

Wednesday 20 September

The morning of Wednesday 20 September found several units of IRA men scattered around the southern flanks of the Dartry Mountains. In Sligo town, now firmly under National Army control, an attempt was made by residual IRA members to attack National Army posts. At 5:30am a number of IRA men entered the town and opened fire on the Ulster Bank garrison, a surprising feat considering the depletion of IRA units and an actively enforced curfew.²⁴⁹ Notwithstanding, the IRA was in retreat and trying desperately to regroup. The majority of the men on the mountains appear to have been hiding in Glen Upper townland, just north of Glencar Lake. Others from Rahelly, in small groups, were likely still moving onto the upland plateau from the surrounding areas, as the National Army's grip consolidated around the mountains. Following the routing by McGoohan's men, it was not possible to remain in the Glencar Valley. News of the loss of the *Ballinalee*, the lockdown of Ballintrillick and the failure to re-take Manorhamilton likely reached the IRA in the mountains. It appears, at this time, that those in command were aware that crossing to Ballintrillick was now too dangerous. Pilkington reassessed. He decided that it was now necessary to seek 'refuge in the Glencar mountains'.²⁵⁰ Decades later, it was recalled that 'they were all ordered by Pilkington to go to Glencar ... the people who were in Rahelly ... their only chance to reach safety.'²⁵¹ Speaking in 2012, Chris Branley (son of Paddy Branley who had billeted in the cave) said:

According to what I have heard, he [Pilkington] ordered all forces to come along the headland. To keep behind that

²⁴⁶ CW/OPS/02/01/05; Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133; Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1976

²⁴⁷ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

²⁴⁸ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

²⁴⁹ CW/OPS/02/01/05; *The Irish Times*, 22.09.1922

²⁵⁰ Kilgannon 1926: 81

²⁵¹ Chris Branley, audio recording 2008

and get for Glencar ... The men on the Ballintrillick side – they were coming here ... All the IRA men were ordered to Glencar for safety ... There were men who would guide them into this cave.²⁵²

'We were supposed to retire to the mountains ... We were all told to retire to a certain place', Jack 'Trooper' McHugh recalled.²⁵³ Though not named, the 'certain place' was almost certainly Tormore Cave, located just 420m northeast of the Branley home.

Tom Scanlon noted that Brian MacNeill, Seamus Devins, Paddy Carroll and Joe Banks were detached from the Rahelly troops when they headed up the mountain on Wednesday 20 September. While not known with certainty, local narrative suggests the men were en route to meet with Billy Pilkington.²⁵⁴ As a small group of four, which included two senior staff, they may have been an advance party, setting out for the cave prior to the main body of men. They climbed from King's Gully, a different point of access from where the others had ascended at Barnarobin and Glen Upper. While there are conflicting accounts about what happened on the mountains of North Sligo on 20 September 1922, a written statement made shortly afterwards by an anonymous National Army soldier, enlisted under Captain McGoohan, reflects the generally accepted version of events, as held by the families of the victims.²⁵⁵ The statement is consistent in terms of the principal details of that day. Captain Charles Edward McGoohan of Ballinamore, County Leitrim and Captain Sean Sexton of Ballinalee, County Longford led a party of 56 National Army soldiers up King's Gully and onto the plateau of Slievemore Mountain.²⁵⁶ Brian MacNeill, Seamus Devins, Paddy Carroll and Joseph Banks had ascended approximately two thirds of the climb up the gully. They may have been heading directly to Tormore Cave or, more likely, aimed to cross eastwards to Glen Upper townland and meet with Pilkington's men. On the plateau, McGoohan spotted them with his field binoculars. He told his troops to lie down and conceal themselves. The four were approached by McGoohan,

who 'wore an ordinary cap [and] went forward for some distance in front of his party, and signalled to the four men ... waving his cap and shouting to them to come on.'²⁵⁷ The friendly cap waving signal used by McGoohan was one that was regularly used by the IRA during the War of Independence.²⁵⁸ It is worth noting that this sly ruse had been employed locally by the National Army before this, reflecting IRA veterans' knowledge from the earlier war now applied to capture their former comrades. During the Battle of Collooney a few months previously, Commandant Farrelly of the National Army 'was not uniformed but wore an old trench coat and a volunteer's cap.'²⁵⁹ He had dressed specifically to confuse and lure IRA men into a trap. In Scanlon's telling of the same event, 'they thought it was us [their comrades]. [That is] who they had expected to find.'²⁶⁰

MacNeill, Devins, Carroll and Banks headed towards McGoohan and stopped at a distance of about 50 yards (46m) when the National Army troops appeared from their concealment. The four were ordered to surrender and they complied. They were disarmed and identified, and were then marched a short distance east of the gully, onto a flat area of ground near the mountain summit in Lislahelly townland.²⁶¹ Captains McGoohan and Sexton conferred about the course of action and decided to shoot the four. Sexton, at that time, had a hand injury having been grazed by a bullet in recent fighting.²⁶² They asked for volunteers amongst their own soldiers to carry out the killing. The troops refused. Captain McGoohan apparently stated that, 'It did not matter as he had a Lewis gun that would do the work'.²⁶³ The National Army troops were sent further up the mountain, out of sight of the four prisoners. McGoohan and Sexton stayed behind with four 'ex-British soldiers', all from County Longford and named as Larry Farrell, 'Ginger' Horkins, Bracken and Fitzmaurice.²⁶⁴

Tom Scanlon's description of what happened next is a retelling of the testimony of one of those directly involved. Scanlon was not a witness, but he claimed to have subsequently extracted this information from captured and interrogated National Army soldiers. His account corresponds with the anonymous statement held in the Military Archives, including the names

²⁵² Chris Branley, video and audio recording 2012

²⁵³ Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1976

²⁵⁴ Chris Branley, audio recording 2008

²⁵⁵ Bonsall *et al.* 2022: 18-52; BMH/CD/333/36. The statement is a two-page typed document; it is unsigned and of unknown provenance. It is likely that it was written shortly after the events, as the letter was received and printed by the newsletter, *Poblacht na h-Éireann*, in January 1923. In printing the letter, the editors decided to retract the names of the National Army men made implicit in the killings. The statement was deposited, anonymously, with the Military Archives in 1965.

²⁵⁶ BMH/CD/333/36

²⁵⁷ BMH/CD/333/36

²⁵⁸ Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986

²⁵⁹ Younger 1968: 356

²⁶⁰ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

²⁶¹ Chris Branley, audio recording 2008

²⁶² CW/RR/036

²⁶³ BMH/CD/333/36

²⁶⁴ BMH/CD/333/36; Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

of those involved. It should be noted, however, that Scanlon's knowledge of the perpetrators' names might have originated from shortly after the events, with the publication of the anonymous statement in *Poblacht na h-Éireann* newspaper in January 1923.²⁶⁵ There is also a reasonable possibility that the information that Scanlon later extracted from National Army captives may have originated from the same person who would go on to make the anonymous statement; perhaps in exchange for their life being spared by Scanlon. Scanlon's account is brutal in tone:

Only in the middle of the ambush did they [MacNeill, Devins, Carroll and Banks] realise who the 'civilians' were ... McGoohan was from Leitrim and was an ex-IRA man. He was in my [unit] at Glenasmole [training] camp! ... The prisoners were then disarmed and the machine gun was turned on them ... Brian [MacNeill] saw them posting the machine guns and he made four or five jumps ... He was fifteen [13.7m] yards away when the burst of the machine gun hit him ... An ex-British soldier, Horkins, was on the shooting. There was a Captain from the Longford area, Larry Farrell and another British soldier also.²⁶⁶ There were two ex-British soldiers and three officers ... McGoohan went round on them afterwards and he shot them individually, for young Banks wasn't killed. They robbed the dead and they cut Seamus Devins' finger off to get the ring his wife had given to him on his marriage day. I think that it was Horkins who robbed the dead.²⁶⁷

The four IRA men were left where they were killed and the National Army marched northwards. Captain Harry Benson and Volunteer Tommy Langan were crossing

the northern flank of the Dartry Mountains that morning in Lyle townland, close to Benwisquin peak. The detrimental weather and blanket fog, which had so severely hampered the IRA men's traverse across the mountains, momentarily lifted around noon.²⁶⁸ From a distance of 3.5km, Captain McGoohan spotted Benson and Langan with his field glasses. Since separation from their comrades, Benson and Langan had spent more than a day (possibly up to 36 hours) in atrocious weather on the mountain plateau. It is not known where they went or where they were headed. However, local narrative recalls that the two men, upon reaching the southern flank of the mountain, headed east for Tormore Cave where they spent the Tuesday night, 19 September.²⁶⁹ The cave, which they were likely aware of, would have offered excellent respite from the weather conditions and they may have anticipated meeting their comrades there. Had they been there on the night of Tuesday 19 September, it would have been a 4km walk across largely open bog to Benwisquin. Being out of contact with the Rahelly men, Benson and Langan would not have known the fate of the *Ballinalee* and that the plan to retreat to Ballinrillick had changed. It is feasible that on the morning of Wednesday 20 September, Benson and Langan, rather than being lost or disoriented on the misty uplands, decided to descend the mountain close to Benwisquin with the expectation that they would meet with comrades at Ballinrillick.²⁷⁰

Captain McGoohan split his men into two companies of 26 soldiers each. One company was sent on a quarter of a mile, possibly to search for other IRA men remaining on the hill. The second company remained with McGoohan and the ex-British soldiers. Benson and Langan observed McGoohan give a friendly signal (described as waving his cap on top of his rifle), leading the two men to think it was an IRA comrade. They walked towards McGoohan and were ordered to surrender. Langan put up his hands and Benson attempted to run away but was stopped by shots fired in his direction. Both were captured, disarmed, searched and identified. The two men were led 'some distance' along the narrow ridge of Benwisquin. Two of the 26 men, 'Ginger' Horkins and Bracken, 'dropped behind our party with them'.²⁷¹ Scanlon described what followed based on an eyewitness he had spoken to:

they beat them viciously. Benson's

²⁶⁵ *Poblacht na h-Éireann*, 27.01.1923

²⁶⁶ In the text of the anonymous statement, Horkins is referred to generally as 'the machine gunner'. The statement also names him, along with Bracken, as the killers of Benson and Langan. But there is also some confusion in the anonymous statement, which states that 'Larry Farrell it was that did the shooting with the Lewis gun', in relation to the first group killed. Here, Scanlon names Horkins as the gunner. Despite the confusion, and irrespective of who physically handled the guns, Scanlon believed that the six named National Army men were implicit in the killings.

²⁶⁷ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133. Seamus Devins' ring was stolen but was eventually returned to his wife. The ring was not a gift from his wife, however, but was presented to him by Nelson's Jewellers for protecting their stock during an arms raid by his men (see Bonsall *et al.* 2022: 121).

²⁶⁸ Hugh Gallagher, audio recording 15.12.2014; Chris Branley, audio recording 2014

²⁶⁹ Chris Branley, audio recording 2014; Seamus Monaghan pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 21.06.2022

²⁷⁰ As suggested by Bonsall *et al.* 2022: 36

²⁷¹ BMH/CD/333/36

jawbone was broken. Then McGoohan bayoneted them after for, [when] he was falling, Benson shouted 'Up the Republic!' They shoved them headfirst into two long holes and they then fired down on him. The bullet went through his neck and out the top of his head.²⁷²

Harry Benson and Tommy Langan were killed at about 12 noon, two and a half hours after their four comrades had been killed and 3.5km from the location of those first killings (Figure 3.27). After killing Benson and Langan, the National Army troops came together and descended the Ballintrillick side of the mountain.²⁷³ The bodies of Benson and Langan lay undiscovered in swallow holes on Benwisquin Mountain for eleven days and were not recovered until 1 October 1922.²⁷⁴

The six men who were killed on the mountains of North Sligo on 20 September 1922 later became known as 'Sligo's Noble Six' (Figure 3.28). They were Divisional Adjutant Brian MacNeill (aged 22), Brigadier General Seamus Devins (aged 34), Captain Harry Benson (aged 22), Lieutenant Paddy Carroll (aged 25), Volunteer Joe Banks (aged 18) and Volunteer Tommy Langan (aged 19).²⁷⁵

Thursday 21 September

Captain Jeremiah Roddy was part of the National Army troop that attacked Rahelly House. In his Army Pension Board application Roddy recalled:

A general attack was planned on Benbulbin (Rahilly Camp) Headquarters of Irregulars Sept. 1922. Orders was understood to be "no prisoners", so I refused to go on them conditions. Seamus Devins, Div. Adj. MacNeill, Benson, Carroll, Langan and Banks were shot. Severed all connections with Free State and came to U.S.A. Dec. 1922.²⁷⁶

Captain Roddy's statement suggests that a shoot-to-kill policy was in place for the attack on Rahelly House. The actions of his National Army comrades, those who arrested large numbers of prisoners and those who were responsible for killing Sligo's Noble Six after their capture, reveal that the implementation of orders was

inconsistent. Roddy is unlikely to have been the only person within the National Army contingent who objected to killing former comrades. Chris Branley recalled that the IRA 'had got the message that there were to be no prisoners taken on that day ... they were aware of it.'²⁷⁷

Billy Pilkington's report to IRA HQ, dated 8 December 1922, illustrates what was known at that time about the killing of the six men in his division:

The following is the report on deaths of Divisional Adjutant MacNeill, and Brigadier Devins, with four others. They occurred during a big round up of North Sligo area by F[ree] S[tate] troops under Generals McKeon and Lalor. To keep an appointment with me at a place north of Glencar Lake, the Adjutant and the Brigadier, with two others Lieut. Carroll and Vol. Banks started on the morning of 20th Sept. from a house in which they billeted the previous night at the western end of the Benbulbin mountain. The route taken was along the mountain top, as it was considered the safest. Midway between their starting point and destination they encountered a big party of F.S. forces who had ascended the mountain at a southern point that morning, with the result that the four were killed.

What exactly happened we are not presently acquainted with. The F.S. version as appearing in the press from their Army Hdqrs. said that the four were killed in a big fight, in which our men retreated, leaving their dead behind. This of course is untrue. The local F.S. version is that when the four were called on to surrender, Brigadier Devins opened fire, the answering fire killing the four. This does not fit the truth either. Why were all the bodies so badly riddled with bullets, practically all the wounds being fatal?

The true version which our suspicions dictate, and have since been confirmed by friendly F.S. soldiers who had been speaking to some of those who were on the job, is that the four men were surprised and surrendered, and afterwards

²⁷² Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

²⁷³ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

²⁷⁴ Bonsall *et al.* 2022: chapter 2

²⁷⁵ Bonsall *et al.* 2022

²⁷⁶ MSP34REF33131, Jeremiah Roddy

²⁷⁷ Chris Branley, audio recording 2014

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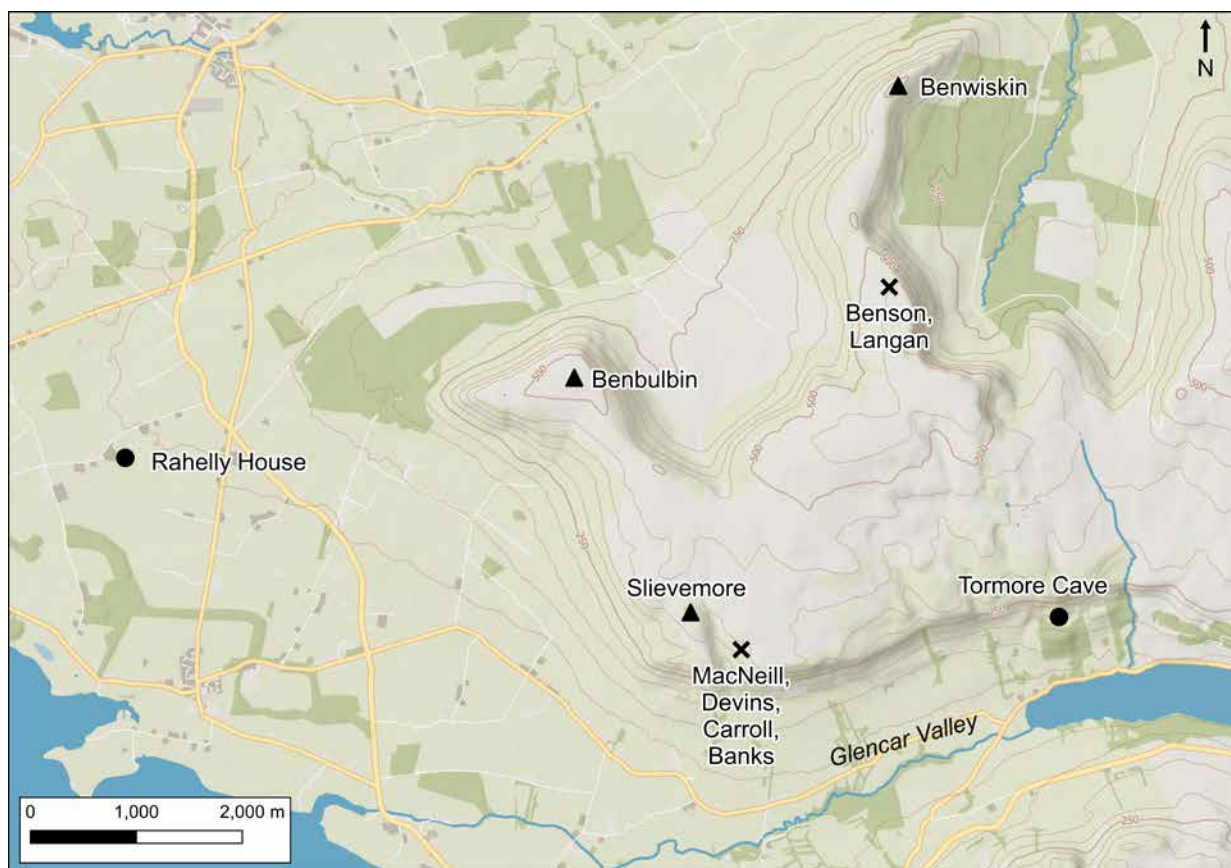


Figure 3.27 Locations on Slievemore (King's Mountain) and Benwiskin Mountain where Sligo's Noble Six were killed by National Army troops on 20 September 1922 (James Bonsall).

murdered. The Officer in charge of F.S. party was a Capt. McGoohan, a native of Ballinamore, Co. Leitrim and attached to 1st Midland Division; another Officer was Staff-Capt. Sexton native of Co. Longford.

Near a fortnight later the horribly mutilated bodies of Capt. Benson O/C No. 1 A.S.U., No. 1 Bgde. and Volunteer Langan were found two miles distant from place of former tragedy.

Benson's body had 7 bullet wounds in head and one in heart. Langan's body six wounds in head and a bayonet wound in stomach coming out at back. The reason of delay in finding bodies was due to our ignorance of their deaths. It was the persistent reports from F.S. sources of their deaths that led to the search which found the bodies. These two men were killed same day as the others by the same party of F.S. soldiers.

Although we have not definite proof that our six comrades were murdered as all the men of McGoohan's column are since operating outside this area, and consequently cannot be got at to make them divulge what exactly happened; still, I hope in the near future to be able to supply you with all the details as to the manner of their deaths.²⁷⁸

Some 60 years after the execution of Sligo's Noble Six, IRA veteran Willie Devins continued to hold Seán MacEoin responsible for the killings, stating that MacEoin had harboured 'awful spite for the boys in Rahelly' because they had captured the eponymous *Ballinalee*. He recalled that a few men from the area were in the National Army and had led the soldiers up the mountains.²⁷⁹ Local man Hugh Gallagher recalls that when Harry Benson and Tommy Langan were captured on Benwiskin Mountain, which can be approached from

²⁷⁸ Letter from Billy Pilkington to Liam Lynch, dated 08.12.1922. Archives Department, UCD

²⁷⁹ Willie Devins, audio recording 1986



Figure 3.28 Sligo's Noble Six, first published on the front page of Éire The Irish Nation newspaper, 1 December 1923 (Local Studies & Archive, Sligo County Library).

the laneway at Carrownamaddoo, the National Army believed that they had been in the *Ballinalee*. Though this was not the case, their supposed association with the *Ballinalee* was locally believed to be the reason why they were killed in such a gruesome manner.²⁸⁰

Tom Scanlon, who had escaped off the mountain with a small group just prior to the executions, sought answers as to who was responsible:

I set out myself to get hold of the story. At last we got hold of two fellows who were in the Free State party [National Army soldiers]. And each of them confessed,

one only after ... two to three month and he told us about both groups of murders. The next fellow we talked to was on the [indecipherable, possibly 'first'] murder himself but he said that he did not take any part in it, but the two statements were tied to each other. A statement was published in *An tÓglach* [a National Army newspaper] in October or November 1922. The F[ree] S[tate] troops said that they then had been killed in action.²⁸¹

²⁸⁰ Hugh Gallagher pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 03.03.2023

²⁸¹ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

Aftermath

Following the death of Seamus Devins, Martin Bernard McGowan took over his position as OC of the I North Sligo Brigade. According to local narrative, on the day after the shootings McGowan told local IRA men not to go up the mountains.²⁸² The order came too late, however, as dozens of Republicans were already scattered throughout the uplands. Small, pitched battles continued on Thursday 21 September. There were reports of heavy fighting in the woods at the base of Benbulbin Mountain as the National Army continued with the round up. Internal intelligence reports indicate that approximately 60 prisoners had been taken, with the capture of many significant personnel, the death of at least six IRA men, and the recovery of the *Ballinalee* armoured car. A large quantity of vehicles, weapons and ammunition had also been seized.²⁸³

The North Sligo IRA never fully recovered from the killings of 20 September 1922, which came as ‘a very severe blow to the Brigade which had practically to be reorganised again.’²⁸⁴ The killing of Sligo’s Noble Six, in a national context, was not an isolated incident resulting from ‘the fog of war’. It occurred seven days prior to the introduction of the Public Safety Act, which allowed for the execution of persons found in possession of arms. During the Civil War, the Act (which was never fully ratified due to the temporary Free State’s inability to introduce legislation during the Truce period) saw 81 prisoners executed.²⁸⁵ Prior to the formal acceptance of the Act, the State took even greater liberties, carrying out unofficial and ‘unsanctioned’ executions in the field. The pattern of State sanctioned reprisals that occurred in Dublin and Kerry in August and September 1922 were paralleled in North Sligo in the days leading up to the introduction of the Act. Similar to events in the southwest, doctors’ inquests into the causes of death of reprisal victims were either late, downplayed or simply did not take place.²⁸⁶

A month was spent re-ordering the I North Sligo Brigade, which coincided with the period of occupation of Tormore Cave. The execution of Sligo’s Noble Six was arguably the defining point of County Sligo’s Civil War, certainly in public consciousness over the past century. In recent decades, Tormore Cave has been known by some people as the ‘Noble Six Cave’, based

on an understanding that there was a connection between the six fatalities and the cave. What is not generally known, however, is that while it was likely their destination on the day they were killed, Sligo’s Noble Six did not successfully reach the dugout. It is quite likely that Seamus Devins knew the cave and may have used it during the War of Independence or in an earlier part of the Civil War, but it is not known whether any of the other five men were familiar with the site. Harry Benson and Tommy Langan, according to Tom Scanlon’s account, spent up to 36 hours on the mountains. It is possible, as some local narratives suggest, that they may have spent some of that time in the cave, perhaps overnighing there, but left and were subsequently shot on Benwisikin Mountain. In truth, it will never be known whether all or any of Sligo’s Noble Six had ever visited or used Tormore Cave, but in death they have become synonymous with the site.

National Army withdrawal

As National Army troops withdrew from the mountains of North Sligo, an uneasy sense of peace prevailed: ‘Following the removal of [National Army] troops from the north side of the town of Sligo absolute quiet reigns.’²⁸⁷ One newspaper reported near the end of October that there had been a lull in activities in Sligo in previous weeks.²⁸⁸ Attempts were made to seek out Republicans on the run in North Sligo in the days following the killings.²⁸⁹ However, on 6 October, 36 Republicans were captured and there was an assumption that all Republicans had now been rounded up: ‘There is no trace of any further irregulars in the neighbourhood of Rahelly or on the mountains.’²⁹⁰ This was not accurate, however. Approximately 34 men had made it to the safety of Tormore Cave. According to Chris Branley, ‘there was nobody ever found here.’²⁹¹ He further recalled that ‘there was supposed to be some men here for six weeks after that day. Whether they had nowhere to go or it wasn’t safe I don’t know.’²⁹² As the days and weeks passed, the men in the cave would have learned about the fate of their six friends and comrades on the mountains of Slievemore and Benwisikin. While Pilkington and his men remained in the cave, divisional Quartermaster Charles Gildea, whom Pilkington had appointed as Commander of the IV South Sligo Brigade in replacement of Frank

²⁸² Hugh Gallagher pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 03.03.2023

²⁸³ CW/OPS/02/01/05

²⁸⁴ Farry 2012: 103

²⁸⁵ McGarty 2022

²⁸⁶ Andy Bielenberg, 2022, ‘The Dead of the Civil War’, Public lecture at the National Library of Ireland, 13.10.2022

²⁸⁷ *Derry Journal*, 27.09.1922

²⁸⁸ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 21.10.1922

²⁸⁹ CW/OPS/02/01/04, Military Archives

²⁹⁰ Farry 2000: 85; *Derry Journal*, 27.09.1922

²⁹¹ Chris Branley, audio recording 2008; Chris Branley, video and audio recording 2012

²⁹² Chris Branley, video and audio recording 2012

Carty, was made acting GOC of the division. Divisional Assistant Adjutant Jack Brennan of the IV South Sligo Brigade in Tubbercurry temporarily assumed Brian MacNeill's position as Divisional Adjutant following the latter's death.²⁹³ A dispatch was issued to all OCs of the 3rd Western Division who were informed of the assault on Rahelly House and instructed 'to harass enemy and intensify campaign so as to divert attention of enemy for the time being.'²⁹⁴

In 1938, JP (Jack) Brennan wrote to the Pensions Board:

I remember the big round up on the 1st Brigade, September 1922 ... [when] a number of our troops and officers were killed and wounded including Divisional Adjutant Brian MacNeill killed and the General Officer Commanding Liam Pilkington suffered a broken collar bone. Immediately after this conflict, I remember receiving a dispatch ... "giving details of losses [and] notification of the Divisional Quartermaster [Charles Gildea] taking control 'til recovery of the General Officer Commanding."²⁹⁵

It is interesting to note in these comments that no details were given about the situation and predicament of the men in hiding. This underlines the secrecy surrounding Tormore Cave. Dispatches amongst the divisional command to its brigades continued for approximately a month, mirroring the length of time the IRA men are supposed to have stayed in the cave.²⁹⁶ It is quite possible that a two-way line of communication existed between Pilkington in the cave and the new Divisional Commander Gildea and brigade commanders on the outside. Tellingly, the temporary divisional positions assigned to Gildea and Jack Brennan remained in place for what is variably recorded as 'three or four' or 'five to six' weeks, the approximate time of the Tormore Cave occupation. After that period, Frank O'Beirne was appointed Divisional Adjutant and Pilkington resumed his position as GOC.²⁹⁷

The bitterness of the struggle, the execution of Sligo's Noble Six, and the Public Safety Act (the 'Murder Bill' as it was known by Republicans) created a desire for

revenge locally.²⁹⁸ On 10 October, an attempt was made to kill, or at least seriously intimidate, four National Army soldiers who had been abducted by Republicans. The crew of the *Ballinalee* (driver Christy McLynn, gunner J. Sherlock and assistant driver J. Maguire) brought the prisoners to a safe house in Strandhill owned by the Coen family. They were brought out to a stable, forced onto their knees and questioned. They were then brought out into a small field and told they were to be shot in reprisal for the execution of the men on the mountain. Colonel Commandant Fallon had been tipped off and made his way towards Strandhill with a party of troops in a Lancia car. Upon spotting a young and uneasy look-out scout, they immediately surrounded the house where they saw the IRA men retreat, and opened fire. The IRA men were arrested fifteen minutes later.²⁹⁹ In early November, two men were shot dead near Tubbercurry in unusual circumstances. Uncertainties remain surrounding their execution; Frank Carty claimed they were 'spies', while the National Army claimed them as 'army volunteers'.³⁰⁰ The I Sligo Brigade mentioned the taking out of 'spies implicated in shootings of six of our men at Benbulban [sic] mountain.'³⁰¹ In contrast to the Sligo IRA's usual treatment of captured enemies, these two men appear to have been treated with considerable brutality prior to being shot. This may be indicative of an escalation in bitterness following the killing of Sligo's Noble Six.³⁰²

The Public Safety Act passed through the Dáil at the end of September and was enacted on 15 October 1922. Being found with a weapon was now punishable by death, so risks had to be carefully calculated. A two-week amnesty on enacting executions was given with an ultimatum that Republicans would surrender their arms by 14 October.³⁰³ In one contemporary newspaper, it was noted that 'during the past few weeks there was a lull, and that people were beginning to get their nerves settled again.'³⁰⁴ It came as a shock to Sligo town residents, therefore, when ten IRA prisoners escaped from Sligo Gaol on Tuesday morning (17 October), assisted by shots fired at various positions around the town to act as a diversion.³⁰⁵ That night, large numbers

²⁹⁸ Dorney 2013

²⁹⁹ CW/OPS/02/01/04; CW/OPS/02/01/05

³⁰⁰ *Belfast Weekly Telegraph*, 18.11.22; Bonsall et al. 2022: 49

³⁰¹ MA/MSPC/A/29

³⁰² Bonsall et al. 2022: 49

³⁰³ Dorney 2013; *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 21.10.1922

³⁰⁴ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 21.10.1922

³⁰⁵ This was the third major escape from Sligo Gaol. The men cut through metal window bars with knives that had been toothed to

²⁹³ MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan

²⁹⁴ MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan

²⁹⁵ MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan

²⁹⁶ MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan

²⁹⁷ MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan

of heavily armed Republicans arrived into town and took part in an assault on National Army posts. The following night, it was reported that large numbers of IRA men attacked garrisoned outposts in the town including the Ulster Bank, Sligo Gaol, the Courthouse and Town Hall. The four-hour attack was carried out with rifles, machine guns and grenades, with the IRA ultimately retreating in the early morning hours. No fatalities occurred, but the message was clear that the Sligo IRA was striving to remain a viable opposition force.³⁰⁶ On the same day, the road bridge at Drumcliff was demolished and, following repair works, was again destroyed by the IRA on 23 October.³⁰⁷ It is possible that a small group of men might have left Tormore Cave on these two occasions to carry out the demolition. The cave is located approximately 6.5km directly east of Drumcliff Bridge and could have been accessed relatively easily through the Glencar Valley. Indeed, there were multiple safe houses between the cave and Drumcliff that could have been visited en route.

By the end of 1922, the IRA in North Sligo had dwindled in number and was confined to the mountainous regions. Pilkington, by this time no longer based in Tormore Cave, remained confident as new officers had been appointed, intelligence gathering was successful, and communications were reorganised. He believed that 'good work can be expected in this area.'³⁰⁸ The impact of September was still being felt, however. Pilkington complained that his division had no munitions output because their munitions officer (Lieutenant Paddy Carroll, one of Sligo's Noble Six) had been killed and it was difficult to find a safe place to locate a factory. The divisional Information Officer, Robert G. Bradshaw, had been arrested during the September round up, which had negatively impacted upon intelligence gathering.³⁰⁹

An attempt to regroup

Attempts to regain a foothold continued as 1922 drew to a close. On 9 December, a small group of Republicans from North Sligo, disguised in National Army

uniforms, captured the Town Hall garrison for several hours during which National Army Sergeant James Skeffington (from Charles Street in Sligo town) was shot dead.³¹⁰ The IRA escaped with 21 rifles, 4 revolvers and 1,300 rounds of ammunition.³¹¹ The population of Sligo town and North Sligo generally appeared to have continued their support for the IRA. Pilkington noted on 10 December 1922: 'I may mention that I find the civilian population generous and sympathetic in most of the area; there is no difficulty in finding billets and food for the Active Service Units.'³¹² The killing of Sligo's Noble Six may have contributed to increased public empathy. Indeed, in the Glencar Valley it appears that the National Army exercised only a very superficial sense of control, recognising with frustration how in December 1922 'the irregulars, that are at present on the run round Sligo, come home, and sleep in their homes nearly every second night.'³¹³ In recognising their difficulties to penetrate the IRA, the same intelligence report stated: 'there is a column of about 20 irregulars down at Barnarobin and the houses principally patronised are P. Flanagans, Gilmartin's, Smyths. This was a dumping for material during the Rahelly fight. They also frequent the houses of Branleys and O'Connor of Glencar.'³¹⁴ All of the names listed are today identified as having male members in the IRA and many female members in their support network (see Chapter 10). Indeed, James McCann, Captain of the Glencar Company who fought in the defence of Rahelly, climbed Slievemore on 20 September and remained on the run.³¹⁵ He organised two IRA companies in the early months of 1923, one in Glencar and the other at an unknown location in County Sligo. He claimed that they had '69 young men amongst them'.³¹⁶

While key areas such as the Glencar Valley remained fiercely Republican, more broadly, acts of economic sabotage took their toll on a war-weary population. The destruction on 10 January 1923 of Sligo Railway Station, a local expression of a national IRA campaign against Free State infrastructure, caused widespread national condemnation.³¹⁷ In the attack, 40 to 50 IRA men mined and set fire to the station, destroying two passenger trains and seven engines. A number of the engines, on

make effective hacksaws. During the operation, a separate team were assigned to play a melodeon and held noisy sing-songs and dances to drown out the noise! They had assembled materials to make a number of rope ladders. They were met outside by armed men and shots were fired over the town as a diversion. *Frontier Sentinel*, 21.10.1922; *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 21.10.1922; *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 18.10.1922; *Ballina Herald and Mayo and Sligo Advertiser*, 26.10.1922

³⁰⁶ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 21.10.1922

³⁰⁷ Farry 2012: 103

³⁰⁸ Farry 2012: 105

³⁰⁹ Farry 2000: 89

³¹⁰ W2D149, James Skeffington; Hopkinson 1988: 216

³¹¹ Farry 2000: 88

³¹² Farry 2000: 90

³¹³ CW/OPS/02/01/05

³¹⁴ CW/OPS/02/01/05

³¹⁵ Having ascended the mountain with some of the men who ended up in Tormore, there is every likelihood that McCann was one of those who took refuge in the cave. However, from the records all that can be said is that he was on the run during this period.

³¹⁶ MP34REF18169, James McCann

³¹⁷ White 2017: 688

fire, were sent crashing into the station goods store, with one falling into the deep water harbour.³¹⁸ The attack caused considerable embarrassment for the Dáil; several members questioned how such an assault could be carried out in a State-garrisoned town.³¹⁹ One newspaper wrote a scathing attack accusing the National Army garrison in Sligo town of being 'too timid to fight'.³²⁰ The attack was undertaken to limit National Army troop movements, but also as part of a nation-wide campaign of economic sabotage to undermine and destabilise the Free State government. The phenomenal scale of the destruction and the undermining of local industry was not well received by Sligo's working population.³²¹ Indeed, the social and economic effects persist today, in that the station platforms remain unroofed and, most significantly, on the Sligo to Dublin route trains operate on a single-track line as far as Maynooth. Subsequent to the attack, multiple homes were raided, resulting in the arrest of Christy McLynn, former driver of the *Ballinalee*.³²²

Republican activities on a smaller scale continued through the early months of 1923, with predominantly economic and infrastructural targets. Looting, sniping, cutting of telegraph wires, road trenching, holding-up of mail trains, destruction of bridges, bombing and burning of private houses, and the destruction of rail infrastructure, including the burning of signal cabins, became typical attempts at economic sabotage. Rahelly House was burned in January 1923 in an attempt to prevent National Army troops from setting up a post in the building.³²³ An attack was also made on Tubbercurry Barracks on 26 January, during which soldier Martin Leonard was killed.³²⁴

A divisional report from mid-March 1923 reported that the 3rd Western Division IRA had 400 men in active service, 1300 men on the roll, 300 Lee Enfield rifles with 15,000 rounds of ammunition, four Lewis guns, one

Vickers gun and one Thompson machine gun.³²⁵ Despite the setbacks and fewer engagements, the IRA in County Sligo still maintained columns 'in the same areas as they had done since the outbreak of the war'.³²⁶ Pilkington led one such column of approximately 20 men. Ernie O'Malley regarded, even as late as April 1923, that 'The fight had varied in intensity [throughout the country]. In Connaught the western divisions maintained their ground, especially Billy Pilkington's area'.³²⁷ By the turn of 1923, however, the Free State was consolidating large regions of the country under its control and could afford to exert more concentrated pressure on regions like counties Kerry and Sligo, which had not capitulated quickly. One IRA report recorded:

The enemy [National Army] have been very active; they are raiding the country constantly in large bodies. The ASU is not strong enough to deal with them, in the way of putting up a successful fight, but we intend adopting harassing tactics in future, to meet this new campaign successfully.³²⁸

A divisional meeting of the 3rd Western Division was held on 21 February 1923 about four months after the Tormore Cave ordeal. By this time the divisional HQ was based in an unrecorded dugout in Rockingham Demesne near Boyle.³²⁹ Representatives from all brigades, except the I North Sligo Brigade, attended. Despite a hopeful optimism in the prowess of a new campaign, a truce became an accepted necessity. Billy Pilkington became a key national player, albeit a very reluctant one, in the realisation of peace talks that brought about a truce in April 1923. IRA Chief of Staff, Frank Aiken, issued a call for Republican forces to dump arms on 24 May 1923. Billy Pilkington was against the ceasefire and in June reported: 'Although the feelings and opinions of all ranks in the division were against the decision calling off the war and dumping the arms, still the orders enforcing this decision have been faithfully and effectively carried out'.³³⁰ Despite declaring an end to the armed struggle, the summer of 1923 was a precarious one, with IRA men remaining on the run in an attempt to evade capture. National Army operation reports of that period are replete with

³¹⁸ *Western Chronicle*, 19.01.1923; *Western Mail*, 12.01.1923; *Dublin Evening Telegraph*, 11.01.1923

³¹⁹ *Irish Weekly and Ulster Examiner*, 10.02.1923

³²⁰ *Londonderry Sentinel*, 16.01.1923

³²¹ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 04.01.1923

³²² *Derry Journal*, 15.01.1923. When McLynn was arrested in Strandhill for attempting to execute soldiers, he was transferred to Longford Barracks, from where he quickly escaped. Following the burning of Sligo's train station and his subsequent arrest, McLynn was then transferred to the Curragh Camp, from where he again escaped (CW/OPS/06/04). He was apprehended in a dugout with Dominic Benson (Harry Benson's brother) in June 1923.

³²³ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 20.01.1923; *Ballymena Weekly Telegraph*, 27.01.1923; *Belfast News-Letter*, 31.01.1923; Divisional HQ dispatches, UCDA, O'MN, P17a/119

³²⁴ Farry 2000: 91

³²⁵ Farry 2000: 91

³²⁶ Farry 2000: 89

³²⁷ O'Malley 1978: 227

³²⁸ Divisional HQ dispatches, UCDA, O'MN, P17a/119

³²⁹ MSP34REF5687, Frank Carty. In 1925, an arms dump was discovered in Rockingham containing 13 Lee Enfield rifles, 1200 rounds of .303 ammunition and 30 rounds of revolver ammunition, a Mauser and a bomb (Tonra 2001).

³³⁰ Farry 2000: 93

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details of patrols, arrests, round ups and searches for dugouts and arms dumps.³³¹ Many of those arrested would spend the following year in bleak prison camps, while the Free State deliberated over whether the war had been finally won. This cautious approach reflected

that while there was a lack of appetite for continued conflict, many Republicans remained sceptical that there would not be a return to war. Speaking about IRA ammunition stores, IRA volunteer Eddie Wallace noted that after the ceasefire, 'what we had, we hid'.³³²

³³¹ CW/OPS/02/01/04; CW/OPS/02/01/05

³³² Eddie Wallace, audio recording 1986

Chapter 4

Dugouts: an essential component of guerrilla warfare

'Why! We've lost it,' said Séamus. 'It must be the fairies,' said Seán Fitzpatrick.

I could not see any trace of a dug-out.¹

At the Tormore dugout, archaeological excavations revealed a series of modifications to the natural cave to make it suitable for occupation. Features included stone steps leading down from the entrance, a mortar floor and a flagstone area (see Chapter 5). Family narratives recall that Tormore Cave served as an IRA dugout during the Civil War and, to a lesser extent, the War of Independence. Secreted places in the landscape where IRA men concealed themselves for days, weeks or months were typically known as 'dugouts', derived from the fact that most consisted of artificial subterranean chambers dug into the earth. In instances where a ready-made chamber was available, such as a natural limestone cave, a mine shaft, a prehistoric megalithic tomb, an early medieval souterrain or a post-medieval limekiln, these were appropriated and sometimes adapted. As it is used today, the term 'dugout' is somewhat vague and non-specific, but to the IRA in 1920s Ireland, it denoted any concealed place used for hiding men or storing arms, provisions and documents.

Dugouts were central to the success of guerrilla warfare, in both rural and urban contexts, by providing combatants with a place to live when it was too dangerous for them to reside in their own homes or districts, and when safe houses were unavailable or compromised. Life on the run was arduous. Sometimes men might enjoy a level of comfort in safe houses with sufficient food, dry clothes, warm surroundings and a comfortable bed. More often than not, however, men on the run wore shoes and clothing that had not been washed for weeks and were dirty and damp or occasionally saturated. They frequently slept on floors or on the bare ground in wet and cold conditions. Meals were irregular and combatants often went hungry and thirsty. Men experienced periods of fatigue and exhaustion. They received little relief for illnesses or injuries sustained. The most difficult aspect of life

on the run for many was being separated for lengthy periods from family and loved ones.

Ultimately, a dugout was the physical manifestation of a safe place, a hidden space known only to a select few. Typically, these were extremely difficult places to discover without first-hand intimate knowledge of the landscape. It was this localised familiarity with the landscape that gave guerrilla combatants a significant advantage. GOC Billy Pilkington and his men knew Tormore Cave as 'the Glencar hideout'. They would have perceived the cave, both strategically and physically, as a dugout. In ordering his men to retreat there in September 1922, Pilkington clearly believed it to be a superior dugout that offered the greatest promise of going undetected by the National Army. He was not wrong. The cave was never discovered by the hundreds of National Army troops who combed this mountainous landscape for days. Several Republican dugouts located in closer proximity to the abandoned IRA base at Rahelly House were not used, suggesting Pilkington believed these were less secure.

How were dugouts used?

Dugouts fulfilled different functions at different times, depending on guerrilla tactics and the requirements of a particular period. They were used for occupation, storage, as prisons, for surveillance and as IRA headquarters.

Occupation

The primary function of dugouts was to provide a safe location for IRA men to live while on the run from enemy forces. Periods of occupation varied greatly, ranging from hours to weeks and, in extreme cases, months. John Joe Sheehy recalled staying with members of his unit for a month in a dugout in County Kerry during the Civil War.² Generally, however, the dangers faced by

¹ O'Malley 2002: 334

² John Joe Sheehy in MacEoin 1980: 358

men on the run, and by the families who facilitated and serviced these dugouts, meant that they were usually only suitable for short-term occupation. Winnie Ginty documented that the IRA used the dugout under her barn at Curry, South Sligo on at least eight occasions; each time up to six men spent just a night or two there.³ For increased security, dugouts were often used in association with other dugouts, safe houses and camps, essentially a network of safe spaces where combatants could rest, regroup, launch harassing attacks and take refuge.

Storage

Dugouts fulfilled an essential role for the storage of arms and ammunition. In general, a distinction was maintained between occupied dugouts and arms dumps to prevent men and munitions being captured simultaneously.⁴ Captain Martin Corry of the Cork I Brigade spoke of an early medieval souterrain in a ringfort at Rathfilode, County Cork that was explored as a potential weapons dump.⁵ Similarly, Daniel F. O'Shaughnessy of the Kilfinane Company, County Limerick, described how 'On 9th July [1920], the waiting column saw a patrol of police walking over the Cush road. The few rifles and shotguns were now taken out of a souterrain at Cush on the side of a glen.'⁶ Ovens Cave, County Cork was appropriated as a dugout by the 3rd Battalion, Cork I Brigade (Figure 4.1). It was used to store arms and probably also served as a dugout for Republicans.⁷ In 1917, the IRB in Cork stored arms inside earthen sewer pipes that were hidden in field banks, as well as in subterranean concrete chambers; none of these dugouts were discovered until 1925 when the Civil War was over.⁸

Dugouts were also used for the maintenance of arms, as described by Martin Walsh in relation to a cave in County Wexford: 'We selected a cave at Abbeybraney in the Gusserane district as a dump where the boys and myself oiled and looked after those guns weekly.' Stolen explosives were also stored in the dugout. Here the men carried out the dangerous work of filling mines by the light of the naked flame of a carbide lamp.⁹ Walsh described how suddenly:

a rainbow of light flashed around a carbide lamp, which was laid in front

of us on a box of explosives. Donovan, sensing danger, grabbed the lamp and flung it over his shoulder into a stream outside. A flash of fire followed the lamp, out. We both threw ourselves flat, waiting for something to happen, and we were more than lucky to escape with singed eyebrows.¹⁰

Perhaps the finest example of a dugout used for such a task is the well known munitions factory maintained by Seán Russell, Director of Munitions at IRA GHQ. It was located beneath a bicycle shop in Dublin's Parnell Square.¹¹

To compensate for the shortfall of arms available to the IRA in County Sligo during the War of Independence, their small supply of weapons had to be regularly moved around the county and transferred from dugout to dugout, allowing for attacks to occur across the brigade region.¹² In North Sligo, Martin Bernard McGowan, Quartermaster for the I North Sligo Brigade, noted:

In 1920 special dugouts were constructed throughout the battalion area. These were capable of holding arms and equipment and were so concealed that they were difficult to locate. I had a hiding place over the ceiling of my school which could only be entered through the skylight in the roof.¹³

Andy Doocey recalled that he assisted the battalion quartermaster in visiting dumps and cleaning the arms stored there, 'once a fortnight or once a week' during the War of Independence.¹⁴

The I North Sligo Brigade Activity Reports contain numerous references to arms and equipment being transported from one dugout or safe house to another. The Glencar Valley, in particular, appears to have been a place where arms were regularly exchanged, perhaps due to its central location within the brigade region. One record notes that in February 1920, 'ammunition [was] conveyed to Glencar and handed over to Captain McCann.'¹⁵ Following the successful IRA ambush at Moneygold in 1920, a stash of arms was seized from the

³ MSP34REF53128, Winifred Walsh (née Ginty)

⁴ O'Shea 2022: 73

⁵ Souterrain (CO064-021002-), Rathfilode townland; Dowd *et al.* 2017

⁶ BMH.WS1435, Daniel F. O'Shaughnessy

⁷ Dowd 2013

⁸ Ted O'Sullivan in Bielenberg *et al.* 2015: 148-9

⁹ Carbide lamps utilise the burning of acetylene gas in an open flame.

¹⁰ BMH.WS1495, Martin Walsh

¹¹ BMH.WS0511, Michael Lynch

¹² BMH.WS0404, Linda Kearns

¹³ BMH.WS1545, Martin Bernard McGowan

¹⁴ MSP34REF18708, Andy Doocey

¹⁵ MA/MSPC/A/29



Figure 4.1 In October 1934, speleologist Jack Coleman discovered a Lewis machine gun (on top of box) and a Lee-Enfield .303 rifle (in front of box) in Ovens Cave. The arms had been placed at the end of a narrow passage over 75m inside the cave entrance (Photographed by Jack C. Coleman, courtesy of the Speleological Union of Ireland).

RIC. Lieutenant John Smyth of the Drumcliff Company ‘brought [the arms] to Benbulbin’. The following month, on 18 November, Smyth then transported the same weapons from the dugout to Ballinagalligh townland, located in Barnarobin townland under the peak of Benbulbin. Martin Bernard McGowan collected the arms and delivered them to Seamus Devins and Linda Kearns at the Branley home at Tormore, with the intention of transporting them to Frenchpark, County Roscommon for an attack on Auxiliaries.¹⁶ It was on this occasion that Kearns and the IRA were intercepted and arrested outside Sligo town (see Chapter 9).

In September 1922, as the National Army consolidated their forces in Sligo town, they conducted a number of raids based on intelligence received. On 2 September, a party of four soldiers left ‘Sligo Garrison No. 2’ (formerly the Temperance Hall on Temple Street, now Gilhooly Hall) and searched the yard of the Bishop’s Palace (St. Mary’s Presbytery, Temple Street) (Figure 4.2). Carefully concealed in a lavatory, they discovered a significant arms cache including a mine, 400 sticks of gelignite, fuse detonators and ‘war flour’ (a homemade explosive material). As if to demonstrate innocence (which he no doubt possessed), Reverend Father Butler, denying all knowledge on behalf of himself and the

bishop, then requested that the soldiers search the entire holy grounds and Cathedral!¹⁷ Two days later, another raid on a private house in Sligo town led to the recovery of 400 sticks of gelignite, detonators and explosive materials (Figure 4.3).¹⁸

Prisons

Holding a large quantity of prisoners would always prove physically difficult for the IRA. However, local requirements to temporarily house small numbers of prisoners were satisfied by the use of dugouts and safe houses, but when fighting became more intense, safe houses were usually abandoned in favour of dugouts. The infamous ‘Sing Sing’, a late medieval or post-medieval burial vault in Kilquane Graveyard at Knockraha in County Cork, was the official prison of the Cork I Brigade IRA. Sing Sing was used to interrogate and detain Black and Tans, informers and spies, several of whom were taken from the vault and executed. The original contents of the vault, namely human skeletal remains and associated funerary furniture, must have been removed before it was repurposed as a prison.¹⁹ Similarly, during the Civil War in Tiduff, Ballyheigue,

¹⁷ CW/OPS/02/01/05

¹⁸ CW/OPS/02/01/05

¹⁹ Graveyard (CO064-026002-), Kilquane townland; Borgonovo 2010: 213; Dowd *et al.* 2017: 29-30

¹⁶ BMH.WS0404, Linda Kearns



Figure 4.2 *The Bishop's Palace (now St Mary's Presbytery), built 1878-80, on Temple Street in Sligo town (Marion Dowd). A large cache of arms and explosives was discovered concealed in a lavatory here in September 1922.*

County Kerry, a souterrain known as *Múchán na gCat* ('the hovel or ruin of the cat'), appropriated as a hideout, was occasionally put to use as a 'prison for anyone who did not obey the laws of the old I.R.A.'²⁰ Tiduff native Flor McCormack remembered that, 'Many's the bucket of tay I carried down there to *Múchán na gCat* to the prisoners.'²¹

In July 1920, during the War of Independence, the North Sligo 2nd Battalion IRA kept 'prisoners belonging to Bundoran Battalion' for 'two days in [a] dug-out', taking advantage of regional borders to better conceal prisoners. During the Civil War, an IRA-run prison was maintained in Clew Bay, most likely at Rosmoney Coast Guard station.²² Despite being in 4th Western Division territory, Sligo occasionally sent its National Army prisoners there.²³ This was not unusual as both divisions regularly shared resources and moving prisoners from one area to another helped confuse authorities as to their whereabouts.

The I North Sligo Brigade also maintained a detention camp in Ballinatrillick, where at one stage they kept at least a dozen National Army troops. Numerous dugouts were maintained in that area and, while the location

and nature of the detention camp remain unknown, it may have comprised a dugout, as a detention camp could not have been maintained in the open.²⁴ In September 1922, prior to the fall of the Rahelly House base, a National Army intelligence report on Sligo noted that a number of their intelligence officers had been arrested and threatened with execution. One officer, listed as 'Davey', likely a cover name, was captured in County Sligo. Specific details about where he was imprisoned or by whom are scant but, disturbingly, he reported being stripped naked and held in chains in a dugout. Luckily for 'Davey', he managed to escape and returned to base.²⁵

Surveillance

Dugouts were not always constructed in remote areas nor used exclusively for the purpose of retreat. Often located in close proximity to a key site, dugouts served as centres of intelligence operations, where raiding and ambush activities were coordinated. Dugouts were also occasionally occupied by scouts and intelligence units when engaged in surveillance. In these instances, dugouts were occupied in shifts, with one or two men stationed there at any one time. In 1920, an IRA surveillance operation was

²⁰ NFCS0417D: 29

²¹ MacMahon 2023

²² MA/MSPC/A/29; CW/OPS/02/01/05; Keane 2003: 73

²³ W2D261, George Dowd

²⁴ MA/MSPC/A/29

²⁵ CW/OPS/02/01/05

DUGOUTS: AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF GUERRILLA WARFARE

Garrison No 2.
Temperance Hall,
Sligo,
2nd. Sept. 1922.

"On information received on the morning of September 1st. I took charge of a party of four men, and searched a yard at the rear of the Bishop's Palace. In an old unused lavatory I found the following carefully concealed:-

- 1 Mine
- 1 Grease Cap
- 1½ St High Explosive (War Flour)
- 59 lbs Blasting Powder
- 5 st. Gunpowder
- 20 lbs Gunpowder (smokeless)
- 400 Sticks of gelnite
- 400 yds fuse
- 2 Moulds for casting buck-shot
- 30 Detonators
- 40 Blank cartridges.

I interviewed the Rev Fr Buttler on behalf of the Bishop and he disclaimed all knowledge of the stuff or of how it got there. His Lordship then requested us to search the Balace, Garden and Out-offices, and also the College. He also gave us permission to search the Cathedral if we thought it necessary

Signed J. McHUGH Lieut.
B. Coy. 2nd Batt.
Garrison No 2.
Sligo.

The above was received
by me also the stuff.

Sean Rogers, Capt.
Sligo.
2nd September .

Figure 4.3 National Army correspondence regarding the discovery of an arms dump in a house in Sligo town in September 1922 (Robert Mulraney).

established in a small artificial cave near Snavo Church in Dromkeal townland, County Cork by the Bantry Company IRA (Figure 4.4). This is not a natural cave, but a subterranean passage approximately 15m long that was quarried into a rock outcrop, probably

during the 19th century. Republican James O'Sullivan explained how the site had been used: 'The telegraph wires between Bantry and Castletownbere were tapped and leads taken into sounders, which were installed in a cave.' The post was staffed round the clock by three

men, each working an eight-hour shift. On several occasions the IRA intelligence unit received valuable information regarding activities of the Crown forces.²⁶ Recent investigation of the Snave dugout by David Myler has revealed the presence of stone walling at the rear of the cave and concrete on the roof. These features may relate to the construction of the main road overhead as the cave runs beneath it but are also typical of IRA modifications made to dugouts during the revolutionary period. An aluminium tea pot was discovered carefully tucked at arm's length into a side alcove at the back of the cave and likely relates to IRA occupation (Figure 4.5).

In Connemara, Captain John C. King described an IRA dugout that was used to observe the movements of Black and Tans during the War of Independence:

Thomas Coyne, Patrick Wallace and I built a dug-out on the slope of the hill, in some furze which grew all over that part of the mountainside. We had a large telescope set up there and could get a perfect view of the roads in the direction of Westport, for about ten miles, as well as the Galway-Leenane and Clifden road, from our elevated position. It was our custom to come down to the Wallace residence each day, to get some food.

In terms of construction materials, King mentioned the 'sheet-iron roof of the dug-out'. While in the dugout, the three men 'slept fully clothed, just removing our coats and boots.'²⁷

Roads regularly traversed by enemy troops, or buildings occupied by the enemy, sometimes attracted the construction of dugouts, with the aim of launching an ambush from these hidden quarters. John Joe Sheehy described a series of attacks on National Army troops from a long-established IRA dugout near Knockane ('Griffins Glen') in County Kerry.²⁸ In North Sligo, a dugout was constructed close to Grange village at Ahamlish, during the War of Independence. Though hidden, this dugout was close to a major road and at great distance from suitable terrain into which safe retreat could be made. It was constructed two months prior to the IRA's major ambush at Moneygold in October 1921, and it is highly likely that this dugout was specifically constructed to carry out the attack.²⁹ The

tactical advantage of the Ahamlish dugout included its use as an observation post and a temporary arms dump prior to the ambush, and afterwards could be used to conceal 'hot' weapons seized from the RIC.

Headquarters

In 1923, the national GHQ of the IRA was located in a dugout. At Poulacapple, in the Knockmealdown Mountains of South Tipperary, the most senior IRA leaders met for Executive and Council meetings throughout 1922 and 1923 in the 'Kathmandu' dugout. Its very name was suggestive of its perceived status as a kingdom hidden within the mountains. 'Kathmandu' was the last GHQ of the IRA and one of the last places where IRA Chief of Staff Liam Lynch was billeted prior to his death nearby on 10 April 1923. The HQ was located in an animal byre on an active farm. It was described in detail by IRA Staff Commandant Seán Dowling in 1980:

The hide out at Poulacappal [sic] was an extraordinary one, the further end of a simple thatched cow byre 30 feet [10m] long; [the] stone walls and a corrugated roof had been extended to create a small room, entered from inside the byre, through a tiny iron door ... that swung closed under its own weight.³⁰

While IRA meetings were taking place, a jennet was tethered in front of the door as 'the sort of animal likely to discourage intruders.' Dowling continued:

inside this small space, hardly thirteen feet by six [4m x 2m], were bed boards in two tiers, with on one side, a hinged table. Overhead again in a cramped space under the thatch four men, maybe, might sleep. As many as fourteen all told could crowd in. Someone called it 'Kathmandu' and the name stuck to the present day. Although it is no longer there ... it sheltered at one time or another during the Civil War practically every leader, including de Valera and Lynch. 'We heard this night that de Valera was coming', says Bill Treacy, 'and bedad hadn't Pat Egan, drowned wet and with the clothes sticking to him, to get out of his bunk to accommodate him. Dev [de Valera] wasn't aware of course.' The hideout defied all efforts to locate it, efforts made by the Staters in the knowledge that it existed somewhere in

²⁶ BMH.WS1455, James O'Sullivan

²⁷ BMH.WS1731, John C. King

²⁸ John Joe Sheehy in MacEoin 1980: 358

²⁹ MA/MSPC/A/29

³⁰ Seán Dowling in MacEoin 1980: 418-9



Figure 4.4 Snave Cave on the Cork coastline, location of an IRA surveillance post during the War of Independence (David Myler).

the neighbourhood.³¹

Pax Ó Faoláin remembered that the entrance to the Poulacapple HQ was often concealed behind bales of hay. He described how, on entering, ‘you found yourself in a limited space, the last six feet [2m] of the cowhouse. It could hold six men on bunks inside.’³²

The IRA Army Council of Frank Aiken, Seán Hyde, Tom Barry and Billy Pilkington met at ‘Kathmandu’ in April 1923 when it was decided to call for a cessation of armed conflict. Pilkington, on the run for seven months by that time, was no doubt well-adjusted to working and living in such an environment having occupied the Tormore Cave dugout for six weeks in September and October the previous year. Many years later, Bill Treacy, one of the IRA men involved in constructing the Poulacapple dugout, made a reconstruction model of ‘Kathmandu’ (Figure 4.6).³³

Dugouts: part of an invisible network

Where the natural environment provided spaces such as rock shelters and caves, and the industrial landscape presented built structures and mine shafts, these liminal zones were quickly identified by the IRA and appropriated. In places where the landscape did not provide such resources, dugouts had to be excavated and constructed ‘from scratch’. The variety,



Figure 4.5 The tea pot, minus spout and handle, found in Snave Cave likely relates to IRA occupation (David Myler).

³¹ Seán Dowling in MacEoin 1980: 418-9

³² Pax Ó Faoláin in MacEoin 1980: 146

³³ MacEoin 1980: 420

diversity and sheer volume of IRA dugouts attest to the importance attached to these covert places in 1920s Ireland. They represent just one physical component of the larger invisible network of safe places used by guerrillas.

The area governed by the Sligo Brigade, and later the 3rd Western Division, incorporated numerous dugouts through which arms, men and dispatches could safely be moved. In a hand-drawn sketch prepared by Divisional Intelligence Officer Robert G. Bradshaw for the benefit of GHQ Intelligence, Bradshaw outlined the dispatch network through which communiqués were delivered (Figures 4.7a and 4.7b).³⁴ While prepared one month prior to the introduction of the IRA divisional system in 1921, it could apply to both brigade and divisional hierarchies. The drawing clearly illustrates Sligo town HQ at the centre of the network, with five main arteries leading from it to key towns and regions of the 3rd Western Division. Collooney and Tubbercurry in the IV South Sligo Brigade, and Grange and Manorhamilton in I North Sligo Brigade, represent the main hubs from which numerous offshoots ran into the surrounding mountainous terrain. The mountains were not marked or named on the sketch map, giving the impression that dispatch routes ran into ‘nowhere’ places. These apparently blank spaces, bisected by marked dispatch lines, represent the locations of intelligence hubs probably not known to anyone other than those who utilised them. The physical manifestation of these invisible hubs were the dugouts, caves, safe houses and secret rooms where information was stored, weapons were stashed, and people concealed.

Of most interest to this project is the dispatch line on Bradshaw’s sketch that runs from Sligo town to Manorhamilton’s 4th Battalion of the I North Sligo Brigade. Along the route two offsets, each annotated ‘D route’, run north to Stations 1 and 2. While this is too vague to pinpoint an exact location, it is clear that two important dispatch centres for the North Sligo IRA were located within the Dartry Mountains. One of these is very likely to be in the Glencar and Tormore area and the second is possibly in the Glenade Valley. It is therefore conceivable that one or more dugouts or safe houses in the Glencar Valley region were central to the delivery of dispatches and goods within the greater network of the division. This theory is supported by the high concentration of known dugouts and safe houses located in that area. During periods of guerrilla warfare, roads were under tentative control by enemy forces. While the landscape of I North Sligo Brigade

was expansive and mountainous, communication lines could be maintained due to the suitability of the upland terrain for access by foot. Despite the sharp and sudden rise of the mountain range, the many walkable gullies on the range’s southern side allowed for ease of access to the upland plateau above. From there, the towns and villages of Sligo, Grange, Manorhamilton and, a little further north, Bundoran and Rossinver, could be discreetly reached. These were the main battalion centres of the I North Sligo Brigade, effectively placing the Dartry Mountains central to brigade operations.

After the fall of Rahelly House, the divisional command was temporarily paralysed by the death of Divisional Adjutant Brian MacNeill, the arrest of Intelligence Officer Robert G. Bradshaw, and the absence of GOC Billy Pilkington (who was on the run and by then billeted in Tormore Cave). The three roles were quickly reassigned to Charles Gildea and Jack Brennan by a dispatch that must have originated from Pilkington within the cave.³⁵ Messages informing of an internal restructuring of the division were thus capably passed from Tormore Cave in the Glencar Valley to the temporary GOC Gildea in Tubbercurry and temporary Divisional Adjutant Jack Brennan in the IV South Sligo Brigade region. Neither man was informed as to the whereabouts of Pilkington and the men he commanded, demonstrating a highly effective dispatch network capable of concealing its source.

IRA headquarters and meeting places across County Sligo

The design and use of the national IRA GHQ at Poulacapple, County Tipperary echoed regional adaptations that had long been seen across County Sligo. During the War of Independence, meetings of senior IRA leaders often occurred in dugouts, with multiple dugouts used as headquarters and meeting places for increased secrecy and safety. The Military Pension applications of several Cumann na mBan members provide a window into the extensive network of IRA dugouts in operation. Mai Deignan looked after an abandoned house on the family farm at Doongelagh, Geevagh in South Sligo, which was used for regular IRA meetings during the War of Independence. Geevagh was an ideal location, being centrally located in the 3rd Western Division region, while also being relatively

³⁴ Collins Papers, IE/MA/CP/04/31

³⁵ The only other person who might otherwise have had the authority to issue a change in command personnel was Divisional Vice OC Frank Carty. However, prior to the occupation of the cave, at the ‘Council of War’ meeting held at Cloonacool in September 1922, Carty was relieved of his position as OC of the IV Brigade. It is therefore expected that he was also removed as VOC of the divisional command.



Figure 4.6 Model of the 'Kathmandu' dugout made from memory by IRA veteran Bill Treacy, and now housed in the local history museum at the Sean Treacy Memorial Swimming Pool in Tipperary town (Robert Mulraney). Note the hidden chamber to the left of the cattle byre in the inset image.

equidistant from the towns of Sligo, Boyle and Tubbercurry where the main brigades were located. Meetings at the Doongelagh dugout were attended by senior IRA staff including Billy Pilkington, Jim Hunt, Frank O'Beirne and Mai's brother, Tom Deignan OC of the II Arigna Brigade. Mai maintained that all War of Independence operations of the Arigna Brigade were planned and carried out from this abandoned house. When her brother was on the run, Mai took charge of ammunition, bombs, rifles and shotguns that were stored in the dugout. Though the house was located in a 'backward place', it was discovered and blown up by Crown forces with gelignite two weeks before the

Truce.³⁶ It is likely that the Geevagh house was used, during the War of Independence, in a similar way as the later divisional headquarters at Cloonacool and that in time, the latter replaced the former. However, during the War of Independence there was no divisional hierarchy, so it may simply have functioned as a safe regional meeting place.

During the Truce period, Boyle Barracks, located at the edge of the 3rd Western Division's territory, was taken by the IRA for use as the divisional HQ. Following a stand-off with state troops at the barracks in April 1922,

³⁶ MSP34REF60115, Mai Trainor (née Deignan)

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT

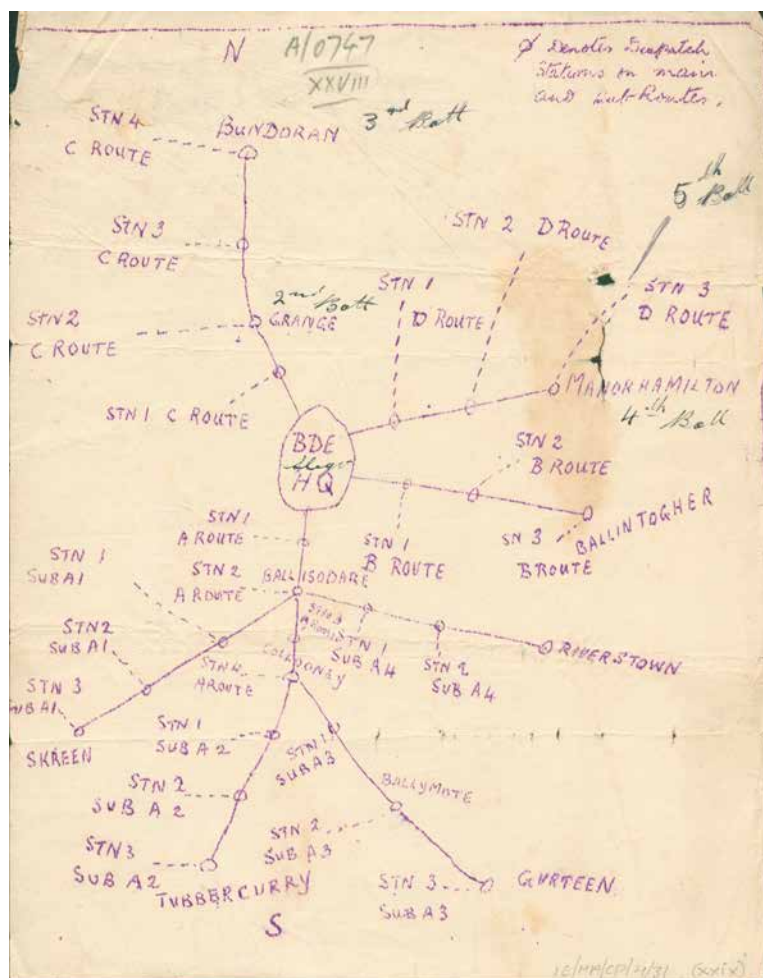


Figure 4.7a Robert G. Bradshaw's 1921 sketch of the dispatch networks active in County Sligo (Collins Papers, IE/MA/CP/04/31).

it was decided to relocate the divisional HQ to a more secure location, in anticipation of the approaching conflict. Assistant Adjutant Jack Brennan's house at Cloonacool outside Tubbercurry was chosen. Charles Gildea later recalled that 'the area surrounding his place was under our control absolutely.'³⁷ A hidden room had been specially constructed in the house and intelligence documents were stored there. Similar to Mai Deignan's secret house, Cloonacool was located in prime territory, central to the five brigades of the 3rd Western Division. Harold McBrien recalled that 'all dispatches were sent to and received from this centre.'³⁸ Brian MacNeill and Billy Pilkington often stayed there overnight. On one occasion, the Cloonacool HQ was used to hide the injured Tom Deignan, OC of the II

Arigna Brigade, after Riverstown had been captured by the National Army in July 1922.³⁹

The secret room in the Brennan home at Cloonacool remained the de-facto divisional HQ until mid-July 1922 when nearby Collooney was captured by the National Army. This would undoubtedly have impacted the lines of communication between the I North Sligo and IV South Sligo Brigades.⁴⁰ The divisional HQ then appears to have been relocated to Sligo town and the I North Sligo Brigade. The Cloonacool dugout, however, continued to function as the office of Divisional Adjutant Brian MacNeill until his death on 20 September 1922.⁴¹ It was also used when the divisional command found itself in

³⁷ MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan – Letter from Charles Gildea, 03.11.1938

³⁸ MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan – Letter from Harold McBrien, undated

³⁹ MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan – Letter from Tom Deignan, undated

⁴⁰ MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan

⁴¹ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133; MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan. In a letter written to his mother on 10 August 1922, Brian MacNeill asked her to write to him and address it to 'Mr J.P.

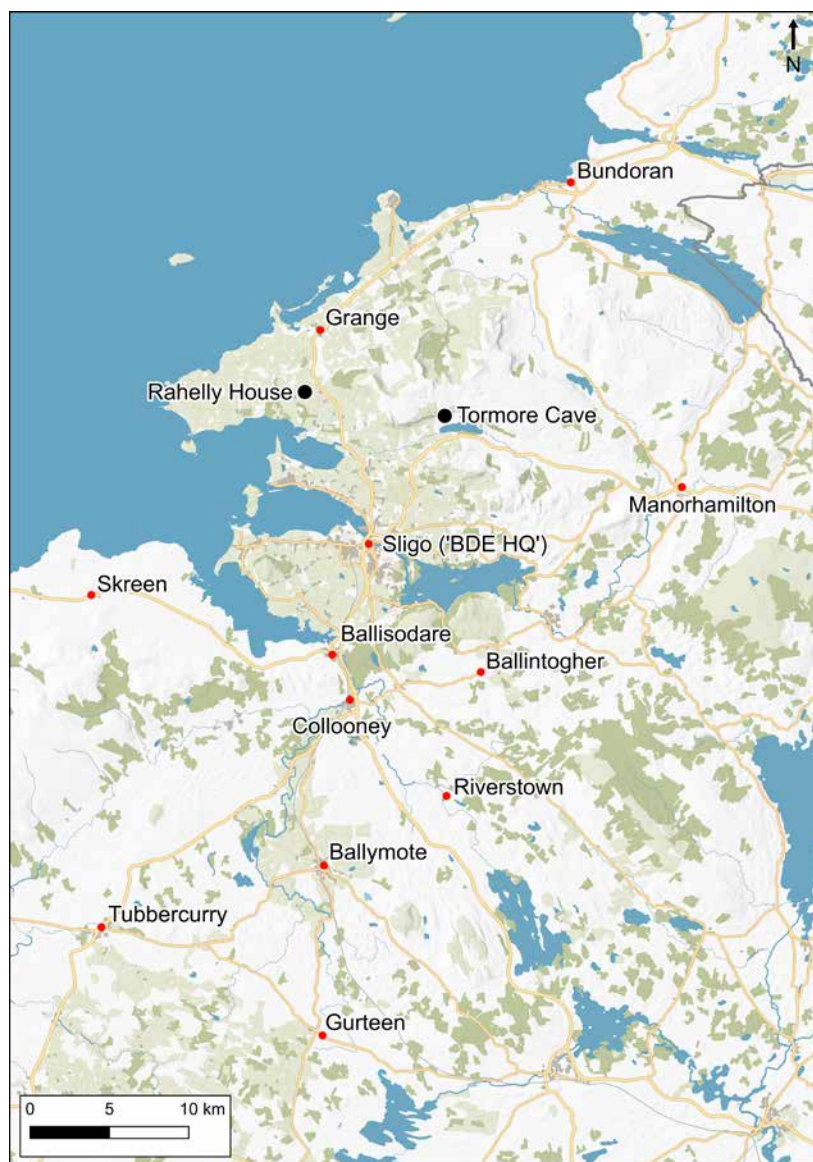


Figure 4.7b Map showing villages and towns marked on Bradshaw's 1921 sketch of the Sligo dispatch network (James Bonsall).

the locality. In September 1922, when the *Ballinalee* had retreated from the Battle of Lough Talt, the divisional command met at Cloonacool to hold a 'Council of War'. Pilkington decided to leave his Divisional QM Charles Gildea in charge of South Sligo, while he returned to Rahelly House to defend the north of the county.⁴² This was the last time the divisional command would meet prior to the attack on Rahelly.

Tom Scanlon, OC of the 1st Battalion (Sligo Town), constructed two secret rooms in Sligo during the Civil War. One of these, possibly located on Teeling Street, was used as the divisional HQ by Billy Pilkington. Scanlon described in great detail the effort used to construct the hidden room.⁴³ It is likely that use of this room as a HQ fluctuated as Republicans lost and gained footing in the town. When not serving as an IRA HQ, it probably served to accommodate men on the run and/or store sensitive documents.

Brennan, Cloonacool, Tobercurry, Co. Sligo' – see Bonsall *et al.* 2022: 155.

⁴² MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan – Letter from Charles Gildea, 03.11.1938

⁴³ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, Pb17/133

By September 1922, as Sligo town became fully garrisoned by the National Army and closed to Republican forces, Rahelly House, which had initially served as the barracks of the 1 North Sligo Brigade, by necessity became something of a de-facto HQ of the 3rd Western Division or, at least, the HQ of the Sligo 1 Brigade. It is highly likely that only weapons, supplies and men were based at Rahelly, and that intelligence documentation was kept in a separate dugout nearby. Following the fall of Rahelly, when Divisional QM Charles Gildea was temporarily appointed to take command, it appears that the Cloonacool hideout reverted to being the temporary divisional HQ. When the divisional command was restored and Frank O'Beirne was appointed Divisional Adjutant, a new secret room was provided by Charles Gildea.⁴⁴

Due to its ability to quickly transfer command of power across a network of dugouts, secret rooms and safe houses, the 3rd Western Division did not cease to be active after the National Army took full control of Sligo town. In fact, the National Army never claimed a complete victory, as the 3rd Western Division, albeit much diminished in its ability, continued to harass National Army troops and garrisons. Though the IRA become less of a threat, the National Army continued to make great efforts to locate Billy Pilkington, Frank Carty and their brigades. In an unusual and somewhat clockwise movement, the IRA HQ appears to have returned to the area of Boyle, though the precise location has never been identified.⁴⁵

Hiding in plain sight: urban dugouts and secret rooms

Dugouts in cities and towns often comprised rooms in abandoned buildings, cellars or concealed spaces in safe houses and business premises. These hidden spaces functioned as the quiet nerve centres of the IRA intelligence network. To be successful, they had to remain undetected and had to be abandoned and relocated with relative ease. IRA veteran Tim Hurley, a qualified carpenter, described to Ernie O'Malley some of the secret rooms he and his comrades had constructed throughout Dublin city. A secret room at 11 Mount Street, a Republican safe house, was concealed behind a cloakroom and could accommodate two men standing upright; Cathal Brugha stayed there for a time. At 3 Mountjoy Square, where Michael Collins often stayed, a secret room was situated behind

a bookcase that swung open.⁴⁶ Charles Dalton of the Dublin City 'Squad' mentioned a city centre dugout he frequented during the War of Independence: 'I stopped as usual in the 'dugout' where we used to stay while on the run. This was located in the unoccupied portion of Summerhill Dispensary.'⁴⁷ A vast network of IRA workshops, dumps, dispatch centres and dugouts were located on the adjacent Parnell Street. Michael Collins famously adopted numerous pubs on Parnell Square as meeting points. Some, such as Vaughan's Hotel, were well known to both the IRA and the authorities. Others, such as Devlin's Public House at 68 Parnell Street, was known only to senior IRA personnel and remained undetected by the authorities. The IRA's central intelligence body, disguised as a print and binding shop at 3 Crow Street, was situated almost adjacent to Britain's colonial centre of power at Dublin Castle.⁴⁸

In the same way that rural dugouts exploited the natural landscape, urban dugouts took advantage of the built heritage of towns and cities. Beneath the grand buildings of Georgian Dublin, underground vaults and cellars were used for hiding arms and supplies. The open rooftops of these buildings offered a means of escape from approaching troops. At Devlin's Public House, Michael Collins was allocated a large comfortable room at the front of the house, but he preferred to sleep in a room at the back that overlooked a small yard and stables. A night-time raid would cause disturbance to the horses in the stables, alerting him and allowing for him to make a quick dash for the rooftop to escape.⁴⁹ While the comparatively vast scale and spread of Dublin offered the particular advantage of concealing IRA offices and industries in relatively plain sight, in smaller towns and villages throughout the country different but equally ingenious approaches were adopted.

Multiple premises in Sligo town were put to strategic use by the IRA and Cumann na mBan, serving as important hubs within a secret network. The Pilkington family home on Abbey Street, beside the medieval Dominican Friary, was raided on multiple occasions by the Black and Tans during the War of Independence. Billy Pilkington (and probably his brothers who were likewise in the IRA) regularly escaped capture by scaling the friary walls. On one occasion during the War of Independence, Billy apparently raised

⁴⁴ MSP34C396, Charles Gildea

⁴⁵ Seán Dowling in MacEoin 1980: 412

⁴⁶ Tim Hurley in O'Malley and Horgan 2012: 79

⁴⁷ BMH.WS0434, Charles Dalton

⁴⁸ Fow 2017

⁴⁹ Coogan 1990: 134-5

the tricolour on the 15th century tower in the friary, returned to adjust the flag, but fell from a height and broke both his ankles. He was brought to the infirmary on a shutter, and subsequently to the home of a Dr Burke where he stayed until he recovered.⁵⁰ Pilkington had also appropriated a 19th century box tomb on the friary grounds as a hideout (Figure 4.8). During a raid on the family home by the Black and Tans, 'he had to flee in his bare feet. He crossed the abbey wall and to escape a hail of bullets lifted a tombstone, and lay on the coffin until it was safe to emerge.'⁵¹ According to family narrative, he used the tomb regularly; he would slide the heavy stone lid aside, climb in, then drag the lid back into place.⁵² This might explain why the lid is highly fragmented, though now repaired. Madge McLoughlin, who lived in the house immediately beside the friary, supplied Billy with food whenever he was hiding in the tomb.⁵³ This use of graveyards was not unique. In County Clare, burial vaults in Killernan graveyard were used as dugouts by the West Clare IRA.⁵⁴ As described by the son of one veteran: 'they'd get into the vault, stack the coffins on one side and sleep on the other side of the vault. They were nice little houses, like. Slated, perfectly dry and they [the IRA] maintained that they were more afraid of the living than the dead!'⁵⁵ In County Kerry, tombs in Kilsarkan graveyard were occupied during the War of Independence by IRA volunteers who 'had no fear of the dead'.⁵⁶

Sligo Cemetery was also appropriated by the IRA for a variety of purposes, with at least two burial vaults being used. Volunteers congregated at the cemetery in advance of the Frank Carty jailbreak of June 1920. Later that same year, the RIC discovered a cache of arms, including ten revolvers, in the cemetery (Figure 4.9).⁵⁷ Sisters Beatrice, Julia and Nell Keaveney transported weapons to and from the cemetery by concealing the arms under a false base in a pram; the Auxiliaries never suspected such a deadly cargo hidden beneath a baby.⁵⁸ One of the burial vaults was appropriated as an IRA dugout, presumably after it had been emptied of coffins and skeletal remains.⁵⁹ Billy Pilkington is remembered to have regularly hidden in a vault or crypt in Sligo

Cemetery during the War of Independence. As a teenager, Volunteer Harry Doherty was sent to deliver a message to Pilkington one evening at dusk (Figure 4.10). Harry went to the cemetery, but no one was there. He felt a tap on his shoulder, which gave him 'a terrible fright'. He turned round to find Billy Pilkington standing behind him, seemingly having appeared out of nowhere.⁶⁰ The vault that was used is not known, though Plunkett Doherty surmises it may be the Lynn vault located immediately inside the entrance to the old part of the cemetery and beside the gate lodge (Figure 4.11).⁶¹ The Mayor of Sligo was said to be the only person with a key to the vault used by Billy Pilkington.⁶² However, an earlier generation of the Pilkington family had been caretakers of Sligo Cemetery and had lived in the gate lodge within the grounds. Billy may have been privy to specialist knowledge about (and access to) the tombs from older relatives.

The Harp and Shamrock Hotel on Stephen Street was a noted rendezvous for Republicans. Linda Kearns recalled meeting Frank Carty and Billy Pilkington there to receive orders. In November 1920 she was instructed to wait at the Harp and Shamrock where she would receive a dispatch delivered by a young boy in advance of collecting arms from the Branley home at Tormore. Later that night, as the weapons were being transported, Kearns' car was stopped. Kearns and her passengers, Seamus Devins, Eugene Gilbride and Andrew Conway, were arrested and viciously beaten.⁶³ Years later, Tom Scanlon suggested to Ernie O'Malley that one of the men at the Harp and Shamrock that night, Joe Mac Devitt, spoke 'loosely' about the activities of Kearns and her group. 'Joe always talked' observed O'Malley in a side note, 'and he always impressed local people at Sinn Féin meetings and the singular type of Irish Volunteer, who was single in the sense that he had never been in action.'⁶⁴ Seemingly, Mac Devitt, who was renting a car from a man named Brennan for IRA work unrelated to the arms transfer, aroused Brennan's suspicions. Brennan went to the RIC who then arrested Mac Devitt, but Kearns' car met with the same cordon and she and her three passengers were also arrested.⁶⁵

⁵⁰ *The Sligo Champion*, 08.04.1977

⁵¹ *The Sligo Champion*, 08.04.1977

⁵² Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 28.04.2022

⁵³ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 28.04.2022

⁵⁴ Burial ground (CL031-026001-), Killernan townland

⁵⁵ Mac Conmara 2019: 168-9

⁵⁶ Graveyard (KE049-086002-), Kilsarkan East townland; Mac Conmara 2019: 169

⁵⁷ Farry 2000: 12

⁵⁸ Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986; Feehily 2016: 57

⁵⁹ Feehily 2016: 57; Declan Foley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 02.11.2022

⁶⁰ Plunkett Doherty pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 08.02.2022 and 19.10.2022

⁶¹ Builder and architect John Lynn (1774-1863) was responsible for the design of Sligo Gaol. Six other members of the Lynn family are also interred here.

⁶² Plunkett Doherty pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 08.02.2022 and 19.10.2022

⁶³ BMH.WS0404, Linda Kearns

⁶⁴ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

⁶⁵ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133; Farry 1992: 262

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT



Figure 4.8 The box tomb in Sligo Dominican Friary where Billy Pilkington reputedly hid during Black and Tan raids on the family home. Top: Tomb in left foreground, beside the friary wall; the Pilkington family home was on the other side of the wall (Marion Dowd). Bottom: Close-up of tomb; the broken lid has been carefully repaired (James Bonsall).



Figure 4.9 The O'Connor Chapel-tomb (a vestibule mausoleum) in Sligo Cemetery (Marion Dowd). It was built by merchant Peter O'Connor (1802-1893) when his adult daughter died in 1872. Peter and his wife, Ellen, were also interred there. Multiple local sources have identified this as the tomb where the IRA had an arms dump during the revolutionary period.

⁶⁶ Padraic Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 14.07.2023; Fíona Gallagher pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 14.07.2023



Figure 4.10 Plunkett Doherty holding a photo of members of the Sligo IRA, including his father, Harry Doherty, standing centre at back with flat cap (Frank Fagan). A century later, Plunkett recalls a story his mother told him about his father, Harry, delivering a message to Billy Pilkington in Sligo Cemetery during the War of Independence.

In Sligo town, long after the official end of the Civil War, members of An Garda Síochána raided a number of homes in search of dugouts. Nothing of note was discovered in any of the raids, but at that time the IRA was still a proscribed organisation and its existence and potential to regroup represented a continued threat to the State. In December 1925, in the Glynn family household on Chapel Street, home to Peadar Glynn (IRA) and his sister May Glynn (Cumann na mBan), the Gardaí discovered a secret space (Figure 4.12). On the top floor of the house, a large room had been portioned-off and wall-papered over. Hidden within the false wall was a secret door, also wall-papered over. Upon opening it, the Gardaí passed into a small, narrow passage ending in a brick wall. They found, set into the wall, a frame containing a section of false brickwork. The small frame could swing open and essentially functioned as a secret door. Beyond the door was a small room lit by a skylight.⁶⁷ The intricacies of accessing the

room, and the fact that it remained hidden for so long, was fondly recalled many years later by Tom Scanlon, who was responsible for its construction:

I was 12 months at the building [of it] with my uncle ... We made a kind of closed up room and we concreted it up completely and we papered the wall outside as if it was a disguise. This was in Glynn's ... At the sides [of the room] we made a door, then and we matched the paper. The spring lock [on the door] was connected to a nail in [a] picture. What you did was this. You took off the picture and you pulled off the nail, and it released the spring lock. The door then swung open, and it allowed us into a passage between the room and the roof. We had a bed there and a table and chairs. It was often used for an emergency for sleeping there at night. Billy [Pilkington] used the place

⁶⁷ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 19.12.1925

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT



Figure 4.11 The burial vault in Sligo Cemetery that was used as a hideout by Billy Pilkington is uncertain, but Plunkett Doherty believes the Lynn vault is the most likely candidate (Marion Dowd). This vault is now empty, further supporting Plunkett's suggestion.



Figure 4.12 Chapel Street resident Joe McDonagh standing outside 11 Chapel Street in Sligo town, the former home of siblings Peadar Glynn (IRA) and May Glynn (Cumann na mBan) (Marion Dowd). A secret room in the house was used by the IRA during the War of Independence and Civil War. As a child, Joe heard of the secret room and the interconnecting attics of several houses along the terrace. The house was completely demolished in July 2024.



Figure 4.13 This building was formerly P.J. Flanagan's house and grocery shop at 38 High Street in Sligo town (Marion Dowd). The IRA had a secret room in the house during the early 1920s.

as his Divisional Headquarters when he was in the town.⁶⁸

Scanlon further noted that years after the Civil War, 'the Staters heard about it. Some Army Engineers came in then. They found the missing space, but they could not find the doors!'⁶⁹ Peadar Glynn later clarified the significance of this room: 'My home was Divisional H.Q. during the Civil War. We cut off two or three rooms and got them back only in 1927.'⁷⁰ The secret room continues to be remembered locally. Joe McDonagh, born in 1946, has lived on Chapel Street all his life. He grew up hearing about the secret room in Glynns and that it had been there from the War of Independence. Joe's mother, Anna McDonagh (née Burns), told him that several of the attics along Chapel Street were interconnected; the secret room was part of this.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

⁶⁹ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

⁷⁰ MSP34REF47091, Peadar Glynn

⁷¹ Joe McDonagh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 15.05.2023

Hidden in plain sight, the Glynn home was just twelve doors down from the No. 1 RIC Barracks.

On the same day that Glynns was searched, the Gardaí raided P.J. Flanagan's house and grocery shop at 38 High Street in Sligo town (Figure 4.13). There they discovered a set of stairs, extending beyond the main staircase in the house, that had been sealed off. Access was gained by removal of a large mirror at the top of the stairs.⁷² This room was used by Frank O'Beirne, OC of the Collooney Battalion (IV South Sligo Brigade). Tom Scanlon suggested he was also involved in the construction of this hidden space.⁷³ A century later, the secret room in Flanagan's shop continues to survive in local memory; when the room was re-discovered in recent decades, it contained only a chair.⁷⁴

In another raid, this time in Collooney village, the Gardaí raided the home of Frank O'Beirne. O'Beirne maintained a particularly impressive dugout: bricks at the back of a disused fireplace were set into a hinged frame that opened into a 'partitioned-off portion of the out offices adjoining the house.'⁷⁵

The legacy of these secret places would continue to occasionally present itself. In 1937, Margaret Verdon applied for compensation to pay for repairs to the walls of her two-storey home at Caltragh on the southern limits of Sligo town.⁷⁶ The house walls had been undermined by the construction of a dugout measuring 3m x 5.2m and 3m high. This subterranean chamber had been dug through the floor of one of the rooms inside the house, ran under the external house wall, and exited in the garden outside (Figure 4.14). Four to six men, including Frank Carty, used the dugout over an extended period during the revolutionary years. Margaret now sought reimbursement to cover the cost of having provided meals to the men for such a lengthy period.⁷⁷

Construction and preparation of dugouts

Secretive infrastructure was an essential component of the IRA's guerrilla campaign. With the development of IRA tactics and the advancement of the Civil War, dugouts became increasingly more advanced and increasingly relied upon. However, dugouts in more

⁷² *An Phoblacht*, 25.12.1925; *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 19.12.1925

⁷³ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

⁷⁴ Plunkett Doherty pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 08.02.2022

⁷⁵ *An Phoblacht*, 25.12.1925; *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 19.12.1925

⁷⁶ *The Sligo Champion*, 31.07.1937

⁷⁷ Jim Verdon pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 21.06.2022



Figure 4.14 Siblings Tony Cogan and Sarah McMahon outside their childhood home at Caltragh (Marion Dowd). In the 1920s, this house was owned by the Verdons. A dugout ran beneath the external house walls, from one of the internal rooms into the garden outside. Tony and Sarah grew up hearing about the dugout but could never locate it.

simple forms existed from the beginning of the War of Independence. There can be little doubt that the basic model of a dugout was one inherited from the trenches and foxholes of the European war. At home, such ideas took root and developed during the War of Independence. Some of the early dugouts, described below, seem somewhat naive in their description and use, but they were nevertheless functional and displayed traits that were developed upon in ensuing years.

Basic dugouts

Dugouts in rural landscapes varied considerably as combatants sought to exploit the local environment to suit their needs. There are many accounts, especially from the War of Independence, of dugouts being constructed within haycocks and ricks of turf. Following the Castledaly ambush near Gort, County Galway in November 1920, Captain John Fahy and his brother Martin found themselves in need of a dugout. They decided to make use of a large haycock. With a hay-knife, the upper part of the haycock was cut through horizontally. Next, a square ‘room’ approximately 2m² was hollowed out from above. Martin Fahy continued:

We put planks of timber and corrugated iron over the hole. We re-built the cock and re-thatched it. We made a hole in

the side of the cock about one and a half feet [0.45m] in diameter for a doorway. We tied enough hay to fit exactly and, when we entered, we closed the door by pulling the rope until the hay attached to it fitted into the doorway. There was then no opening to be seen from the outside. We had a mattress and blankets. It was warm and comfortable. The greatest number of Volunteers who slept [there] was five.⁷⁸

The IRA used the haycock dugout for two and a half months over the winter of 1920–1921, while Crown forces were busy raiding the local area.⁷⁹

In yet more primitive conditions, IRA volunteer Walter Stephens, on the run and in a more desperate situation, hid in a dugout constructed within a dung heap in County Clare. His comrade, Michael Brooks, would seal him in each night with shovelfuls of fresh manure. The dugout was successful until he was ultimately forced out by competition from bees who established a hive within the dugout!⁸⁰ In Doonbeg village, County Clare, another resourceful volunteer hollowed out a space

⁷⁸ BMH.WS1018, Martin Fahy

⁷⁹ BMH.WS1018, Martin Fahy

⁸⁰ Shanahan 2019: 164

within a rick of turf on the fair green. It remained sufficiently self-supporting that he could hide inside it when Crown forces raided the area.⁸¹

As the intensity of the conflict progressed in the latter stages of the War of Independence, Crown forces, now more suspicious, began to search farmsteads more thoroughly. Tossing turf ricks and bayonetting and burning haycocks became an integral aspect of raids on homes and farmsteads. Damaging farm resources in this manner was encouraged and implemented by the Crown forces to inflict maximum pressure on the civilian population. A more secure form of dugout now became necessary.

The 'excavated' subterranean dugout

During the Truce period hundreds of excavated dugouts were constructed throughout rural Ireland in the belief that the ceasefire would be temporary. The anti-Treaty IRA soon found themselves in conflict with former comrades who had taken the pro-Treaty side. In South Sligo, 'Republicans had to build new dugouts in secret because they were now fighting their own friends and neighbours who knew where the old haunts were.'⁸² Similarly, in County Kerry many of the War of Independence dugouts had to be scrapped because 'their haunts and habits were known to former comrades.'⁸³ It became imperative to establish new dugouts in increasingly isolated places, places that had no obvious connection to sympathetic safe houses or homes of active Republicans.

While excavated dugouts varied in size and design, many shared a consistent approach in terms of construction. The entrances tended to be very low and narrow.⁸⁴ A subterranean chamber was excavated into the ground. The cavity was unlined, or was lined with timber, sods or sheets of corrugated iron. A dugout cut into a bog outside Manorhamilton town had been lined with sheets of corrugated iron, roofed with timber, then covered over with sods of turf; seven to eight men could stay there at any one time.⁸⁵ In the years immediately after the Civil War, dugouts continued to be established for hiding arms. Civil War veteran Petie McGowan taught younger IRA recruits how to make a 'dump' for three rifles belonging to their North Sligo

unit. It was made of 'galvanised iron and wood and concealed ... in a stone ditch at a field.'⁸⁶

A seemingly common dugout design was explained by James Brennock of the Fermoy IRA, County Cork:

The making of a dugout involved a lot of work as an area of about 22ft. x 18ft. [6.7m x 5.4m] had to be dug out of the centre of the mountain to a depth of about 11'6" [3.5m] or so ... The area which had been dug was then floored. The sides were lined with galvanised iron and sheeting boards. The roof ... similarly constructed ... was then covered with clay and turf mould to a depth of about a 1.5ft [0.45m]. The top sods, which had been stripped off when the digging began, were then replaced and, as the sods still carried a natural covering of mountain heath and furze, there was nothing to indicate that there was a dugout underground. The exit of the dugout was through a hinged trapdoor covered, in the case of the roof, at the end of a short stairway dug out of the mountain from one end of the underground room.⁸⁷

Many of the features described by Brennock are remarkably similar to those found at Tormore Cave (see Chapter 5), such as the process of clearing out and removing soil and stones, defining an enclosed work area which was 'floored ... and lined', and the construction of entrance steps. Tormore Cave is considerably larger than the dugout described by Brennock, although the habitable part of the cave is of similar dimensions. Carefully selected sites such as Tormore Cave offered an infinitely superior form of dugout as they did not require a significant investment of time or labour. Caves were essentially ready-made dugouts. Excavation of an artificial dugout was time consuming and difficult. Brennock described the considerable risks that parties faced when excavating dugouts: 'The clay had to be removed a considerable distance by horse and cart and then distributed in such a way as to not attract attention.'⁸⁸ One IRA volunteer described working for three weeks on the construction of a dugout in County Roscommon, after which time it still had not been completed.⁸⁹ During the construction phase, the men involved were exposed for

⁸¹ Shanahan 2019: 163

⁸² Jennings 1989: 46

⁸³ O'Shea 2022: 73

⁸⁴ Breen 1924: 155

⁸⁵ Located in a bog known as 'Stone Pound' near O'Donnell's Rock – probably Larkfield townland; Kelly 2023: 27

⁸⁶ McGowan 1993: 144

⁸⁷ BMH.WS1113, James Brennock

⁸⁸ BMH.WS1113, James Brennock

⁸⁹ BMH.WS0963, Andrew Kennedy

an extended period and risked being seen by security forces or informers. In contrast, Tormore Cave did not require excavation and the physical work needed for its preparation was carried out inside the cave, out of sight of authorities and the general public.

Thomas McNamara provided a valuable account of the diverse range of dugouts occupied by the Mountshannon Company of the Irish Volunteers in County Clare:

In order to provide ourselves with some place to sleep at night, the Mountshannon Company built four dug-outs. The biggest was in a limekiln on Pat Noonan's farm at Sillernane. We cleared out the interior of the kiln and made a roof of galvanised iron supported on poles cut from trees in the locality. On top of the galvanised iron were placed sheets of timber cut in the local sawmills and over the timber were put sods so well fitted into one another that it would be very difficult to detect anything underneath. Entrance to the dug-out was obtained through the eye of the limekiln, into which was stuffed a furze bush that, in addition to reducing the draught, allowed ventilation and helped to throw off suspicion as to what was inside. The interior of the dug-out when finished was about 11 feet [3.3m] square and 6½ feet [2m] high. The other three dug-outs were not so commodious. One was situated in the townland of Derrycon and the other in Middle Lyon near the Company Captain's house, while the third in Bohatch was dug into the side of the mountain. All the dug-outs were equipped with mattresses and bed clothes which we procured from our own homes.⁹⁰

Compared to the four dugouts described by Thomas McNamara, Tormore Cave would have been more commodious, better ventilated and less damp. Some of the work involved with the Mountshannon dugouts further mirrors the work that took place at Tormore Cave, including the construction of a mortar floor, a flagstone surface and walling. McNamara's account is one of several that mention the presence of mattresses in dugouts. Mattresses were also likely present in Tormore Cave but would have been removed some time after the dugout had been abandoned.

In Roscommon, IRA volunteer Luke Duffy recounted the ubiquity of dugouts during the revolutionary period and the poor living conditions:

During the time of this crisis, we constructed a number of dug-outs which we furnished with bedding from a disused mansion in the area. We constructed one dug-out for every two villages. It was intended to take up our abode in these if conscription was enforced. The dug-outs were made in the face of hills and in the face of turf banks and so forth. One dug-out constructed at Cloonshee near Ballagh Church was capable of holding 20 men. The dug-outs in question came in useful afterwards during the Terror period for accommodating men of the active service column and men on the run, but on the whole were very unhealthy and uncomfortable places to spend any time in.⁹¹

Insights from a Tipperary dugout

James O'Flynn, Assistant Adjutant of the III Tipperary Brigade, provided an illuminating and detailed description of the construction and contents of a well-organised IRA dugout, greatly informing our understanding of Tormore Cave.⁹² He begins with a description of the dugout, which served as brigade HQ:

A brief description of the Brigade H.Q. may not be out of place here. It consisted of a dug-out, approximately 12 feet [3.65m] long by 10 feet [3m] wide by 7½ feet [2.3m] high, constructed underneath a field ... The entrance was by a trap door ... closely camouflaged with sods of earth and grass, and those entering or leaving secured it behind them.

Ernie O'Malley visited a dugout operated by Séamus Robinson, OC of the III Tipperary Brigade, and Seán Fitzpatrick, the Brigade's Adjutant. He recalled the well-placed sods of green turf which made the dugout entrance very difficult to locate. O'Malley described how 'in a field with a rise in it they halted and searched about in surprise. 'Why! We've lost it,' said Séamus [Robinson]. 'It must be the fairies,' said Seán Fitzpatrick. I could not see any trace of a dug-out. Seán Fitzpatrick put his hand on a long sod of green turf. He lifted it up.

⁹⁰ BMH.WS1077, Thomas McNamara

⁹¹ BMH.WS0661, Luke Duffy

⁹² BMH.WS1249, James O'Flynn

I could see an opening. The sod rested on a trapdoor. 'The grass is watered daily,' said Seán.⁹³

James O'Flynn, who was likely present at the time of O'Malley's visit, continued:

The trap door was also the only means of ventilation and we often had to leave it either open or ajar to ventilate the dug-out. Access from the entrance down into the dug-out was by means of a ladder. The floor and ceiling were covered with sheeting [wooden] boards and the four sides were lined with similar material.⁹⁴

The ventilation issues that O'Flynn mentioned would not have been an issue at Tormore Cave where there is a free flow of fresh air through the passage at all times. The cave would also have been more structurally sound and robust, again highlighting its superiority as a dugout relative to artificial earth-cut subterranean chambers.

Ernie O'Malley described how the Tipperary dugout had been kitted out as an office, from where brigade activities were coordinated:

We were in a long wooden room; railway sleepers and part of the pavilion from Cashel golf course had provided the wood. Bedding was rolled up on one side. There were typewriters, files of papers, wooden slits; small arms and rifles hung from wooden pegs, grenades and ammunition were stacked on shelves. It looked neat and business-like. Motor car batteries gave light. The room was dry, clean and comfortable. The officers worked away at typewriters and maps whilst Séamus and I talked. A brigade officer could always be found there. They were very proud of the dug-out; picked men from Rosegreen company had built it.

The Tipperary dugout (3.65m x 3m x 2.3m high) was far smaller than the habitable zone of Tormore Cave (6m x 2m x max. 2.5m high), yet despite the cramped space, the Tipperary site was installed with a table, stool, mattresses and shelving. There can be little doubt that furniture was also installed in Tormore Cave but was removed in the months and years after the Civil War had ended.

Senior IRA men lived in the Tipperary dugout. It did not function in isolation, but operated within a support network of safe houses and families sympathetic to the Republican cause:

Seán Fitzpatrick and I generally slept on the two mattresses in the dug-out. The others, viz. Robinson, Sheehan, Carew and O'Mara, were generally accommodated in some of the farmhouses in the vicinity. There was also sleeping accommodation in another dug-out which was constructed on somewhat similar lines to the Brigade H.Q. It was furnished only with a few mattresses and was only occasionally used. Our meals were supplied to us free gratis and for nothing by Davins and Loobys of Rathsallagh, Houlihans of Castleblake and O'Donnells of Graigue ... Any bulky stuff arriving for the brigade was usually left at Davins or Loobys of Rathsallagh.⁹⁵

A similar scenario existed at Tormore. The Branleys were the principal family that attended the cave, but there was an extensive network of safe houses along the Glencar Valley that provided support. Many Catholic and Protestant families were sympathetic to the IRA in Sligo and provided them with food and aid, though they were not necessarily supportive of their politics and actions. Without community intervention, it would have been impossible for over 30 men to survive in Tormore Cave for several weeks.

The safety and security of dugouts depended largely on keeping their location a secret, as highlighted by O'Flynn:

The location of the Brigade H.Q. dug-out was known only to the brigade staff and, of course, to the men who had constructed it. It was constructed by a unit usually referred to as the 'Special Half Company attached to the Brigade'. These were selected men who were often called upon for guard and scouting duties when raids or rounds-up were expected or when anyone of particular importance visited the area. Amongst ourselves we always referred to the Brigade H.Q. as No. 71.⁹⁶

⁹³ O'Malley 2002: 334

⁹⁴ BMH.WS1249, James O'Flynn

⁹⁵ BMH.WS1249, James O'Flynn

⁹⁶ BMH.WS1249, James O'Flynn

The precise location of Tormore Cave was also closely guarded, known only to a select few. Most of the Republicans stationed at Rahelly House had probably never been there before, and there are various anecdotal accounts of individuals having to guide or direct men across the mountains towards the cave. The Branley brothers, Paddy, Dominic and Thady, all active IRA volunteers, certainly knew its location. Billy Pilkington had stayed there during the War of Independence, and it is likely that Seamus Devins and Eugene Gilbride were also familiar with the site. Beyond that, it seems that few others knew the precise location of the cave prior to September 1922. Chris Branley believed ‘a lot wouldn’t have known anything about it.’⁹⁷ Even women in the Branley household and sympathetic neighbours who lived nearby appear to have been kept in the dark as to its precise location, for their own safety as well as that of the men in hiding. Indeed, the need to keep the location secret was passed down to later generations of the Branley family. The vague name by which the dugout was known in 1922, ‘the Glencar hideout’, also reflects a deliberate effort to maintain secrecy. ‘Glencar’ covers a wide area extending over multiple townlands on either side of Glencar Lake. If the townland name had been used, for example, ‘the Tormore hideout’, it would have been easier to locate the cave, particularly by pressuring the Branley family who lived in the same townland and were known to operate a safe house.

Contents and furnishings of dugouts

When used for occupation, dugouts such as Tormore Cave were furnished with domestic furniture and fittings typical of material found in any rural cottage in 1920s Ireland. Material confiscated from dugouts raided by the National Army provides a valuable insight into the types of objects that would once have been found in Tormore Cave. As the cave was never discovered, objects and furniture would have been removed when it was abandoned as a hiding place after the Civil War. Material that was not worth recovering was left behind, namely dishes and bottles that were broken beyond repair, and iron vessels that were no longer fit for purpose due to corrosion. These abandoned fragments, as described in Chapter 6, do not represent the original contents and furnishings of the cave. All usable objects would have been removed and returned to their original owners, or repurposed in local homes, almost certainly the Branley farmhouse.

An IRA dugout located in the vicinity of Mountcharles, County Donegal was raided by National Army troops from Finner Camp in August 1923, several months after

the Civil War had ended. There they found bed clothes, an oil stove, petrol and paraffin oil.⁹⁸ The use of petrol and paraffin echoes the discovery of bog deal and sods of turf in Tormore Cave, which may have been soaked in paraffin or petrol and used to provide low light or low heat.

Other items that might be expected at Tormore Cave include food, clothes, blankets, lamps, arms and ammunition. These items and more were listed in documents seized by the National Army from a dugout at Charlestown, County Mayo, in March 1923 illustrating the supplies required by the IRA⁹⁹ (Figure 4.15):

32 pairs of drawers; 12 pairs of pants; 24 undershirts; 12 vests; 15 coats; 8 caps; 2 cross-cut saws; 1 hatchet; 19 tins of petrol; 26 tins of petrol at P. Tighe

3 ground sheets; 3 blankets; 1 signal lamp; 5 haver sacks; 3 bicycles (two of which are partly broken); 3 bottles of [?] G. and I. oil; 3 mines detonated; 2 small cider boxes detonated; 40 yds of cable; Some Lewis gun parts

The following items had been crossed out, presumably because they were no longer required or had already been acquired:

195 .303 ammunition; 6 coats; 200 haver sacks (roughly); 24 pairs of leggings; 1 battery for mine; 20 water bottles; 20 bandoliers; 20 detonators for mines; 5 gun rifles dismantled

This document also names and underlines the individuals responsible for co-ordinating the supplies and providing safe storage: ‘Under M. Hogan’s care’, ‘at P. Tighe’ and ‘Kerrigans Dump’. In a letter accompanying the list, J.J. Philbin, Assistant QM 4th Western Division IRA, wrote that more clothing would be forthcoming in ten days or so. He asked, perhaps both practically and altruistically: ‘Will you keep one of the old coats for John Davitt, give it to him yourself, as the poor devil has got no coat’.¹⁰⁰

Raids on dugouts

Even with the construction of new dugouts, a greater number of these were discovered during the Civil War as

⁹⁷ Chris Branley, video and audio recording 2012

⁹⁸ CW/OPS/06/03

⁹⁹ Lot 11, IE/MA/CW/CAPT

¹⁰⁰ Lot 30, IE/MA/CW/CAPT

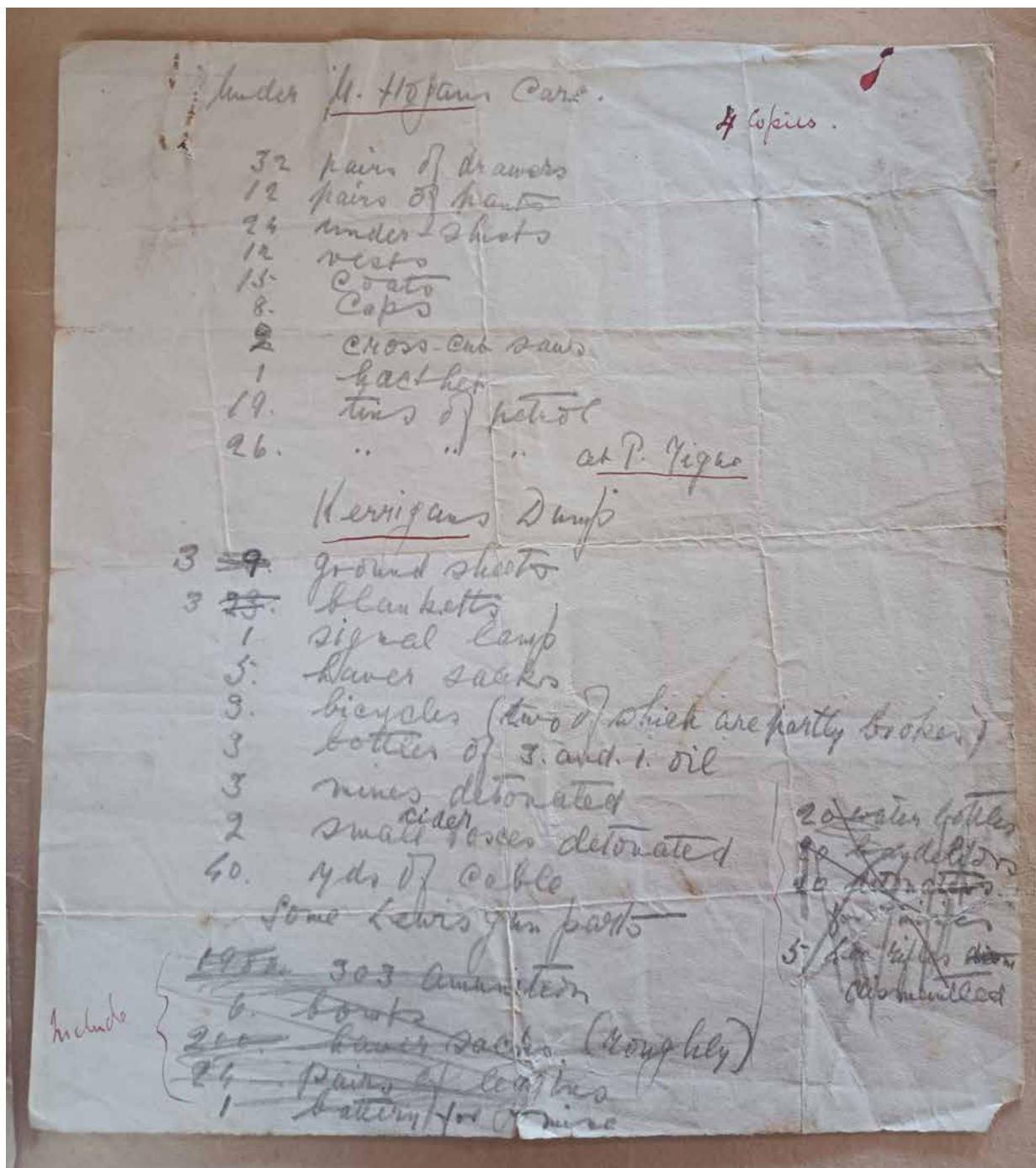


Figure 4.15 'Kerrigan's dump' (Robert Mulraney, reproduced with kind permission from the Captured Documents Lot 11 of the Civil War Captured Documents Collection, 1922-1925, IE/MA/CW/CAPT, Military Archives).

National Army soldiers had a superior understanding of the landscape and IRA guerrilla tactics compared to the Crown forces and Black and Tans of the earlier conflict. The National Army also had greater support from local civilians and spies in locating IRA dugouts. In April 1923, towards the end of the Civil War, four Republicans were

captured by the National Army in a large dugout in the forestry beneath Benbulbin Mountain.¹⁰¹ The following month, a dugout in Salthill, County Donegal was raided

¹⁰¹ It is possible, though far from certain, that this was Cooldrumman Upper souterrain (SL005-133---); CW/OPS/06/03

by the National Army during which a hatchet, shovel, spade, pick hammer, nails and candles were retrieved.¹⁰² At Beltra in West Sligo, clothes, bedding, shovels and picks were discovered in a dugout by the National Army and destroyed.¹⁰³ These tools likely relate to the construction or maintenance of dugouts, but would also have been used for military actions such as road trenching and laying of mines. A few months later, in July 1923, seven high profile Republicans associated with Frank Carty, including Christy McLynn (driver of the *Ballinalee* armoured car) and Dominick Benson (older brother of Harry, one of Sligo's Noble Six), were arrested at a dugout at Skreen in west Sligo. Arms, ammunition and explosive detonators were seized, in addition to stolen mail bags, stolen Civic Guard coats, an oil stove, blankets and documents.¹⁰⁴ Amongst the documents seized were notices threatening to execute spies, similar to those posted in Moylough Church, near Tubbercurry in South Sligo eight months previously when two 'spies' were murdered in retaliation for the killing of Sligo's Noble Six.¹⁰⁵

As the Civil War progressed into the final months of conflict, the National Army became more and more confident of their ability to defeat the IRA yet remained vigilant of the threat of Republicans regaining a foothold. In attempting to quash isolated pockets of resistance, National Army raids on IRA dugouts became particularly prevalent, serving to disrupt guerrilla tactics and isolate brigades from one another. If an occupied dugout was located, the consequences were dire as the National Army continued to execute arrested Republicans under the Public Safety Bill. In many cases, troops, particularly those associated with the Dublin Guard, continued to carry out occasional acts of extreme brutality. In County Kerry, Republicans Michael Sinnott and James O'Connor made a dugout under hay in a shed where they had 'beds and blankets'. They were discovered by National Army troops on the night of 13 February 1923 and shot dead in the dugout.¹⁰⁶ In the same county, a National Army soldier shot John Linnane dead in a dugout in Trienearagh townland, southeast of Listowel, on 13 April. The dugout was about 1.5m high and had been similarly constructed under hay in a hayshed.¹⁰⁷ Shortly before the Civil War ceasefire, Johnny O'Connor was captured along with comrades while they slept in a dugout in

County Kerry. O'Connor was imprisoned but lived to recount his experiences to Ernie O'Malley in 1949.¹⁰⁸

The reprisal killings which occurred in County Kerry in March 1923 are often considered amongst the greatest atrocities of the Irish Civil War. By then, the killing of IRA prisoners had become 'an almost mechanical practice.'¹⁰⁹ While the degree of violence committed in these reprisals is often the factor by which they are remembered, it should be noted that in each of these events the role of dugouts was central. On 3 March, Stephen Buckley, Dan Donoghue and Tim Murphy were captured in possession of arms in a dugout at Radrinagh townland east of Killarney town and brought to Killarney Barracks. The dugout comprised a cavity in a thick stone wall that ran along a small lane. A few days later, on 7 March, the three men together with two other Republican prisoners, were brought by National Army troops to Countess Bridge in Killarney and ordered to dismantle an IRA roadblock. However, the soldiers had set a trap by placing a landmine within the rubble. It detonated when the IRA prisoners approached. Fire was opened on the men and four of the five were killed. A similar event took place later that day. Stephen Fuller, George Shea, Timothy Twomey and John Shanahan had been captured in a dugout on 21 February 1923 and held in Ballymullen Barracks in Tralee. On 7 March, Fuller, Shea, Twomey and six others were removed from the barracks and taken by lorry to Ballyseedy, outside Tralee, again on the pretext of clearing a roadblock. The men were tied together in a circle around a landmine, which was then detonated killing eight instantly. The force of the explosion threw Stephen Fuller into a ditch. Though seriously injured, he managed to escape to a nearby safe house. He survived the next several months concealed in a dugout.¹¹⁰

Atrocities continued. Six men from the 3rd Battalion Kerry I Brigade were besieged in a series of coastal caves in Clashmelcon townland in North Kerry, where they had sought refuge on 15 April following a National Army round up at Causeway village. The Clashmelcon Caves (also known as Dumfort's Cave), located at the base of steep sea cliffs, were difficult to reach and had been previously utilised as an IRA dugout. On 16 April the National Army congregated in the field overhead. Private James O'Neill, attempting to climb down the cliff face, was shot dead by the Republicans billeted in the cave. The National Army opened machine gun fire on the cave, while simultaneously dropping

¹⁰² CW/OPS/06/03

¹⁰³ CW/OPS/06/03

¹⁰⁴ CW/OPS/06/03

¹⁰⁵ Lot 30, IE/MA/CW/CAPT; Bonsall *et al.*, 2022

¹⁰⁶ Macardle 1924: 21-2

¹⁰⁷ Macardle 1924: 71

¹⁰⁸ Johnny O'Connor in O'Malley and Horgan 2012: 233

¹⁰⁹ Macardle 1924: 69

¹¹⁰ Macardle 1924: 22-35

explosives on the cave entrance. They also dropped burning hay bales in an attempt to smoke out the IRA. As the situation became desperate, IRA volunteers Tom McGrath and Patrick O'Shea tried to escape by swimming out from the cave. They were drowned and their bodies were never recovered. On 18 April, IRA Commandant Timothy 'Aero' Lyons emerged from the cave and surrendered. A rope was lowered but as he climbed up, the rope either snapped or was deliberately severed. 'Aero' Lyons fell to his death and his body was washed out to sea, washing ashore three weeks later. The remaining men, Captain James McEnery, Volunteer Edward Greany and Volunteer Reginald 'Rudge' Hathaway (an Englishman and British Army deserter, who went under numerous pseudonyms), were taken prisoner and executed seven days later.¹¹¹

The brutality of the killings at Countess Bridge, Ballyseedy and Clashmelcon have received much deserved attention in recent years. Yet events of a very similar nature occurred within the 3rd Western Division's II Arigna Brigade area but are less well known nationally. While somewhat less active than the I North Sligo Brigade and the IV South Sligo Brigade, the II Arigna Brigade was of great importance, with a mandate for the garrisoned area of Boyle. In early February 1923, National Army soldiers were drafted into Arigna from Dublin, the Midlands and Donegal. Local IRA men under Vice OC James Cull of the II Arigna Brigade engaged the National Army in an attempt to restrain their movements. They were unsuccessful and were forced to retreat beyond enemy lines. Cull, worried for the welfare of his two sisters at home in Tullynahaw, County Roscommon, returned to find they had suffered daily raids and abuse from National Army troops. On 27 February, Cull retreated to a nearby dugout where he could rest but maintain a watchful eye over his house. The dugout itself was an old coal mine adit running for approximately 6m into a bank of the Arigna River in the townland of Giddaun.¹¹²

Cull was in the dugout with Captain Patrick Tymon of Knockadryan, QM of the Arigna ASU. The two men were observed by National Army look-outs leaving Cull's house one night, heading for the dugout. Troops arrived at the house, detained the sisters, and opened fire on the dugout. Tymon was shot in the ankle. Cull returned fire, injuring two soldiers. Cull then proceeded to bandage his comrade with strips of cloth torn from his own shirt. By this time a number of civilians had gathered on the opposite bank of the Arigna River observing as events unfolded. They witnessed troops

remove a straw mattress from the Cull home and douse it with petrol. It was then crammed into the dugout entrance and set alight. The National Army succeeded in smothering the two men trapped inside. Members of the Dublin Guard then arrived and detonated a mine at the entrance. This was the same Dublin Guard that had tied nine prisoners to the mine at Ballyseedy, County Kerry earlier that month. They returned the following evening to oversee the bodies of Cull and Tymon being removed from the dugout.¹¹³

The terror inflicted on sisters Mary and Annie Cull is even less well documented. For days prior to the killings, they were continuously harassed by troops who raided their house and were actively aggressive towards them. The women were detained in a room in their home during the assault on the dugout, then held for a further three days after the killings. One of the sisters was ordered to Drumshanbo to identify her brother's body but having complied, was not given time to pray over him.¹¹⁴ Terrorising the support network of IRA members, that is, the families and communities of the men involved, was now considered a legitimate tactic in the National Army's arsenal and came under the terms of the Public Safety Bill. The Cull sisters suffered enormously. Having lost their mother the previous month, they had also been subjected to the execution of their other brother, Michael, by National Army troops in January 1923. The younger sister, Mary, was 22 years old at the time and thereafter was unable to work, became dependent on her family, and was described as being 'mentally effected', 'mentally deficient' and an 'invalid for life'. She received a partial dependents' state gratuity of £85 in 1935.¹¹⁵ Patrick Tymon's family received no pension.¹¹⁶

Despite these events occurring many months after the occupation of Tormore Cave, the men who sought refuge in the cave dugout would likely have met a similar fate to Cull and Tymon if captured. Following on from the killing of their comrades, collectively known as 'Sligo's Noble Six', this likelihood was almost inevitable. The fact that Cull and Tymon refused to surrender is likely partly due to an expectation that, should they surrender, they would either face extrajudicial murder or legal execution. The too-often conveyed idea of IRA men being wilful martyrs during the Civil War misrepresents the reality of the Free State's uncompromising position on enemies of the State. In so doing it undermines the personal tragedies

¹¹¹ Macardle 1924: 73-87; WRSU2088, James O'Neill; Dowd 2022a

¹¹² Hugh A. Gallagher pers. comm. to R. Mulraney, 13.03.2023

¹¹³ *Éire*, 14.04.1923; *Éire*, 22.03.1924; *The Wolfe Tone Weekly*, 18.01.1938

¹¹⁴ *Éire*, 14.04.1923; *Éire*, 22.03.1924; *The Wolfe Tone Weekly*, 18.01.1938

¹¹⁵ Census of Ireland 1911; MSPC DP2370A, James Cull

¹¹⁶ MSPC DP5837, Patrick Tymon

of men who found themselves in situations with few or no options.

Dugouts in North Sligo and Leitrim

Michael Hopkinson observed that, ‘The great strength of the Republican columns was their mobility, local knowledge and roots; they were aided by their geographical isolation and the mountainous terrain.’¹¹⁷ This was certainly true for the IRA in North Sligo. Tormore Cave was one of an extensive network of dugouts and safe houses in the environs of Benbulbin Mountain, the Dartry Mountains and along the relatively remote Glencar Valley. In filing their activity reports to the Pensions Bureau, the Ballintrillick and Glenade Companies of the 2nd Battalion, 1 North Sligo Brigade were more forthcoming than many other companies in detailing the construction of dugouts. They document that in April 1920, during the War of Independence, at least two dugouts were constructed locally, one on the land of Pat Gilroy and one on Hugh McGloin’s land.¹¹⁸ At this time there was a round up by Crown forces of known IRA men in the locality but, despite their efforts, no members of the 2nd Battalion flying column were arrested, possibly due to the success of their dugouts. A third dugout was constructed at Doostroke (north of Eagle’s Rock) in May 1920 and a fourth in Ahamlish (Moneygold townland) in August of that year.¹¹⁹ The latter was in close proximity to the site of the Moneygold ambush and was constructed just two months prior to that highly successful attack. In the immediate aftermath of the Moneygold ambush, Cumann na mBan member Agnes Carty brought food and clothing to the flying column and ‘assisted in hiding arms along the mountainside’, an indirect reference to the presence of dugouts for concealing men and arms in the Benbulbin environs.¹²⁰

In October 1920, repair and reconstruction of dugouts continued in North Sligo. In May and June 1921, additional dugouts were constructed.¹²¹ Probably in response to increased pressure from Crown forces and the arrest of the Company OC, many members of the 4th Battalion (Manorhamilton) who were on the run began construction of a dugout locally at an unidentified location.¹²² The Kinlough Company were involved in the construction and repair of dugouts in July, October

and November 1921.¹²³ John Smyth, attached to Rahelly House, took part in the construction of a dugout in his area, noting that the Truce period was a busy time for their preparation.¹²⁴ Tormore Cave, which had already functioned as a basic dugout, was likely further developed at this time, with the construction of some of its advanced features. Some dugouts, notably those that involved the appropriation of a pre-existing structure, were prepared relatively easily. Others involved large-scale excavation. John Gilmartin of the North Sligo IRA worked as an engineer in the Glencarbury barytes mines in the Dartry Mountains. He was in charge of dugout construction because of his invaluable expertise and working knowledge of how the mines were propped up and the internal supports required.¹²⁵

National Army intelligence reports document numerous excursions from Sligo town and other garrisons into the mountainous terrain in search of dugouts. As late as April 1923, Army reports detail 50 troops from Sligo town scouring the rural hinterlands of Drumcliff and Carney villages looking for dugouts. In the Drumcliff area they discovered and destroyed a large dugout, possibly at today’s ‘Benbulbin Forest Park’. At Carney they found a second dugout where four men were hiding.¹²⁶

Beyond the study area, expanding into the broader 3rd Western Division area, accounts are plentiful of dugouts that were occupied throughout Tom Deignan’s II Arigna Brigade, Patrick Brennan’s III North Roscommon Brigade and Frank Carty’s IV South Sligo Brigade. These brigades made use of local topographical features. For example, natural limestone caves were exploited as dugouts at Lough Key, a highly karstic region of III North Roscommon’s Brigade area. In the mixed geology of II Arigna’s Brigade territory, an area that contains less karstic limestone and more sandstones, mine adits related to the coalfields and iron mining industries of the Arigna hinterland were appropriated. In west Sligo, a mountainous and remote region of igneous and metamorphic geology where no caves or mines occur, artificial subterranean dugouts appeared to have been predominantly used.

In the course of this project, we have identified and located nine IRA dugouts in the mountainous landscape of North Sligo and Leitrim, in addition to Tormore Cave (Figure 4.16; Table 4.1). The original number

¹¹⁷ Hopkinson 1988: 212

¹¹⁸ MA/MSPC/A/29; these were most likely in Cloontypruglisk townland

¹¹⁹ MA/MSPC/A/29

¹²⁰ MSP34REF52330, Agnes Carty

¹²¹ MA/MSPC/A/29

¹²² MA/MSPC/A/29

¹²³ MA/MSPC/A/29

¹²⁴ MSP34REF49273, John Smyth; MA/MSPC/A/29

¹²⁵ Hugh Gallagher pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 03.03.2023

¹²⁶ CW/OPS/06/03

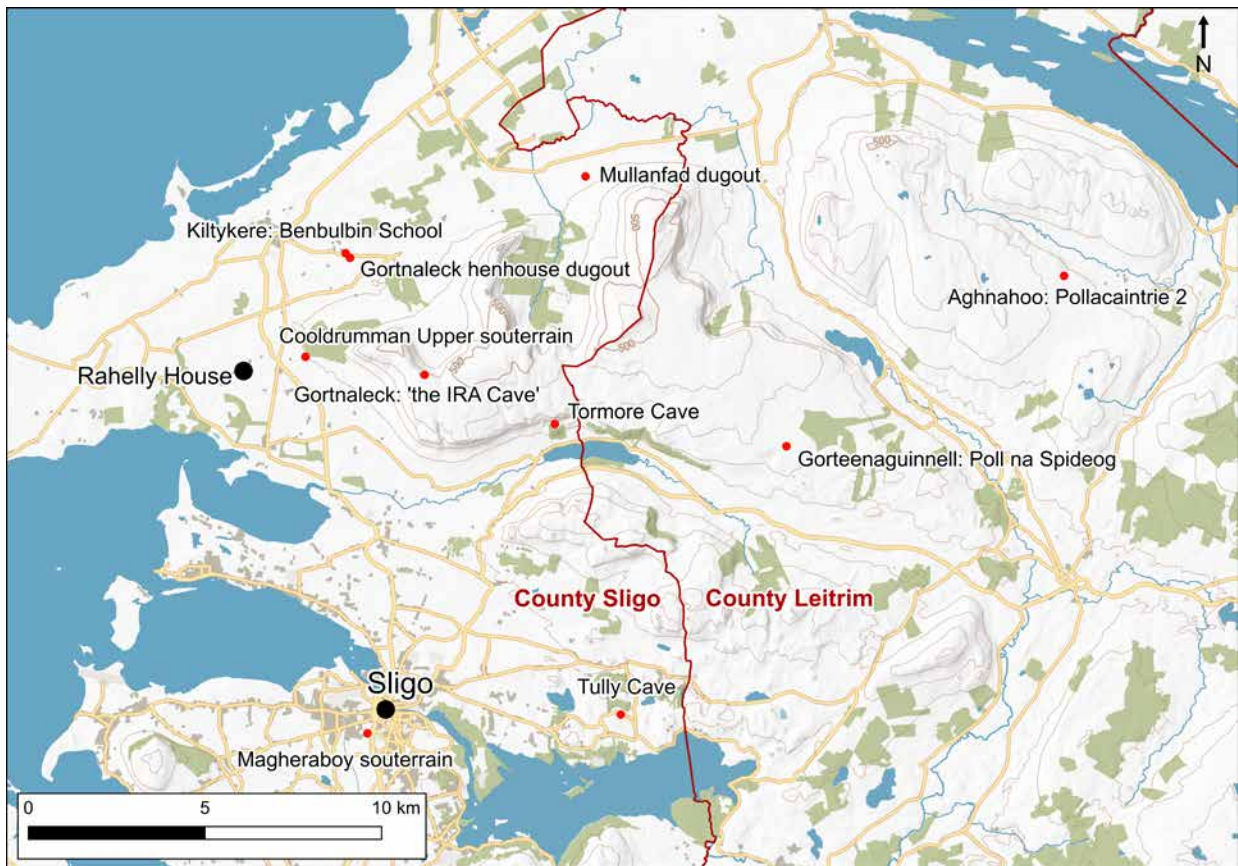


Figure 4.16 Map of identified IRA dugouts in the mountainous landscape of North Sligo and Leitrim (James Bonsall).

of dugouts that were in operation in the 1920s was significantly higher, but scores have been destroyed, lost or forgotten. In the immediate vicinity of Tormore Cave, for instance, Maggie Branley frequently talked to her granddaughter about 'three caves that are open, but they'll never find them.'¹²⁷ We have not been able to identify which caves she was referring to, but we have identified several caves within close proximity that may have been used. These include a further three small caves east of Tormore Cave and within the same townland, close to the Branley homestead (see Chapter 7). There are further anecdotal accounts of a man discovering arms and ammunition in a cave further west along the cliff face from Tormore Cave but when he subsequently returned, he could no longer find it. We have identified one small cave in that area. There are numerous other small caves and mine shafts which have not been fully recorded; any one of these might be the caves referred to by Maggie Branley. A similar version is that a cache of arms wrapped up in a cloth

were found in a cave in this area.¹²⁸ A cave located in Glen Upper townland, approximately 1.3km northwest of Tormore Cave and at a higher altitude, may be one of the sites mentioned by Maggie Branley and/or the site where the arms were discovered.

Here we provide brief descriptions of the nine sites as they illustrate the variety of IRA dugouts that once existed and help place Tormore Cave in context. This may also serve to alert archaeologists and cavers to the possibility that 'modern' material discovered in archaeological monuments and caves may reflect activities from the 1920s.

Cooldrumman Upper Souterrain, Cooldrumman Upper townland, County Sligo

This souterrain, an archaeological monument, is located in gently undulating lowland pasture and was constructed during the early medieval period, sometime between the sixth and twelfth centuries

¹²⁷ Rachael McGowan pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 09.05.2022

¹²⁸ Darren Kerrigan pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 03.03.2022; Derry Taheny pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 02.04.2022

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT

Table 4.1 Known IRA dugouts in North Sligo and Leitrim.

County	Townland	Name	Type of dugout
Sligo	Cooldrumman Upper	Cooldrumman Upper Souterrain	Souterrain: recorded archaeological monument (SL005-133----)
Sligo	Gortnaleck	The IRA Cave	Natural limestone cave
Sligo	Gortnaleck	None	Excavated chamber beneath henhouse
Sligo	Kiltykere	Benbulbin School	Excavated chamber beneath floor of school
Sligo	Magheraboy	Magheraboy Souterrain	Souterrain: recorded archaeological monument (SL014-270----)
Sligo	Mullanfad	None	Excavated earthen dugout
Sligo	Tormore	Tormore Cave	Natural limestone cave (SL009-074----)
Sligo	Tully	Tully Cave	Natural limestone cave
Leitrim	Gorteenaguinnell	<i>Poll na Spideog</i>	Natural limestone cave
Leitrim	Aghnahoo	Pollacaintrie 2	Natural limestone cave

AD (Figures 4.17 and 4.18). It consists of an artificial subterranean stone-lined passage over 10m long, 1.1m wide and 1.2m high. At the end of the passage is a more spacious rectangular chamber measuring 4.5m x 1m and 1.4m high.¹²⁹ During the early medieval period, the souterrain would have been used for storing perishable foods, particularly dairy produce, by a local farming family who lived in an adjacent ringfort. It may have also been used at that time as a place of refuge during times of trouble. Over a millennium later, in the 1920s, the souterrain was reappropriated by the IRA as a dugout. Several features within the souterrain seem to relate to this period of usage. Loose stone rubble neatly piled along both sides of the main souterrain passage may indicate efforts to clear the interior and maximise the living space while simultaneously creating benches. A crude area of burning, possibly an attempted hearth, is located in a corner of the end chamber. Directly above this is an opening that may have served as an air vent, possibly an original early medieval feature. Modern pottery sherds, glass shards and iron fragments are scattered over the souterrain floor.

‘The IRA Cave’, Gortnaleck townland, County Sligo

This natural limestone cave, known locally as ‘the IRA Cave’, is remembered to have been used as a dugout (Figure 4.19). A woman from Grange village recalled that her grandmother used to bring a bottle of tea, kept warm in a sock, to her husband when he was billeted

there.¹³⁰ The cave is located on the northeastern flank of Benbulbin Mountain at 490m OD, just below the summit, commanding expansive views to the north and east. The two entrances into the cave are entirely concealed due to the undulating nature of the mountainside. This spacious cave is 33m in length, reaches a maximum width of 7m and a maximum height of 3.65m. The east facing entrance is 3.20m wide and 2.10m high; the south facing entrance is 4.1m wide and 1.65m high. In daylight hours the cave is never shrouded in total darkness. Recent decades have seen an increase of visitors to the cave resulting in the accumulation of rubbish over the floor. A broken green glass bottle is the only possible object that may relate to 1920s activities. There is no evidence of modifications or structures at the site.

Dugout beneath henhouse, Gortnaleck townland, County Sligo

A dugout was once located on the side of the road running through Gortnaleck townland on Joe Leyden’s farm. Leyden was an active Republican during the 1920s. At a court appearance in 1925 he was fined for possession of a hand grenade and revolver.¹³¹ One of the sheds on Leyden’s farm had been constructed downslope from a natural rise of ground; the loft of the shed was at the same level as the slope behind it. A dugout was constructed into the natural bank of high ground behind the shed. A henhouse was built on top

¹²⁹ Dowd *et al.* 2017

¹³⁰ Joe Elliott pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 13.03.2022

¹³¹ Hugh Gallagher pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 03.03.2023

DUGOUTS: AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF GUERRILLA WARFARE

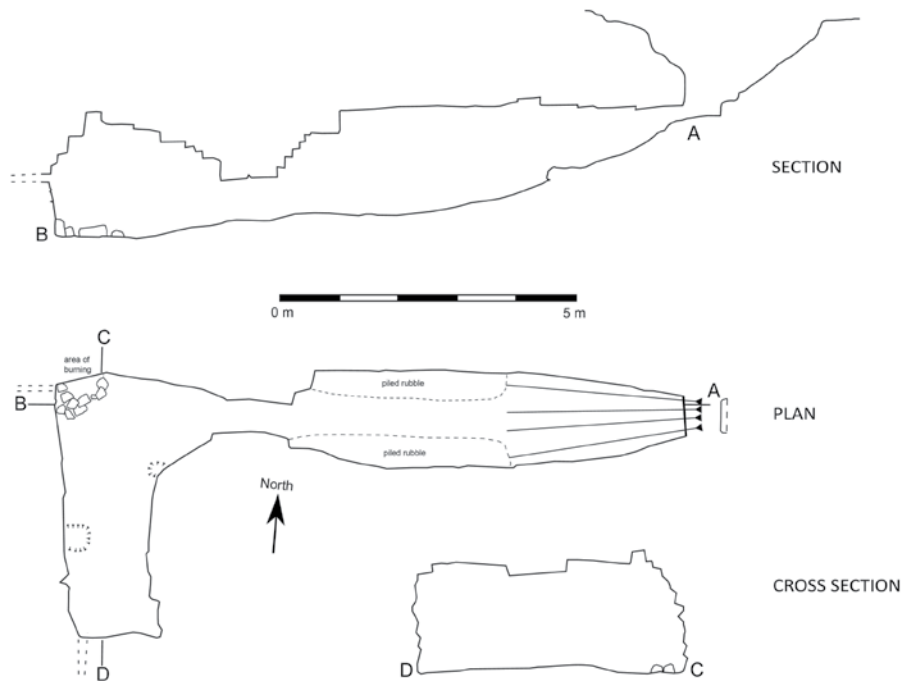


Figure 4.17 Profile, plan and cross section of Cooldrumman Upper souterrain (Sam Moore).



Figure 4.18 The entrance and interior of Cooldrumman Upper early medieval souterrain, reappropriated as a dugout by the IRA in the 1920s. Benbulbin Mountain in the background (Marion Dowd).



Figure 4.19 Top: View from 'The IRA Cave' on Benbulbin Mountain. Below: Derry Taheny stands at the main cave entrance (Marion Dowd).

of the natural rise, above the dugout. Access into the dugout was via a small, cramped passage at the rear of the loft, running under the floor of the henhouse. Modern farm buildings have led to the destruction of the dugout, but the current owner, Hugh Gallagher, created a niche feature in the modern concrete wall to mark the former location of the passageway from the shed loft into the dugout. He has also retained a slab that originally blocked the dugout entrance (Figure 4.20). This dugout was used for hiding men and arms during the revolutionary period.¹³²

¹³² Hugh Gallagher pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 03.03.2023

Dugout under floor of Benbulbin National School, Kiltykere townland, County Sligo

Benbulbin National School was constructed in the mid-19th century, funded by the landlord, Lord Palmerstown (Henry Mount Temple). During the revolutionary period, a dugout was constructed under the floorboards beneath the headmaster's desk inside the school. Arms were concealed there, and men on the run may also have sought refuge there.¹³³ The building no longer functions as a school and has been refurbished as a private dwelling house. In a similar example, Martin

¹³³ Hugh Gallagher pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 03.03.2023



Figure 4.20 Hugh Gallagher holds part of the concrete slab that covered the Gortnaleck dugout (Marion Dowd). The flagstone on the wall concealed the entrance to the dugout. Hugh had a niche (yellow circle) built into the modern wall to indicate the location of the former passage between the loft of the original shed into the dugout. The dugout had been constructed into the hill slope, with a henhouse placed above it, approximate location of former henhouse indicated. Note the north face of Benbulbin in the background.

Bernard McGowan, OC 2nd Battalion (North Sligo) IRA, was a schoolteacher at Drummons National School, 10km east-northeast of Benbulbin National School, during the War of Independence. There, he concealed arms ‘over the ceiling of my school, which could only be entered through the skylight in the roof.’¹³⁴

Magheraboy Souterrain, Magheraboy townland, County Sligo

This early medieval souterrain measures up to 0.8m high, 0.55m wide and is at least 5m in length, with an additional perpendicular passage at least 2.5m long. The location of the original souterrain entrance is not known, but in modern times a second entrance was created when two roofing lintels were either deliberately removed or had collapsed inwards, leaving an opening on the ground surface that measures 0.6m x 0.65m. When discovered by archaeologist Sam Moore in 2005, this opening was covered by a metal

grid. Immediately beneath the opening, the original drystone souterrain wall had been reinforced with cement and part of the roof had been concreted over. Within the passage, a metal gate or grate occurred 2.7m from the opening and curtailed further access along this section of the passage (Figure 4.21). A length of rope was looped around one of the lintels on the north side of the souterrain.¹³⁵ There is a strong possibility that this early medieval souterrain at Magheraboy was appropriated by the IRA as a dugout in the 1920s as suggested by the cement additions, rope, metal grid and mesh. These elements do not date to the early medieval period, they are all relatively modern. Such additions would not have been necessary if a landowner wanted to safeguard livestock from injury. Rather, they seem to relate to reinforcing the structure, improving access and organising the interior. Another salient point may be the proximity of the Magheraboy souterrain to an IRA dugout formerly located beneath Verdon’s house 520m to the southeast in Caltragh townland (see above).

¹³⁴ BMH.WS1545, Martin Bernard McGowan

¹³⁵ Moore 2005



Figure 4.21 The early medieval souterrain at Magheraboy was likely repurposed as a dugout by the IRA in the 1920s, as suggested by the modern metal gate and cement roof (Sam Moore).

Finally, there is evidence from elsewhere in Ireland that early medieval souterrains were appropriated by the IRA during the revolutionary period, such as *Múchán na gCat*, County Kerry (see Chapter 4).

Earthen dugout, Mullanfad townland, County Sligo

This dugout was located on the Gallagher family farm. Brothers John and Patrick Gallagher were both IRA volunteers during the revolutionary period. The dugout was located approximately 150m northwest of the family home and was constructed into a natural rise in the field (Figures 4.22 and 4.23). IRA men on the run occupied the Mullanfad dugout and used it for storing arms. Though now destroyed, Hugh and P.J. Gallagher, sons of John Gallagher, remember that it had been lined with sheets of corrugated iron. After the dugout had fallen out of use, the corrugated iron was removed and re-used to roof animal sheds on the farm.¹³⁶ As children, Hugh and P.J. were not allowed to explore what remained of the dugout. P.J. recalls that in recent decades it took a large volume of material to fill up the chamber to safeguard animals from falling in.

¹³⁶ Hugh Gallagher pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 03.03.2023

The only above-ground trace of the dugout at present is a change in the type of vegetation that grows above the site, nettles rather than grass.¹³⁷

Tully Cave, Tully townland, County Sligo

A natural limestone cave in Tully townland is known locally to have been used as a Republican dugout during ‘the Troubles’ of the 1920s (Figure 4.24).¹³⁸ A leather shoe embedded in the mud floor of the cave may relate to IRA occupation.¹³⁹

Poll na Spideog, Gorteenaguinnell townland, County Leitrim

Poll na Spideog is located 6.6km east of Tormore Cave, within the 2nd Battalion of the I North Sligo Brigade area.¹⁴⁰ It was first recorded by the Yorkshire Ramblers club during a caving expedition in 1951 and described

¹³⁷ P.J. Gallagher pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 03.03.2023

¹³⁸ Jackie McGowan pers. comm. to M. Dowd, July 2014

¹³⁹ Dowd 2017

¹⁴⁰ The cave was visited in 1975 by another British caving club who called it ‘Waterfall Pot’. In 2015, the Shannon Group initially named it ‘Altar Cave’ and later ‘*Poll na Spideog*’.



Figure 4.22 Brothers Hugh and P.J. Gallagher standing in the entrance area of the now-destroyed dugout at Mullanfad. The large boulders relate mainly to later land reclamation rather than the dugout (Marion Dowd).



Figure 4.23 The Mullanfad dugout had been dug into a natural rise in the field (Marion Dowd). The only above-ground trace of the structure at present is the differential vegetation growth seen here. Hugh and P.J. Gallagher were raised in the farmhouse in the centre background. Their father, John Gallagher, was active in the IRA during the Civil War and oversaw the dugout construction.



Figure 4.24 Tully Cave, locally known to have been used by the 'Old IRA' to hide arms and ammunition (Robert Mulraney).

as a 'capacious chamber partly levelled where [a] hut had been built during the troubles [i.e., 1920s]'¹⁴¹ The cave consists of a large circular depression or vertical pot that appears inaccessible without the use of ladders or ropes (Figures 4.25 and 4.26). On the southwestern side it is just about possible to carefully climb down the 10m vertical drop into the dark zone of the cave.¹⁴² Within the main chamber is an area of level ground, approximately 4m x 2m, defined by a series of stones placed in a subcircular arrangement, resembling the flagstones in Tormore Cave (see Chapter 5). To the north of this platform there is a drop of 5m into a second chamber, which contains a natural pool of water and stalactite formations.

Located in moorland and 258m above sea level (over 100m higher up the mountains than Tormore Cave), *Poll na Spideog* would have been an ideal dugout considering its extreme isolation. The vertically inclined entrance is practically invisible, even from close range. It is also difficult to distinguish *Poll na Spideog* from the dozens of other potholes in the same area. To the uninformed,

the cave would be dismissed as inaccessible without use of climbing equipment. If entry was attempted, it would prove virtually impossible to descend into the cave if under fire from individuals stationed in the chamber below. The natural supply of fresh water deep in the cave would have made this an ideal billet.

Pollacaintrie 2, Aghnahoo townland, County Leitrim

The Pollacaintrie Caves are located in the Aghnaha-Corelea Mountains in the northeast extremity of the Dartry range in County Leitrim, near the border with Northern Ireland.¹⁴³ This broad and barren series of low hills form the southern side of the Glenaniff Valley and contain a number of significant caves. In 1956, British cavers noted a drystone wall in one of three adjacent caves, Pollacaintrie 2.¹⁴⁴ Observing that local people, wary of disturbing the fairies, did not readily enter

¹⁴¹ Watts 1952: 342

¹⁴² Barry 2021: 32-3

¹⁴³ This is the only recorded spelling of the cave name that continues to be used locally (Patrick McGuinness pers. comm. to R. Mulraney, 13.08.2022). The unusual name likely derives from *Poll na Cainteoirí*, which translates as 'Hole [Cave] of the speakers'. The speakers in question are likely members of the *sídh* (fairies) who occupied the cave according to folklore.

¹⁴⁴ Lloyd 1957: 63



Figure 4.25 The entrance depression leading into the first chamber of Poll na Spideog (Robert Mulraney).

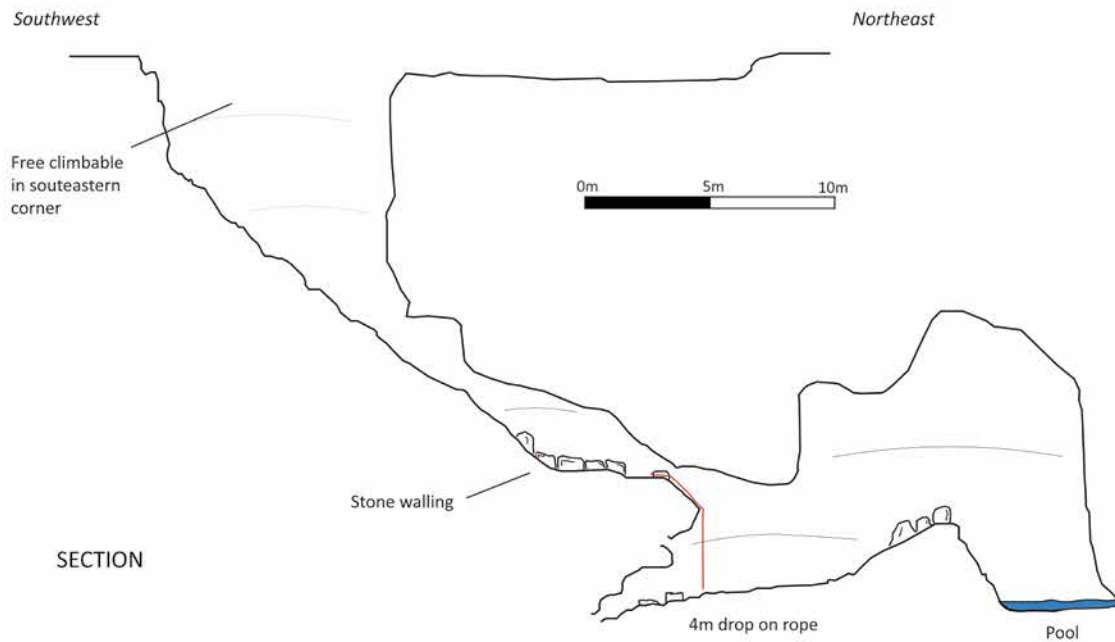


Figure 4.26 Survey of Poll na Spideog (in section). Note the pothole entrance, which is only easily accessible from one corner; the cave then develops both vertically and horizontally. In the first horizontal development is an area of low stone walling, which might have been used similarly to that at Tormore Cave (Surveyed by Claire Macnamara, Stephen Macnamara and Magda Kluj; adapted by Robert Mulraney).

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT

caves, the presence of the construction was a mystery. Upon enquiring locally, the cavers learned that the wall had been 'built in the times of the "troubles" [i.e., 1920s] to provide a hiding place for the "boys on the run" ... [but] it never had to be used for this purpose'.¹⁴⁵

Pollacaintrie 2 is discretely located within a small limestone outcrop and has two entrances, one via a tight crawl and one via a pothole entrance (Figure 4.27). Access to the cave was probably via the larger entrance (a pothole 3m in diameter) with the aid of a basic ladder. The entrance is concealed by a copse of trees growing from the cave walls. At the bottom of the 5m deep pothole, the cave dips further down a slope. In the mid-part of the cave, several evenly spaced steps (it is unclear if they are of natural or human construction) assist in descending the slope. Suddenly there is a drop as the floor surface meets the top of the constructed wall (Figure 4.28). The wall is 2m high and 2.5m wide.

It was constructed entirely of stones sourced from the cave itself; there is no sign of mortar. It is necessary to climb down the wall to reach the next part of the cave, where there is a flat area measuring 2.5m x 5m. This is almost certainly an artificially levelled floor with larger stones likely thrown deeper into the cave or used in the wall construction. Several markings on the cave walls, close to the drystone wall, are not natural and may relate to 1920s activities. For instance, in one area there are two vertical lines, similar to finger rills, pulled through the moonmilk on the cave wall. The entire cave is littered with domestic and farm waste. This was not noted in the 1956 caving report and much rubbish clearly post-dates that time, namely modern tractor tyres and plastics. Some of the refuse, however, potentially relates to the 1920s. There are, for instance, numerous late 19th and early 20th century chemical bottles scattered about the floor.

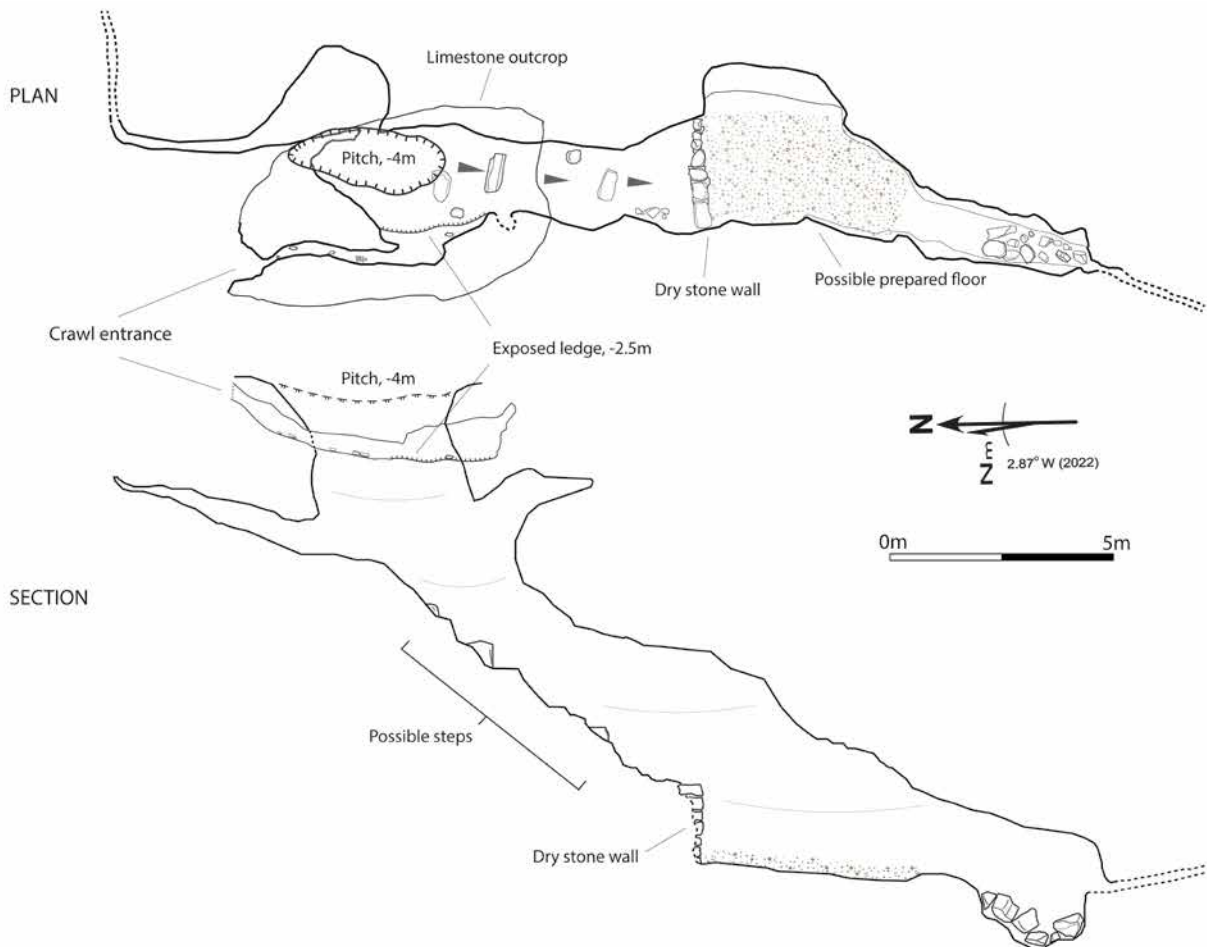


Figure 4.27 Survey of Pollacaintrie 2. Note the two entrances, by crawl and by laddered descent; the possible steps leading down to the top of the drystone wall; and the flat and compacted floor surface (Robert Mulraney).

¹⁴⁵ Lloyd 1957: 63

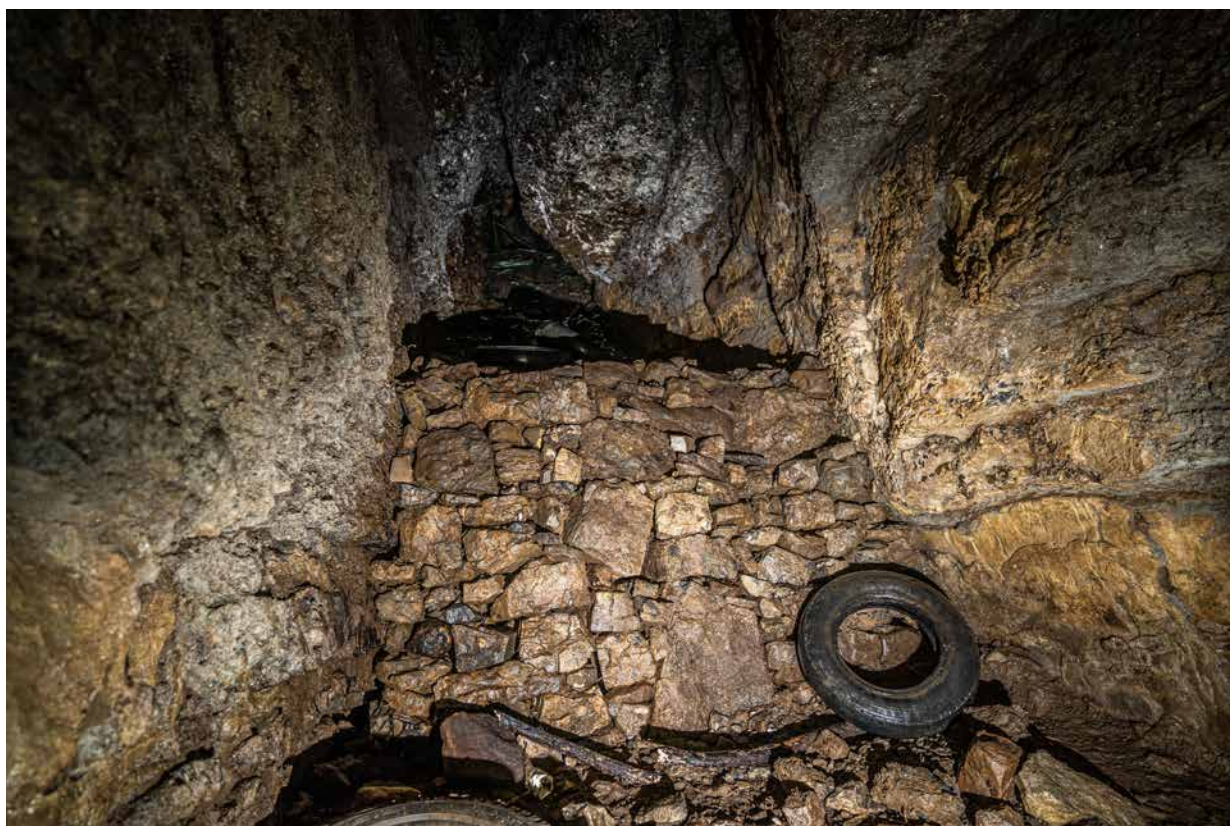


Figure 4.28 Drystone wall constructed inside Pollacaintrie 2 (Robert Mulraney).

Similar to *Poll na Spideog*, Pollacaintrie 2 would not have been easily discovered. Access into the chamber required the use of ladders or ropes. The second entrance is a very tight crawl space with a sudden drop into the cave. Access by this means would leave the entrant exposed to those defending the cave. It is likely, however, that the entrance was concealed by stones or vegetation. While the stone wall acts as a retainer for boulders and stones slipping down from the entrance, it also presents something of an obstacle. It is not easy to scale and would have provided good cover for those standing behind it on the levelled floor. A defensive position could easily be held behind the wall, with only the upper shoulders, arms and heads exposed, with rifles resting on the wall. Anyone descending the pot would be in the direct line-of-fire, with little chance to retreat or hide. Defenders would have been in an entirely dark area shooting into the open part of the cave, which is in natural daylight.

Though it was documented in the 1950s that Pollacaintrie 2 was apparently never used as a dugout, there is little doubt that it had been prepared to serve this purpose. The cave falls within the area of the 4th

Battalion of the I North Sligo Brigade. This battalion was centred around Manorhamilton town, extending to the border with Northern Ireland at Garrison village and beyond. Within the battalion area were smaller company divisions, including the Rossinver Company, the most likely company responsible for preparing Pollacaintrie 2, probably during the War of Independence. The Rossinver Company was originally associated with six other companies belonging to the 5th Battalion (North Leitrim). The other five companies turned Free State, however, forcing the anti-Treaty Rossinver Company to merge within the 4th Battalion (Manorhamilton). It is highly unlikely that a dugout would have been established here during the Civil War, in an area that by then was largely hostile to the anti-Treaty IRA. Members of the Rossinver Company potentially sought refuge in Tormore Cave, along with comrades from the wider I North Sligo Brigade, after the sack of Rahelly House. Interestingly, General Pilkington's plan, following the evacuation of Rahelly, had been to regroup on Benbulbin Mountain and move eastwards into North Leitrim. Had events followed in this manner, Pollacaintrie 2 might have been used.

Safe houses

Dugouts did not and could not operate in isolation. All, or almost all, were inextricably linked to a safe house located in proximity. Some safe houses were homes of active IRA men or Cumann na mBan women; others were homes of families who were sympathetic to the Republican movement but were not actively involved; other still were homes of families who had little or no interest in politics but were concerned for the welfare and safety of Republican neighbours and friends.

In South Sligo, J.J. Jennings' father was not in the IRA, but the family provided a safe house during the War of Independence and Civil War, despite the threat that the hosts 'were liable for the death penalty' for harbouring 'rebels'. J.J. recalled that during the War of Independence: 'Our house constantly had visitors. Our granary and outhouses were always used as dormitories where "the boys" bunked down on straw.'¹⁴⁶ The IRA marched and drilled in Jennings' fields at night and had a dugout in their bog. J.J. remembered these visits, which he witnessed as a young child:

The 'boys', who were constantly on the run, often dined in our house. They had to keep on the move for fear of spies and of being ambushed themselves. There were times when thirty or forty men came. That evening, supplies of loaves, butter and eggs arrived. Two or three large frying pans were forced into service, and the kettle was kept permanently boiling on the crane over the fire. The frying started at about seven or eight o'clock and continued all night until about six in the morning. Each man had two meals, evening meal and breakfast. When all had dined once, those who dined first started again. The menu was always the same – bread, rashers and eggs.¹⁴⁷

When it was not prudent to stay overnight or for a long time in a safe house, men billeted in dugouts but visited safe houses for short periods of respite. During the Civil War, the home of J.J. Jennings' grandmother became 'an outpost of the Irish Republic ... these men came out of their burrows to enjoy the few hours social activity.'¹⁴⁸ Similarly, in County Kerry, IRA volunteer

Jeremiah Sullivan would return home from a dugout for 'about a day and be away again.'¹⁴⁹

Several families in North Sligo continue to be remembered as having provided safe houses to the IRA during the revolutionary period. In Barnarobin townland, on the southern flank of Benbulbin Mountain, the Smyths, Flanagans and Scanlons provided safe houses to 'a crowd of fellas', while Volunteer Willie Devins recalled staying for 'weeks and weeks' in 'Mrs Leydons'.¹⁵⁰ To signal that it was safe for men on the run to come to a house for food, the occupants would put a flat cap on a stick.¹⁵¹ Homes of active IRA men also acted as safe houses but were far less secure than civilian safe houses and were subject to repeated raids (Figure 4.29)

Tormore Cave was directly linked to the Branley homestead (Figures 4.30 and 4.31). The Branley home functioned as a safe house during the War of Independence and Civil War and was raided on 20 to 30 different occasions by the Black and Tans and seemingly also by the National Army.¹⁵² The frequency of raids may have led to a family narrative that the Black and Tans had an informant or spy in Tormore townland.¹⁵³ The Branley home was two-storeyed, and a local narrative claims that someone kept lookout from the upper floor of the house. As it is located on a hillside, anyone approaching from the main road skirting the northern shores of Glencar Lake, or anyone coming up the narrow lane to the house, would be easily spotted. A dyke was supposed to have been cut at the rear of the house to enable men to quickly escape unnoticed up the mountain, north from the Branley home, if trouble was approaching from the south.¹⁵⁴ A dyke is still clearly visible running parallel to the rear of the house before turning to run up the mountain. However, it is debateable whether this was deliberately constructed for men on the run; it more likely relates to accessing the barytes mine.¹⁵⁵ During particularly risky

¹⁴⁶ Jennings 1989: 24

¹⁴⁷ Jennings 1989: 15

¹⁴⁸ Jennings 1989: 53

¹⁴⁹ O'Shea 2022: 73

¹⁵⁰ Willie Devins, audio recording 16.06.1986

¹⁵¹ Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986

¹⁵² Gene O'Carroll pers. comm. to M. Dowd and J. Bonsall, 27.01.2023 (as related to him by Chris Branley on 04.01.2009). It is likely that the National Army raid referred to here was the one conducted by McGoochan on a house in the Glencar Valley on 19 September 1922.

¹⁵³ Gene O'Carroll pers. comm. to M. Dowd and J. Bonsall, 27.01.2023 (as related to him by Chris Branley on 04.01.2009)

¹⁵⁴ Gene O'Carroll pers. comm. to M. Dowd and J. Bonsall, 27.01.2023

¹⁵⁵ The barytes (barium sulphate) mine at Glencar had been in operation since at least 1858 but was damaged by fire in 1922 and closed until 1927 (it continued in intermittent operation until 1980). It is possible that the 1922 fire related to Civil War activities and the presence of National Army soldiers and Republicans on the mountains in September and October of that year. The mines were in



Figure 4.29 Brothers P.J. and Hugh Gallagher outside the family home at Mullanfad where they were born and raised (Marion Dowd). This was the house where their father, John, and his brother, Patrick, lived. Both brothers were active in the North Sligo IRA during the revolutionary period. A dugout was located on their farmland circa 150m behind the house.

or dangerous periods, men on the run could not stay in the Branley safe house and retreated to Tormore Cave.

According to oral narrative, there was a secret room in the Branley home.¹⁵⁶ The house is now in a ruinous state, but a possible concealed room was identified in 2023. A narrow space, 0.74m wide, occurs between the two main rooms and runs the entire breadth of the house. Of similar dimensions was a room at 8 Lansdowne Terrace, Dublin that was constructed as a hideout for Austin Stack; it measured just 1.37m x 0.46m.¹⁵⁷ At the Branley home, the external house wall along the section of the possible secret room is distinctive as the stones here are not coursed compared to the rest of the house and outhouses. Instead, the breach is blocked by one large boulder lying at an angle, with smaller stones haphazardly packed around it (Figure 4.32). If this was a secret room, the loose stones could be quickly

dismantled, allowing access into the room, then could be quickly built back up again.

Secret rooms in safe houses were not unusual. Cumann na mBan's Lizzie O'Beirne recalled that in early 1923, she was ordered by Billy Pilkington and Brian MacNeill 'to have a secret room constructed' in her home at Kilnamanagh ('Kilnamagh'), a few kilometres southwest of Collooney in South Sligo. Lizzie was a sister of Frank O'Beirne (OC Collooney Battalion, IV South Sligo Brigade); relationships such as these strengthened IRA confidence in the security of safe houses (Figures 4.33, 4.34 and 4.35). Lizzie, her mother and a third woman (Cumann na mBan's Maria Davey) brought the building materials into the house concealed in their aprons. An old man, a relative of the family, built the secret room. It was situated in the loft of a farm outhouse building that was connected to the main residence. Access to the room was through a concealed entrance from an upstairs bedroom.¹⁵⁸ Five or six IRA men lived in this room continually during the Civil War until the general release of IRA prisoners in 1924. During that

Glencarbury townland, some 1.4km northwest of Tormore Cave and 1.7km directly north (ascending the mountain) from the Branley safe house (Foley 2016).

¹⁵⁶ Gene O'Carroll pers. comm. to M. Dowd and J. Bonsall, 27.01.2023

¹⁵⁷ Tim Hurley in O'Malley and Horgan 2012: 78

¹⁵⁸ Rory O'Beirne pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 01.09.2023

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Figure 4.30 Brothers Chris and Frank Branley outside their childhood home in 2003 (Branley family, Boston).



Figure 4.31 The Branley safe house in 2022 (Marion Dowd).



Figure 4.32 Rear wall of the Branley homestead with the location of the possible secret room highlighted (Marion Dowd).

time, Lizzie cooked and served ‘hundreds of meals’.¹⁵⁹ Billy Pilkington was a regular visitor to the O’Beirne home and utilised the secret room. During the War of Independence, Lizzie had to endure numerous raids on her home by the RIC and Black and Tans. There was also a dugout on the family farm where guns and equipment were stored; it was covered by a large pile of stones that had been taken from the Owenmore River.¹⁶⁰

Generally, safe houses were part of a local IRA network that incorporated several sites in close proximity. Castlegal townland, on the southern slopes of Cope’s Mountain in North Sligo, provides an example of IRA organisation on a micro scale (Figure 4.36).¹⁶¹ A small cave high up on the western face of the mountain served as an IRA look-out post commanding expansive views over Sligo town, Sligo Bay and the principal road between Sligo town and Manorhamilton. Sheets of corrugated iron were used to improve the shelter. Perpendicular to the main road is a minor cul-de-sac that runs along the lower mountain slopes through a

¹⁵⁹ MSP34REF44588, Lizzie Lang (née O’Beirne)

¹⁶⁰ Rory O’Beirne pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 26.05.2023 and 01.09.2023

¹⁶¹ Francis Mahon kindly supplied all the information about revolutionary period sites in Castlegal. Francis grew up hearing stories about the various buildings and sites from his father, Frank Mahon, and their neighbours.



Figure 4.33 Lizzie O'Beirne with her younger brothers, Michael James (left) and Frank (right), circa 1910 (Rory O'Beirne). The three siblings would all become active in County Sligo during the War of Independence and Civil War.

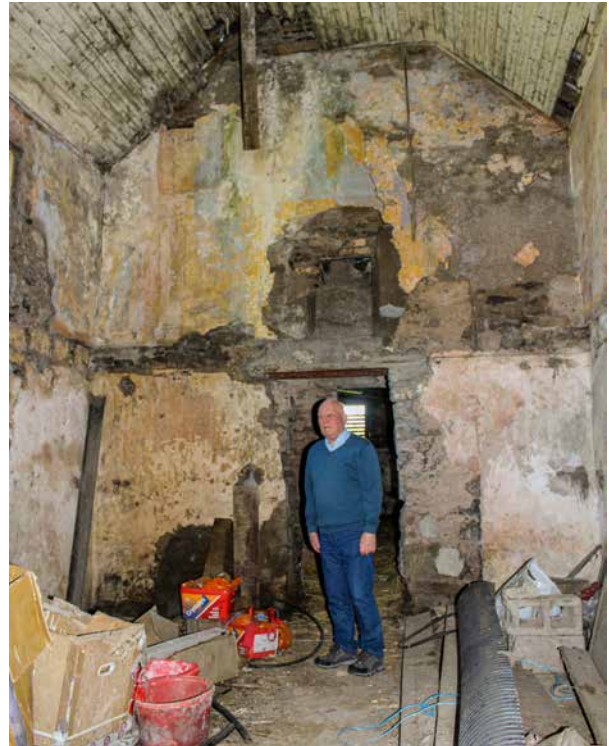


Figure 4.34 Rory O'Beirne stands in the house where his father, Michael James, uncle Frank and aunt Lizzie lived in Kilnamanagh. This was a safe house during the War of Independence and Civil War. The secret room was in the loft area behind where Rory stands (Marion Dowd).

rural and sparsely populated area. About 900m off the main road along this laneway was Donegan's safe house. In the 1911 Census, the family comprised Michael and Bridget Scanlon, their daughter and son-in-law, Kate and Patt Donegan ('Dunigan' in the census), and Kate and Patt's two young children, Bridget and Tom.¹⁶² The IRA regularly stayed in a large stone barn adjacent to the Donegan homestead (Figure 4.37). A narrative passed down by Tom Donegan to Frances Mahon, who was born and reared in the house next door, told of an IRA man who was billeted in the barn during the War of Independence and accidentally discharged his Lee Enfield rifle. The bullet went through the slate roof and the hole was visible until the roof was dismantled in recent years. A map found concealed behind the Sacred Heart picture in Bridget and Tom Donegan's house may relate to IRA activities on the mountain during the 1920s. A blue cross had been marked on the map at a location high up on the mountain near the look-out cave. What the cross represents is unknown. An indication of how Civil War politics continued to impact upon the lives of civilians is seen in how Gardaí searched the Donegan house as late as the



Figure 4.35 The O'Beirne family home circa the 1930s; this was an IRA safe house during the War of Independence and Civil War (Rory O'Beirne).

1970s. Set against the backdrop of the new Troubles in Northern Ireland, it was raided as it was known to have been a 'sympathetic' house in the 1920s. Nothing was discovered and by that stage siblings Bridget and Tom Donegan were elderly. A story commonly told in Castlegal townland in years past was that the IRA had stashed arms in a concrete trough somewhere on the mountain; the guns were covered with oil to prevent

¹⁶² 1911 Census

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them from rusting. The consignment was linked to one of the Devins family, an IRA volunteer living 800m east of the Donegan safe house. An IRA tent camp was

located a short walk from Devins' home in a more remote part of the mountain, out of sight of the houses and laneway (see Figure 3.3).

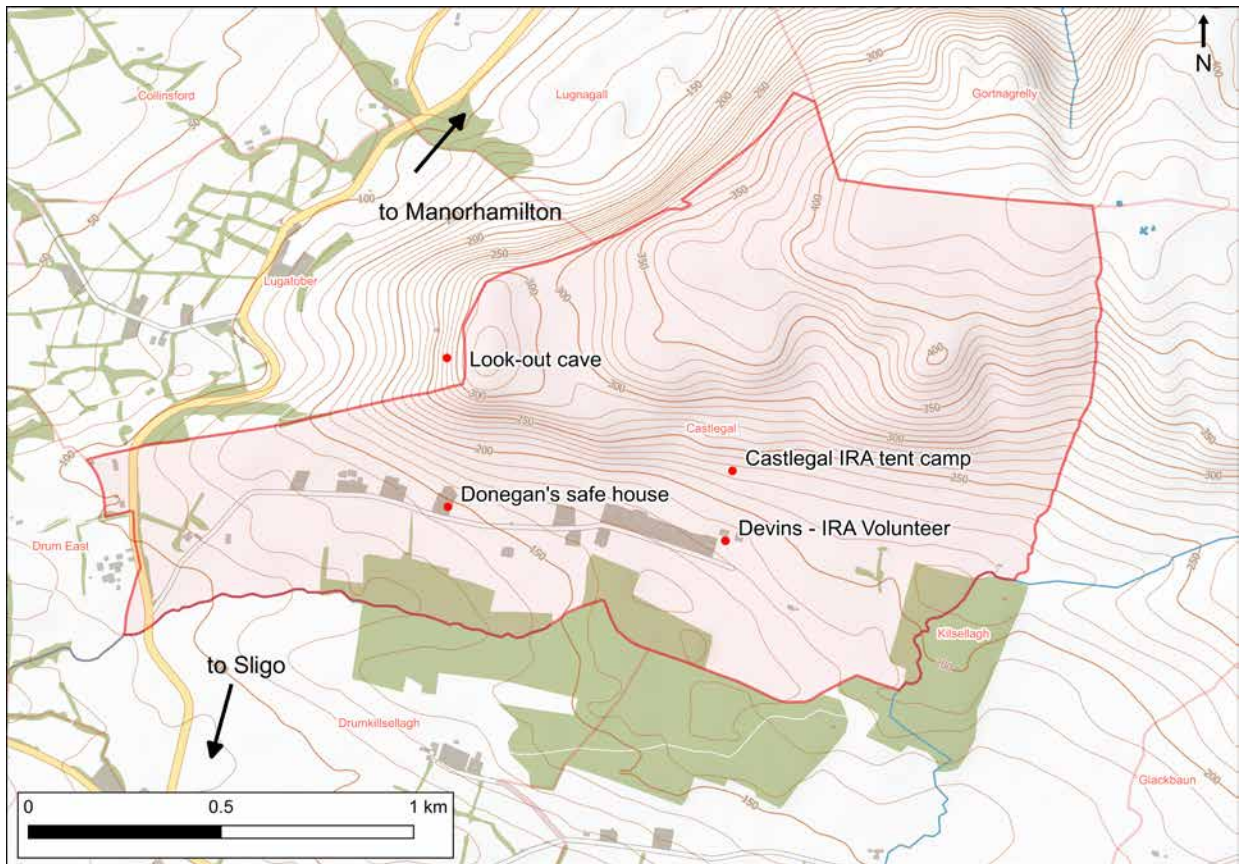


Figure 4.36 Sites in Castlegal townland on Cope's Mountain associated with IRA activities in the 1920s. The townland boundary is highlighted in red (James Bonsall and Francis Mahon).



Figure 4.37 Francis Mahon stands outside Donegan's barn, which served as a safe house for the IRA during the War of Independence (Marion Dowd).

Archaeology

Chapter 5

Civil War modifications, built structures and features in Tormore Cave

*There was nobody ever found here.*¹

Chris Branley

The cave dugout selected by Billy Pilkington to retreat to in September 1922 had been extensively prepared in advance, probably during the Truce period. The cave consists of a natural limestone passage just over 18m in length. It is not particularly large, ranging from 1.2m to 2m in width and varying from 1.4m to 2.5m in height. In terms of the potential for using this underground space, Tormore Cave can be divided into three sections: Area 1, Area 2 and Area 3 (Figures 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4). An overview of all three areas is provided here. As Area 1 is where IRA activities were concentrated in the early 1920s, this part of the cave is explored in greater detail later in the chapter.

Area 1 encompasses the outermost 8m of cave passage. This section commences at the cave entrance and extends for 8m, after which point there is a sharp drop in the floor level. Part of Area 1 includes internal stone steps cut into a bank of material that slopes down from the entrance to the cave floor beneath. This sloping bank and the stone steps reduce the available 'living space' of Area 1 to just 3.5m x 1.6m. It is possible to stand upright and move about here as the cave reaches a maximum height of 2.5m. This is the most spacious part of Tormore Cave. Not surprisingly, the 1920s activities were confined almost exclusively to Area 1. It is the only part of the cave where artificial modifications were definitively made and where structures were built. It is also where the majority of the artefacts were recovered. The features and structures discovered in Area 1 are described in detail below.

Area 2 begins at the eastern end of Area 1, approximately 8m inside the entrance, where the cave floor level drops sharply by 0.85m. This sharp drop is artificial and is partly due to the building up and levelling of the floor in Area 1 during the 1920s. Dropping down into Area 2, this section of cave passage is 5.5m long, 2m wide, and slopes gradually from west to east. While Area 2 is relatively spacious, the floor is composed of

large boulders that could not have been easily cleared, as had been done in Area 1 (Figure 5.1). The cave is also damper in this section of the passage with water dripping from the cave roof, while the walls are almost entirely coated in 'moonmilk' (Figure 5.2). Interestingly, the moonmilk which is present in copious amounts in Area 2 and to a small degree in Area 1, is present only at higher levels on the cave walls. This may be suggestive of disturbance at a human height level, easily caused by gentle physical contact (touching, leaning, etc.) or perhaps by an increase, in that area, in air temperature due to the presence of numerous bodies. Moonmilk is a natural deposit formed as the result of calcium-rich water being processed by chemotrophic bacteria; it forms a very soft and saturated creamy-white deposit. Due to dampness and the sloping rubble floor, Area 2 was probably not used to any great extent in the 1920s.

Approximately 40 loose stones (C.9) cover the boulder floor in the eastern part of Area 2, extending over an area measuring 2.2m x 1.2m (Figure 5.1). Some of these stones were probably thrown down from Area 1 when clearing away surplus boulders to prepare the outer part of the cave for occupation. This rubble was recorded but not excavated, though surface animal bones and artefacts were collected.

Prior to the archaeological excavations, numerous sheep and goat bones, including over 35 butchered bones, lay exposed on the floor of Area 2 (Figure 5.5). Two of these bones (a butchered medium mammal long bone, probably sheep/goat, and a butchered sheep astragalus) were radiocarbon dated. Both returned results indicating activity sometime between 1680 and 1950, an extremely broad timespan that is not particularly informative. Bayesian analysis indicated a 88% probability that the sheep astragalus dates to between 1907 and 1948, and a 68% probability that the butchered long bone dates to between 1905 and 1930. Both spans incorporate the revolutionary period (see Appendix 10). The carcasses were not trampled or fragmented though they lay on the surface, however,

¹ Chris Branley, video and audio recording 2012

Note for non-archaeological readers

During archaeological excavations, each archaeological component (feature, layer, deposit) is given an individual number and recorded as a separate entity. In Irish archaeology, these are called ‘context numbers’ and are abbreviated as ‘C.’. At Tormore Cave, seventeen different archaeological contexts were recorded (see Appendix 1). We have generally tried to avoid using context numbers in this book for readability, but some are included in this chapter for clarity. Similarly, all artefacts and ecofacts are given an individual number when discovered. In Ireland, these numbers are prefaced by the unique excavation licence for a particular excavation, followed by the individual find number. The unique excavation licence number for Tormore Cave, issued by the National Monuments Service, is 22E0030. To break it down, find number **22E0030:09** consists of ‘22’ – the year the excavation took place; followed by ‘E’ for ‘excavation’; followed by ‘0030’ – the 30th archaeological excavation licence to be issued in 2022; followed by ‘09’ – the ninth artefact discovered during the excavation. Throughout this book we have used find and ecofact numbers sparingly for readability, but these are listed in the relevant Appendices.

strongly suggesting that sheep and goats were butchered in Area 2 *after* the cave had been occupied in September 1922.

Area 3 describes the final 5m of the cave passage and consists of a constricted space that is entered by squeezing through an opening in the cave floor at the eastern end of Area 2 (Figures 5.4 and 5.6). Area 3 has a naturally uneven boulder floor that can only be accessed by stooping and crawling. After 2m, the cave passage abruptly turns north and rises sharply upwards. The floor of Area 3 is extremely muddy with many loose stones and pools of water. The floor and walls are completely saturated. At the end is a small, sub-oval chamber with just about sufficient space to turn around. In the roof there is a small opening to the outside which permits circulation of air, but it is impassable due to thick calcite development on the cave walls. Area 3 is far too small, low, cramped and wet to have been of any use for human activities.

Initially, it was considered possible that Area 3 may have been used as a toilet during the 1922 occupation, considering that it affords a level of privacy. Had that been the case, however, within days the men would likely have become ill and living conditions would have become unbearably unhygienic and odorous. As part of the *Tormore Cave Project*, forensic scientist Prof. John P. Cassella investigated Area 3 for the presence of trace amounts of body fluids, such as faeces and urine, using an ultraviolet light. No biological traces were noted (Appendix 12). However, two green threads,

each approximately 5cm in length, were discovered clinging to the cave wall (Figure 5.7). These threads had originated from someone who had clambered into this tight space and got their clothing snagged on the rough cave wall. Subsequent forensic analysis of the two threads revealed that they derive from the same item of clothing. The threads are a green polyester, a synthetic material that only became available for public consumption in the early 1950s (Appendix 12). The threads do not, therefore, date to the 1922 occupation. The calcite accretions on one of the threads, however, indicates that they are not recent in date and have probably been in the cave for several decades.

Archaeological excavation: methodology

The first phase of the *Tormore Cave Project* was to survey the cave and create a digital record of the site, work carried out by R. Mulraney in April 2022 (Appendix 4). Following this, archaeological excavations took place in Tormore Cave over six days in March and April 2022, directed by M. Dowd under archaeological licence 22E0030 (issued by the National Monuments Service) and with the permission of the landowner. The cave passage was divided into grids, each 1m in length (west-east). All artefacts and bones that lay exposed on the cave floor were collected and separately bagged according to the grid in which they were found. The animal bones were collected by the project zooarchaeologist, Dr Fiona Beglane. When all surface material had been gathered, the site was ready for excavation.



Figure 5.1 Area 2 from east, looking towards the cave entrance, with C.9 in foreground (Robert Mulraney).



Figure 5.2 Moonmilk formation on the upper parts of the cave walls in Area 2 (Robert Mulraney).

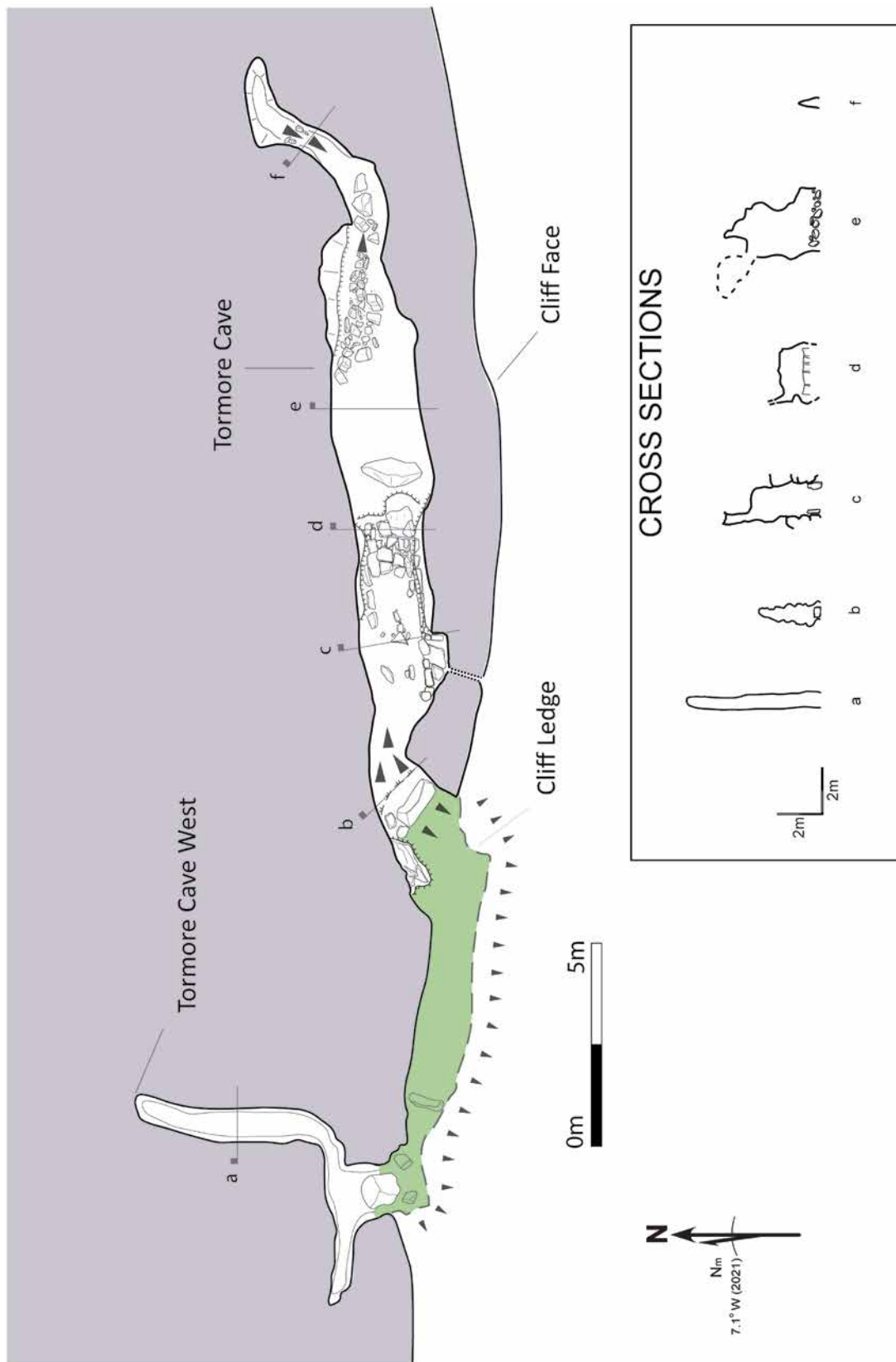


Figure 5.3 IRA activities were concentrated in Tormore Cave, but the cliff ledge and the smaller Tormore Cave West both offered useful space that must have been utilised (Surveyed and prepared by Robert Mulraney).

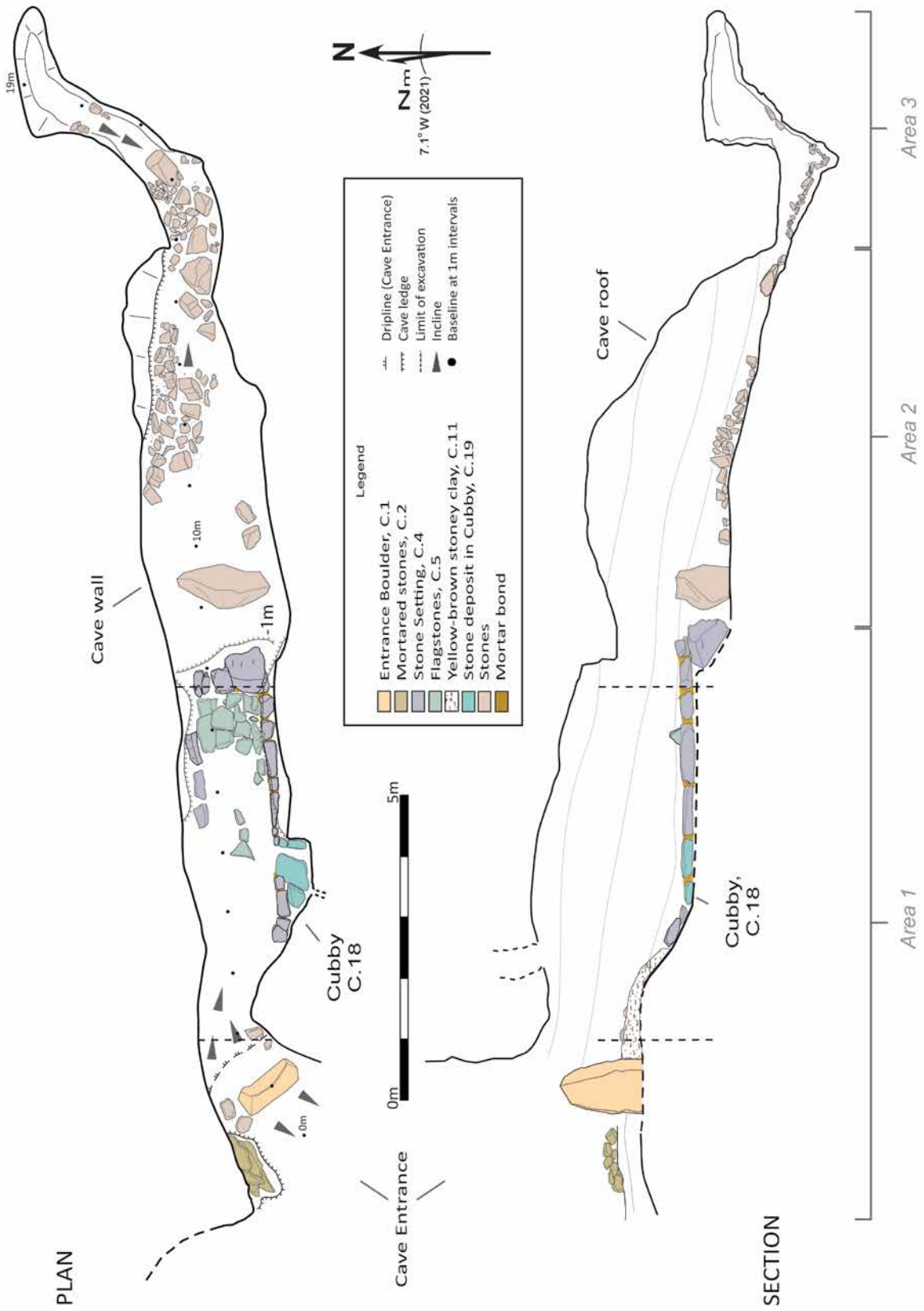


Figure 5.4 Plan and section of Tormore Cave with Area 1, Area 2 and Area 3 indicated (Surveyed and prepared by Robert Mulraney).

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Figure 5.5 Some of the animal bones (mostly sheep and goat) recovered from the cave floor prior to excavation (Marion Dowd).



Figure 5.6 R. Mulraney standing in Area 3 (John P. Cassella).



Figure 5.7 Green thread (22E0030:139) found attached to the cave wall in Area 3 (James Connolly). The adhering white calcite indicates that it was exposed in the cave for a period of time, but it post-dates the 1920s occupation by several decades.

Archaeological excavations were confined to Area 1, the most spacious part of the cave, where activities were focused during the War of Independence and the Civil War. Two archaeologists worked on the site daily, with a third archaeologist present for two days (Figure 5.8). Excavations involved removing deposits that had accumulated in the cave since 1922, thus revealing features and deposits from the revolutionary period. These 1920s features were exposed and recorded but not excavated. Sixteen different archaeological contexts were recorded during excavations (Appendix 1), with an additional number (C.7) given to all surface

Figure 5.8 Archaeological excavations in Tormore Cave took place over six days in March-April 2022 (Robert Mulraney).



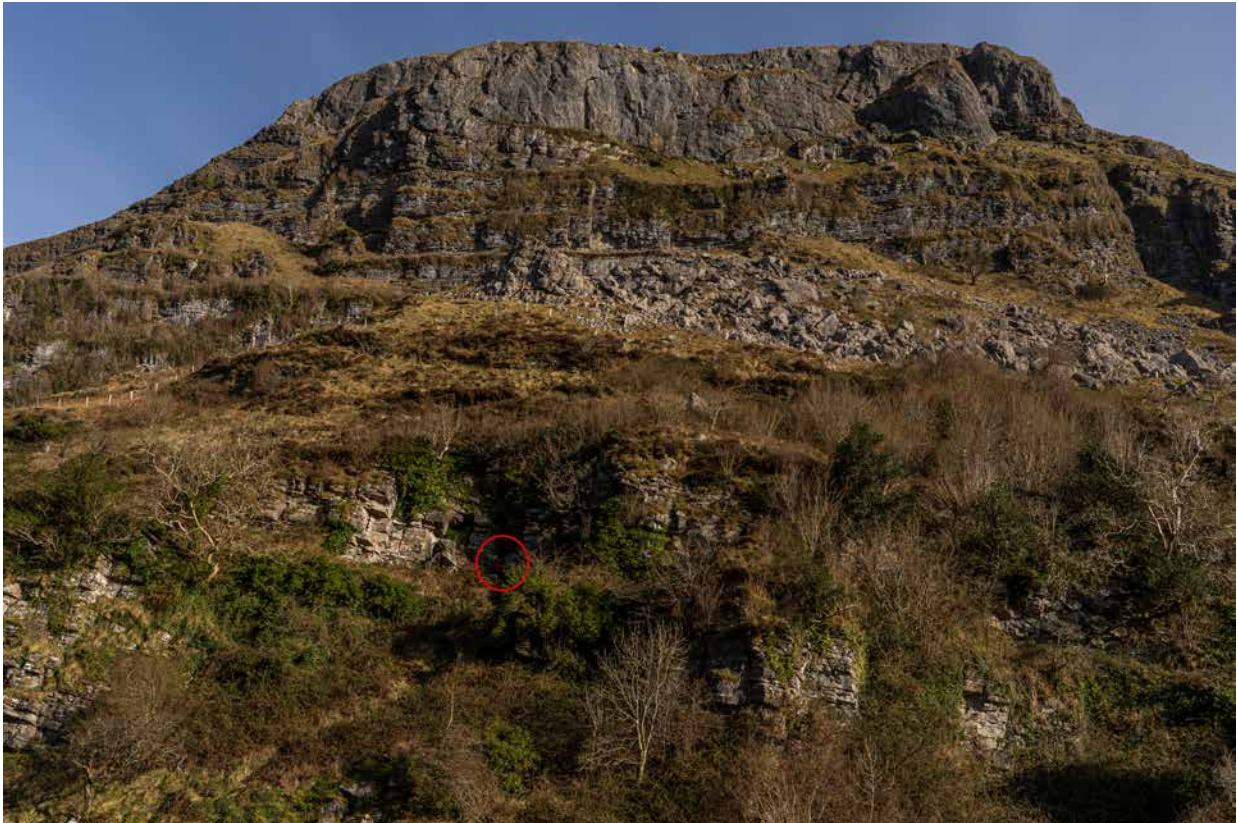


Figure 5.9 Tormore Cave is an invisible feature in the na Carraige cliff face (Robert Mulraney). Note the red circle around the individual standing at the entrance to the cave.

finds. All the features exposed within the cave were recorded, drawn and photographed in detail using standard archaeological techniques. Deposits were excavated by hand, stratigraphically, using the single context method. All the excavated sediments were taken to the rock shelter outside the cave entrance and dry sieved through 5mm sieves to ensure full recovery of small bones and artefacts. Artefacts (pottery, glass, metal etc.) and ecofacts (bones, turf, wood etc.) were bagged and labelled according to the grid and layer in which they were found and given a unique find or sample number (Appendices 2 and 3 respectively). By adopting this approach, it was later possible to reconstruct the distribution of material across the cave and discern patterns of activity.

Structures and modifications revealed by archaeological excavation

Tormore Cave was used during both the War of Independence and the Civil War, but it is not clear when the cave was prepared as a dugout; this work probably took place during the Truce period. The 2022 archaeological excavations exposed six distinct features in Area 1 related to guerrilla occupation:

1. **Cave entrance** – modified to conceal the cave from view
2. **Stone steps** – leading from the cave entrance into the cave interior
3. **U-shaped stone setting** – defined and contained the ‘living space’
4. **Mortar floor** – located within the stone setting, covering the entire ‘living space’
5. **Flagstones** – laid over part of the mortar floor
6. **Cubby** – natural niche in the south wall of the cave that was a focus of activities

1. Cave entrance

The entrance to Tormore Cave faces southwest but is so well concealed that it is virtually impossible to spot from the valley below (Figure 5.9). The entrance to the cave was created by an ancient natural collapse, forming an open arch 3m high by 2m wide. This dark void would typically make the entrance highly visible from the valley below. However, a massive natural limestone boulder (C.1) almost completely blocks the entrance (Figure 5.10). This boulder would originally have formed part of the cave roof but, following glacial retreat and the collapse of the majority of the cave,



Figure 5.10 M. Dowd stands between the massive Entrance Boulder (C.1) and the stone walling (C.12) that enclose and conceal the cave entrance (Robert Mulraney).

it would have fallen flat on the cave floor near the entrance. In the 1920s, this boulder was deliberately hauled or manoeuvred into place to obscure and conceal the cave entrance. The boulder is wedge-shaped, standing 1.28m high, 0.78m wide and is 1m thick at the base. It is untenable that, collapsing from the roof, a boulder of such shape and size would naturally land in the upright position it is found in today. Of further note, the valley floor below the cave is strewn with boulders of similar size, none of which are in a 'standing' or upright position. The boulder tilts eastwards into the cave. It would have provided an ideal look-out point for a sentry standing guard behind it, as he would have been concealed while in command of expansive views over the valley (Figure 5.11). According to local narrative, a bush was cut down and pulled in front of the entrance during the Civil War, further obscuring it. A gun was apparently positioned at the entrance during IRA occupation.²

A narrow gap (0.25-0.45m wide, 0.82m deep, 0.64m high) between the entrance boulder and a pile of crudely mortared stones means that access into the cave is restricted to just one person at a time in single file. The deposit of stones forms a rough mass held together by a mortar bond (C.2). It had been placed between the north cave wall and the entrance boulder to narrow the entrance gap and obscure the entrance (Figure 5.12). A sample of the mortar was taken for X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF) analysis to identify its chemical composition. The results indicate a mortar composed of Calcium Oxide (CaO) or 'quicklime' mixed with a Silica (SiO₂) and Alumina (Al₂O₃) rich substrate. This material has the characteristics of a typical and traditional mortar mix of the period. The make-up of the chemical compounds in the mortar suggests the inclusion of soil typical of that found within the cave (Appendix 5). This façade of crudely mortared stones (C.2) blends seamlessly into the cave environs, successfully obscuring the entrance even further.

On the opposite side of the entrance boulder, stones (C.8) also block the space between the boulder and the south cave wall. Vegetation and sediment mask this mass of stones, thus it is not clear whether these were also partially mortared together. The overall effect is that, from the valley below, the cave entrance is completely obscured, appearing like a face of solid rock. Only from a limited area to the west can a very small area of darkness from the cave entrance be seen, but this would have been easily concealed by the addition of vegetation.

2. Stone steps

Stepping through the gap on the north side of the entrance boulder, a series of stone steps constructed in the 1920s lead down into the cave interior (Figures 5.13 and 5.14). Prior to the archaeological excavation, there was no evidence of these steps as they had been completely covered with a loose, blackish-brown silty clay sediment (C.3) that had accumulated over the past century. A shard of a green glass bottle and five animal bones (sheep/goat and rabbit) were found in this sediment, as well as nine prehistoric chert lithics (stone tools) that had been dug up in the 1920s when prehistoric layers within the cave were inadvertently disturbed during preparation of the dugout.

There is a drop of 2m in ground level from the cave entrance to the cave floor inside. The four stone steps (C.12) uncovered during the excavation provide a safe descent into the cave. The steps extend for 1.6m, though one or two additional steps are almost certainly

² Gene O'Carroll pers. comm. to M. Dowd and J. Bonsall, 27.01.2023

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Figure 5.11 The Entrance Boulder offers an ideal look-out point over the valley below (Robert Mulraney).

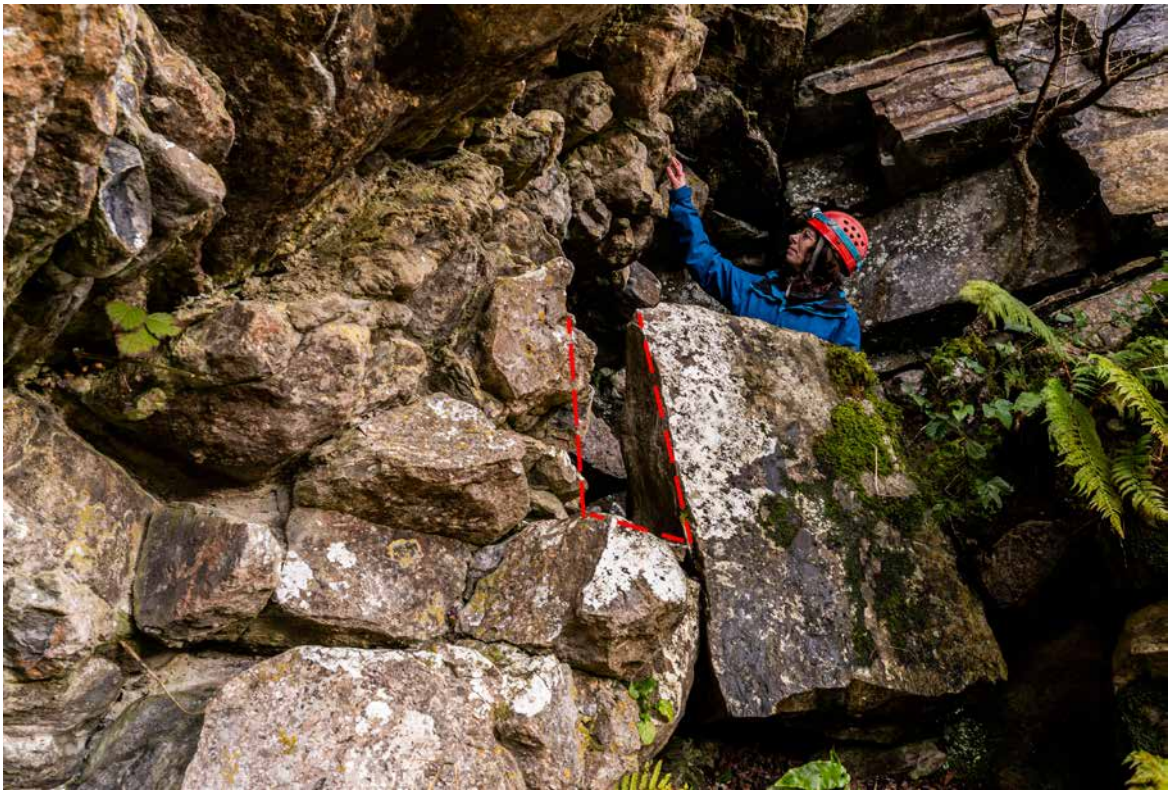


Figure 5.12 Crudely piled stones (C.2) bonded with mortar block the space between the northern cave wall and the massive Entrance Boulder (C.1). A narrow gap to the left (north) of the boulder, indicated in red, permits entry into the cave (Robert Mulraney).

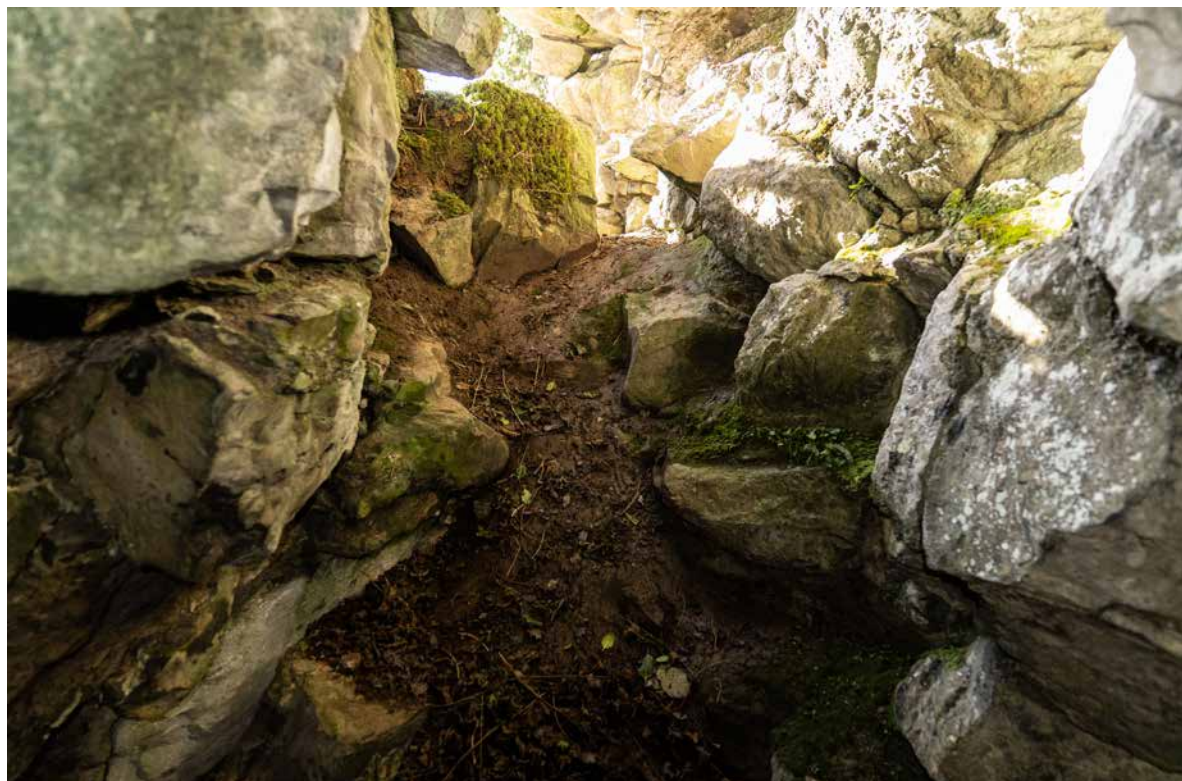


Figure 5.13 A slope of blackish-brown silty clay (C.3), located immediately inside the cave entrance, concealed the stone steps prior to excavation (Robert Mulraney).

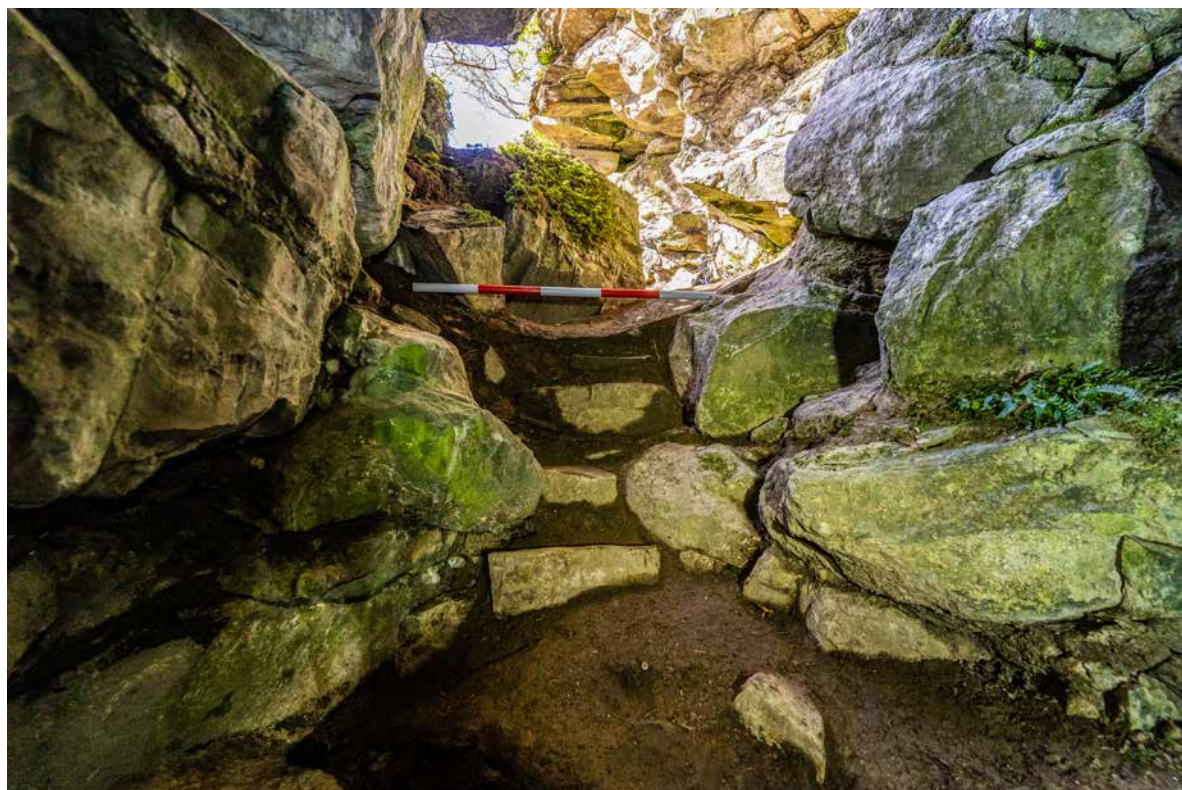


Figure 5.14 Stone steps (C.12) revealed through archaeological excavation. These steps were constructed in the early 1920s (Robert Mulraney).

covered by superficial sediments to the east, in a section of Area 1 that was not excavated. The steps had been carefully constructed. A bank of firm, yellowish-brown silty and gravelly clay (C.11) descends from the entrance into the cave. This may be partly natural but is also likely to have been banked up during preparation of the dugout. This clay bank produced two prehistoric chert artefacts that relate to much earlier use of the cave. The four steps were cut into this compact bank of sediment. Each step was defined by a flat slab that had probably been sourced inside the cave. Each slab had been carefully selected to fit the available space, varying from 0.23m to 0.52m in width.

3. U-shaped stone setting

After descending the stone steps, the main 'living space' of Tormore Cave is reached (Area 1). An artificial and steep drop of 0.85m at the eastern end of Area 1 illustrates that this outer part of the cave passage was deliberately built up and levelled off, essentially raising it above the level of Area 2. This represents the first effort to make the internal space more habitable. The available floor space was then enclosed by the construction of a U-shaped setting of stones (C.4) (Figures 5.15 and 5.16). This setting was visible prior to the archaeological excavation. The stones, all limestone, were gathered from within the cave and carefully set on edge along their long axes. The setting extended for 4.2m along the full length of the southern wall of the cave, with a 0.45m wide breach at the west end outside the Cubby (see below). Running parallel to this, along the opposite northern wall of the cave, the stone setting was originally 2.65m in length. However, a significant portion has collapsed into a void between the cave wall and the northern edge of the stone setting. Today, the northern wall is just 1.1m in length. At the eastern end of Area 1, the north and south lengths of the structure are connected by a 1.8m stretch of upright stones giving a U-shape to the arrangement. The stones selected to construct this setting were all angular and blocky in shape. In several areas the stones were mortared together; in fact, the entire southern length of the setting is bonded with mortar. It is likely the northern wall was similarly bonded, but the bond does not remain, subsequent to collapse.

This U-shaped stone setting (C.4) was a sturdy structure, usually just one stone in height. In some places along the southern side, smaller stones were mortared on top of bigger stones, thereby creating a level surface along its length. Generally, the U-shaped stone setting stands 0.40m above the cave floor, with stones varying in thickness from 0.15-0.25m. There was

no sign of a stone setting at the western end where the stone steps inside the entrance terminate. Overall, the setting encloses an area 4.7m east-west by 0.86m north-south. The function of the stone setting is not entirely clear. While it serves to define the available living space within the cave, in so doing it also reduces the space. This is the area where men would have sat or stood by day and slept by night. Parts of the stone setting may have been used for resting against while people sat on the cave floor. A loss of ground space would be justified by walling that would prevent the men from resting against the cave wall, which would be cold and wet at all times. This low walling also served to prevent objects from slipping off Area 1, which is somewhat raised, and getting lost down voids along the sides of the cave walls. Whatever its exact purpose, this U-shaped stone setting served to define and contain an area that was better insulated, drier, cleaner and flatter than elsewhere in Tormore Cave.

4. Mortar floor

A firmly compacted mortar floor (C.15) was laid down within the area defined by the U-shaped stone setting (Figures 5.17, 5.18 and 5.19). This floor was not visible prior to archaeological excavation. The mortar extended from the floor onto the interior faces of the stone setting, indicating that the U-shaped setting had been *in situ* before the mortared floor was laid down. The mortar floor was exposed and recorded but was not removed; it remains preserved in the cave today, under the re-instated flagstones (see below). The mortar covered an area 1.36m by at least 3.2m, though it likely extended under the unexcavated area to the east of the stone steps. Part of the southeastern portion of the mortar floor had broken up, caused by a century of concentrated dripping of water from the cave roof. The damaged area revealed the floor to be 1.5-3.5cm thick. Small angular gravel and/or crushed stone is apparent in the matrix and the mortar is now particularly brittle. XRF analysis of some of the mortar fragments indicated that it was a contemporary quicklime and local clay mix (Appendix 5). The mortar floor in Tormore Cave is identical to the mortar floors found within vernacular dwelling houses and outhouses throughout 1920s Ireland. For the men billeted here, the surface was far superior to, and more comfortable than, the natural cave floor. It provided a better environment for storage by creating a drier and more insulated space.

5. Flagstones

A shallow deposit of dark brown silty clay (C.10) covered the mortar floor over an area measuring approximately

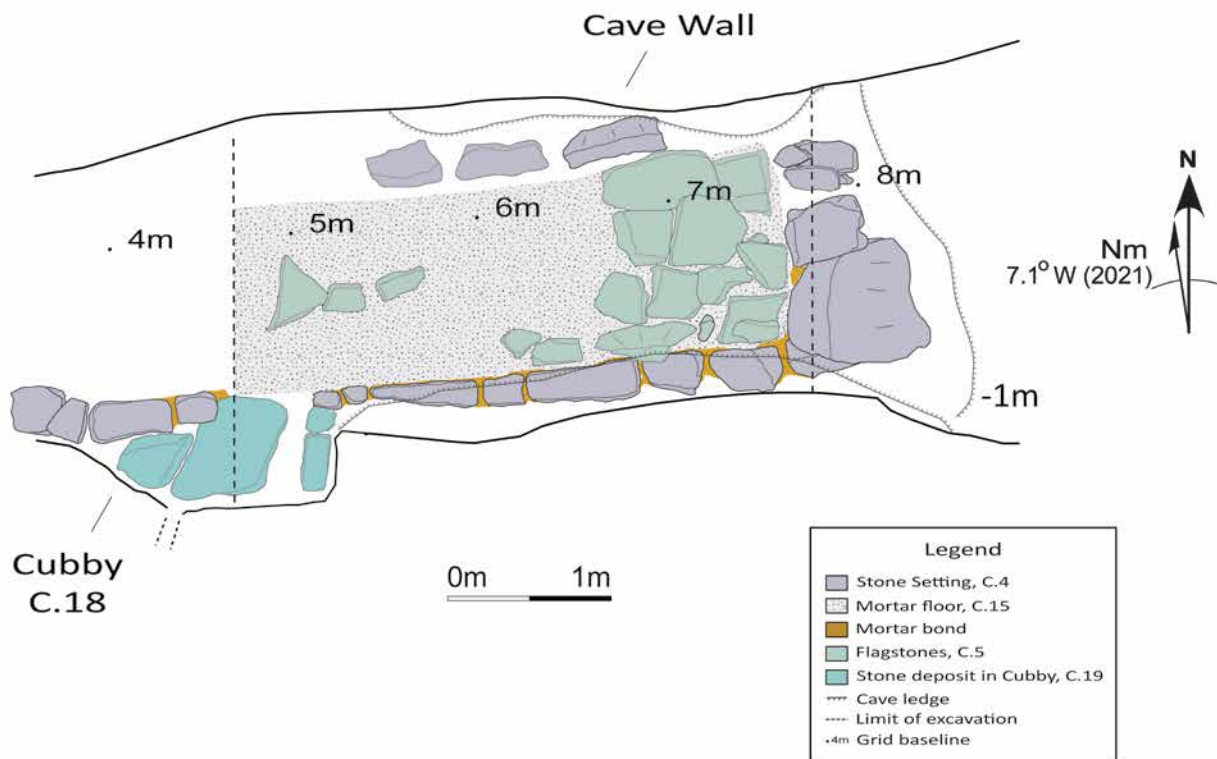


Figure 5.15 Plan of U-shaped stone setting (C.4) and mortar floor (C.15) in Area 1 (Surveyed and prepared by Robert Mulraney).



Figure 5.16 U-shaped stone setting (C.4) from west (Robert Mulraney).

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Figure 5.17 Mortar floor from northwest. Note also the mortar used in the U-shaped wall structure (Robert Mulraney).



Figure 5.18 Fragments of the mortar floor (22E0030:S11, S12 and S13) recovered during excavation (James Connolly).



Figure 5.19 Close-up of the mortar fabric (James Connolly).

1m² and was sealed by a series of flat flagstones (Figures 5.20 and 5.21). This brown silty clay was just 2cm thick, but several artefacts were found embedded into it and were later covered by the flagstones: a metal handle of a billy can or tin can, three fragments of a twisted copper wire wrapped in textile and two iron objects. A discrete concentration of rabbit bones lay on and in the southeastern portion of this silty clay (C.10) where the underlying mortar floor had been disturbed.

A flagstone floor or surface (C.5) overlaid the brown silty clay. It consisted of ten flat limestone slabs that had been laid down within the eastern portion of the U-shaped stone setting, creating a relatively level surface measuring 1.34m by 0.94m (Figure 5.20). This flagstone floor or surface had been visible prior to excavation. Five additional flat slabs lay scattered to the west of this flagged area, closer to the cave entrance. Originally, these may also have formed part of the surface but became disturbed and displaced sometime over the past century. During the archaeological excavation, the flagstones were lifted, the underlying brown silty clay (C.10) was removed, then the flagstones were re-instated directly on top of the mortar floor as per their original position.

The dark brown silty clay (C.10) that was sandwiched between the mortar floor and the flagstones extended westwards towards the cave entrance, but here it was not sealed by flagstones and thus had been subjected to disturbance since 1922 by human and animal visitors to the cave. This unprotected sediment was a greyish brown silty clay (C.14). It rested on the mortar floor indicating that it had accumulated *after* the construction of the floor. This unprotected greyish brown silty clay was 10cm thick, more substantial than the portion sealed beneath the flagstones. Artefacts from this disturbed greyish brown silty clay included a glass bottle shard, sherds of a slip-decorated glazed red earthenware dish, thirteen copper rivets set in iron, a 1986 English penny, an iron buckle, an iron object or objects in sixteen fragments, and an iron object that had broken into 76 fragments. Several prehistoric chert lithics were also mixed in with the 1920s material, including a fragment of a roughout for an Early Mesolithic butt-trimmed flake, two flakes and a flake fragment. Chunks of mortar that had come away from the underlying mortar floor were also retrieved. Outside the Cubby, several pieces of bog deal and burnt turf fragments were found in this greyish brown silty clay. Nineteen bones from this layer (C.14) included remains of cattle, sheep/goat, rabbit/hare, bird and fish. The variety of material in this stratum, including a 1980s coin and 1920s pottery, illustrates the level

of disturbance and intermixing since the dugout was abandoned in 1922. This is not surprising because it was the uppermost deposit on the cave floor prior to the archaeological excavation.

6. Cubby

A natural sub-rectangular niche or recess in the southern cave wall occurs about 5m inside the cave entrance. It was named the 'Cubby' during the excavation as it resembles a cupboard or storage space and appears to have served a specific function based on the accumulation of artefacts and bones in and near it. In addition, there is a gap 0.45m wide in the U-shaped setting of stones in front of the Cubby, suggesting access to this space was important. The Cubby measures 1.58m by 0.86m and is at least 1.10m high, as defined by the cave wall. Prior to excavation, the upper 0.8m of the Cubby was 'open' while the lower portion was filled with a series of deposits (Figures 5.22 and 5.23). A natural, narrow phreatic chute extends from the back wall of the Cubby through the southern cave wall and exits onto the cliff face outside. This chute naturally draws air from the cave interior outside, similar to a flue.

Two deposits were excavated from within the Cubby and further unexcavated deposits are located at a greater depth. The lowest deposit encountered was a series of stones (C.19), possibly intentionally placed, that were recorded but not excavated. Part of the mortar floor adhered to the side of the largest of these stones, indicating that these slabs were exposed when the mortar floor was laid down. Overlying these basal stones, as well as partially overlying one of the stones in the U-shaped setting, was a mid-orangey brown moderately compact sandy clay (C.17). This sandy clay layer was at least 30cm thick but was not fully excavated. It produced two sods of turf and numerous fragments of burnt turf, a green glass bottle shard, a pottery sherd, three small unidentifiable animal bones and three prehistoric chert artefacts, including a convex scraper fragment.

This sandy clay layer (C.17) was sealed by a layer of mid-brownish grey sandy clay (C.13). C.13 was equivalent to the layer of silty clay (C.14) that covered the mortar floor outside the Cubby, but within the Cubby this grey sandy clay layer contained a greater concentration of artefacts and frequent fragments of burnt turf, bog deal and fragments of mortar. The grey sandy clay (C.13) layer in the Cubby measured 1.10m by 0.86m and was 12cm thick. Eighteen artefacts came from this layer. These comprised two prehistoric chert flakes,

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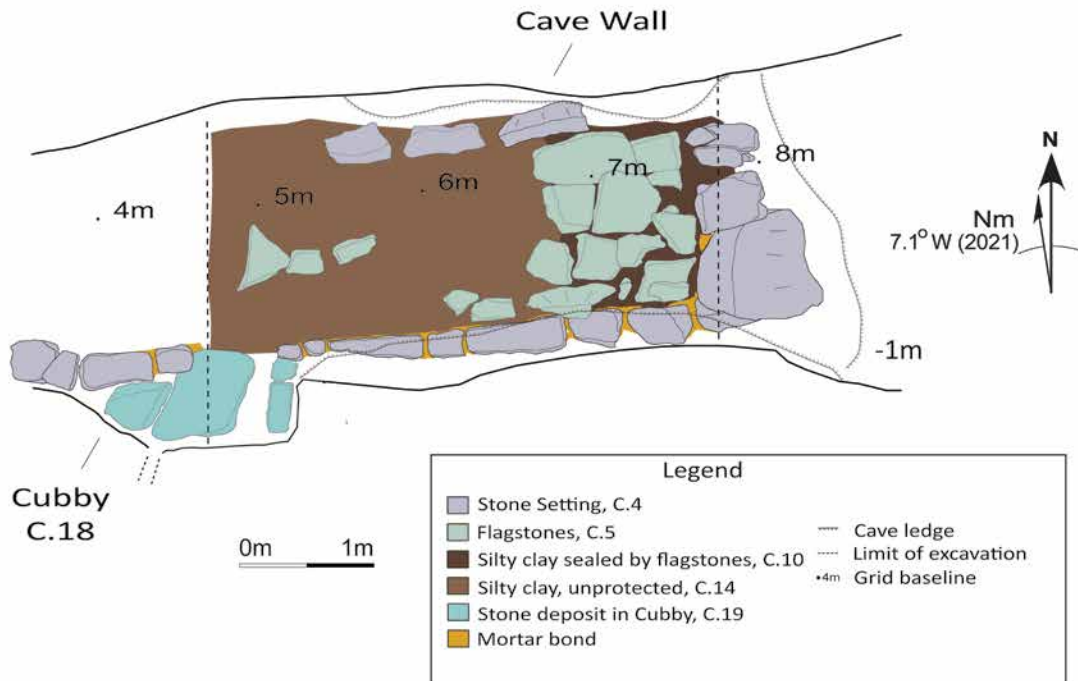


Figure 5.20 Plan of flagstone surface and silty clay layers resting on top of the mortar floor (Surveyed and prepared by Robert Mulraney).



Figure 5.21 Flagstone surface from northwest (Robert Mulraney).

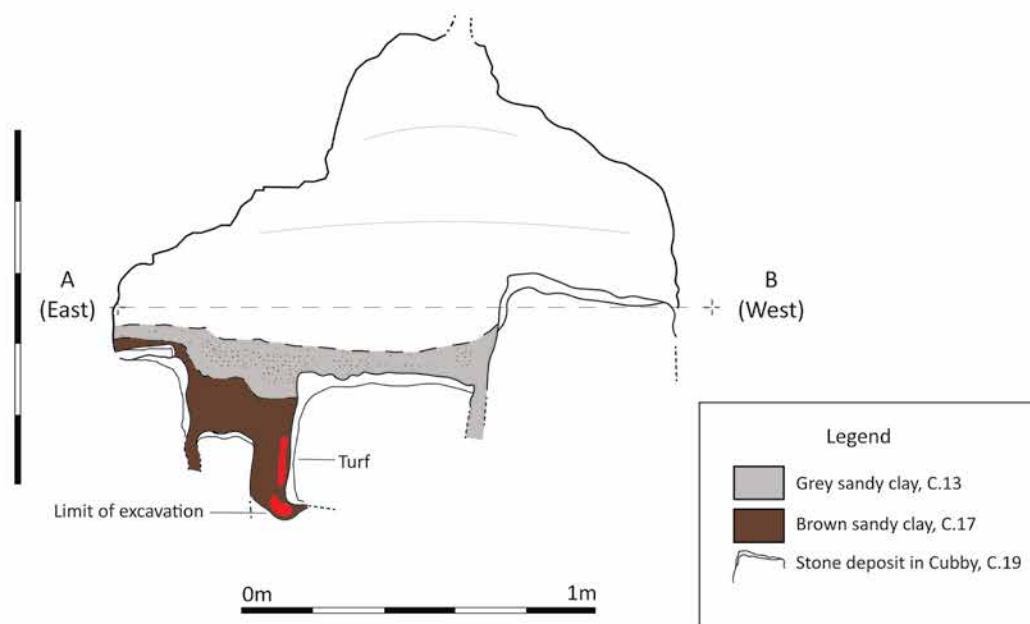


Figure 5.22 Profile of the Cubby (Surveyed and prepared by Robert Mulraney).

an incomplete clay pipe bowl, three copper rivets set in iron, iron fragments, three shards of a green glass bottle and eight sherds of pottery from two different vessels. This layer also produced ten animal bones representing cattle, baby rabbit or leveret, bird and fish.

Possible graffiti

To the naked eye, the absence of graffiti in a space that was occupied for a lengthy period of time by a large group of men might seem unusual. It is probable, however, that the men billeted in Tormore Cave were specifically instructed not to create any discernible markings, particularly initials or personal names that could subsequently be used to identify them, the IRA, or the strategic importance of the cave. It must be remembered that, upon leaving Tormore Cave, the men would not have known whether or not they would need to use the cave dugout again. On close investigation of the cave walls in 2022, a series of markings made by a hard physical object, such as a metal implement, were discovered. These markings were located on a section of the south wall of the cave some 6.5m inside the entrance and within Area 1, the area of 'occupation' (Figures 5.24 and 5.25). While no understandable morphology is discernible, there is a regularity to the markings, whereby at least six roughly parallel lines, between 2.2cm and 3.2cm apart, are intersected

by one long perpendicular line. There are also some more minor lines and what appears to be a 'smudge' dragged through the upper side of the graffiti. The latter feature appears to have partially removed some of the thin parallel lines. The depths of the incisions vary but are no more than 2.2mm in maximum depth. Such marking may represent an imprint or scratches from clothing or equipment. Alternatively, if carved by a hand-held tool, they represent a deliberate action, perhaps some form of numerical tally. At the top left-hand side of the same section of cave wall, a second series of inscribed markings exist that are wholly unnatural in a cave environment. These may be finger rills, created by dragging a finger or fingers through the soft moonmilk on the cave wall. The marks consist of a series of interconnected loops which may represent poorly preserved letters, although it was not possible to discern any obvious legible writing (Appendix 4).

Post-excavation work

The archaeological rationale adopted by the *Tormore Cave Project* was to reveal the features that had been constructed in the 1920s but leave them intact (known as 'preservation *in situ*') rather than remove them by excavation (known as 'preservation by record', i.e., the feature is removed and thereafter only exists in the records that archaeologists have created). For instance, we exposed the stone steps and the mortar floor but



Figure 5.23 Recording the Cubby after its excavation (Robert Mulraney).

did not disturb or remove these. We established the full extent of the U-shaped stone setting, drew it, photographed it and recorded it, but did not remove it. The flagstones were lifted, the underlying sediment resting on the mortar floor was excavated, and then the flagstones were replaced in their original positions. However, sediments within the Cubby and sediments that sealed the 1920s features and structures were removed. These layers all contained archaeological objects. Excavated sediments were sieved outside the cave (Figure 5.26). All bones, ecofacts and artefacts were extracted, bagged and labelled. The sieved residue sediment was then packed behind a large slab at the north end of the ledge outside the cave.

The archaeological artefacts and ecofacts recovered during the excavation were brought to the Archaeology Laboratory in the Faculty of Science at ATU Sligo for initial processing (Appendices 2 and 3). All the animal bones and non-metal artefacts were washed and left to air dry for two weeks. The finds were then placed in clean, labelled bags and boxes. Assemblages of material were sent to different specialists for analyses as follows (Figure 5.27):

- Prehistoric lithics were analysed by Cian Hogan in County Mayo (Appendix 6)
- Pottery and glass were analysed by Clare McCutcheon in County Cork (Appendix 7)
- Mammal bones were analysed by Dr Fiona Beglane in County Donegal (Appendix 8)
- Fish and bird bones were analysed by Sheila Hamilton-Dyer in Southampton, England (Appendix 9)
- Four animal bones were radiocarbon dated by the ¹⁴Chrono Centre at Queen's University Belfast, under National Museum of Ireland Licences to Alter and Export 7621; and the dates were then analysed by T. Rowan McLaughlin (Appendix 10)
- Metal artefacts were conserved by Susannah Kelly in University College Dublin (Appendix 11)
- Two threads were analysed by Prof. John P. Cassella at ATU Sligo (Appendix 12)

When all of the specialist analyses were completed, the archaeological material was returned to ATU Sligo where it was photographed by James Connolly.

A further aspect of post-excavation work involved digitising the site surveys and excavation drawings,

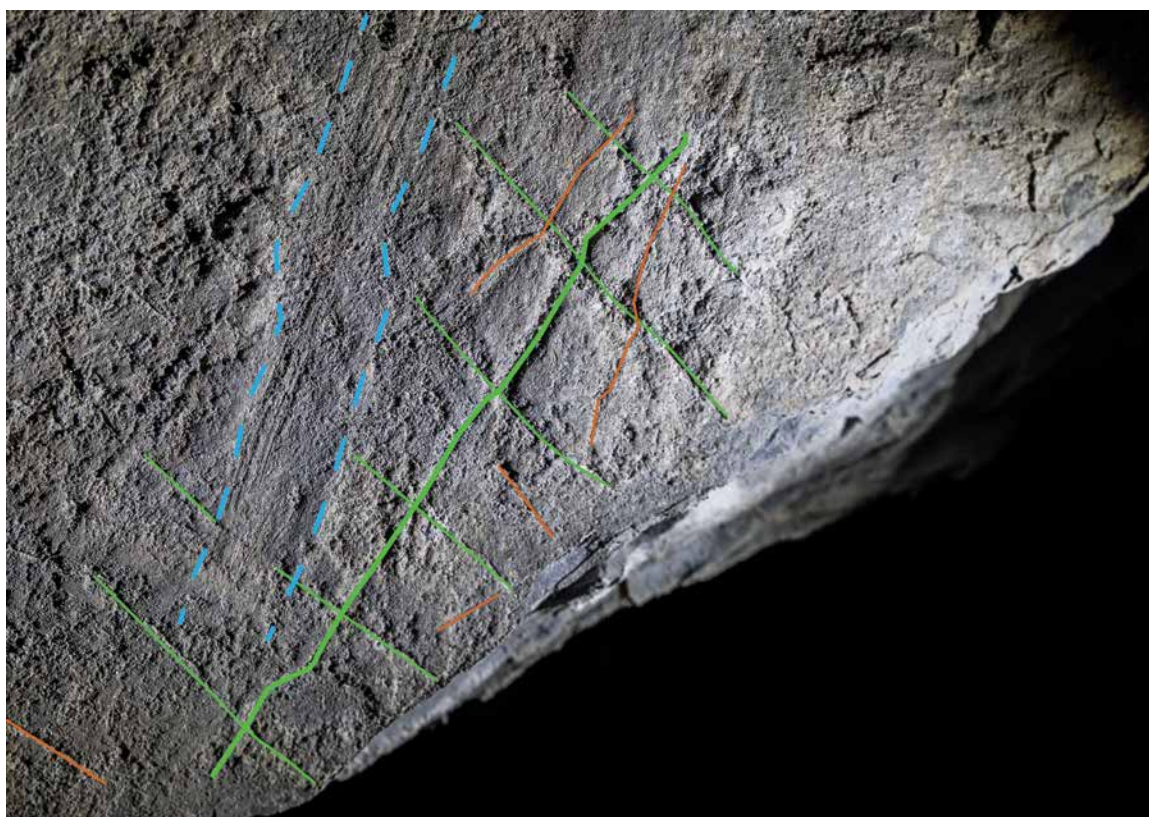
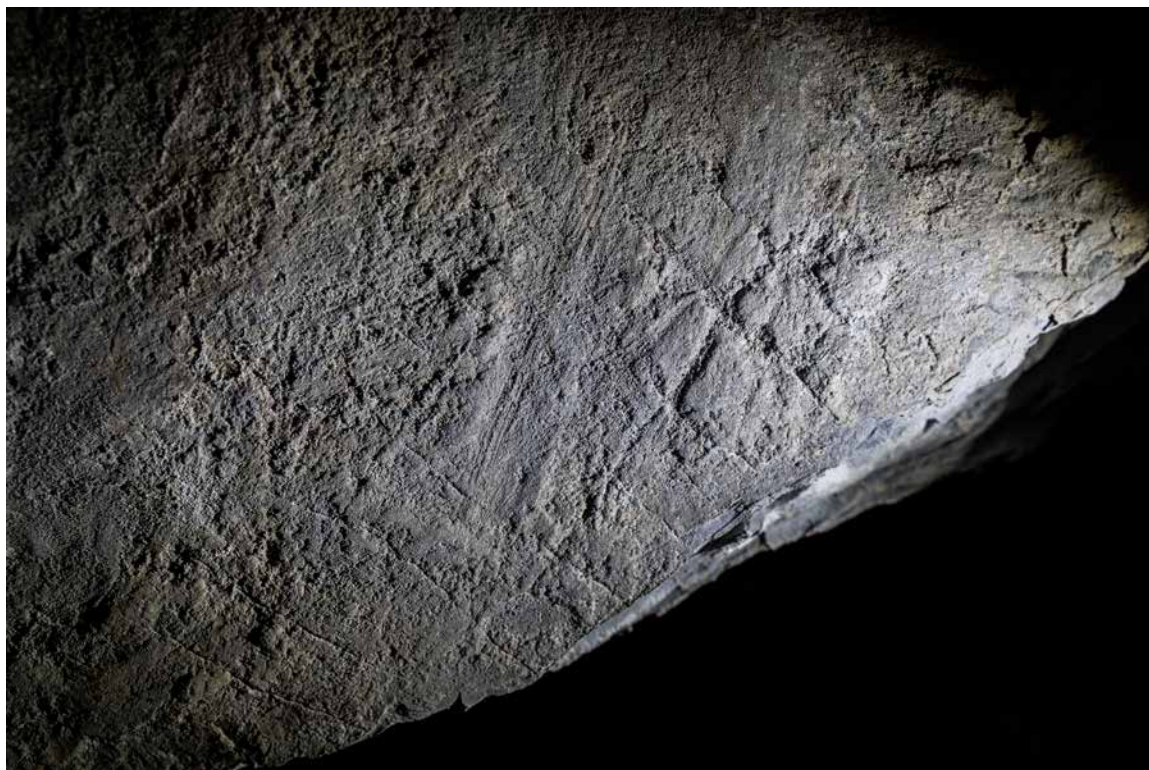


Figure 5.24 (a) The lower right-hand side of the 'graffiti stone', showing a central line with at least six lines running transversely through it creating a herringbone-type pattern. There are also some minor lines and what appears to be a 'smudge' pulled through the upper side of the graffiti. (b) An interpretation of the graffiti showing the variety of markings; the 'smudge' is represented by the broken blue line (Robert Mulraney).



Figure 5.25 (a) The upper left-hand side of the 'graffiti stone', showing a series of distinct but indecipherable shapes or letters. (b) An interpretation of the graffiti showing the variety of markings (Robert Mulraney).



Figure 5.26 Sieving excavated sediments on the rock ledge outside the cave (Robert Mulraney).

and writing up the excavations, based on the context sheets and records that had been generated on-site. In accordance with the National Monuments Act 1930 and subsequent amendments, a preliminary report on the excavations was submitted to the National Monuments

Service and the National Museum of Ireland within four weeks of completion of the excavation.³ A brief summary of the excavation was uploaded onto the national database of archaeological excavations and is publicly available.⁴

³ Dowd et al. 2022a

⁴ <<https://excavations.ie/report/2022/Sligo/0031607d/>>

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Figure 5.27 Some of the specialists involved in analyses of archaeological materials from Tormore Cave. A. Niamh O'Neill-Munro loading collagen extracted from an animal bone sample into an Elemental Analyser as part of the radiocarbon dating process (Michelle Thompson); B. Susannah Kelly conserving the iron artefacts from the cave (Susannah Kelly); C. pottery specialist Clare McCutcheon examining the Tormore pottery (Clare McCutcheon); D. Cian Hogan recording the prehistoric lithics (Cian Hogan).

Chapter 6

Things left behind: artefacts found in Tormore Cave

Will ye be coming back for the rabbit?¹

Mrs Mitchell

The two-week archaeological excavations that took place in Tormore Cave in 2022 resulted in the recovery of over 100 artefacts, the majority of which related to occupation of the cave in the 1920s by the IRA. Almost 800 animal bones were also retrieved, though the vast majority of these pre-date and post-date the 1922 focus of activity. An unexpected consequence of the archaeological excavations was the discovery that this was not the first time the cave had been used. A small assemblage of prehistoric stone tools was intermingled with the revolutionary period material. These tools reveal that people had been visiting Tormore Cave, on an intermittent basis, over thousands of years. The oldest artefact can tentatively be dated to the Late Mesolithic period and is approximately 7,000 years old (Figure 6.1). Other stone tools seem to relate to subsequent prehistoric periods. In addition, a small quantity of animal bones reveals activities at the cave during the early medieval period, about 1,200 years ago. This chapter explores the material that was discovered from the prehistoric and early medieval periods, as well as the artefacts related to the IRA occupation in the 1920s.

Prehistoric activities in Tormore Cave (circa 5,500–800 BC)

Prior to the 2022 excavations, Tormore Cave was not a recorded archaeological site, as only the Civil War aspect of the site's use was known. The prehistoric and early medieval discoveries, however, illustrate that this subterranean space had been used by people on an intermittent basis over 7,000 years. Tormore Cave is now included in the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), meaning that it is a protected archaeological site with a unique SMR number: SL009-074----. The 2022 excavations were extremely limited and, without doubt, further archaeological deposits, particularly related to prehistoric activities, remain preserved in the cave. Under archaeological legislation, it is now illegal to dig, excavate or search for historic or archaeological

material in Tormore Cave, and it is illegal to use a metal detector at the site. Such work can only be carried out by a licensed archaeologist under a licence issued by the National Monuments Service and the National Museum of Ireland.

An assemblage of prehistoric chert and flint lithics (stone tools) was recovered from sediments that had been unknowingly dug up and re-distributed in Tormore Cave during the 1920s. The tools reveal that prehistoric people visited the cave on multiple different occasions, probably using it for shelter or short-term occupation. At least one piece seems to be Late Mesolithic (5,500–4,000 BC) in date, while the others are Neolithic (4,000–2,400 BC) or Bronze Age (2,400–800 BC). In prehistory, the entrance would not have been blocked, making the cave far more visible than it is nowadays. It is almost certain that further prehistoric deposits remain within Tormore Cave.

Sixteen lithics were discovered in Tormore Cave (Figure 6.2). Fifteen were made from chert, which is abundant in the region. One piece was made from flint, which is not available locally (Appendix 6). Two chert cores were also recovered. Smaller flakes and blades would have been struck from these cores by 'knapping'. Waste chert flakes ('debitage') produced during the knapping process were also retrieved. Together, these finds illustrate that prehistoric people sat in Tormore Cave knapping chert cores to produce finished chert tools and implements. The finished items would have been removed from the cave for use elsewhere; the waste pieces were left behind.

The most interesting prehistoric discovery is a probable roughout for a butt-trimmed chert flake (Figure 6.1).² This indicates that hunter gatherers may have used the cave approximately 7,000 years ago during the Late Mesolithic period (5,000–4,000 BC). Butt-trimmed flakes would have been used as knives for activities

¹ Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1986

² The term 'roughout' means that the artefact was never completed.

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Figure 6.1 Left: probable Late Mesolithic chert roughout for a butt-trimmed flake from Tormore Cave (22E0030:96). Right: Late Mesolithic chert distally-trimmed blade from Castlegal townland on the lower slopes of Cope's Mountain, located 4km south of Tormore Cave (James Connolly).³

such as butchering and processing animal carcasses or cutting through thick plant stems.

Part of a finished chert tool was also discovered, a fragment of a convex scraper. These tools were used by prehistoric people for scraping activities such as cleaning animal hides. Convex scrapers are usually associated with the Neolithic (4,000–2,400 BC) and Bronze Age (2,400–800 BC) periods, suggesting a later phase of activity at Tormore Cave. Chert is naturally abundant within the cave and on the rock face outside (Figure 6.3). This raises the possibility that prehistoric people visited the cave while on excursions into the mountains to source raw materials for making tools and implements. The cave would have provided shelter during such excursions. Tormore Cave exists at the contact point between the Upper Dartry Formation and the Lower Glencar Limestone Formation. The latter does not contain chert, or at least chert of a workable quality. Thus, in order to access chert quarry sites in the region, an elevation equivalent to that of Tormore Cave would have been sought out.

The stone tools from Tormore Cave attest to the presence of prehistoric communities in the wider environs of Glencar Lake (Figure 6.4). A dense concentration of prehistoric chert tools, and debitage related to knapping chert for the manufacture of implements, was discovered in 2020 on the northern

shore of the lake, also in Tormore townland. Hundreds of pieces of prehistoric worked chert were recovered, indicating that over thousands of years prehistoric people made multiple trips to the lake. Here, chert was knapped and tools were manufactured and used, with the waste debris left behind on the lakeshore gravels. The lake would have been a very important hub over millennia, a place where prehistoric people came to catch fish and fowl, to bathe and to wash materials. Glencar Lake was also an important source of drinking water for people and animals. By boat, people could travel from the lake to the coast via the Drumcliff River. The communities living by the lake in prehistory would have been familiar with the mountainous environs. On several different occasions, individuals or small groups discovered Tormore Cave and sheltered or lived there, leaving some of their chert tools and manufacturing debris behind. Few Mesolithic sites have been identified in County Sligo and thus the possible Late Mesolithic component of the Tormore Cave assemblage provides a modest but important contribution to the early prehistory of the county.⁴

The modifications made to Tormore Cave in the 1920s and during the 1922 occupation inadvertently caused damage to the prehistoric deposits. Older layers were dug up and dispersed, scattering the prehistoric stone tools throughout the cave. The Republicans who lived in the cave in 1922 would have been completely

³ Hogan *et al.* 2022

⁴ Hogan *et al.* 2022

THINGS LEFT BEHIND: ARTEFACTS FOUND IN TORMORE CAVE

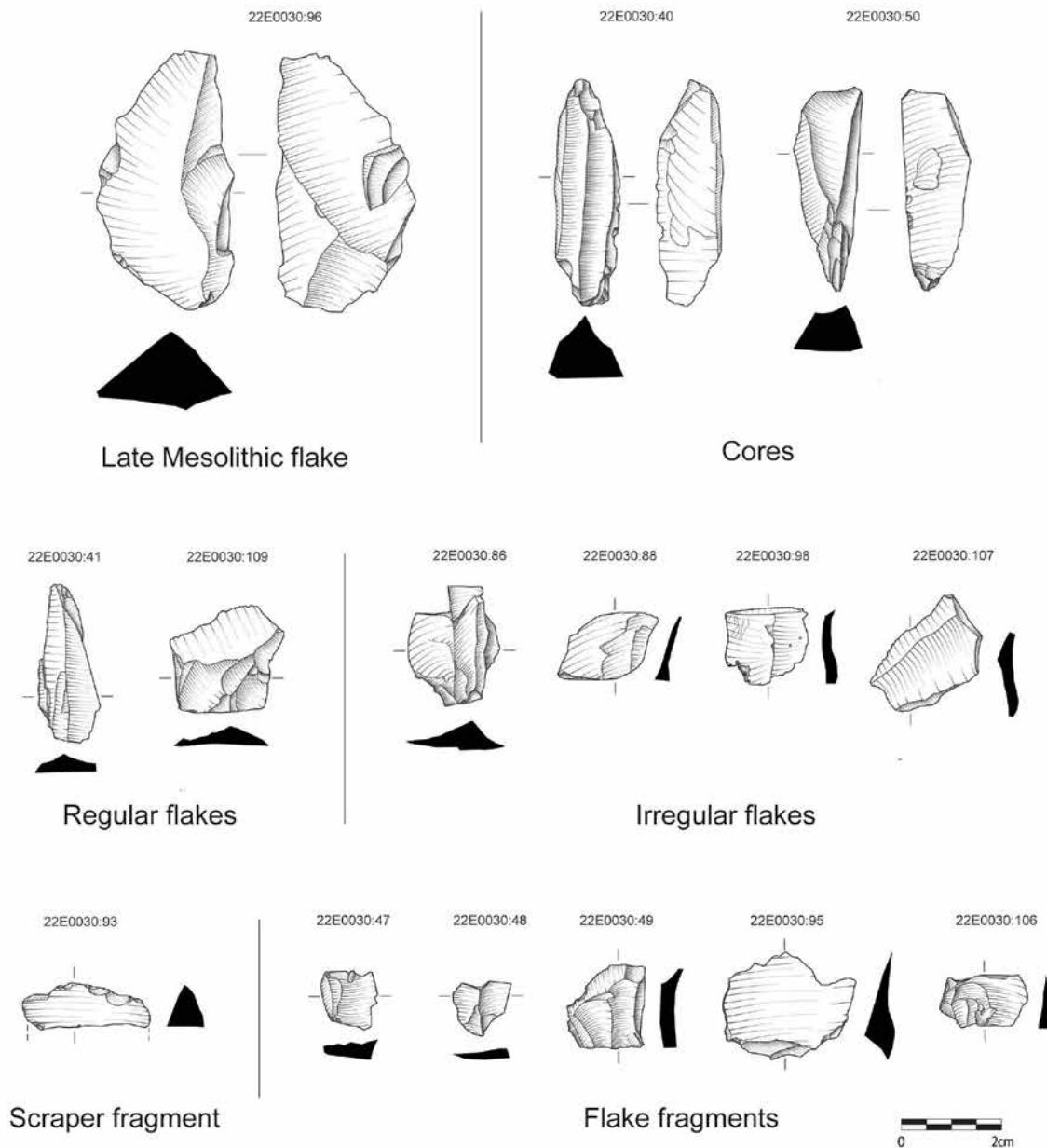


Figure 6.2 Prehistoric lithics from Tormore Cave (Elaine Lynch).

unaware of the people who had sought shelter there thousands of years earlier.

Early medieval activities in Tormore Cave (circa AD 670–1025)

Radiocarbon dates on two animal bones suggest that Tormore Cave was used during the early medieval

period (AD 400–1170). A butchered large mammal rib, probably cattle, was found lying on the cave floor in Area 2. It was radiocarbon dated to 1284±23 BP, indicating activity in the cave sometime between AD 670 and AD 774. Five butchery marks on the bone relate to crude dismemberment of the carcass, though this is unlikely to have occurred within the cave. The rib probably represents discarded food waste.

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Figure 6.3 Chert seams in the limestone rock at Tormore Cave may have been exploited by prehistoric people as a source of raw material for making tools. The trowel serves as a scale (Robert Mulraney).

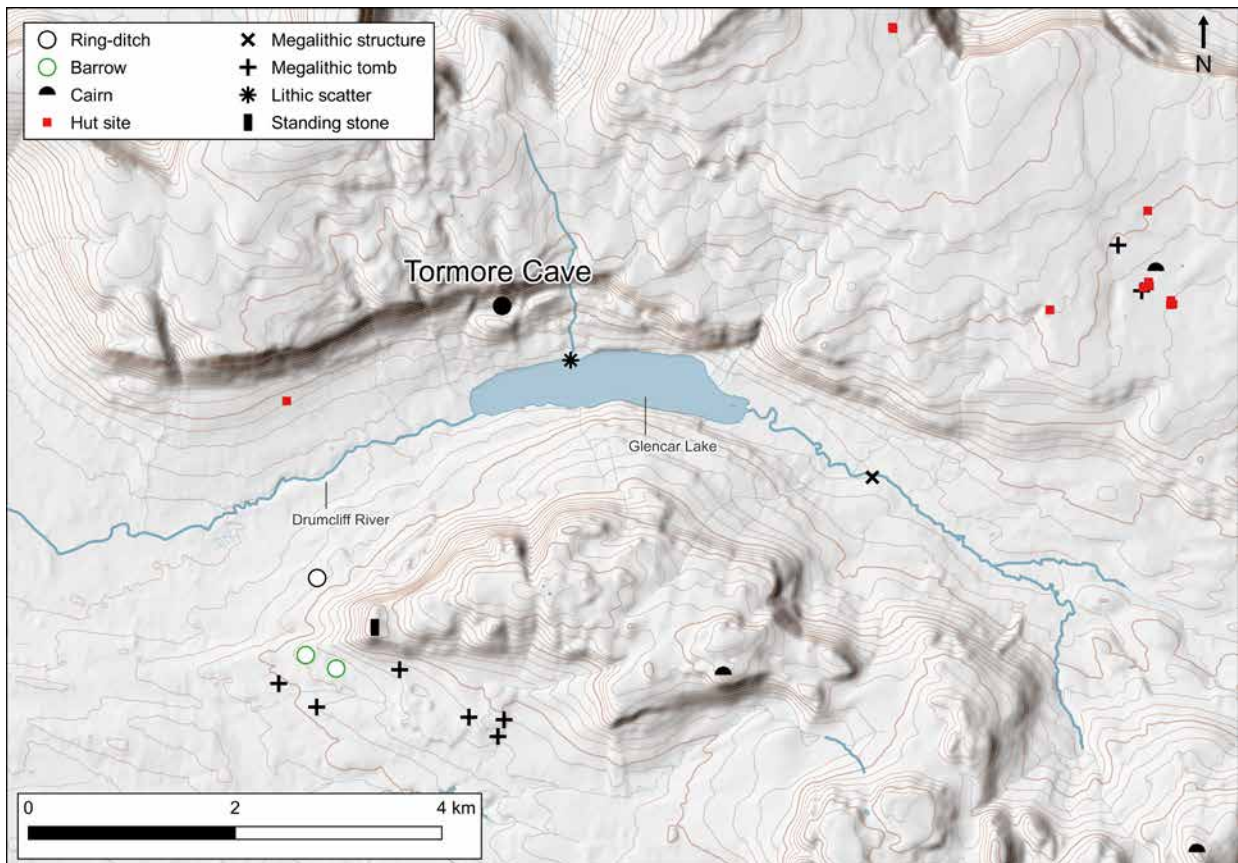


Figure 6.4 Prehistoric sites in the wider environs of Tormore Cave (James Bonsall).

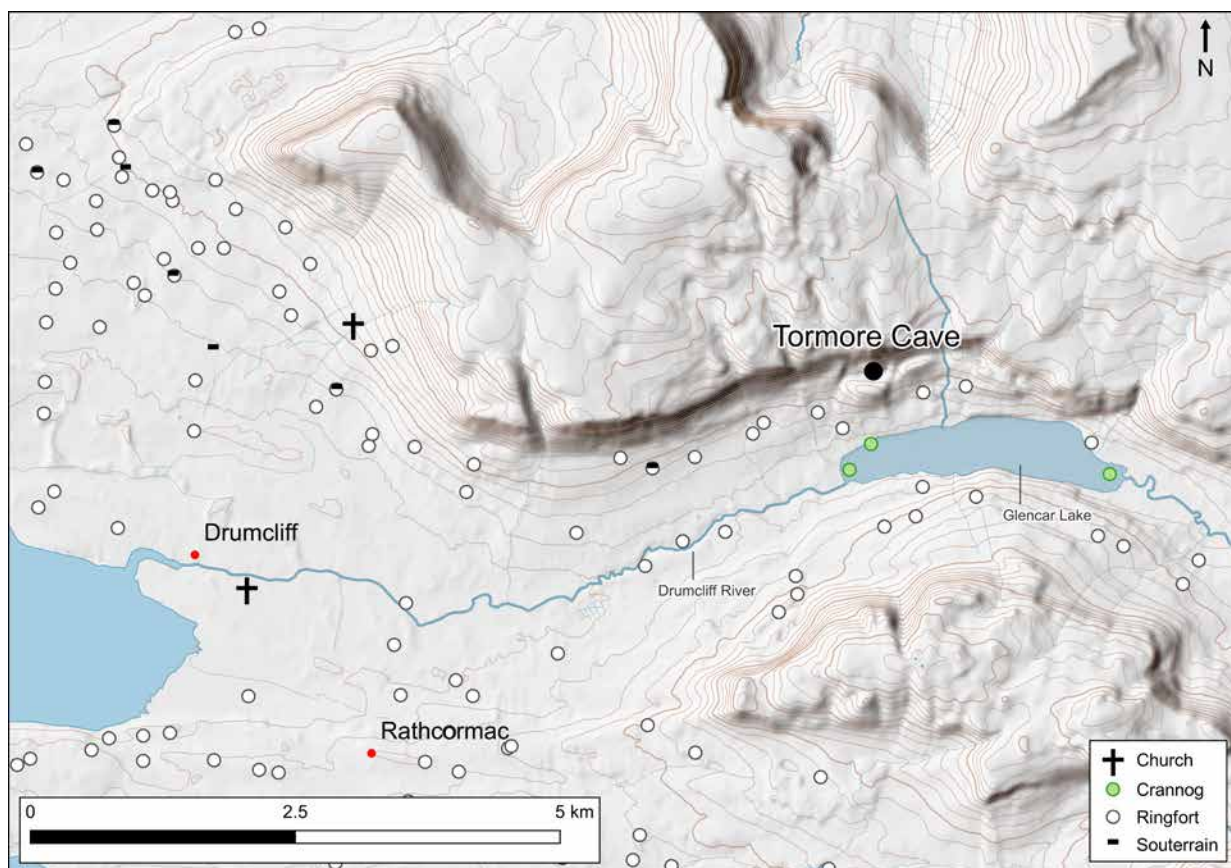


Figure 6.5 Early medieval sites in the wider environs of Tormore Cave (James Bonsall).

The landscape around Tormore Cave indicates a thriving population here during the early medieval period (Figure 6.5). The early medieval church and monastery at Drumcliff, some 6.5km west of the cave, would have been the most important religious centre in the locality. The crannógs on Glencar Lake, and the ringforts located between the cave and the lake, would have been occupied by farming families at that time. Caves were commonly adapted for both long-term and short-term occupation in early medieval Ireland.⁵ The butchered rib fragment raises the possibility that someone sought shelter or was living in Tormore Cave during the seventh or eighth century. The individual who used the cave may have lived in one of the adjacent ringforts but may have sought shelter in the cave while working on the mountains, perhaps while tending sheep or booleying. Alternatively, the cave may have been occupied by an otherwise landless individual, such as an itinerant craftsman or someone employed by one of the farmers who lived in the nearby ringforts and crannógs. Further archaeological excavations in

Tormore Cave would almost certainly reveal additional evidence of early medieval activities.

A second piece of evidence from Tormore Cave relates to a later stage in the early medieval period. A horse metapodial (leg bone) was found lying on the cave floor in Area 2, where the early medieval butchered large mammal bone was also discovered. The horse bone showed no signs of modification or butchery. It was radiocarbon dated to 1071±24 BP, indicating this horse lived sometime between AD 895 and AD 1024, during the tenth or early eleventh century. It is difficult to explain how an early medieval horse bone ended up deep inside Tormore Cave. The ringforts and crannógs in the wider vicinity would have been occupied, and the horse was likely owned by one of the families living in these settlements. It is difficult to imagine that an animal of this size would voluntarily climb the mountainside and wander into the cave. It is also worth noting that no other horse bones were retrieved (albeit others may await discovery deeper in the cave sediments). The horse bone may reflect scavenger activities, potentially dragged into the cave by a wolf, dog or fox. It is also possible that a dead horse, or part

⁵ Dowd 2015: chapter 8

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of a carcass, was dumped into the cave by an early medieval farmer, though this would have required great effort and makes little practical sense.

The butchered large mammal (probably cattle) bone and horse bone date to two different parts of the early medieval period, the seventh or eighth century and the tenth or early eleventh century. Both bones were found on the floor of Area 2 but are likely to have been disturbed from their original positions by 1920s activities. The butchered rib was stained, suggesting it had been covered by sediment for an extensive period of time. These bones were probably originally located in Area 1 but were dug up and thrown into Area 2 during preparation of the cave by the IRA.

War of Independence and Civil War activities and occupation

The material culture from Tormore Cave is predominately domestic in nature as it relates to occupation in the early 1920s. Many of the artefacts recovered are typical of what one would find in a

traditional vernacular cottage of the time; most are containers of some form that would have been used to carry food and beverages to the cave occupants.

Coarse red earthenware pans and crock

Seventy-two pottery sherds were recovered during excavations, scattered through Area 1 with a smaller number from Area 2 (Figure 6.6). These sherds derived from three different ceramic vessels: two glazed red earthenware dishes or pans, and a black-glazed red earthenware jar or crock (Figures 6.7-6.12). These everyday domestic vessels were manufactured from clay in local potteries. Glaze was applied to the interior to seal the vessel and for ease of cleaning; the exterior was untreated revealing the reddish colour of the clay. These earthenware pans and crock were multi-purpose vessels used in households across the country, particularly by farming families.⁶

Prior to being brought to Tormore Cave, the two glazed red earthenware pans would have been used

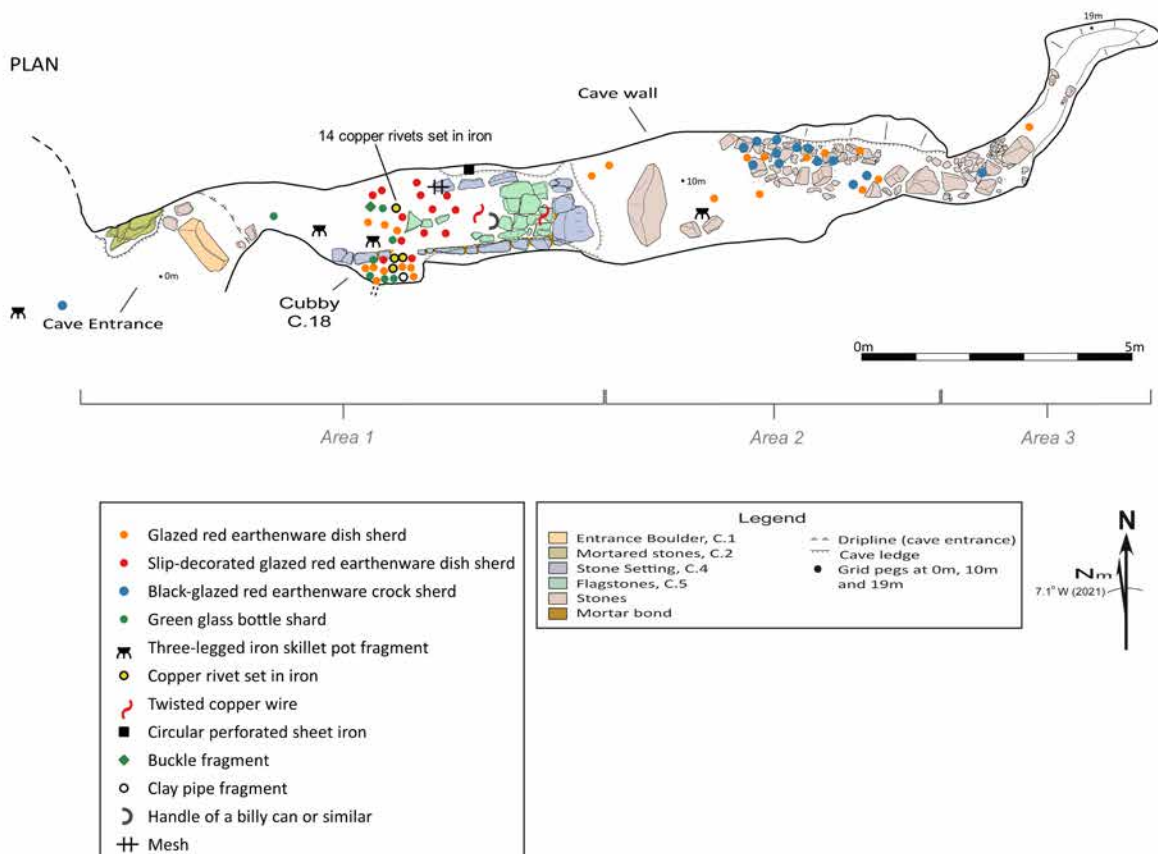


Figure 6.6 Distribution of artefacts found in Tormore Cave (James Bonsall and Robert Mulraney).

⁶ MacManus 2003

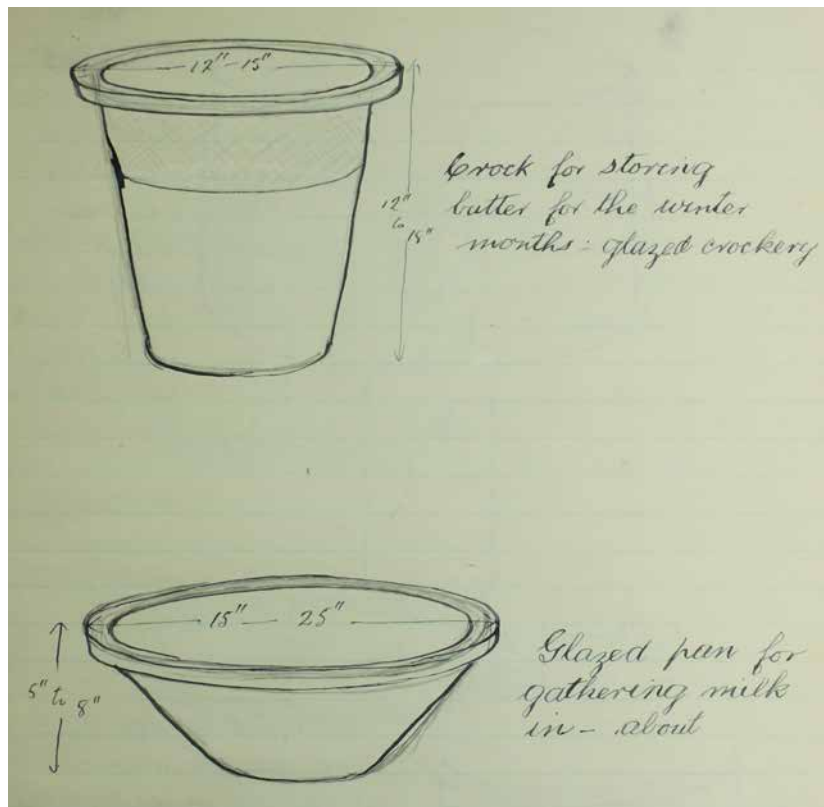


Figure 6.7 Drawing from 1937/8 of a glazed earthenware crock used for storing butter during the winter months and a glazed earthenware pan used for gathering milk (The National Folklore Collection, UCD, 1038:353). The top image is equivalent to the black-glazed vessel from Tormore Cave; the lower drawing resembles the two settling pans from the cave.



Figure 6.8 Sherds of a glazed red earthenware dish from Tormore Cave (James Connolly). A rim sherd from this pan was submitted to the National Museum of Ireland in 2004 by Des Gilhawley and now forms part of their collections in Dublin.⁷

⁷ NMI reg. 2009:2



Figure 6.9 Sherds of a slip-decorated glazed red earthenware dish from Tormore Cave (James Connolly). The potter applied a lighter coloured slip over the clay as a decorative feature before sealing the vessel interior with a glaze.



Figure 6.10 Dairy settling pans from Sligo Folk Park Museum at Riverstown, County Sligo (Marion Dowd).

Figure 6.11 Sherds of the black-glazed red earthenware crock from Tormore Cave (James Connolly).



Figure 6.12 Refitted base of the green glass wine bottle from Tormore Cave (James Connolly).



Figure 6.13 The black-glazed pottery sherds from Tormore Cave derived from a dairy crock similar to this intact example (F-1969-17) in the National Museum of Ireland's Folklife Collection. It is 26.5cm tall and the diameter at the rim is 37cm (© National Museum of Ireland).



in the dairy. After the cows had been milked, the warm milk was poured from buckets into these broad, shallow settling or setting pans. The milk cooled in the earthenware pans and was left to settle or 'rest' in the kitchen or dairy of a farmhouse for up to three days. When ripened, the cream was skimmed off, poured into a second container, and churned into butter. Settling pans were also used for other purposes such as washing hands, clothes, vegetables and for making dough.⁸ Ceramic pans like the two examples from Tormore Cave would have been used throughout the 19th century and into the 1920s and beyond. When they were brought to Tormore Cave, these dishes may already have been decades old. They presumably came from the Branley homestead or an adjacent safe house. Their large size (ranging from 30-50cm high x 14-20cm in diameter) made them suitable for delivering large quantities of food, such as potatoes or porridge, to the men in the cave. The black-glazed earthenware jar was taller and deeper than the dishes. It would have been used in a domestic setting for storing buttermilk but would also have served other functions such as for storing water or keeping eggs preserved in butter or isinglass ('fish glue').⁹ Like the dishes, this black-glazed crock would have originated from a local family who supported the men by supplying food and/or beverages.

Green glass bottle

Six shards from the base of a green glass wine bottle were recovered from Area 1 (Figures 6.6 and 6.13). This bottle is probably of 19th century date. It had a capacity of 0.75 litres. It may have contained tea or milk and, like the ceramic vessels, probably originated from a nearby safe house. The upper part of the bottle, which was not recovered during excavations, may have fulfilled a secondary function. Veteran Andy Cooney recalled a signalling system used by the IRA in County Kerry whereby the 'top would be knocked out of a bottle and the sound made by blowing through the bottle could be heard a long way off.'¹⁰ Ernie O'Malley mentioned use of the same device, which he called a 'blower'. A 'booming horn sound was made which could travel a long distance. It meant - enemy in sight.'¹¹

Fragments of metal containers

Fragments of at least two other containers were retrieved during excavations. Three iron fragments

appear to have formed the base or lid of something like an iron pail, bucket or container of some sort (Figure 6.14). The three pieces do not refit, but the curvature indicates that the container would have had a diameter of about 23cm. Two fragments have a hole near the outer edge, possibly related to attachment. Separately, a simple wire handle was found embedded in the cave floor beneath the flagstones (Figure 6.15). Simple handles like this were typically attached to tin billy cans or pails. The distance between the two looped ends indicates that the pail or can had a diameter of approximately 15.5cm. This was a smaller vessel than that represented by the three iron fragments of a base or lid. These two metal containers, like the ceramic vessels, were presumably brought to the cave carrying food or beverages. Tea, for instance, was regularly transported in tin cans. IRA volunteer Willie Devins described that while lying in wait prior to the Moneygold ambush of October 1920, a local man 'came over with a tin can of tea and I went on with this to the rest of the lads.' Later that night, while waiting to carry out a second attack, a local woman 'brought us out a tin can of tea.'¹² On occasion, the men likely enjoyed tea in the 'country style', described by Ernie O'Malley as 'strong tea that a mouse could trot on. Stewed tea took away the hunger.'¹³ More importantly, regular supplies of fresh water would have been fundamental to the survival of the men in the cave.

Three-legged cast iron skillet pot

Four fragments of a cast iron three-legged skillet pot were discovered during archaeological excavations (Figure 6.16). One fragment was found protruding through the grass some 3m outside and downslope from the cave entrance, while three fragments were found on the cave floor 3-5m inside the entrance. An additional two pieces from the same vessel were removed from the cave in 1985 by Danny McHugh and have been donated to the *Tormore Cave Project*.

Three-legged skillet pots were ubiquitous in households across 1920s Ireland and played a central role in everyday domestic life (Figure 6.17). These were essentially large, round-bottomed pots with lugs, supported by three legs as a 'concession to a hard uneven floor'.¹⁴ These heavy vessels were typically found at the hearth and were used for cooking, but their multi-functional nature led them to be called 'the countrywife's maid-

⁸ Evans 1957: 93-7; Kinmonth 2020: 433-9

⁹ Kinmonth 2020: 439

¹⁰ Andy Cooney in O'Malley and Horgan 2012: 172

¹¹ O'Malley 2002: 342

¹² McGowan 1993: 115, 116

¹³ O'Malley 2002: 136

¹⁴ Evans 1957: 76



Figure 6.14 Three iron fragments, probably from the base of a billy can, bucket or pail (22E0030:57, 58, 59) (James Connolly).

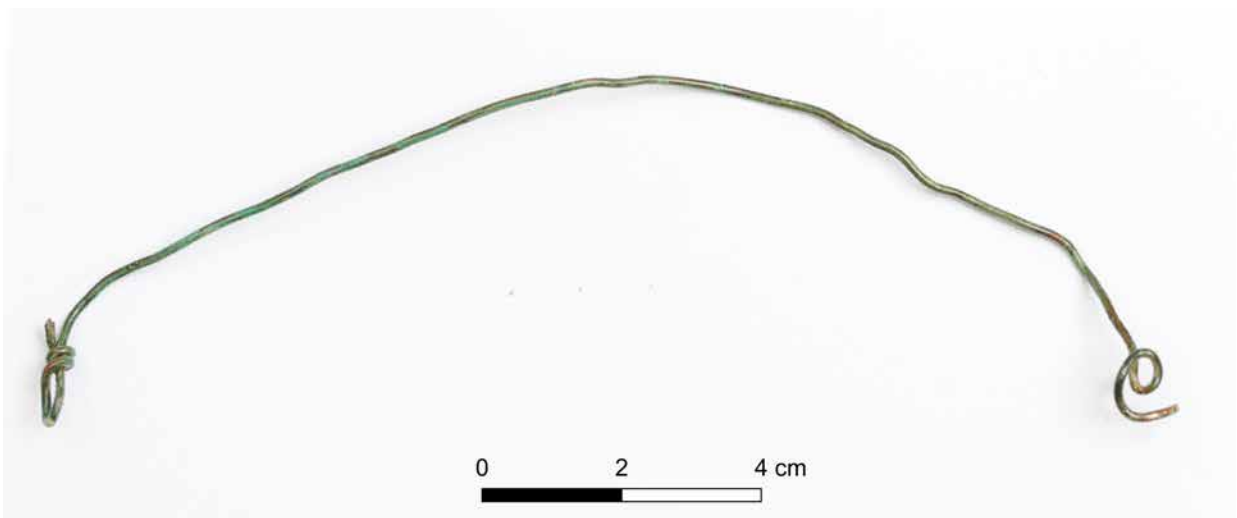


Figure 6.15 Copper alloy handle (22E0030:60), probably from a small pail or billy can (James Connolly).

of-all-work'.¹⁵ The skillet was hung over an open fire on a crane that could be swung out into the room or into the hearth. The skillet was particularly associated with boiling porridge (oatmeal), 'Indian meal' (maize), eggs, potatoes, peelings from vegetables, fish or simply for boiling water. Instructions from the 1930s, collected by the National Folklore Collection, explained how to make

porridge: 'You fill a skillet of spring water, and you put salt into it. Then you put it on the fire to boil, and when it is boiling you put oaten-meal on it, with your hand, and keep stirring while doing so and let it boil for an hour.'¹⁶ In 1938, Kevin Grindley of Enniscrone, County Sligo wrote: 'They boiled the potatoes in a three-legged boiler called a skillet. When they were boiled the skillet

¹⁵ Evans 1957: 76

¹⁶ NFCS 0976: 062



Figure 6.16 Fragments of the three-legged cast iron skillet pot from Tormore Cave (22E0030:1, 3, 4, 131, 134, 142) (James Connolly). The four black fragments have undergone archaeological conservation.

would be left in the middle of the floor. All the children would sit around in a ring about the skillet on small stools called “creepies”.¹⁷ The three-legged skillet was also sometimes used in the preparation of folk medicines.

At Tormore Cave there is no evidence of a hearth or fire and it is highly unlikely that a heavy and cumbersome iron skillet pot would have been brought to the cave for cooking purposes. It is also unlikely to have been used to store food, as such requirements could have been fulfilled by baskets, bags or wooden crates that would have been lighter and easier to transport. A more plausible alternative is that this durable pot served to address a pressing concern for those sheltering in the cave - the need for a portable toilet. The typical chamber pot of 1920s Ireland would have been too small to serve the requirements of a large contingent of men and, as these were ceramic, the risk of breakage was high. By contrast, the iron skillet pot was of sufficient size and durability to function as an effective portable toilet. Unlike chamber pots, the skillet had the

added advantage of a lid, which would allow for better olfactory hygiene in the cramped environment of the cave (some of the amorphous iron fragments recovered during excavations may represent a lid). The skillet may have been placed in Area 2, away from the living space, and could have been brought outside the cave and emptied on a daily (or nightly) basis. A vessel like this would not have broken easily but may have fallen while being carried outside to empty it.

Clay pipe

Part of the bowl of a clay pipe (Figure 6.18) was found in the Cubby, a natural niche in the cave wall. Faint traces of an impressed design are visible on the exterior surface and may represent a harp. There also appears to be an indiscernible engraving above the harp, either ornamentation or text; a common design of late 19th and early 20th century pipes was a harp image with the phrase ‘Erin go Bragh’, an anglicisation of ‘*Éirinn go Bráth*’, or ‘Ireland forever’. The interior of the bowl is fresh and clean with no blackening from smoke, indicating that the pipe was shattered before it had been used.

¹⁷ NFCS 0164: 325



Figure 6.17 An intact three-legged cast iron skillet pot, representative of the example that was used in Tormore Cave in the early 1920s (Marion Dowd).

Clay pipes and cigarettes were smoked during the Irish War of Independence and Civil War. Bridget Pilkington brought supplies to the IRA hiding in Tormore Cave; she told her granddaughter that the men ‘had to have tea and tobacco’.¹⁸ Smoking would have been one of the few pleasures available to men on the run. While incarcerated in Dublin in August 1916, John Shouldice recalled: ‘I saw a warder puffing his pipe in his back garden, sitting in the sun, and could see the tobacco smoke curling up into the air. I never had such a longing for a smoke and had to turn away from the pleasant prospect with an aching void for a fag or a pipeful of tobacco.’¹⁹

¹⁸ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 29.04.2022

¹⁹ BMH.WS0679, John Shouldice

Objects of unknown function

A series of metal artefacts are described here that were discovered during the 2022 excavations in Area 1 of Tormore Cave. Some or all of these items may originally have formed part of the same object that deteriorated over the past century.

Buckle?

A small iron object was found that may be part of a buckle from a belt or uniform (Figure 6.19). It measures just 2.3cm x 1.2cm. An alternative possibility is that it was attached to a strap on a trunk, box or satchel.



Figure 6.18 Top: clay pipe bowl fragment (22E0030:70) (James Connolly); bottom: negative image showing possible harp design (Robert Mulraney).

Copper rivets set in iron

Seventeen copper rivets set in iron (Figures 6.20-6.22) were recovered from surface layers near the Cubby, 4-5m inside the cave entrance. They occurred in relatively close proximity and are clearly the only surviving elements of an object that has otherwise deteriorated over the past century. The rivets originally attached an iron band to a secondary material that has not survived, perhaps leather, textile or cardboard.

A quantity of iron fragments (Figure 6.23) found in close proximity to the rivets, and in the same archaeological layers, may originally derive from the same object. These fragments are all part of an iron band or frame, with one 'T-shaped' piece and several 'L-shaped' fragments.

Despite extensive consultation with historians and military and museum personnel, as well as the general public and craftworkers, we have not been able to identify what the copper rivets derive from. They evidently functioned to bind an object together, and in this capacity, they comprise two parts. The first is the actual rivet component, a square and flat tipped nail with a flat round head. The rivet heads are all 1.36cm in diameter. The second component is the washer which receives the rivet; these vary from 1.36-1.51cm in diameter and are also copper. These objects most resemble the 'rivet and rove' style binders used in the layering of wooden panels in clinker-style boat construction. Such rivets and roves, which are still in use today for boat building, were utilised for a wider range of purposes in the 19th and early 20th centuries.



Figure 6.19 Possible iron buckle (22E0030:135) (James Connolly).

It is worth exploring some of the possible items that may be represented by these rivets, though no fully satisfactory explanation has yet been established. Personal military equipment, such as a bandolier, can be discounted because of the iron element, which would have made the item impractically heavy. It is possible that the rivets formed part of a field medical supply box or case made of strong cardboard reinforced with iron bands attached to the cardboard box with copper rivets. Broadly comparable examples were used across Europe during the First World War. It stands to reason that when the IRA were preparing Tormore Cave as a billet, a medical supply kit may have been brought to the cave in anticipation of the cave's future use. Another possibility is a canvas case or bag with an iron reinforcement band: Cumann na mBan member Bea Kilgannon recalled that she kept ammunition in her home in boxes and a 'canvas kind of thing'.²⁰

Another possible interpretation for the copper rivets is that the original object was broken up and the rivets assumed a secondary role to form part of an improvised explosive device (IED). Dan Breen described a 'new' type of bomb used by his unit during the War of Independence for blowing up RIC barracks. These 'cart-box bombs' consisted of a metal box filled with gelnite and then tightly packed with 'old nuts and bolts and pieces of scrap iron'.²¹ It is possible that the rivets and perhaps some of the amorphous iron fragments found in Tormore Cave represent raw materials for

bomb shrapnel, essentially degraded objects that were retained with the intention of being repurposed for an IED.

An alternative, and perhaps more fanciful possibility, is that the copper rivets and roves might originate from iron plating removed from the disabled *Ballinalee* armoured car. It is possible that the IRA, retreating up the mountain under fire, stripped a section of metal plating from the armoured car and used it as a makeshift cover or sniper shield. The National Museum of Ireland has in its collections one such sniper shield that was used in County Mayo during the War of Independence.²² The only issue with this theory in relation to Tormore Cave is that one might expect to find a greater quantity of iron sheeting in the cave.

A final, very tentative, possibility is that the copper rivets from Tormore Cave originated from a hand-held wood and leather bellows. Small household bellows used in domestic contexts at the fireplace frequently had copper rivets. A bellows, made primarily of leather and wood, would have decayed with the passage of a century in the cave environment, leaving behind only the metal elements. Further support for this possibility lies in the fact that the rivets were found near and in the Cubby where burnt turf was recovered. It is possible that a bellows was brought to the cave with the intention of lighting fires in the Cubby, though this may never have materialised.

Twisted copper wire in textile

Four lengths of twisted copper wires within a braided cotton sleeve were recovered in the cave, three from the sediment beneath the flagstones and one was found lying on the cave floor (Figures 6.24 and 6.25). Together, the fragments are an overall length of 36.7cm, though the original object was clearly much longer. The twisted wires are just 1.2mm in diameter. One end forms an oval loop with internal dimensions of 7mm x 2.6mm.

Various interpretations have been put forward as to the purpose of this length of cotton-covered twisted copper wire. Several rifle owners and people from military backgrounds have suggested that this was a pull through for cleaning a rifle. The suggestion is that as a pull through, the copper cable provided rigidity to push it down the barrel whilst also having a degree of

²⁰ MSP34REF54764, Bea Kilgannon

²¹ Breen 1924: 116

²² Sniper shield, NMI, 2023, viewed 03.07.2023, <<https://www.museum.ie/en-IE/Collections-Research/Collection/Arming-and-training-the-IRA/Artefact/Sniper-shield/05e8e69d-6825-49ca-b733-b728c1d214d9>>

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT

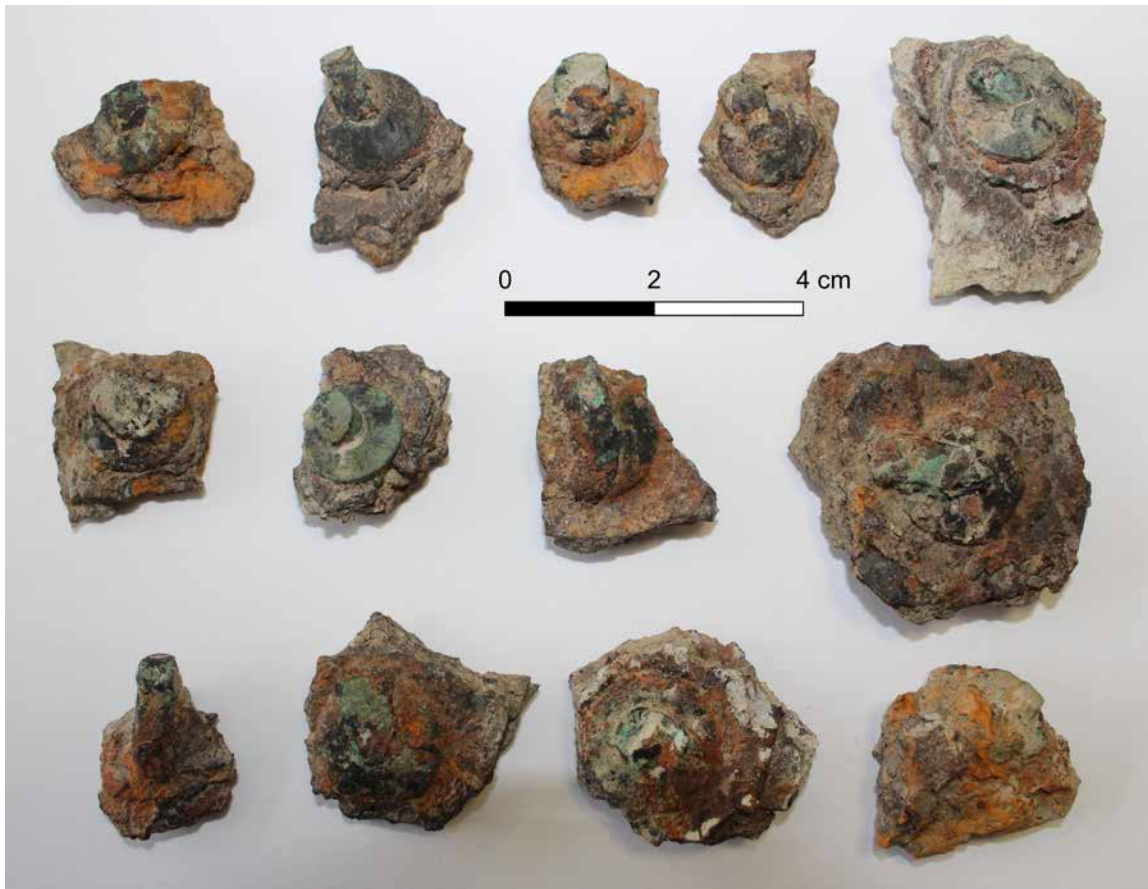


Figure 6.20 Some of the copper rivets prior to conservation (Marion Dowd).



Figure 6.21 The seventeen copper rivets post-conservation, with some showing the rivet head and others showing the rivet shaft and washer; the surrounding black material is iron (22E0030:61, 71, 73, 133) (James Connolly).



Figure 6.22 Close-up of four of the copper rivets set in iron (James Connolly).

flexibility to reduce the risk of snapping. Most of the cleaning would have been done by a small gauze patch attached to the pull through. Thus, the pull through needed to pass easily through the barrel and had to be narrower than the bore size. The typical rifle of the time, the Lee Enfield SMLE, had a barrel length of 25.2 inches (64cm). When the loop came out the other end of the barrel, it was firmly gripped and dragged through. An initial pull through with a fragment of gauze or wire

wool attached to the reinforced loop would have served as an abrasive to remove any residue from the barrel. The copper alloy mesh described below could plausibly have served as the gauze for the initial abrasive clean of a rifle.²³ This was followed by pulling through a length of cloth threaded through the loop to clean the barrel. A third stage usually followed to provide a thin coat of oil along the barrel interior with another piece of cloth. However, the use of copper wire as a pull through,



Figure 6.23 Iron fragments (22E0030:136) (James Connolly).

²³ Andrew Dowds pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 15.10.2022

rather than using a traditional fabric one, is a highly uneconomical use of copper, a material that was, and continues to be, of monetary value. Furthermore, the cord of the pull through itself was generally composed of a simple fabric onto which an abrasive material was attached. Of course, it is possible that the copper wire initially served an entirely different function but was repurposed by the IRA in the cave as a pull through.

It is far more likely that this finely made copper wire represents an item for conducting a current as it is bound in a protective fabric sheath. One such application might be as an ignition wire for starting a car. By removing the cable from the magneto to the distributor cap, the car could not be stolen or removed. Removing ignition wires was a common practice during the War of Independence and Civil War. North Sligo veteran Andy Doocey recalled that during the War of Independence he was involved in removing magnetos from cars that were 'running under a British permit' to dismantle them.²⁴ The IRA regularly commandeered motor cars, thus having an ignition wire at one's disposal would have been ever useful. Ernie O'Malley recorded Tom Scanlon quoting a few lines of a song still popular to this day: 'You could hear the din going through the Glen in Johnson's motor car' which was, according to Scanlon, sung on one occasion by driver Dominic O'Grady, presumably having commandeered a car.²⁵

Yet another suggestion is that the wire and copper rivets together formed components of a wet cell battery. It is difficult to advance this idea without the survival of further components. Another electrical application worth considering is that the copper wire is from the detonator of an incendiary or explosive device. Explosives of the time were typically homemade and crudely improvised. These usually consisted of a keg, a concrete cast container, or a container filled with concrete, which was then lined with gelignite. This was often used in conjunction with one of the developed explosive materials such as 'Irish War Flour' (nitrated resin with flour, acid and potassium chlorate) or 'Irish Cheddar' (a mix of potassium chlorate, nitrobenzene and castor oil).²⁶ The concrete walls helped to direct the force of the blast upwards, not outwards, which was particularly relevant when the bomb was used as a road mine. This heavy device, correctly termed an improvised explosive device (IED), could be buried

or placed against a wall. It was then attached to an electrical detonator, which very likely used copper wire as its electrical conductor. Small but heavy metal objects were frequently placed inside the casing to cause maximum damage. Bolts or rivets, such as those recovered during the archaeological excavations in Tormore Cave (see above), would have made ideal shrapnel material. Michael V. O'Donoghue, Engineer Officer of the Cork 2nd Battalion IRA, described how he used copper wire in the construction of his detonators to teach young recruits during the War of Independence:

I had rigged up an electrical exploder with dry batteries and got some copper cable, a low-tension detonator and a few sticks of gelignite ... I placed the gelignite in position in a crevice behind the rock and inserted the low-tension detonator. After connecting up the [copper] cable to the detonator, we withdrew. Here I attached the cable to terminals of the exploder, being very deliberate to explain the positive and the negative leads and connections. I shouted "Ready, fire."²⁷

A final suggestion for the purpose of the twisted copper wire from Tormore Cave is that it may have formed part of a signalling or communications device. The loop at the end potentially functioned to make contact between electrical terminals in such a device. The use of fabric covered copper wire was commonplace for electrical equipment in the 1920s. A typical communication device of the time, which employed the use of a copper cable in a woven sheath, was a field phone. These were utilised in the field by British troops and police forces, and their development was greatly advanced during the First World War. At the most basic level, these consisted of a box containing a 'telephone' (for speaking and hearing), which held a series of wire connectors connected to another such unit via wire cabling. Two (or more) telephone boxes were thus physically connected to one another, the only limiting factor was the length of the cable. This could be surprisingly extensive, as the cable was typically unwound from a coil as required. A field phone would not have been out of reach for the North Sligo IRA as several members had fought in the First World War and the brigade had also raided British barracks innumerable times. The use of such a device would have significantly improved conditions in Tormore Cave. With a field phone and as little as 50m length of cabling, a sentry position above

²⁴ MSP34REF18708, Andy Doocey

²⁵ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/137. The line sung is from a Donegal song called 'Johnson's Motor Car', made famous in the 1970s by folk group 'The Dubliners'.

²⁶ Davies 2015

²⁷ BWH.WS1741, Michael V. O'Donoghue



Figure 6.24 Four lengths of twisted copper wires in a woven cotton sleeve (22E0030:8, 62) (James Connolly).



Figure 6.25 Close-up of looped terminal (James Connolly).

the cave could be established, at a point later referred to by Chris Branley as a look-out post.²⁸ This would have allowed men to move more freely around the cave entrance while a sentry unit kept watch overhead. A short distance vertically above the cave is a triangular pillar of rock, from where there are expansive views to the south, east and west. Only to the north is visibility limited by further cliffs. A field phone would serve to quickly inform those in the cave of a National Army

approach along the Swiss Valley and allow men to take up an armed defensive position. A field phone employed in such difficult terrain would have greatly increased the safety of those billeted in the cave.

Despite its technological simplicity, the field phone is so effective that it continues to be used today, most notably in modern cave rescue for communicating from a cave incident underground to the ground surface overhead. Cave rescue organisations, including the *Irish Cave Rescue Organisation* (ICRO), employ a modern version of

²⁸ Chris Branley, audio recording 2014

the field phone, named the 'Spéléophone 2005'.²⁹ While used in conjunction with an array of other modern communication devices, the Spéléophone essentially consists of a coiled copper cable that can be rolled from a spool, with simple phones on both ends. It is used to establish a communication line between the surface and underground, in very much the same way that the men of Tormore Cave may have taken advantage of a communication line between the dugout and the look-out post.

Copper alloy mesh

The function of this small, thin piece of copper alloy mesh is not known with certainty but it may have been used with a pull through for cleaning a rifle barrel (Figures 6.26 and 6.27). It measures 3.3cm x 3.2cm and is just 0.5mm thick. The fact that it is a metal alloy and not fabric gauze indicates that it was not intended for use in a First Aid capacity. There is little doubt that every man in the cave was armed with a rifle. It is likely that, during bouts of restlessness, cleaning and maintenance of weapons occurred regularly as part of daily drills. The abrasive gauze was typically rolled into an S-shape (in section) and attached to the loop on the pull through cord. When not in use the weighted pull through, along with the gauze, cleaning cloths and a small bottle of oil, could be neatly packed into the butt of some rifles, such as the Lee Enfield SMLE rifle, which many of the men would have possessed.³⁰ If so, a piece of scrubbing gauze may have been lost on one occasion. If this copper alloy mesh is indeed a pull through component, then it represents the only artefact indicating the presence of arms in the cave. Taken with the copper wire, which likely represents either a component of an explosive device or a land phone, it builds an impression of a highly organised unit stationed at the cave.

Bog deal (also known as bog fir, bog pine and bog oak)

Eight pieces of 'bog deal' (wood, typically pine, preserved in bogs) were recovered from the upper deposit on the cave floor, outside the Cubby and 4-5m inside the cave entrance (Figure 6.28). The bog deal pieces occurred in close proximity to two partially burnt sods of turf, though there are no signs of burning on the bog deal. Traditionally, pieces of bog deal and turf were dipped into animal fat or oil and then burned,



Figure 6.26 Copper alloy mesh (22E0030:2) (James Connolly).

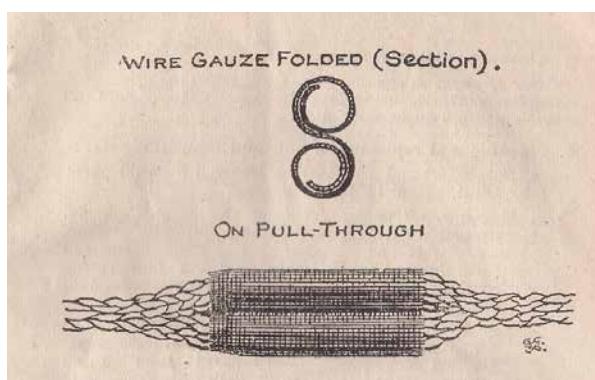


Figure 6.27 Sketch from a British Enfield rifle training manual illustrating how a pull through was used (British War Office, 1942).

like a candle, to provide a source of light. The National Folklore Collection has numerous records of lights and candles made from splinters of bog deal in the 1930s.³¹ An account from County Cork explains: 'before lamps were invented, the people ... had many ways for making light, such as splinters; these were pieces of bog oak which was found with the turf in the bogs.'³² To make such a candle, circa 20 strips of bog deal (each about 1.3cm thick) were tied together in a bundle with a *súgán* (hay rope). If the candle burned too brightly, water was sprinkled on the *súgán* to calm the flames. An account from County Clare described a slightly different process: 'Pieces of bog-deal were placed near the fire or up the chimney and left there to dry thoroughly. They were then broken into small splinters which were kept near the fire for use. When a light was required, one of

²⁹ Daniel Drodz - Communications Officer (ICRO), pers. comm. to R. Mulraney, 29.06.2023

³⁰ British War Office, 1942, *Small Arms Training*, Volume I, Pamphlet No. 3 - Rifle

³¹ NFCS0361: 410-1; NFCS0169: 426

³² NFCS0317: 205



Figure 6.28 Pieces of bog deal (22E0030:S10) found in the vicinity of the Cubby (James Connolly).



Figure 6.29 Two scorched sods of turf (22E0030:S8) and burnt turf fragments (22E0030:S6, S7, S9) recovered from within and immediately outside the Cubby (James Connolly).

them was stuck into a sod of turf or onto a turnip which served as a candlestick.³³

Sods of turf and burnt turf fragments

Two partially burnt sods of turf were recovered from the Cubby. Quantities of burnt turf fragments came from the same layer as well as from outside, but close to, the Cubby (Figure 6.29). Evidently turf was burned in the cave but the small quantity of burnt fragments

indicate that burning activities were limited. The turf may represent a brief experiment at lighting a fire but may alternatively represent efforts to provide low-level lighting. Family narratives recall that a fire was never lit in the cave during the Civil War occupation because the smoke would have attracted attention.³⁴ Certainly there is no evidence of any substantial fires, there are no hearths, virtually no charcoal, no soot marks on the cave walls or roof, and no signs of burning on the cave floor. It is possible that turf was brought to the cave

³³ NFCS0588: 209

³⁴ Michael Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 10.12.2021

with the intention of building a fire, with the Cubby serving as a convenient hearth served by a natural flue. If so, this plan may have been quickly aborted due to the smoke generated. If the turf was burned inside the cave, it is likely that it would have been burned inside a pot or container, to restrict its size, producing minimal smoke but a small amount of well needed heat. If men were maintaining look-out positions at Tormore West or above the cave, then it is plausible that such a resource could provide them with turf sod embers for use as a light source. These would perhaps be essential for accessing such places which would otherwise be in absolute darkness. Slow burning turf sods could be ignited from the bog deal candles (see above). J.J. Jennings recalled that in South Sligo, turf cutters in the 1920s would take a 'lighted sod' of turf to the bog so that they could light tobacco and smoke their pipes.³⁵ A final, though less likely, consideration regarding the sods of turf is that they were kept in the cave if needed for an arson attack. Dan Breen makes reference to the use of five or six sods of turf soaked in paraffin oil when setting fire to Hollyford RIC Barracks in County Tipperary.³⁶

Mammal, bird and fish bones

Almost 800 mammal, bird and fish bones were recovered during the archaeological excavations in Tormore Cave (Appendices 8 and 9). The bones derived from horse, cattle, sheep, goat, hare, rabbit, fish and chicken. The vast majority of these bones appear to relate to activities that took place in the cave after the 1922 occupation, while a small quantity relates to much earlier activities in the early medieval period. Only a few bones appear to represent food consumed by those billeted in the cave during the Civil War. Significantly, these bones were concentrated in and around the Cubby. A small burnt bone fragment of a domestic chicken (*Gallus gallus*) wing bone (humerus) reveals that roast chicken was consumed in the cave on at least one occasion. Two fish bones were also identified, one of which appears to derive from cod (*Gadus morhua*) (Figure 6.30; Appendix 9). Despite the difficult circumstances the men in



Figure 6.30 Two fish bones, probably cod (*Gadus morhua*) (James Connolly).

hiding experienced, they likely adhered to the Catholic practise of not eating meat on Fridays, a day when fish was typically consumed. The cod bones in the cave may reflect this adherence to religious tradition. A small fragment of a large mammal bone from the Cubby had been subjected to intense heat causing the bone to turn white in colour (calcined). Two spots of green staining on this bone fragment suggest it was in contact with a copper alloy object.

Bones from at least three rabbits and one hare were also recovered. A concentration of bones from one rabbit occurred under one of the flagstones in Area 1 (Figure 6.31). No butchery marks were noted and none of the bones were deliberately broken, but it is likely that this rabbit had been trapped and brought to the cave as food. This tallies somewhat with a humorous narrative recalled by Jack 'Trooper' McHugh who had sheltered in Tormore Cave. He recalled that he and a comrade were billeted in 'Mrs Mitchell's' safe house in the Glencar Valley [probably Mary Mitchell, b. 1865, living in Glen Upper townland]. Mrs Mitchell was cooking a rabbit 'Trooper' had shot or caught on the mountain. The National Army began firing on the house and the two IRA men fled out the door. Mrs Mitchell, crouched under the kitchen table, shouted after them: 'Will ye be coming back for the rabbit?'³⁷

³⁵ Jennings 1989: 12

³⁶ Breen 1924: 108

³⁷ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.04.2023



Figure 6.31 Rabbit bones from Tormore Cave (James Connolly).

Chapter 7

Day to day life in the Tormore Cave dugout

*I hung back when evening came. I did not want to go below.
The others had already dropped down.
One young fellow spoke to me from the hatch: 'are you coming?'*

Tom Maguire

In advance of the events of autumn 1922, significant planning and preparation was invested in making Tormore Cave suitable for occupation for an extended period. The cave is not large, but its inconspicuous nature more than compensates for its modest size. It is difficult to imagine how 30 or more men could have occupied such a small space for so long but this was, literally, a matter of life or death. Other parallels are known, such as the Kerry I Brigade flying column's dugout where Tom O'Connor described staying with 27 IRA men for several weeks during the War of Independence. O'Connor recalled that they slept on mattresses on the floor and appointed men to the duties of cooking.² By combining the archaeological evidence recovered during excavations, with family memories and local narratives that have endured over the past century, it is possible to gain an insight into the living conditions endured by the IRA billeted in Tormore Cave. These insights are set within the social context of 1920s Ireland and the general functioning of dugouts during the revolutionary period.

Why Tormore Cave?

The Glencar Valley was a key IRA stronghold with numerous safe houses, dugouts and a generally supportive community. Local knowledge of the plateaus and gullies within the mountainous terrain was key. In failing to secure passage to Manorhamilton via the glens, OC Billy Pilkington identified the topographical and tactical advantages in choosing a secondary retreat through the mountains, from Rahelly House to North Leitrim via the Dartry uplands. The aim was to re-establish the divisional HQ in the North Leitrim hills, close to the border with Northern Ireland.

They were, however, unsuccessful. As the National Army combed the Glencar Valley and environs, the divisional command was not able to re-establish itself in

North Leitrim and survival became a pressing priority. The safe houses in the Glencar Valley were well known to the National Army and were compromised. A report from 14 December 1922, for instance, listed known safe houses in the immediate area as Flanagans, Gilmartins, Smyths at Barnarobin, and O'Connors and Branleys at Glencar.³ The latter house was the safe house directly linked to Tormore Cave.

Numerous other dugouts and caves were scattered through the hills and were closer to Rahelly House, but Billy Pilkington did not select these for refuge. Most of the constructed dugouts were located in the lowlands and were not sufficiently remote. In the region between Benbulbin peak and Truskmore, there are many natural caves, some relatively spacious, but these were not suited for occupation because they were either inaccessible, or not inconspicuous enough, or too wet. For instance, Diarmuid and Grainne's Cave and the 'IRA Cave' in Gortnaleck townland have multiple entry and exit points, which might facilitate an easier escape. These caves are also considerably more spacious and less damp than Tormore Cave, thus offering better living conditions. There are numerous caves on the Truskmore plateau, but these are deep and vertical in nature and require advanced techniques to access them. In addition, there are numerous small caves throughout the area, such as two in close proximity to Tormore Cave and within the same townland. These two caves would have been fragments of a larger system. One is located at the plateau surface near *Sruth in Aghaidh an Aird* waterfall, while the second is directly south of the waterfall, but at the base of the cliff, 150m below. Similar to Tormore, these caves are very difficult to locate but it is likely they were known by the IRA. Further to this, they are reasonably close to the Branley homestead and are adjacent to a fresh water source. However, they were bypassed in favour of Tormore Cave, probably because in the case of the

¹ Tom Maguire in MacEoin 1980: 297

² Tom O'Connor in O'Malley and Horgan 2012: 132

³ CW/OPS/02/01/05

higher cave it was simply too small, while the latter cave was judged too loose and not convincingly solid.

Compared to other dugout options that were located much closer to Rahelly House, Tormore Cave offered a distinct number of advantages. It is at a very remote location, but not so remote as to inhibit contact with the wider support network of families who provided the necessary food, clothing and medical supplies. In contrast, caves such as Diarmuid and Grainne's Cave, which is located at a very high elevation, and *Poll na Spideog*, located in extremely remote peatlands, were beyond easy access for the local support network. A cave such as *Poll na Spideog* might have been reserved for temporary use in the event of a retreat from Tormore, but it would have been difficult to sustain a large number of people for an extended period due to its isolation. Other potential caves, such as those in Glen Upper and Gortnaleck townlands, which are remembered as caves used by the IRA, would have been located in places with relative ease of access. However, all of these sites are in areas of open moor and flat bogland. Open landscapes offer little or no advantage for defence, with no ability to conceal an escape route, making for an extremely exposed retreat under fire. In contrast, Tormore Cave offers far more options for defence and retreat, all of which take advantage of the enormous geological and topographical diversity of the Swiss Valley landscape. Unlike the aforementioned caves, Tormore Cave is inconspicuous. It does not have a widely visible entrance like Diarmuid and Grainne's Cave. Similarly, *Poll na Spideog* is located on an open and exposed plateau, unlike Tormore which is situated within a complex landscape that is difficult to traverse. The Glencarbury barytes mines, which had recently closed, offered a particularly vast subterranean network of passages with multiple entrances. Any mine-hideouts could be easily discovered, however, simply by walking along the mineral vein on the surface due to their location within the barytes mineral linear default that runs predictably northeast-southwest. Such data would have been readily available to the National Army and annotated on maps.

Environmental and defensive factors largely dictated the selection of Tormore Cave as a prime dugout. But a second factor, a human one, also influenced its selection: secrecy. A number of potential billets had long since become compromised due to the fact that former comrades from the War of Independence were now serving in the National Army and were aware of older dugout locations. Pollacaintrie 2 may have been one such place. This cave was adapted as a dugout in the 4th Battalion area, but apparently was never used. The

5th Battalion (North Leitrim) was an exception to the region in that most of its men turned Free State. This led to its collapse, making the location of Pollacaintrie 2 highly compromised during the Civil War. The 'IRA Cave' at Gortnaleck, a large and spacious cave, had also been used during the War of Independence and so must have been known to any North Sligo IRA men who went pro-Treaty. Tormore Cave appears to be different. Its location was a closely guarded secret. When Pilkington communicated with Charles Gildea and Jack Brennan from the cave, these two senior divisional leaders appear to have been unaware of his whereabouts. Yet it is clear that the preparation of the cave had begun long in advance of its occupation. It is highly likely that this place was chosen by Pilkington during the Truce period, or earlier, to remain as a dugout that would only be used if all else failed, one that was reserved for extreme emergencies.

Defending the last outpost of the I North Sligo Brigade

Tormore Cave is located in an area with huge topographical diversity, where the cave entrance represents only a very small break in the landscape, and one that was very easily concealed. Upon entering the narrow Swiss Valley, National Army soldiers would have been faced with a visually confusing panorama of 100m high cliffs with numerous small caves, crevices, openings and shadows, each representing a possible dugout. Huge loose boulders are strewn along the hill slopes and valley floor, and dense scrub makes progress difficult, especially for a unit in formation or defence. The uneven terrain is difficult to traverse due to the prevalence of a floor of loose scree which is barely held in place by a thin scrub layer, creating something of a natural *chevaux-de-frise*. The entrance to Tormore Cave is wholly invisible from the valley below, yet the valley floor is perfectly visible from the entrance above, allowing for up to three riflemen or scouts to be stationed behind the entrance boulder. While the men in hiding probably would not initiate combat to avoid being detected, such a set-up allowed for a great physical advantage should the need arise. Similar to traditional dugouts, one or two sentries were likely always posted at the entrance to Tormore Cave.⁴ Tom O'Connor described how, in their long occupation of the Kerry flying column dugout, 'we had sentries out all the time'.⁵ Tormore would have been no different and it is plausible that a number of sentry units or scouts were scattered around the area outside the cave (Figure 7.1).

⁴ Shanahan 2019: 161

⁵ Tom O'Connor in O'Malley and Horgan 2012: 132



Figure 7.1 Standing behind the Entrance Boulder in Tormore Cave would have provided an ideal vantage point over the valley below
(Robert Mulraney)

While no obvious signs of human use were observed in the adjacent and smaller Tormore Cave West, its location offers numerous strategic advantages. Arms, ammunition, food and other provisions could be readily stored and accessed in this small, enclosed and dry space (Figure 7.2). It also provides enough space to allow for two or three men to sleep, relieving pressure on the large number stationed in Tormore Cave. An additional advantage of Tormore Cave West, one that the IRA would not have overlooked, is the fact that it faces east, a direction that cannot be observed from Tormore Cave. Manorhamilton town is located to the east and was never properly re-taken by the IRA, thus there was a threat that National Army troops might besiege the plateaus of the Dartry Mountains from that direction.

Further security could be added by the placement of sentries above the cave. There is archaeological evidence to suggest that a field phone was in use at Tormore Cave (see Chapter 6), allowing for two-way contact between the cave and a vantage point above. If such a set-up was in operation, it would have been enormously advantageous. This idea is strongly supported by Chris Branley who described one such sentry position at Tormore:

They had an ambush [site] built into the rock higher up, that they could defend themselves out of, if the cave had been discovered. They couldn't get into the cave because this ambush [site] was overlooking it and it was built that you wouldn't see it. They used to take out the stone and you could go inside and pull back the stones, and there you were.⁶

The location described by Branley corresponds with a geological feature, a pyramid-shaped outcrop of rock that is distinctive to this day and lies approximately 50m above the cave (Figure 7.3). From here, a field telephone would enable communication with the main contingent of men inside Tormore Cave. The lookout perspective from the 'pyramid' is far superior to that of the cave, making it particularly advantageous as a sentry position. This spot commands expansive and panoramic views incorporating Sligo coast to the west and Manorhamilton to the east. The landscape above the cave is an extreme one, with enormous boulders strewn across the mountainside, offering numerous locations from which ambush and defensive positions

⁶ Chris Branley, audio recording 2014

DAY TO DAY LIFE IN THE TORMORE CAVE DUGOUT



Figure 7.2 View from the entrance of Tormore West Cave (Robert Mulraney).



Figure 7.3 A distinctive triangular rock outcrop 50m above Tormore Cave may have served as a look-out post (Robert Mulraney). It likely also served as a useful landmark for the IRA as to the cave's location.

could be taken. Just 3m northeast of the pyramid feature is a small sunken cave chamber which can be accessed through a narrow aperture in the ground. This cavern, though uncomfortable, could facilitate two or three men in hiding or could be adapted for storage of munitions and supplies. The small opening would have made it particularly easy to conceal using just one or two slabs (Figure 7.4).

With a sentry position located at the pyramid and a line of communication open with Tormore Cave, any approach of enemy troops could be observed well in advance of their arrival. With this knowledge, an informed decision could be made as to whether the men ought to 'lay low' in the hope of troops passing by; take positions and defend the cave; or strategically abandon it and make a safe retreat. If soldiers were observed approaching from Sligo town, a steep ascent from Tormore could be made at the northeast of the Swiss Valley, up a slight gully towards *Sruth in Aghaidh an Aird* waterfall. From here a retreat across the plateau to the refuge of *Poll na Spideog* cave could be made. If troops were to approach from Manorhamilton, an escape could be made via the Glen Upper gully onto the plateau, which was well known to the men. While a field phone would have enormously aided such manoeuvres, more primitive means of signalling would also have sufficed. Knowing that the IRA and the local population interacted by using obscure signals and gestures, and despite the remoteness of the cave dugout, a simple communication network could have been maintained with ease. This is further suggested by the noted ability of Billy Pilkington to communicate, during the Tormore occupation, with other divisional command leaders in South Sligo.

At the cave itself, if a fighting defence of the cave proved necessary, the rock ledge between Tormore Cave and Tormore West Cave would offer space for other men to take up positions. While precarious, they would be considerably less exposed than National Army troops on the valley floor below. Any metal sheeting present in the dugout could have provided additional cover, such as the 'sniper shield' consisting of a sheet of cast iron with a gun loop, used by the V East Mayo Brigade.⁷ The men who retreated from Rahelly House and sought refuge in Tormore Cave were known, in advance of the Rahelly siege, to have been very well supplied with arms. Indeed, in Tom Scanlon's account of the retreat he asked Billy Pilkington to allow him to take

an advance scout party off the mountain. Pilkington agreed with one condition: 'Very good', he said 'but the only thing I won't let you take with you is the Lewis.'⁸ It is likely the Lewis, a large automatic machine gun, was mounted for defence at Tormore Cave, perhaps located on the ledge between Tormore Cave and Tormore Cave West, overlooking the valley. Furthermore, the Vickers heavy machine gun was noted as being removed from the *Ballinalee* armoured car and it is likewise plausible that it was transported to Tormore. If an ambush site was located at the pyramid-shaped rock above the cave (as Chris Branley described), a Vickers machine gun stationed there would provide very strong defensive cover over the entire valley below.

Weather conditions, light and heat

When the IRA arrived at Tormore Cave on 20 September 1922, it would have been during a period of significant rainfall and reasonably warm weather. The stormiest day and night occurred on 25 September, with winds blowing up to 43.2kph, an event that occurred within the first week of refuge in the cave. As their stay progressed, the rain mostly disappeared, although wet days were recorded on 11 and 13 October, coinciding with a sharp drop in temperature. It is not known precisely when the Glencar dugout was abandoned. The length of time it was used for is generally referred to as a six-week period. Caves in Ireland generally remain at a constant temperature of 8° to 9° Celsius throughout the year, reflecting the average annual temperature of the outside environment. This effectively means that in summer the cave feels cold, but in winter the cave feels warm. The mean air temperature in County Sligo was approximately 8.5°C in September and early October 1922, but later in October dropped to a mean average of 4°C with extreme lows of -5°C (Appendix 13).

For much of the time the IRA were billeted in Tormore Cave, therefore, the average temperature outside was similar to that inside, but it began to drop considerably as the weeks passed. The cave itself probably did not provide much additional warmth, except for shelter from the wind and rain. However, the construction of the mortar floor and the U-shaped stone setting would have prevented direct contact with the moist cave walls and the soil floor, offering an additional layer of insulation. Furthermore, the presence of a large number of men in a confined space, while uncomfortable and unpleasant, would have generated a significant amount of body heat.

⁷ Sniper shield, NMI, 2023, viewed 03.07.2023, <<https://www.museum.ie/en-IE/Collections-Research/Collection/Arming-and-training-the-IRA/Artefact/Sniper-shield/05e8e69d-6825-49ca-b733-b728c1d214d9>>

⁸ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133



Figure 7.4 The small cave feature which may have been used in association with the 'pyramid' sentry point. Note that the shadow in the photo is cast by the 'pyramid' feature itself (Robert Mulroney).

The degree to which the cave was modified and prepared for occupation strongly suggests that it was furnished with mattresses and blankets to ensure a degree of warmth and comfort when sleeping. In County Tipperary, Dan Breen recalled that in preparing a dugout, he 'got the loan of a couple of blankets from neighbours, spread straw on the ground, and covered it with a blanket. Over this we placed a layer of newspapers and used a second blanket as a coverlet. The sheets of paper kept us warm.'⁹ Whatever bedding material was used at Tormore Cave, it was subsequently removed, but it is likely to have been more substantial than Breen's dugout. Bedding material coupled with sleeping in tight quarters would have helped achieve a slight increase in temperature in the living area. However, the limited space meant that it would have been near impossible for the men to exercise, making them feel colder.

In September 1922, the maximum daylight hours available would have been, at most, twelve. Tormore Cave would have been a dark, cold and damp place to live. According to anecdotal accounts, the men

billeted there could not light fires as the smoke would have attracted attention.¹⁰ During archaeological excavations, no hearths, charcoal or blackening of the cave roof or walls was encountered, confirming the local narratives.¹¹ We surmise that pieces of bog deal recovered during the excavations were brought to the cave with the intention of providing light. The men cannot have enjoyed a long or deep sleep in such an environment, thus the length of time spent in darkness must have increased feelings of stress, loneliness and anxiety. What limited contact was available with local people would have diminished or ceased entirely at nightfall, and there were few lights on the skyline that might point to home. Conversely, that same darkness offered a sense of comfort, knowing that the enemy could not mount a raid in the dark or, if a raid was attempted, it would be seen long before the army approached.

Contemporary accounts describe a range of lighting options available at the time that were practicable for use in dugouts. These include candles, oil stoves,

⁹ Breen 1924: 35

¹⁰ Michael Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 10.12.2021

¹¹ Chris Branley, video and audio recording 2012

paraffin lamps and occasionally carbide lamps. In describing his visit to dugouts belonging to the III North Roscommon Brigade at Lough Key, County Roscommon, Tom Maguire mentioned two surprising light sources: 'light inside was provided by a car battery, [with] carbide and candles perched on timber ledges retaining the earthen walls'.¹² While the car battery powered light seems innovative, the carbide lamps were almost certainly present due to the close proximity of the Arigna coal mines where such lamps would have been commonplace at that time.

Ailbhe Ó Monacháin captured something of the discomfort those in Tormore Cave might have experienced in his description of a dugout he occupied in County Galway:

the three of us moved up to an old cattle shed on a hill ... It was alright as a shelter against the sun but it let the rain in and the weather was broken and cold. There were, of course, no beds in the place but there was plenty of straw infested with mice. It was a terrible sensation for us trying to sleep in that straw and hundreds of mice running over us, but we got used to even that. We remained in this place three or four days. The weather was wet and our straw beds very damp. Of course, we could not light a fire as the smoke would have been seen for miles around, and we could not go out for exercise.¹³

Ó Monacháin's discomfort was mirrored by Tom Maguire's stay in the Lough Key dugouts:

the light was only doused for the night when the racket started. Rats were entering from everywhere, big brown ones. Making frantic squeals as they tried to crawl along the roof timbers to reach our food buckets [suspended from the roof]. Some would fall to the floor or on to our bunks scampering in all directions. Some fought with each other, squealing. You could not imagine the clamour. I hate rats, but I put in the night anyway, wishing it was morning and wishing I could go out and be away from them ... I hung back therefore when evening came. I did not want to go below. The others

had already dropped down. One young fellow spoke to me from the hatch, 'are you coming?' 'No', said I, 'not for all Roscommon would I spend another night in a dug-out with those rats.' 'What are you going to do then?' 'I spotted a nice clump of bushes over there; I will dig in there for the night.' He tried to explain to me that it was as bad over ground as it was below. 'It is from above they are going down.' But it was no use, I insisted on staying above ground. I found that it was almost as bad. The rats scampered past me and over me as I tried to sleep. No place was safe from them.¹⁴

Personal hygiene

Personal hygiene was almost certainly an issue in Tormore Cave, which may have contributed to unsanitary conditions, ill health and the spread of infection and sickness. Expected personal grooming and general health standards are listed in an IRA Training Manual from the 1920s and includes the following regulations:¹⁵

- 29.1 Feet will be inspected twice a week
- 29.4 Socks and shirts will be washed frequently and changed as often as possible
- 29.6 Men will report promptly all ailments to OC Unit
- 29.7 Boots must be well fitting and rendered as water-proof as possible
- 29.8 Wet clothing will be dried before going to bed
- 29.9 Baths must be taken at least once a week and feet must be washed at least once a day
- 29.10 Teeth must be cleaned at night and after each meal

These regulations would have helped engender a semblance of military code while also minimising illness and infection. For the men stationed at Tormore Cave in 1922, however, it would have been almost impossible to abide by most of the instructions cited in the training manual. Water would have been in short supply, with limited opportunities for the men to wash, bathe or shave. The clothes worn must have been perpetually cold and damp. Without a change of clothes or the opportunity to wash and shave, the men must have quickly adopted a dishevelled appearance. Dan Breen recalled of his time on the run in County

¹² Tom Maguire in MacEoin 1980: 297

¹³ BMH.WS0298, Ailbhe Ó Monacháin

¹⁴ MacEoin 1980: 297

¹⁵ IRA Training Manual. Papers of Superintendent Joseph Murray, P/183/3/1 Army personnel, Donegal County Archives.

Tipperary during the War of Independence: ‘Several weeks had often passed during which we had not made the acquaintance of a razor.’¹⁶ By the Civil War, however, Breen noted that ‘discipline in the matter of personal cleanliness was very strict. A column-man with a dirty or unshaven face was unheard of.’¹⁷ As Chris Branley observed regarding life on the run: ‘Twas rough ... sleeping out in a cave or in tombs in the graveyard or sleeping in...a bit of old straw ... that wasn’t simple.’¹⁸ The strict adherence to cleanliness as described in the training manual would have served to maintain discipline and high morale, thus an inability to maintain such standards while billeted in Tormore Cave may have resulted in low morale and perhaps despair.

Health issues and medical treatment

While the cave provided safety and shelter, it came at a cost. We know of at least two medical issues experienced by the men who stayed in Tormore Cave. After the evacuation of Rahelly House, Billy Pilkington broke his clavicle while traversing the mountains. According to one narrative, he had left the cave and climbed up the sheer rock face to the pyramid-shaped rock on the mountain summit, a spot that was probably used as a look-out. While scrambling back down to the cave, he fell, broke his shoulder and was ‘in agony’. A doctor was brought to examine him, probably at the Branley homestead.¹⁹

Another condition endured by the men, which is recalled in local narrative to the present day, is that the men suffered terribly from trench foot (also known as ‘immersion foot syndrome’). This is a serious disease that can lead to amputation and even death. Tens of thousands of soldiers died of trench foot during the First World War. The disease was first documented in 1812 when Napoleon’s army was retreating from Russia and was treated as recently as 1982 during the Falklands War.²⁰ Trench foot is caused by prolonged exposure of the feet to wet, cold and muddy conditions, and particularly when wearing wet socks and shoes or boots for lengthy periods. When the IRA men entered Tormore Cave they were already wet and cold having traversed over 17km across mountainous landscape over several days. It would have been impossible for the men to dry or warm their feet in the absence of a fire. Water would have dripped from the cave roof

pooling on the cave floor, as evidenced by erosion of sections of the mortared floor.²¹ The men must have endured weeks of constantly wet and cold feet, making trench foot inevitable. Some of the symptoms include blisters, wounds, nerve damage, loss of circulation and numbness of the feet. The skin and tissue can fall away from the feet and, in severe cases, a person may lose the ability to walk. Men suffering from trench foot would have found it more difficult to leave the cave or move quickly to a safe house. It is a disease that can lead to lifelong psychological trauma and physical implications. It is worth noting that in Sligo, one of the few anecdotes that has survived in wider local knowledge about the cave concerned the horrendous state of the men’s feet when they left the cave.

The increasingly cold conditions recorded in the second half of October 1922, exacerbated by the damp environment of the cave and the lack of dry clothing and footwear, created an environment conducive to respiratory issues, bronchitis, colds and flu. While we have no evidence that the men in the cave suffered from such issues, numerous relatives of Sligo IRA veterans have spoken of chest and lung issues these men experienced later in life, which their relatives believed had been caused by life on the run and living in dugouts. In Kerry, two IRA men documented the legacy of poor health they suffered in later life, a consequence of the conditions endured while on the run during the Civil War, such as sleeping in wet clothes and not eating properly. Jeremiah Sullivan suffered from asthma, bronchitis and pulmonary tuberculosis, while Michael O’Connor complained of bronchitis, chest problems and breathlessness.²²

When preparing Tormore Cave as a dugout, one might expect that a field medical kit would have been installed in the cave. The copper rivets recovered during excavation (Figure 6.21) may relate to a First Aid case or medical field kit, similar to those used in the First World War. Local doctors would have been called to dugouts and safe houses to check on injured or ill men who were on the run. Several family narratives recall that Billy Pilkington received attention for his broken clavicle from a doctor in the Branley home. We gain some insight into the role of doctors at this time in an account penned by the son of a doctor who practised in Skreen in West Sligo. Dr Cowell was kept busy during the Civil War, ‘visiting the incapacitated

¹⁶ Breen 1924: 53

¹⁷ Breen 1924: 171

¹⁸ Chris Branley, audio recording 2014

¹⁹ Gene O’Carroll pers. comm. to M. Dowd and J. Bonsall, 27.01.2023

²⁰ Bush *et al.* 2023

²¹ During the excavations of March-April 2022, despite occasional rain and sleet, the cave remained largely dry. Upon a return visit in January 2023, however, the cave walls and floor were considerably wetter.

²² O’Shea 2022: 195

in their dug-outs in the mountains, often having to walk miles through slush and bogs ... the visits of mysterious young men to our house, mostly at night, had greatly increased ... One night I opened the door to half a dozen men with rifles, most wearing trilby's and trench-coats, the Republican uniform ... they propped their rifles against the wall behind the front door.²³ The political divide was rarely clear-cut. Dr Cowell had been a medical officer to the local RIC during the War of Independence and, though Catholic, described himself as an 'unashamed unionist'. Yet, when he died in November 1922 at the height of the Civil War, a model-T Ford car of former Republican patients joined the funeral procession behind his coffin.²⁴

Despite attempts to main personal hygiene, IRA men on the run frequently suffered from an ailment known as the 'Republican itch'.²⁵ It manifested as extreme itchiness of the skin, a 'terrible scourge' that likely originated from sleeping on straw and hay. In one safe house in South Sligo, the ailment was treated by applying an ointment made of unsalted butter mixed with sulphur. Another remedy was to pat the affected skin with a wet cloth wrapped round a hot coal.²⁶ Todd Andrews, who spend several months living on the run in poor conditions, reported:

Scabies, known as 'Republican itch' ... was widespread amongst the IRA, although very few proclaimed that they had caught it and still fewer complained about it. Equally, no one ever mentioned that they had 'crabs' or 'lice' ... The cure was straightforward: cleanliness and sulphur ointment. It was most difficult to keep clean in our circumstances. It was impossible to get sulphur ointment. I had to put up with my complaint on the basis of what can't be cured must be endured.²⁷

The itch could become very bad. It interfered so much with the ability to sleep that men were often tempted to return home to recover. The National Army was aware of this; by regularly raiding Republican homes, they ensured IRA men could not recover from their fatigue, wearing them out and making

them easier to apprehend.²⁸

Food and drink

The IRA men undoubtedly experienced periods of hunger while billeted in Tormore Cave, particularly in the early days of occupation due to the heavy National Army presence on the mountains. While on the run in County Tipperary during the War of Independence, Dan Breen recalled that meals were frequently 'few and far between' and he often 'fasted from breakfast to breakfast'. On one occasion, Breen survived for a fortnight on a diet of only boiled rice.²⁹ Archaeological excavations reveal some of the food that was consumed in Tormore Cave as chicken, cod and probably rabbit. According to family narratives, the Hudsons, a local Protestant family, roasted a pig and hung it in nearby woods for the men to access.³⁰ Jack 'Trooper' McHugh was known to shoot rabbits and hares while on the run, and Bridget Pilkington recalled requests for tea and tobacco.³¹ The ceramic pans, crock and glass bottle found during archaeological excavations provide secondary evidence of foodstuffs and beverages. These likely contained typical foods that would have been available in September 1922, including potatoes, turnips, cabbage, bread, porridge and eggs. Meat is unlikely to have been a daily part of the diet but when it was available, it might have included bacon, beef, mutton, duck, chicken and fish. Beverages would have included tea, milk and water. We can surmise that the majority of meals consumed in the cave likely comprised bread (with butter or dripping), porridge, potatoes and tea. Food taken to an abandoned schoolhouse in South Sligo, that was sometimes occupied by Frank Carty during the Civil War, included butter, milk, vegetables, eggs, tea and water.³²

In his recollections some 50 years after the events of September 1922, Jack 'Trooper' McHugh remembered visiting a cottage in the Glencar Valley where the woman of the house was preparing a rabbit that 'Trooper' had shot. The prospect of a meal was interrupted by National Army gunfire however, causing 'Trooper' and his comrade to dash back to Tormore Cave.³³ Maura Branley recollected that on one occasion, 'the men came down to my great grandmother Sarah Branley's house during the cover of darkness and during a rainstorm. She had a lamb slaughtered and fed them. And then

²³ Cowell 1989: 72

²⁴ Cowell 1989: 72

²⁵ Breen 1924: 172

²⁶ Jennings 1989: 14

²⁷ Andrews 1979: 273

²⁸ Shanahan 2019: 9

²⁹ Breen 1924: 36

³⁰ Jeremy Bird pers. comm. to M. Dowd, May 2013

³¹ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.04.2023; Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 29.04.2022

³² Jennings 1989: 46

³³ Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1976

they returned to the cave.³⁴ Alcoholic drinks, such as stout and *poitín*, would have been available within the local community, but strict alcohol absenteeism, which was common to many IRA volunteers, was almost certainly enforced by Billy Pilkington.

As the weeks wore on, it is likely that some men were sent out to commandeer food. In County Kerry, IRA veteran Bertie Scully recalled that men billeted in a dugout in mountains near Castlemaine town were sent out by OC Paddy Cahill to visit between 200 and 300 farms to gather potatoes and provisions.³⁵ Wild foodstuffs would also have been exploited. In County Kerry, one IRA man living on the run discovered a duck's nest, which thereafter supplied the men with eggs.³⁶ At Tormore, blackberries and hazelnuts may have been available in September 1922.

The butchered sheep and goat carcasses from Area 2 in Tormore Cave defy easy interpretation. Butchery appears to have taken place at an unknown time after the occupation of September and October 1922 (see Appendix 8). The clandestine nature of the butchery strongly suggests that the sheep and goats had been stolen from the mountain and secretly slaughtered in the cave. It is quite possible that this relates to a later phase of Civil War usage of the cave, perhaps in early 1923. In describing how he and comrades survived in West Kerry while living on the run, Greg Ashe wryly commented: 'You couldn't die with the hunger when there are sheep on the mountain.'³⁷

Religion and faith

The harsh living conditions experienced in Tormore Cave broadly paralleled the conditions endured in prisons and internment camps during the revolutionary period. Louis Walsh recounted some of the difficulties he experienced in Ballykinlar Internment Camp, County Down during the War of Independence. He was affected by the lack of seclusion and solitude and the constant noise. He recorded that though, 'the nerves of all of us were frayed by the irksomeness and uncertainty and monotony', there was 'a spirit of give-and-take, a kindness and generosity and unselfishness that made everything as easy as possible for us.'³⁸ Walsh attributed religion and patriotism as the two saving graces that allowed men to survive in

what was a 'thoroughly demoralising' environment.³⁹ At Ballykinlar, Mass was celebrated each morning and the rosary was said in the huts every night.⁴⁰ During his time on the run, saying prayers and the rosary were also daily activities for Dan Breen and his comrades.⁴¹

Religion was almost certainly a core component of life in Tormore Cave in autumn 1922. Considering that OC Billy Pilkington was particularly devout (later becoming a Redemptorist priest, see Chapter 8), the rosary or other prayers were likely recited multiple times each day. Pilkington's religious devotion was well known within the IRA; Michael Collins once referred to him derogatorily as 'that monk' (see Chapter 8). He had an aversion to alcohol, smoking and swearing. Several IRA veterans recalled that Pilkington ordered them to say the rosary before or after 'a job', including the Moneygold ambush of October 1920 and the killing of two RIC constables at Ballysadare in April 1921 (see Chapter 8). Just over a year after the events of Tormore Cave, Pilkington was serving communion to comrades while imprisoned in Mountjoy Gaol; he likely took on a similar role as spiritual leader at Tormore Cave.⁴² Considering the fact that six of their comrades had just been killed, the men billeted in the cave might well have understood themselves to have been saved by the mercy of God, and it is likely that the rosary and other prayers were said multiple times each day in acknowledgement of their narrow escape. Such religious rituals would have helped put structure on the day, pass the time, boost morale, offer hope, strengthen resolve and improve spirits. Kathleen Carroll, sister of Paddy Carroll (one of Sligo's Noble Six), recalled that each of the six men who had been shot dead en route to the cave, 'all had religion on them ... they all had religious emblems.'⁴³ By this she meant that they each had a religious item on their person when they were killed. When his body was recovered from Slievemore, for instance, her brother Paddy had a crucifix clasped in his hand (Figure 7.5).

Passing the time and the emotional impact

Military rank would have been observed within Tormore Cave to maintain order and discipline. Billy Pilkington likely set menial tasks for the men in the interests of staving off boredom, depression or anxiety. The cramped size of the space meant that the group probably slept in shifts and also took turns at sentry

³⁴ Maura Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 08.12.2021 (as recalled by her father, Frank Branley)

³⁵ Bertie Scully in O'Malley and Horgan 2012: 157

³⁶ John Joe Rice in O'Malley and Horgan 2012: 291

³⁷ Greg Ashe in O'Malley and Horgan 2012: 122

³⁸ Walsh 1921: 45

³⁹ Walsh 1921: 45

⁴⁰ Walsh 1921: 46

⁴¹ Breen 1924

⁴² Sinn Féin, 27.12.1924

⁴³ Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986

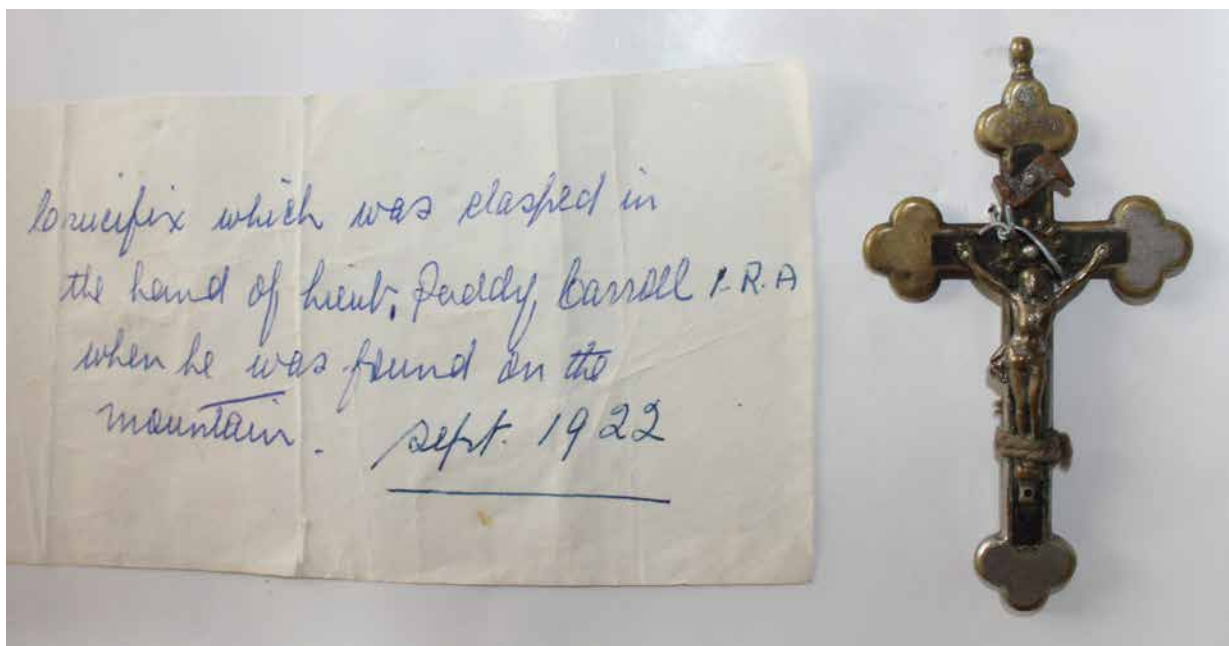


Figure 7.5 The crucifix that was recovered from Paddy Carroll's hand after he was killed by the National Army on Slievemore on 20 September 1922 (Marion Dowd).

duty at the cave entrance and scouting on the cliff above. Other duties may have included sweeping the floor (potentially explaining the various finds in the Cubby), tidying the living space, collecting and dividing food supplies and emptying the portable toilet.

Chris Branley described the cave as 'damp, and not a very sociable place to spend time.'⁴⁴ Humour, singing, poetry recitation, storytelling and conversation all helped to maintain good spirits between internees at Ballykinlar Internment Camp, and the same might be expected at Tormore Cave.⁴⁵ The time spent confined to the cave provided an opportunity to discuss political matters, nationalism or Ireland's colonial history, yet there can be no doubt that the several weeks spent in Tormore Cave would have been an extremely difficult and plausibly traumatic ordeal. There must have been periods when some or all of the men experienced the 'painful monotony', 'depression', 'aching loneliness' and 'terrible mental suffering' that Louis Walsh reported of his time at Ballykinlar Internment Camp.⁴⁶ Todd Andrews, in describing his imprisonment in Newbridge Barracks, a Civil War internment camp, gives an impression of how the lost gains of the revolution led to pessimism and faded hopes: 'The high morale which existed in the Rath [Camp in the

Curragh Internment Camp, Co. Kildare, during the War of Independence] had disappeared to be supplanted by the disenchantment of defeat. The future of the nation had no meaning for us ... Even release was not looked forward to with much enthusiasm because most of the prisoners had no special future to look forward to.'⁴⁷ Andrews described how many of the prisoners became undisciplined, neglected shaving and stopped taking baths: 'The prevailing atmosphere of the camp ... was like that of a mediaeval monastery in the grip of accidie ... the general acceptance of bad language was also a symptom of falling morale.'⁴⁸ Andrews and his prison hut comrades were safe from the encompassing lethargy, however, due to the presence of Paddy Rigney of the Dublin Brigade ASU: 'a natural leader, a disciplinarian with an almost passionate interest in the cleanliness and order of our hut.'⁴⁹ The men in Tormore Cave most certainly had such a leadership figure in Billy Pilkington, who helped hold them together and whose efforts appear to have prevented them from breaking rank. Incidentally, Pilkington was known to be wholly intolerant of bad language. Despite the killings of their comrades prior to taking refuge in Tormore Cave, a sense of discipline, solidarity, trust and friendship must surely have prevailed.

⁴⁴ Chris Branley, video and audio recording 2012

⁴⁵ Walsh 1921: chapters IX and XVII

⁴⁶ Walsh 1921: 93-4

⁴⁷ Andrews 1979: 296

⁴⁸ Andrews 1979: 299

⁴⁹ Andrews 1979: 296

The camaraderie, which undoubtedly existed and allowed for the successful use of the cave, must at times have given way to irate moods, ill tempers and arguments that could be expected of men trying to reconcile a lack of personal space with a longing for home comforts and family. While the conclusion of Pilkington's efforts appears to have been successful, the fact remains that the men likely shared and struggled with similar feelings to those in the internment camps where 'interest in the Irish language was at a discount; nobody spoke it and nobody learned it. Cathleen Ní Houlihan [a personification of Ireland and Irish nationalism] was something of a joke.'⁵⁰ It is possible that passions held for the Republic were now beginning to re-centre on questions of how, if they escaped, life might look for the men in a new Ireland. Indeed, such

feelings are described by Louis Walsh of his time at Ballykinlar Internment Camp.⁵¹ Walsh described some of the concerns of internees, which can't have been much different to those experienced by the men in Tormore Cave:

Most of us had dependants, and the uncertainty as to the duration of our detention and anxiety about the fate of our families, if our resources should become exhausted, must have kept many a man awake at night ... Then there were the loneliness and the heart-hunger and the yearning for one's home and for the grasp of friendly hands and the sound of a loved one's voice.⁵²

⁵⁰ Andrews 1979: 296-7

⁵¹ Walsh 1921: 93-4

⁵² Walsh 1921: 93-4

People & Memory

Chapter 8

General Officer Commanding Billy Pilkington

He was very much loved by his men; very religious, a fighting saint¹

Ernie O'Malley

The most senior IRA leader in County Sligo during the Civil War was Billy Pilkington, General Officer Commanding of the 3rd Western Division. It was Pilkington who had issued the directive for the IRA to escape into the mountains and regroup at the 'Glencar hideout' following the evacuation of Rahelly House in September 1922. He knew the dugout from previous periods of living on the run. During the War of Independence, Billy Pilkington and Martin Bernard McGowan retreated to Tormore Cave after interactions with the Black and Tans.² Pilkington's longest billet in the cave, however, was during the Civil War. Two and a half years after the Civil War ended, Billy Pilkington resigned from the IRA and emigrated to England to train as a Redemptorist priest.³ For the next 52 years he devoted his life to religious service, working in South Africa and Britain. To the best of our knowledge, he was the only senior IRA figure who chose this career path in the wake of the Irish Civil War. Billy Pilkington's role during the revolutionary period is poorly represented in scholarship. This is due to the fact that, after the Civil War, he abandoned politics, left Ireland, and lived the remainder of his life abroad, in a world almost entirely detached from his former life. Yet not only was he a pivotal IRA figure in the northwest of Ireland from 1919 to 1923, he was also a key player on the national stage. Despite being arrested during the War of Independence, and again after the cessation of the Civil War, Pilkington managed to evade arrest during the events and timeframe of the Civil War itself.

The Pilkington family

William Pilkington was the second of twelve children born to Margaret Mary (née Torsney) and John

Pilkington on 2 June 1894 (Figure 8.1). In the 1901 census, the Pilkington family lived in a four-roomed house, with a fowl house and turf house, on Distillery Lane (now Lower Abbey Street) in Sligo town (Figure 8.2). John Pilkington was the town postman. He and his wife, Maggie, by then had five sons, listed in the census as Jim (James), Willie (William/Billy), John, Fred and Edward.⁴

As a child, Billy Pilkington was educated in Sligo town at the Marist Brothers School on Quay Street (now the MSLETB Training Centre). Two new Marist Brothers schools were built on Quay Street in 1898, a Junior School downstairs with a Senior School upstairs.⁵ Billy Pilkington would have been four or five years old when the Junior School opened. When he attended, the principal would have been Rev. Br. Rickard.⁶ Billy progressed to the Day Trades Preparatory School, a secondary school for boys, within the same complex on Quay Street.⁷ When the Day Trades School opened in 1908, Billy Pilkington would have been 14 years old and may have been amongst the first cohort of students taught there. The school aimed 'to provide for boys, who had completed the ordinary National School course, a special training course for two years which would enable them to be apprenticed to any skilled trade and to take up their work intelligently.'⁸ Billy would have studied subjects such as science, mathematics, metalworking, carpentry and woodworking, Irish and history.

By the time of the 1911 census, Maggie and John Pilkington had been married for nineteen years. During that time, Maggie had given birth to eleven children,

¹ O'Malley 1978: 50

² Chris Branley, audio recording 2008

³ Throughout his life he was known to family, friends and comrades as Billy. Occasionally, comrades outside Sligo referred to him as Liam. Following his ordination as a priest in 1932, he preferred to be known as Fr William, though his family and friends in Sligo called him Fr Billy. To the present day, he is known as Fr Billy Pilkington by relatives and people in Sligo who knew him.

⁴ Census of Ireland 1901

⁵ The Marist Brothers established two schools in Sligo town in 1862: a Primary School on Quay Street and a fee-paying 'Academy', equivalent to a Secondary School, on Chapel Street. The Marists withdrew from the Quay Street building in 1880 but returned in 1898. Two new schools were built on the Quay Street site that year.

⁶ Dermot 1962

⁷ During the Civil War, windows and doors of the buildings were 'smashed by stray bullets' on several occasions (Dermot 1962)

⁸ Mullin 2002: 265



Figure 8.1 Maggie and John Pilkington with six of their children circa 1901-2. Children, from left to right: John, William (Billy, circled), baby Mary on her mother's lap, Joseph (Josie), James and Fredrick (Fred) (Anne Feehily).⁹

two of whom had died. The nine surviving children were listed in the census as James, William, John, Fredrick, Joseph, Michael, Mary, Martin and Gerald. Edward (recorded in the 1901 census) and Margaret (a daughter who had been born between the two censuses) had died by this time. Gerald subsequently also died in childhood. The last baby born to the Pilkingtons was a daughter, Anna.¹⁰ The 1911 census records that Billy, then 16 years old, could read and write and was an apprentice to a watchmaker (Figure 8.3). The family of eleven still lived in the same house on Distillery Lane (Figure 8.2).¹¹ That year saw the earliest mention of Billy Pilkington in the newspapers. The teenager sang *The Croppy Boy* at the Sligo Gaelic Club's St Patrick's

Day (17 March) event. The club had been established in 1911 with the aim of developing Irish ideals through lectures, concerts and debates.¹²

Urged by an inherent love of country

Following his secondary education, Billy Pilkington progressed to the Forestry College on the Avondale Estate in County Wicklow, former home of Charles Stewart Parnell. The school had been established by the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction in 1904 to train young men in plantation establishment and forestry management, and to conduct field trials to determine the most suitable tree species for the

⁹ The children's names are incorrect in Feehily 2020: 52

¹⁰ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 29.04.2022

¹¹ 1911 Census

¹² Farry 2012: 6

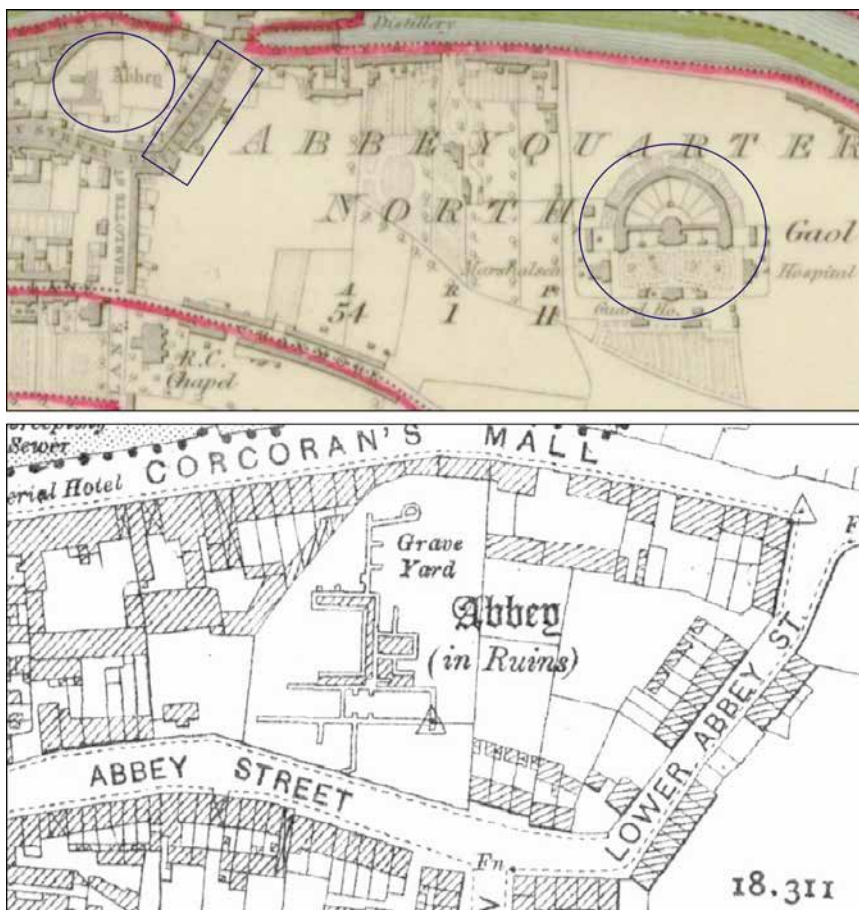


Figure 8.2 The Pilkington family lived on Distillery Lane, now Lower Abbey Street, in Sligo town. The house was located immediately outside the grounds of the medieval Dominican Friary. During the War of Independence, Billy Pilkington evaded capture on more than one occasion by scaling the friary walls and escaping through the friary grounds. He also hid in a tomb within the medieval complex. Less than 300m east of the Pilkington home was Sligo Gaol. Michael Collins was incarcerated there in April 1918. Billy Pilkington coordinated two breakouts of IRA prisoners from Sligo Gaol during the War of Independence. Top: First Edition Ordnance Survey map; bottom: 25-inch Ordnance Survey map. Historic mapping in Figure 8.2 was granted using Tailte Éireann Permit No. 9314 © Tailte Éireann/Government of Ireland.

afforestation of Ireland.¹³ The college was forced to close in 1914 at the outbreak of the First World War.¹⁴ On his return to Sligo, Billy, then aged 20, began working as an apprentice at Wehrly Brothers Ltd., a jewellers and watchmakers in the town (Figure 8.4).¹⁵

During his time at the Forestry College, Pilkington became more politically aware. He came into contact with Liam Mellows, a senior Republican figure, who apparently initiated him into the Irish Republican

Brotherhood (IRB).¹⁶ A 1923 Republican newsletter referred to how,

when the Forestry Department closed down in 1914, and bid its students to join up to fight the battle of the Empire [i.e., First World War], Pilkington did not answer that call but hied him home to Sligo, and started to organise the Volunteers. The Sligo Brigade is the story of his work.¹⁷

¹³ Carey 2004: 20

¹⁴ Carey 2004: 22

¹⁵ Farry 1992: 54; Farry 2012: 121

¹⁶ McManus 2012: 48; MacEivilly 2009

¹⁷ *Daily Sheet*, 07.11.1923



Figure 8.3 The date of this photograph of Billy Pilkington is not known, but it appears to have been taken when he was a teenager or young man (after Farry 2000).

In 1913, Pilkington joined the Irish Volunteers on their formation in Sligo, possibly recruited by Tom Scanlon, who over the following decade became a close friend and comrade.¹⁸ Pilkington quickly rose through the ranks becoming head of the IRB in counties Sligo, Leitrim and Roscommon, and chaired IRB meetings in the region. According to IRB recruit Eugene Kilkenny: 'Business contracted at the meetings was generally a survey of the situation existing and what could be done to intensify the warfare against the enemy, and exhortations to keep the ordinary Volunteers going and active.'¹⁹ In 1932, *The Sligo Champion* wrote that Billy Pilkington was one of the first to join the Irish Volunteers in County Sligo, 'urged by an inherent love of country, intensely Irish, and ever ready to face any fight, any danger that threatened Ireland's cause.'²⁰ The newspaper continued to state that he was promoted to senior officer because of his 'extraordinary personality and remarkable power over men.'²¹ These same qualities became even more apparent during the ensuing War of Independence and Civil War.

In January 1916, the British parliament passed the Military Service Act conscripting most single men (aged 18-41), and married men from May 1916, to join the First World War. While many Irishmen volunteered to serve, conscription was not applied to Ireland, though the threat loomed heavily. Billy Pilkington was a major local agitator and was a director of the local Anti-Conscription movement.²² He set up the Carraroe Company of the I North Sligo Brigade IRA on 4 March 1917.²³ Pilkington was noted by British intelligence as being a 'Drilling Instructor' and was reported for at least four cases of illegal drilling without arms in the final months of 1917. One of these drills, on 25 November 1917, involved a group of 50 volunteers marching from the Sinn Féin Hall in Sligo town to a field in Magheraboy. In relation to this event, Pilkington was described by the British Major-General for the area as 'a most aggressive Sinn Féiner'.²⁴ A British internal recommendation suggested Pilkington 'be tried by Court Martial'. Despite this, drilling continued. Ninety men were drilled by Pilkington and James Kirby in February 1918.²⁵ In April, the British government finally attempted to extend conscription to Ireland, forcing a national civil crisis. By the end of the year, conscription failed to pass in a political sphere which had become radicalised.

About September 1918, Billy Pilkington led the first raid for arms that was carried out by the 1st Battalion (Sligo Town) of the I North Sligo Brigade IRA. The target, the steam ship *Tartar*, was docked at Sligo Quays. Three rifles and a large quantity of ammunition were captured.²⁶ Pilkington also appears to have led the next operation, in October 1918, which involved dismantling about 30 motor cars in an attempt 'to harass the British Enemy'.²⁷ He assisted Sinn Féin candidates in the December 1918 election.²⁸

War of Independence (21 January 1919–11 July 1921)

Billy Pilkington led, or was a key coordinator of, almost all significant operations in Sligo town and North Sligo during the War of Independence (Figure 8.5). He also organised numerous significant operations in South Sligo, especially during Frank Carty's various periods of imprisonment. Pilkington was often noted by IRA volunteers as being active on the ground during operations, regularly leading the charge in attacks

¹⁸ Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986 – she remembered that Billy Pilkington was recruited to the Irish Volunteers by Tom Scanlon in 1915; MacEvilly 2009

¹⁹ BMH.WS1146, Eugene Kilkenny

²⁰ *The Sligo Champion*, 24.09.1932

²¹ *The Sligo Champion*, 24.09.1932

²² *The Sligo Champion*, 24.09.1932

²³ MA/MSPC/A/29

²⁴ Farry 1992: 109

²⁵ WO 35/96/5; WO 35/97/7

²⁶ MA/MSPC/A/29

²⁷ MA/MSPC/A/29

²⁸ MacEvilly 2009



Figure 8.4 Billy Pilkington worked as an apprentice watchmaker at Wehrly Brothers Ltd. on O'Connell Street (then Knox Street) in Sligo town from late 1914. He may also have worked there in 1911 (James Bonsall).

and ambushes. During the War of Independence Billy Pilkington was primarily based in County Sligo, though he travelled to Dublin on several occasions to meet with GHQ and occasionally travelled to England on IRA business. He stayed at least once at Marsden's boarding house, a safe house on Warwick Street, Digbeth in Birmingham, with James W. Cunningham, officer in charge of purchasing and acquiring arms and ammunition in Birmingham for the IRA.²⁹

In the early months of 1919, events moved quickly with the establishment of the first Dáil in Dublin. Billy Pilkington was promoted to OC of the Sligo Brigade in March 1919 when Jeremiah Joseph (J.J.) 'Ginger' O'Connell was transferred to IRA GHQ in Dublin. Raids for arms became commonplace throughout the country and the first attacks on Crown forces took place. In County Sligo, in common with most of the northwest, the IRA was somewhat slower to assert itself by armed means. Throughout 1919, Billy Pilkington planned a series of raids from his brigade HQ on Teeling Street in Sligo town.³⁰ In March, 'all principal Unionists buildings and private homes and Masonic Lodge' were raided for rifles.³¹ Two ceremonial swords were recovered from the Masonic Lodge (Figure 8.6), while 200,000 cartridge cases were taken from Blackwoods wholesaler. In late 1919, about 200 houses were raided for arms, as well as the Sligo Goods Store. Sligo County Council and Sligo

Corporation were raided and rate books were taken. The Poor Law Guardians and Mental Hospital books were also commandeered.³²

A predilection for drilling

Discipline amongst IRA units was maintained by regular open drilling, which eventually led to Pilkington's arrest. On 7 April 1919, he was brought to Sligo Courthouse on two charges of unlawful assembly, specifically for 'illegal drilling' in Sligo town. The first case was for unlawful assembly and marching on Sligo Town Hall on 3 March, in command of 70 volunteers. The second charge was unlawful assembly in the Market Yard in Sligo town on St Patrick's Day (17 March 1919) in command of 148 men in three columns. The *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph* covered the event in detail.³³ Large crowds, which Sligo Courthouse could not accommodate, gathered to witness what must have been a sensational event for the town. It was announced at court that a third charge would be brought forth, to which Pilkington exclaimed, 'You have me now!'³⁴ He then thanked the court for allowing him the opportunity to give a statement:

As a Volunteer, whose loyalty and fealty are claimed by this country, I absolutely refuse to acknowledge the right of this

²⁹ BMH.WS0922, James W. Cunningham

³⁰ MA/MSPC/A/29

³¹ Eugene Gilbride, UCDA O'MN, P17b/137

³² MA/MSPC/A/29

³³ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 12.04.1919

³⁴ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 12.04.1919

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT



Figure 8.5 Map of known actions Billy Pilkington was involved in during the War of Independence (James Bonsall).

court to try me, because England bases her authority on her power to do so. This is the policy of force, and it is not alone the antithesis of justice, but it is absolutely opposed to the aims and objects for which England said she went to war [First World War]. Now, gentlemen, you are well aware that the Irish people ... have set up a government that has the approval and consent of the majority of the Irish people. Consequently, if you believe in the sincerity of English altruism in the war, there is only one logical interpretation of my actions – that is, that I was merely influenced by that program in carrying out the work that was calculated to make An Dáil Éireann the *de facto* government of Ireland.³⁵

The *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph* continued: ‘the conclusion of the speech was marked by applause by those who occupied seats [i.e., the public] in the court.’ Captain Fitzpatrick, Resident Magistrate, recognising Pilkington’s hard stance but courteous manner, sentenced him to six months in prison but offered bail on condition of good behaviour for two years. Billy stated, ‘No, I will go to jail.’³⁶ His comment again excited the crowd and ‘was greeted with loud applause ... a brother of the accused, Fred, was removed from the court. Fitzpatrick said that if any more demonstrations of that kind took place the Court would have to be cleared ... [and] that those present would have to remember that the Court was not a theatre.’ As the court was adjourned, Billy’s mother, Maggie Pilkington, entered the courtroom and went directly towards her son in the dock asking:

‘Are you sentenced?’,
‘I am’ said the son,
‘And what did they give you?’ said the mother,
‘Six months in jail,’ was the reply,
‘Did you give bail?’ was the next question,
‘No’ said the accused,
‘Good!’ said Mrs Pilkington. ‘If you did, I would not let you back into the house again.’³⁷

This detail reveals the political ideals of Maggie Pilkington and her support for the political activism of her sons; she was not a passive observer. The day’s

events were not yet over, however. In the afternoon, the court was convened to introduce preliminary charges for the third set of offences committed by Pilkington. Constable McNally described how at 9pm on 26 March 1919, he had observed Pilkington drilling 28 men carrying hurleys. They were quickly followed by a second group of 28 or 30 men. The constable noted that ‘a party of ladies – about 30 or 35 – “fell in” behind them. They carried hurleys also ... Pilkington ... gave words of command [Atten]’tion! Slope arms!’ The report continued:

At the last word of command, the men with the hurleys brought them to the position of “slope arms” [i.e., weapon upright against shoulder].
Captain Fitzpatrick – *And did the ladies do anything?*

Witness – *They did,*

Captain Fitzpatrick – *Did they slope arms?*

Witness – *Well, some of them* (Laughter).

Continuing, witness said – *The next word of command given by Pilkington was ‘By the right, quick march’ and the men and ladies marched off down Albert Street [now known as Pearse Road], each party following each other.*³⁸

The report of women, presumably Cumann na mBan members, drilling alongside men and bearing ‘arms’ in military ‘slope position’ reflects Pilkington’s enlightened leadership. Cumann na mBan member Mary Farrell noted attending drilling classes in Sligo town between April 1917 and April 1920.³⁹ Her comrade, Winifred Whelan, similarly reported drilling on Chapel Street during the War of Independence.⁴⁰ IRA’s Patrick Gilmartin documented that he had led Cumann na mBan drilling in Sligo town in 1921 and 1922.⁴¹

Billy Pilkington was removed to jail but returned to Sligo Courthouse the following week, 14 April 1919, for sentencing for the third charge. He was given an additional month in prison. Pilkington used the opportunity to undermine the court and garner political agency amongst the public assembled in the Courthouse. Noting the RIC would have had many more incidents of his illegal activities on record, he questioned why he was being persecuted for just three offences, making a witty appeal to the court:

³⁵ MA/MSPC/A/29; *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 12.04.1919; MacEvilly 2009

³⁶ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 12.04.1919

³⁷ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 12.04.1919

³⁸ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 12.04.1919

³⁹ MSP34REF56932, Mary Farrell

⁴⁰ MSP34REF56164, Winifred Whelan

⁴¹ MSP34REF54764, Bea Kilgannon – Letter from Patrick Gilmartin



Figure 8.6 In 1919, the Masonic Lodge (built 1895) on the Mall in Sligo town was raided for arms in an operation orchestrated by Billy Pilkington (Marion Dowd).

I understand and appreciate ... that the motives underlying those charges are to cure me of this predilection I have for drill. Well, in order that I should be cured, I would suggest that as the police are familiar with my Volunteer activities for the last two years in Sligo ... they should make each of those actions of mine the basis of a charge, and in that way they might work up a sentence of fifteen or twenty years against me, with the result that if I got that sentence I might be cured. In conclusion, I hope that you will consider the feasibility of my suggestion.⁴²

A loud applause was made by the courtroom observers, with the magistrate again threatening to clear the court. Pilkington was sentenced to seven months in total. J.J. O'Connell returned to Sligo to replace him as acting brigade commander during his prison sentence.⁴³ Pilkington was a free man by mid-October and was present on Wine Street in Sligo town at the arrest of his IRA colleague, Alec McCabe, to whom he 'gave the tip that the police were on his track.'⁴⁴

Raids and jailbreaks

⁴² *The Sligo Champion*, 12.04.1919

⁴³ Collins Papers, IE/MA/CP/04/31

⁴⁴ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 18.10.1919

On the fourth anniversary of the 1916 Rising (3-5 April 1920), IRA GHQ organised a country-wide burning of RIC barracks and raiding of custom houses and tax offices. In accordance with the national campaign, Billy Pilkington, together with about 60 volunteers, raided Sligo Custom House on 3 April. Billy Pilkington along with two others, armed with revolvers, first entered the building and held up the clerk. It took several hours to gather all the income tax records. At daybreak about 'two tons' of material was removed and burnt outside Sligo town. The Revenue Commissioners made a subsequent compensation claim for £31,500.⁴⁵ Nationally, the IRA attacked and burned 258 RIC barracks. In Sligo, Pilkington led attacks on the RIC barracks at Strandhill, Rosses Point and Drumcliff on 12 May 1920. The latter two were partly demolished and Strandhill Barracks was set on fire and destroyed (Figure 8.7). All three were left 'unfit for habitation'.⁴⁶

On 2 June 1920, over 60 men from the Sligo Brigade IRA, led by Billy Pilkington, attacked the RIC Barracks at Fivemilebourne, County Leitrim in a raid for arms. The Sligo town contingent first gathered at Carns, a few kilometres southeast of the town, then crossed Lough Gill by boat. The attack 'lasted some time' but was eventually abandoned at daybreak (see Chapter 9

⁴⁵ MA/MSPC/A/29; Anon. n.d.; Kilgannon 1926: 70; Farry 1992: 189; Farry 2012: 52

⁴⁶ MA/MSPC/A/29; Kilgannon 1926: 70; Farry 1992: 191; Farry 2012: 52

for more detail).⁴⁷ Years later, when asked how many IRA men were involved in the attack, Peadar Glynn remarked: 'Far too many; in fact, we might have captured it if we had less.'⁴⁸

Shortly afterwards, Billy Pilkington led the daring rescue of Frank Carty and other IRA prisoners from Sligo Gaol (Figure 8.8) on 26 June 1920.⁴⁹ Carty had been arrested in February of that year charged with involvement in a raid on Temple House near Ballymote, residence of Major Alexander Perceval.⁵⁰ A sympathetic warder, Stephen O'Connor, at Sligo Gaol had carried messages between Carty on the inside and Pilkington on the outside. O'Connor had a key to Carty's cell. He agreed to pass it to the IRA, but they were to deflect suspicion by pretending to overpower him when they entered the building.⁵¹ An alternate account is that Bridget Clancy had acquired a 'skeleton key' for Sligo Gaol, possibly linked to her secretarial work in Sligo Courthouse.⁵² Volunteers from North Sligo and South Sligo assisted in the breakout, with reports of up to 100 Republicans involved. In the words of one of the participants, Andy Doocey, 'every bloody volunteer was in on that job'.⁵³ Tom Scanlon agreed, stating 'we had men from five battalions on that job and we could have carried the gaol away then, stone by stone!'⁵⁴ The men first assembled at Sligo Cemetery, where Pilkington ordered them to kneel and say the rosary, even though it was raining.⁵⁵ They then proceeded to Sligo Gaol. The men were not permitted to smoke lest they attract attention.⁵⁶

At about 2am, wooden ladders were used to scale the external prison walls and rope ladders were used to descend into the grounds. The telephone wires were cut. The keys, however, did not work and Tom Scanlon recalled: 'finally we had to break open the front door with a sledgehammer. A lad took off his coat and he was delighted to swing the sledge.'⁵⁷ Thirteen men entered the prison while the night patrolman and warder in charge of the alarm were overpowered. In one account explaining how Frank Carty's cell was unlocked, Seamus

Devins and four men went to the governor's residence and demanded the keys. Carty was released from his cell and fourteen men, including Pilkington and Carty, walked out of Sligo Gaol.⁵⁸ In local memory, Frank Carty was then taken across Lough Gill by boat.⁵⁹ The escaped prisoners appear to have been brought to the home of Lizzie O'Beirne, President of the Collooney branch of Cumann na mBan, where she supplied them with clean clothing.⁶⁰ Seán MacEoin later claimed that he had sketched two plans of the layout of Sligo Gaol while he had been imprisoned there in 1919: 'This plan was sent out of the prison to Billy Pilkington, the Brigade OC, and it was eventually utilised, at a much later date, for the rescue of Carty and other prisoners.'⁶¹ Years later, by then a priest serving in England, Pilkington apparently met the warder he had tied up in Sligo Gaol on the night of the Frank Carty jailbreak, when visiting a home in a parish where he was giving a mission.⁶²

The success of the daring Frank Carty jailbreak provided a great boost to IRA morale. It became rumoured locally that 'a squad from Cork ... had done it, for Cork accents had been heard in the bars in town the previous night.'⁶³ The implication was that the level of professionalism was so high, it must have been carried out by a well-established southern unit. From that point onwards, the Sligo Town Company was active almost every night in operations such as trenching roads, raiding stores for 'Belfast Boycott' goods, collecting arms and ammunition from boats arriving into Sligo Quay, and helping to transfer arms from North to South Sligo.⁶⁴ On 7 July 1920, a conference was held in Sligo Town Hall to appoint district and parish arbitrators. Pilkington was appointed to the Sligo borough Parish Court.⁶⁵

Moneygold ambush, 25 October 1920

The Moneygold ambush, led by Billy Pilkington on 25 October 1920, was arguably the most successful IRA attack of County Sligo's War of Independence.⁶⁶ In its violence and ferocity, it demonstrated Sligo's commitment to the campaign for Irish independence.

⁴⁷ MA/MSPC/A/29

⁴⁸ MSP34REF47091, Peadar Glynn

⁴⁹ MA/MSPC/A/29

⁵⁰ Francis J. Carty, Dublin Castle files, WO 35/206/31

⁵¹ BMH.WS1384, Michael Nevin

⁵² MSP34REF60500, Bridget Clancy

⁵³ Andy Doocey, audio recording 1986

⁵⁴ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

⁵⁵ Information collected by Eve Mulligan from Christina Feehily, niece of Billy Pilkington, 20.05.2017; Gene O'Carroll pers. comm. to M. Dowd and J. Bonsall, 27.01.2023

⁵⁶ Coyle 2008: 35

⁵⁷ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

⁵⁸ MA/MSPC/A/29; BMH.WS1278, John P. Brennan; BMH.WS1545, Martin Bernard McGowan; Kilgannon 1926: 70; Farry 1992: 226-9; Farry 2012: 56; Harte 2014: 25

⁵⁹ Hugh Gallagher pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 24.03.2023

⁶⁰ MSP34REF44588, Lizzie Lang (née O'Beirne)

⁶¹ BMH.WS1716, Seán MacEoin

⁶² *The Sligo Champion*, 08.04.1977

⁶³ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

⁶⁴ MA/MSPC/A/29

⁶⁵ Kilgannon 1926: 70

⁶⁶ MA/MSPC/A/29; Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133; BMH.WS1383, Patrick McCannan; BMH.WS1545, Martin Bernard McGowan; Kilgannon 1926: 72; Farry 1992: 253-6; McGowan 1993: 116-7; Farry 2012: 60; Farry 2017: 61; Abbott 2019: 175-6



Figure 8.7 Strandhill RIC Barracks in Killaspugbrone townland is now a private residence (Marion Dowd).

At this time ‘flying columns’ or ‘Active Service Units’ (ASUs) had not been properly established in County Sligo. In preparation for the Moneygold attack, Pilkington began to devolve the columns, drawing men from the North Sligo and Geevagh battalions who were on the run, and as many as ten men from the South Donegal Battalion seem to have been involved.⁶⁷ By the end of 1920, Pilkington led the Active Service Unit attached to the I Sligo Brigade.⁶⁸ It was composed of 35 men (veteran Willie Devins recalled in 1986 that they went ‘in odd numbers, for luck’).⁶⁹ County Sligo had very low supplies of arms and ammunition. What arms could be sourced were brought from Sligo town to Grange in preparation for the Moneygold ambush.⁷⁰ Some arms were apparently smuggled into Sligo by train.⁷¹

On the morning of 24 October 1920, Charles Gildea and Andrew Conway arrived to carry out a final reconnaissance of the ambush site in Moneygold townland. Soon after, Billy Pilkington and Seamus Devins arrived with the remaining men. Pilkington organised the site as follows:

4-5 slot trenches were dug on the western

side of the road, located over a dip in the land, 4.5m above the road level. These would accommodate five or six riflemen. Seamus Devins and three others [were] located on side road at Derry townland. Two houses on the Cliffoney side were occupied by four men each, all of whom were armed with a shotgun. Six more in reserve occupied a house on the Grange side of the road. Ten more men in reserve were placed at a mound, close to but east of Grange ringfort.⁷²

The men, wearing face masks, took up position at nightfall and lay in wait. The following morning, at 11.30am, a nine-man or ten-man RIC bicycle patrol, travelling two abreast, left Cliffoney RIC Barracks. As they approached the ambush site, Pilkington gave the order to prepare to open fire. Devins, hiding at the side of the road, jumped out, raised his rifle to his eye and gave the order to surrender. The RIC immediately dismounted and began to reach for their rifles and Mills grenades. Accordingly, ‘fire was opened up on them from all sides. [The] Volunteers fired only two volleys and the RIC had no opportunity of returning fire.’⁷³ Sergeant Patrick Perry (aged 51, from County Meath), Constable Patrick Keown (aged 25, from County Fermanagh) and Constable Patrick Laffey (aged 41,

⁶⁷ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O’MN, P17b/133; BMH/CD/057

⁶⁸ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O’MN, P17b/133

⁶⁹ Willie Devins, audio recording 16.06.1986

⁷⁰ MSP34REF41872, Annie Bee Gilbride

⁷¹ IRA veteran Bertie Lambe later relayed this to ‘Trooper’ McHugh; Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.04.2023

⁷² BMH/CD/057

⁷³ BMH/CD/057



Figure 8.8 Sligo Gaol (constructed 1815-18) in the mid-1950s (Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland).

from County Galway) were killed outright on the road (Figure 8.9). Three of the RIC, one injured, rushed for cover into a nearby house, but it was already occupied by the IRA. The RIC were called on to surrender. They complied and IRA Volunteer Brady began to administer First Aid to the injured RIC officer. There were no casualties on the Republican side. Pilkington's men confiscated twelve rifles, equipment and bicycles. The attack, for all its ferocity, was over in about fifteen minutes. As they were about to disperse, the Angelus bells rang out from a nearby church. Billy Pilkington called the IRA men to attention. Before withdrawing, the men removed their caps and masks and prayed.

Constable Patrick Lynch (aged 33, from County Cavan), who was badly wounded, died two days later in the County Infirmary.⁷⁴ Constable Clarke and Constable O'Rourke were seriously wounded and taken to hospital in Dublin. A bystander commented: 'The scene was

terrible. There was nothing but pools of blood and caps and bicycles thrown around.'⁷⁵ A Republican priest who attended the scene subsequently remarked that the horror was forever imprinted on his memory. A lorry conveying the bodies of the dead to Boyle was draped with a banner that read *Sinn Féin Victory: 3 widows and 17 orphans*.

Reprisals for the Moneygold ambush came quickly and violently. The Crown forces wreaked devastation on the villages of Cliffoney and Grange. At least ten houses of Republicans were burned, as well as Ballinrillick Creamery and the Sinn Féin Hall in Cliffoney. At Grange Temperance Hall, over one thousand books were destroyed. According to Tom Deignan and Jack Brennan of the Sligo Brigade IRA, a crowd of armed members of the RIC, including some members of the Auxiliary Division:

burned a number of houses and shot

⁷⁴ Abbott 2019: 175-6

⁷⁵ Farry 1992: 256



Figure 8.9 Sergeant Patrick Perry and Constable Patrick Laffey, two of the four RIC constables killed at the Moneygold ambush on 25 October 1920 (Martin Byrne).

livestock in that area as a reprisal for the ambush and altogether created a reign of terror in the district.⁷⁶ They kept it up for a few nights. The burnings lasted for two nights and a day. They burned Seamus Devins' ... and Andrew O'Connor's [homes] in daylight. At night they fired into the [Grange] Catholic church [and took part in] raiding and looting Lang's pub and provisions stores and McCann's [boatyard] in Grange and Gilmartin's in Cliffoney. They drew a cordon all around Grange and they searched and held up everyone and they fired at people they saw running, for those who were inclined to run away from them.⁷⁷

Billy Pilkington waited five months to exact revenge for this weekend of reprisals.

Within a few days of the Moneygold ambush, Pilkington organised a second ASU-led ambush, which was to take place in Loughmarron (Loghmurrian) townland in the Glenade Valley, County Leitrim around 28 October. The ruse was to raid a mail car with the expectation that the RIC would respond. The expected reprisal party never arrived, however, and the IRA had to withdraw to the 'Sligo mountains'.⁷⁸

Dublin, 1920

Despite the success of the Moneygold ambush, IRA Director of Intelligence Michael Collins' frustration with Billy Pilkington for the otherwise low number of IRA attacks in Sligo is well noted by historians. Collins' stance could be considered a somewhat unfair criticism, however. By late 1919, in terms of initiating attacks on Crown forces, Sligo was several months behind the well-advanced campaigns in Cork and Dublin and therefore could not take advantage of the element of surprise crucial for raiding private households for arms. Likewise, military barracks, which might have been easily over-run earlier in 1919, were now fortified and prepared in anticipation of attack. This limited the ease with which weapons could be procured. The large numbers of men recruited to the IRA Sligo Brigade were limited by the shortfall in available arms. Linda Kearns described how she had to smuggle the same rifles from one part of County Sligo to another, to allow different battalions to carry out assaults.⁷⁹ Volunteer Bertie Lambe reported that the IRA secretly purchased revolvers at ten shillings apiece from a Black and Tan who had been a 'failed actor' in London.⁸⁰ Billy Pilkington frequently bemoaned the lack of weapons supplied by GHQ and became proactive in sourcing rifles independent of Dublin. He achieved this with the help of D.P. Walsh who, acting as an official GHQ purchaser in Scotland, often procured small quantities

⁷⁶ BMH.WS0894, Tom Deignan

⁷⁷ Jack Brennan, UCDA O'MN, P17b/137

⁷⁸ MA/MSPC/A/29; BMH.WS1545, Martin Bernard McGowan

⁷⁹ BMH.WS0404, Linda Kearns

⁸⁰ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.04.2023

for Pilkington and sent them secretly to Sligo via Belfast. Frank Carty,⁸¹ who was on the run, had gone to Glasgow to assist in the purchase of arms for export to Sligo.⁸² GHQ became suspicious and, upon discovering the racket, questioned D.P. Walsh.⁸³ GHQ Quartermaster General Seán Ó Muirthile had the next illicit shipment of arms destined for Sligo diverted to Cork. The news was not well received.

Tom Heavey, Adjutant of the Westport Brigade, was in Devlin's Public House on Parnell Street in Dublin when Billy Pilkington came to discuss the matter with Michael Collins. Liam Devlin's pub was Collins' 'No. 1 Joint' and was never discovered by British agents. Collins regularly received visitors from the rural brigades there. Many noted, for better or worse, his characteristically domineering personality on display here in his centre of operations. Pilkington's visit to discuss the re-diversion of rifles destined for Sligo, as described by Heavey, shows an inversion of the usual state of play:

Pilkington was furious. He met Mick Collins in Devlin's pub in Parnell Street and went for him over it. Collins cursed and swore. *'You may be Mick Collins but you are not using language like that to me'*, said Pilkington, who was a religious person. Collins sobered up at once. But just two days after that, Peadar Glynn, who was later on the staff of the 3rd Western Division, called into the same pub to see Mick. *'Don't send that monk into me again'*, he said. Now that was the real Mick, not the plaster saint he was made out to be; he never had the glass out of his hand. It was the first thing he would say in Vaughan's [public house], *'what are ye having'*, and most of us did not drink at the time.⁸⁴

Bloody Sunday

Billy Pilkington was in Dublin on Sunday 21 November 1920, or 'Bloody Sunday' as it became known – named

⁸¹ Frank Carty's poor luck with arresting authorities continued after his rescue from Sligo Gaol. He was arrested and sent to Derry Gaol, from which he escaped in early 1921. He was then on the run and left for Scotland, where he was involved in training recruits and purchasing arms. Arrested again in Glasgow, a dramatic attempt was made to release him, but failed. He was released after a month's imprisonment and returned to Sligo shortly afterwards.

⁸² BMH.WS0933, Seamus Reader

⁸³ BMH.WS0933, Seamus Reader

⁸⁴ Tom Heavy in MacEoin 1980: 427

after the killing of fourteen spectators attending a Dublin versus Tipperary football match in Croke Park. The Croke Park massacre was a reprisal for an attack on British intelligence agents which saw 'The Squad', the IRA's intelligence unit, assassinate thirteen alleged British intelligence agents that morning. The night before Bloody Sunday, Saturday 20 November, two senior IRA officers of the Dublin Brigade, Dick McKee and Peadar Clancy, alongside Gaelic League activist Conor Mac Clúin (Clune), who was not an IRA member, were arrested and held at Dublin Castle. In response to the actions of The Squad, McKee, Clancy and Mac Clúin were subjected to brutal interrogation, torture and were unlawfully executed. The story of what happened in Dublin Castle that night is well documented, but an aspect that has been largely forgotten is Billy Pilkington's part in the events of Bloody Sunday.

McKee, Clancy and Mac Clúin had attended Vaughan's Hotel on Parnell Square on Saturday night (20 November), where Michael Collins and other high-profile Republicans were present (Figure 8.10). Collins, McKee and Clancy were informed of an imminent raid on the premises by Auxiliaries and made quick their escape. Almost immediately after they had departed, the Auxiliaries arrived and rounded up seven or eight of the men still present, arresting those who were not registered as hotel guests. Conor Mac Clúin, who was only visiting for the evening, was amongst those arrested. According to IRA's Sean Kavanagh, who was present but not arrested: 'Another man, who gave his name as 'Scanlon', was also arrested; he was Billy Pilkington, Commanding Officer of the Sligo Brigade.'⁸⁵ McKee and Clancy were intercepted in the early morning hours at a private residence and taken to Dublin Castle (Figure 8.11). Ben Doyle, who was a prisoner at the Castle prior to the weekend's events, was concerned when he saw Pilkington brought in. He knew that if they had caught McKee, Clancy and Pilkington, then British intelligence had made rapid advances into the national IRA network.⁸⁶

Tom Scanlon, OC of the 1st Battalion (Sligo Town), described the events that unfolded as told to him by Pilkington himself. The irony of Pilkington's choice of false surname would not have been lost on Scanlon, his close friend:

He [Pilkington] was brought into the cell and he gave Scanlon as the first name he could think of. But when he was inside in the cell he said, 'My name is not Scanlon,

⁸⁵ Kavanagh 1969: 362

⁸⁶ BMH.WS1692, John Feehan; MacEvilly 2011: 30

I'm Pilkington!' They took out McKee and Clancy and then Clune [from the cell to the Guard Room] who threw his hat in to Billy and said, 'That's a souvenir for you, if you get out of here!' They came down for Billy. 'You're being released Scanlon' they said, and they opened the door. 'Bring him up to the office' [was the order given to the sentry], but the sentry instead landed Billy out at the Castle gates. The sentry walked him to the gate and then Billy hoofed it. Ten minutes later they raided Vaughan's where they asked particularly for Billy. They cordoned off the streets at once, so it looks as if they had made a mistake! Billy said that he had heard the words 'Bring him to the office' but he said he knew that the sentry had not heard them.⁸⁷

The 'office' most likely refers to the Intelligence Office or the Guard Room in Dublin Castle where McKee, Clancy and Mac Clúin had been interrogated and killed; certainly, this is what Scanlon and Pilkington understood it to be. *The Sligo Champion* later described the event as 'one of his many fortunate escapes from the limitless violence of those to whom he opposed his genius, coolness, and unflinching heart.'⁸⁸

Collooney Barracks attack, 20 March 1921

As the intense violence of the War of Independence progressed, Pilkington led an attack on Collooney RIC Barracks on 20 March 1921 (see also 'Trooper' McHugh's account of the attack, Chapter 9). This was a somewhat controversial event that led to dissention between the North and South Sligo IRA. Collooney was in Frank Carty's IV South Sligo Brigade region, but Carty was on the run in Scotland for the first half of 1921.⁸⁹ Pilkington drew approximately 30 men from the Ballymote, Gurteen and Collooney battalions. Prior to the attack, Cumann na mBan member Julia Keaveney received arms, ammunition and a bomb and delivered these to Pilkington.⁹⁰ Harry Brehony 'carried the bomb'⁹¹ up to the barracks in his stockened feet ... on his back.

⁸⁷ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, Pb17/133

⁸⁸ *The Sligo Champion*, 24.09.1932

⁸⁹ BMH.WS0933, Seamus Reader; Boylan 2009

⁹⁰ MSP34REF50649, Julia Travers (née Keaveney)

⁹¹ 'The bomb had been made from gelnite and it had been put in a quarter barrel. Gelnite was put in first, then the war flour. There was a small can covered with wire reinforced with lime and with cement. The bottom part was put in again [i.e., a hole was put through the bottom] and the hoops were shoved down again.' Jack Brennan, UCDA O'MN, Pb17/137



Figure 8.10 Vaughan's Hotel, 29 Parnell Square, Dublin (Robert Mulroney). A safe house used by senior IRA members and temporarily used as an IRA HQ during the War of Independence. Billy Pilkington would meet Michael Collins here on occasion. Pilkington would also be arrested here on the eve of Bloody Sunday 1920. The building is now in residential use.

That was for 200 yards and he left it outside the door.⁹² It successfully detonated. The attack was described by Volunteers Thady McGowan and Tom Brehony:

Liam Pilkington, the Brigade OC, was in charge of this attack. We were members of the party of about thirty men that he mobilised ... We placed a large land mine against the entrance to the Barracks ... The mine was then exploded and the entrance to the Barracks was blown away. The rushing party, led by Brigadier Pilkington, got into the front part of the Barrack before any fire was opened by the police or Tans inside, and found that the air at the entrance was completely saturated with dust, to such an extent

⁹² Jack Brennan, UCDA O'MN, P17b/137



Figure 8.11 The building at Dublin Castle where Billy Pilkington was held on the night of 20 November 1920. He narrowly escaped execution there the following day (Robert Mulraney).

that it was impossible to breathe in it or see through it ... The police then started to fire and Pilkington and his men were forced to retreat. The firing on both sides lasted about fifteen minutes when the IRA decided to withdraw as any prospect of taking the barracks had then passed.⁹³

Volunteer Harold McBrien's account of how the attack failed when the dust rose and prohibited entry into the barracks demonstrates something of Pilkington's fearlessness, his tenacity for seeing projects through, and his frustration when plans were thwarted:

Pilkington then gave the order for us to advance and we followed him in single file. I was sixth in the line and just got inside the outer entrance gate when I was brought to a halt ... Someone said:

'Get back' and back we went for some distance. Pilkington now shouted, 'Come on' and we moved forward again, but again we got jammed in the same way. Again, someone said: 'Get back' and back we moved again. Pilkington now shouted again: 'Come on' and we moved forward again. Firing from the barracks now started and we had to get away as fast as we could ... We pulled back to the crossroads on this, the eastern side of the town, where there were some trees behind which we took cover. Here everyone started to ask everyone else what the so and so happened. Pilkington, after saying a few angry words to us, made off in the direction of Sligo ... In fact, I believe that Pilkington actually entered the barracks and that it was he who fired the shot that started our men firing.⁹⁴

The men were left in no doubt as to Pilkington's opinion of the failed attack:

The mine went off and when it went off, they were all paralysed ... Billy Pilkington comes along, and he looks at it, and he looks at these fellas, and he gets up on the buckin' bicycle and he rides away and he says nothing. After that he said: 'Well, I picked the wrong buckin' men for that job.'⁹⁵

Assassination of two RIC constables at Ballysadare, 19 April 1921

On 19 April 1921, at about 8.30pm, Billy Pilkington orchestrated a hold-up of the Dublin to Sligo train at Ballysadare Station in South Sligo. Acting on intelligence received, Pilkington was specifically seeking Constable Thomas Kelly (aged 37, from County Mayo) and Constable James Hetherington (aged 31, from County Tyrone).⁹⁶ Pilkington was aware that the two men carried with them 'important dispatches from Dublin Castle', but it was perhaps the fact that these two constables had been the 'most active in the burnings and reprisals'⁹⁷ in the aftermath of the Moneygold ambush that interested him most. Constable Kelly had 'pointed out the houses which were to be destroyed following

⁹⁴ BMH.WS0895, Harold McBrien

⁹⁵ Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1976

⁹⁶ Abbott 2019: 282-3

⁹⁷ BMH.WS0894, Tom Deignan

⁹³ BMH.WS0918, Thady McGowan and Tom Brehony

the Moneygold ambush five months previously. They had travelled to Dublin Castle and were now returning to Sligo.⁹⁸ As the assault was to take place in the IV South Sligo Brigade region, Pilkington recruited Frank O'Beirne of the Collooney Battalion and Tom Deignan of the Riverstown Battalion, to help with holding-up the train at Ballysadare station. Between nine and twelve IRA men were involved, armed with revolvers and all unmasked except for one man who wore 'a muffler or cloth across his face.'⁹⁹ The IRA searching the train were led by Tom Scanlon of the 1st Battalion (Sligo Town), due to the fact that they were most familiar with the RIC officers and best able to identify them.¹⁰⁰ Decades later, Tom Deignan told Ernie O'Malley:

We had nine men with revolvers to get these RIC at any cost. We held them up at the station a bit outside of the town. We got out those who we recognised as Tans. There were about 10 or 12 all told, taken out of a sudden from carriage to carriage. They didn't seem to grasp what they were up against. They were armed Tan officers. Tom Scanlon was searching one of them when the other tried to get around behind this higher man but I cornered him. Tom Scanlon put me in charge of the operation.¹⁰¹

The subsequent court of inquiry and the local newspaper reported that the two constables were in plain clothes and unarmed, but Deignan claimed they had pistols. O'Beirne reported that 'some British officers in mufti [plain clothes] were also disarmed.'¹⁰² Constables Kelly and Hetherington were intentionally singled out and separated from other members of the Crown forces.¹⁰³ Eight or nine armed IRA men marched them off the train station. The constables, with their hands above their heads, 'said nothing.'¹⁰⁴ Pilkington, O'Beirne and James Keaveney were nearby and, having organised the blocking of local roads, now interrogated the captured police. The constables were led to an area approximately 100m away from the station, while Pilkington remained to study the men's documentation.¹⁰⁵ According to Tom Deignan, the two

constables had been carrying envelopes that 'contained descriptions of some of our men who were wanted by the police. These descriptions were very accurate.'¹⁰⁶

The bodies of the two constables were located at 11.35pm that night. A contemporary inquiry noted that: 'both men had been shot; their faces covered with blood. Constable Kelly was lying on his back and Constable Hetherington was lying face downwards.'¹⁰⁷ The subsequent medical examination determined that Constable Kelly had been shot twice, to the back of the head and through the right shoulder. Constable Hetherington received four bullets, to the right chest, right shoulder, right side of the head and right thigh.¹⁰⁸ Having carried out the executions, the IRA men returned to Billy Pilkington and he said: 'Now get down on your knees. They were your enemies, they are now your friends', thus instructing them to pray.¹⁰⁹ O'Beirne and Pilkington were the last to leave the scene, having waited until the 'actual participants had retreated to safety'.¹¹⁰ Joe McGowan related that many years later, after he had been ordained a priest, Fr Billy Pilkington became friends with one of Constable Thomas Kelly's daughters, Sr Mary Kelly, who was by then a nun. They remained close friends ever after.¹¹¹

Second prison break, 29 June 1921

Exactly a year after the successful Frank Carty prison breakout, Billy Pilkington led a second jailbreak to rescue Charles Gildea (OC 6th Battalion), Frank O'Beirne (OC 7th Battalion) and Tom Deignan (OC 5th Battalion) from Sligo Gaol in June 1921. O'Beirne and Deignan had been captured in May 1921 and court-martialled on suspicion of involvement in the killings of Constable Hetherington and Constable Kelly at Ballysadare.¹¹² At least seven different mobilisations were attempted to rescue the three men, leading to multiple different narratives that have since become conflated.¹¹³ Gildea was OC of the IRA prisoners in Sligo Gaol and had established communication with Pilkington on the outside. One account relates that Gildea had two skeleton keys made, which were smuggled out. Another narrative is that Stephen O'Connor, the warder who had played a role in the Carty jailbreak a year earlier, smuggled out an impression of the key that opened the gate into the outer jail yard. O'Connor returned

⁹⁸ Jack Brennan, UCDA O'MN, P17b/137; BMH.WS0894, Tom Deignan; *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 11.06.1921

⁹⁹ Court of Inquiry report, April 1921

¹⁰⁰ MA/MSPC/A/32

¹⁰¹ Tom Deignan, UCDA O'MN, Pb17/133

¹⁰² *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 11.06.1921; Court of Inquiry report, April 1921; MSP34REF37329, Frank O'Beirne

¹⁰³ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 11.06.1921

¹⁰⁴ Tom Deignan, UCDA O'MN, Pb17/133

¹⁰⁵ MA/MSPCA32

¹⁰⁶ BMH.WS0894, Tom Deignan

¹⁰⁷ District Inspector J. Russell, Court of Inquiry report, April 1921

¹⁰⁸ Dr R.J. Martyn, Court of Inquiry report, April 1921

¹⁰⁹ Tom Deignan, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

¹¹⁰ MSP34REF37329, Frank O'Beirne

¹¹¹ Joe McGowan <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6j6Fc5zJ0w8>>

¹¹² MSP34REF37329, Frank O'Beirne

¹¹³ BMH.WS0894, Tom Deignan

with a key, but it did not work and the jailbreak had to be postponed.¹¹⁴ Another account relates that Michael Nevin, an IRA prisoner, was given a copy of the correct key by a sympathetic warder named Hynes. Nevin smuggled this out on his release. At a later date, he returned to visit a prison inmate with the correct key hidden in his sock, which he gave to Gildea.¹¹⁵ Yet another version contends that Denis A. Mulcahy, founding member of Sinn Féin, was being held in custody in the Gaol and made an impression of the master key in a bar of soap. He then passed this to his wife, Mary, during a prison visit. Tom Burgess used the soap impression to create a working duplicate key.¹¹⁶

In advance of the eventual successful jailbreak, the rescue party camped nearby for two nights. Pilkington's grandniece recalls that immediately before the operation commenced, Pilkington ran the length of the wall (9m high) surrounding the gaol.¹¹⁷ This family narrative is backed up by Tom Deignan: 'Pilkington got on to the wall of the gaol and actually walked along it. He could not be seen by the garrison in the gaol while doing so. This was our signal to get going.'¹¹⁸ The groups were armed with revolvers and hand grenades. The external walls, in a part of the prison known as the 'Hangman's Quarters', were scaled with a wooden ladder that had been commandeered from D.M. Hanley's yard [a hardware store]. A rope ladder, made by Tom Scanlon's father in his home, was used to descend into the interior.¹¹⁹ Billy Pilkington, Tom Scanlon and Peadar Glynn entered the prison grounds. Two skeleton keys in Pilkington's possession were used to gain access into the main gaol building. Tom Scanlon recalled: 'Billy insisted on going in ... as he knew the inside layout himself.'¹²⁰ A shovel standing behind the door was accidentally knocked over, creating a terrible ruckus, but the wardens in the guardroom did not hear the noise. Billy went to the prison cells: 'he could hear the breathing of the prisoners inside, but the key would not open the door. Billy worked quietly at it in the beginning. He tried and tried. A quarter of an hour went by for we heard it ring out from the Catholic church.'¹²¹ After another fifteen minutes they had to abandon the mission, lock the front door and return to the wall outside. It was deemed too risky to attempt the jailbreak again that night. The group returned the following night and, on 28 June, were finally successful

in rescuing Gildea, O'Beirne and Deignan. Escaping on bicycles, the men took the opportunity to hold up a local postman and seize his mail.¹²²

A family narrative about this or the earlier Carty jailbreak recounts that a prison warder was unwittingly walking down a corridor in the direction of Billy Pilkington. Pilkington realised he would have to shoot the warder if he came any further and saw them. Pilkington began to pray, at which point the warder turned back without having seen the intruders. Pilkington avoided using arms and the warder escaped unharmed.¹²³ Whether or not this narrative is true, it reflects the perception of Billy Pilkington as a devout man. His deeply held religious convictions may have influenced his decision to prepare and use hideouts in Sligo Friary and Sligo Cemetery. Situated on hallowed ground, these dugouts may have been perceived as offering something more than just physical defence, perhaps also providing spiritual succour and divine protection. At the time of the Rockwood ambush (see Chapter 3), Pilkington had an outpost at Tobernalt holy well (Figure 8.12). The holy well is located on a rocky outcrop at the side of a narrow and sharp bend, which offers an ideal ambush site and look-out post.¹²⁴ Regardless of its strategic advantage, this choice of location may again have held spiritual resonance for Pilkington.

Communication networks

Billy Pilkington left no written records or diaries of his experiences or deeds during the revolutionary period. However, numerous applications made in the 1930s and 1940s by IRA veterans and members of Cumann na mBan for Military Service Pensions, reveal how central Billy Pilkington was to all operations across Sligo town and county. These documents also illustrate the extensive network of safe houses and dugouts that he availed of throughout the region. Pilkington utilised numerous safe houses in rural parts of County Sligo. As part of her Cumann na mBan duties, Mai Deignan looked after an old house on the family farm near Geevagh village in South Sligo where Pilkington regularly held meetings for senior IRA personnel. Mai carried dispatches into Sligo town for Pilkington, a distance of 22km, that were hidden in the tyres of her bicycle.¹²⁵ The home of Lizzie O'Beirne (President of the Collooney branch of Cumann na mBan), near Collooney

¹¹⁴ Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, audio recording 1976

¹¹⁵ BMH.WS1384, Michael Nevin

¹¹⁶ Feehily 2013: 80

¹¹⁷ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 29.04.2022

¹¹⁸ BMH.WS0894, Tom Deignan

¹¹⁹ Andy Doocey, audio recording 1986

¹²⁰ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

¹²¹ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

¹²² MA/MSPC/A/29; BMH.WS1313, Charles Gildea; BMH.WS0894, Tom Deignan; Anon. n.d.

¹²³ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 29.04.2022

¹²⁴ Holy well (SL014-238----), Aghamore Near townland

¹²⁵ MSP34REF60115, Mai Trainor (née Deignan)

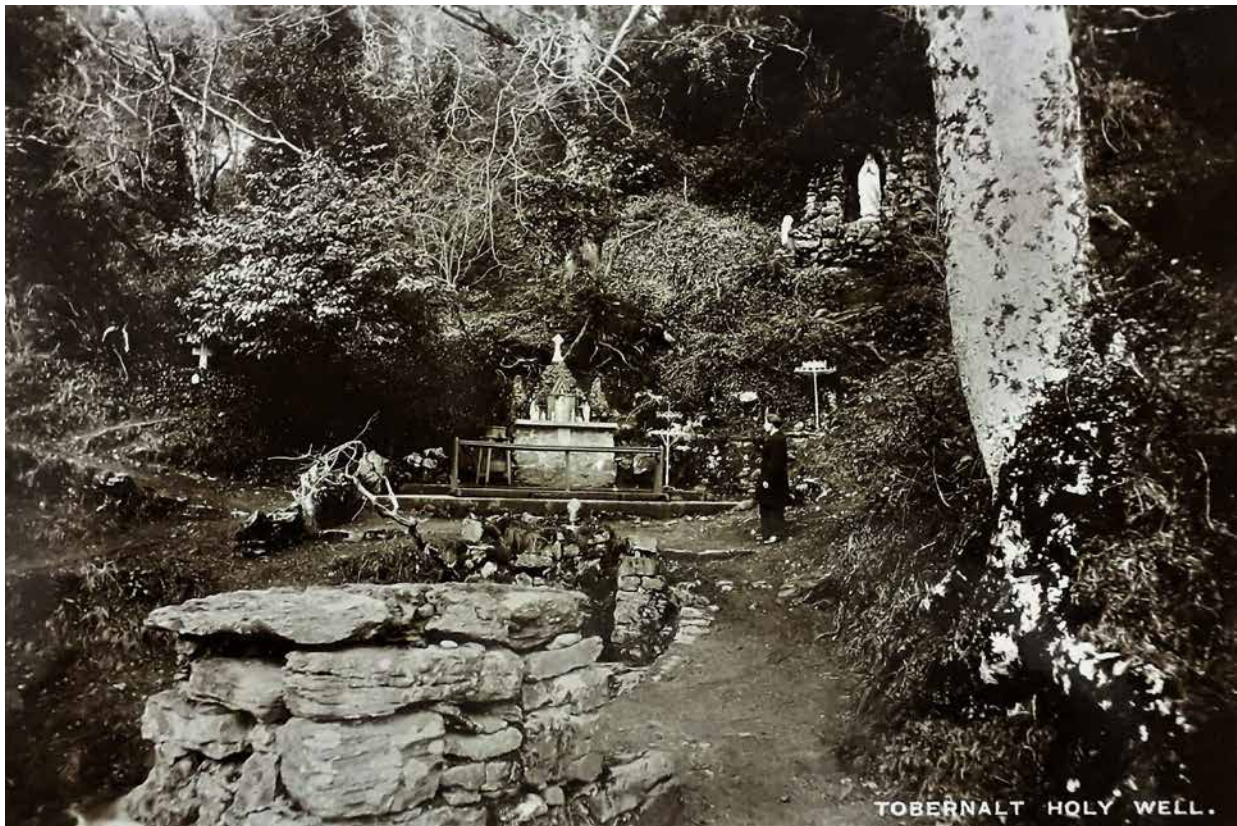


Figure 8.12 Tobernalt holy well circa 1930 (Courtesy of the Irish Capuchin Archives).

village, was frequented by ‘prominent IRA officers’ including Billy Pilkington, Frank Carty, Tom Deignan and Tom Scanlon. Lizzie cycled 14.5km to Sligo town on numerous occasions ‘conveying dispatches and verbal messages’ to Pilkington and other officers.¹²⁶ Pilkington sought shelter in the Branley safe house at Tormore during the War of Independence; a Pilkington family narrative that he ‘hid out in caves in Benbulbin’¹²⁷ likely refers to Tormore Cave adjacent to the Branleys. During the Civil War, Cumann na mBan’s Julia Keaveney delivered dispatches to Billy Pilkington and made regular trips from Sligo town to Rahelly House where he was stationed for almost a year.¹²⁸

A sincere and trustworthy militarist

In October 1921, at the close of the War of Independence, Billy Pilkington’s ‘promising’ abilities were noted by Captain Tom Burke of GHQ as:

the most promising type of officer in

the area I inspected. He is intelligent, a good worker, and is very sincere and trustworthy. He can be relied upon to take action, and seems to be a good militarist. He has had a large amount of work in the past dealing with a big, poorly armed Brigade and in dealing with it he interested himself in more than the real work of the Brigade Commandant. He would benefit by a little judicious direction and control from the higher command for a little time.¹²⁹

Billy Pilkington was an intelligent military strategist, a meticulous planner and a disciplined leader, capable of restraint and of delivering calm and composed responses. He was remembered as ‘a great saver of lives’¹³⁰ and an ‘anchor [who] kept things together in Sligo.’¹³¹ Billy Pilkington was a leader who believed firmly in the power of religious devotion and faith. He ‘kept control of the people he was over, because of his

¹²⁶ MSP34REF44588, Lizzie Lang (née O’Beirne)

¹²⁷ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 29.04.2022

¹²⁸ MSP34REF50649, Julia Travers (née Keaveney)

¹²⁹ Collins Papers, IE/MA/CP/04/31

¹³⁰ Chris Branley, audio recording 2008

¹³¹ Plunkett Doherty pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 08.02.2022

religious belief.¹³² There are numerous accounts of his custom of gathering IRA men together before or after a 'job' to pray or say the rosary.¹³³

Truce Period (12 July 1921–27 June 1922)

When the transfer of British occupied barracks to the IRA began in late January 1922, there was some confusion as to the boundary between the 1st Northern Division and the 3rd Western Division, and thus uncertainty as to who would take over Finner Camp, located 3km outside Ballyshannon in County Donegal. At that time, Finner Camp occupied over 730 acres and had the capacity for at least 2,000 soldiers. By 1917, the camp boasted 28 galvanised huts, a hospital, target sheds, stores, stables, water tanks and wash houses.¹³⁴ On 17 February 1922, the camp was handed over to Captain Jim Murphy, Staff Officer at IRA GHQ, who promptly transferred responsibility of Finner to Brigadier General Seamus Devins of the 3rd Western Division (Figures 8.13 and 8.14). Billy Pilkington was present on the day of the transfer.¹³⁵ Initially, the IRA garrison organised social events at Finner such as *céilithe* (Irish set dancing), but it soon became a training camp. The anti-Treaty IRA held Finner Camp for four months until 29 June when their twelve-man garrison was attacked by pro-Treaty forces and the camp was taken the following morning.¹³⁶

IRA Conventions

Billy Pilkington attended the reconvened IRA Conventions held during Spring 1922 at the Mansion House in Dublin. At the first of these, held on 26 March, Ernie O'Malley noted Pilkington's prominence as a figure of leadership and firm resolution: 'Billy Pilkington, fair-haired, thin faced, ruddy cheeks, straight, a pair of flashing blue eyes and instant directness of speech. He was very much loved by his men; very religious, a fighting saint.'¹³⁷ It is noteworthy that this differs from British intelligence reports that described him as brown-haired and with a round face (see below). Billy described how in County Sligo, following British withdrawal, 'some barracks have been handed over there, but I have my own men in them.' Other regional commanders present at the convention stated that they had not yet seized barracks, which suggests that the Sligo IRA was particularly quick to realise the

importance of securing their territory. In terms of the national question posed by the Treaty, Pilkington was not for compromise and seemed intolerant of the Free State and its Treaty: 'They have the money, the press, the clergy and the arms. All our areas are being sapped in one way or another. I vote we here and now form an independent headquarters.'¹³⁸

On 9 April, at the second IRA Convention, the attendance of pro-Treaty IRA leadership was encouraged. Amongst the ensuing debates, Pilkington remained resolute and uncompromising: 'We intend to cut away from this headquarters. All you' he said, pointing to the pro-Treaty members present, 'want to build up a Free State army so that you can march in step into the British Empire. Do it openly. We stand by the Republic.'¹³⁹ There was no ambiguity as to his stance on the Treaty and the Truce: 'The [Sligo] men were against the cease fire. Billy Pilkington voted against it. We were stronger than we had been at the end of the Tan War.'¹⁴⁰ In the months leading up to the Civil War, Pilkington was clear about where the continuing war should be located. He did not want a Civil War, preferring to focus on the border with Northern Ireland constructed by the Treaty, and enforced by the Ulster Special Constabulary and by the imminent formation of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Within a few days of that Convention, he sent reinforcements to the border, resulting in a number of ambushes on B-Specials and the destruction of numerous border checkpoints and customs stations.¹⁴¹

After the pro-Treaty Griffith meeting of 16 April 1922 (see Chapter 3), much criticism was levelled at Billy Pilkington for his unwillingness to prevent it from taking place, but this is somewhat unfair. In April, many senior IRA and Free State leaders were in consultation in an attempt to prevent a descent into civil war, which was not then considered inevitable. Pilkington himself did not approve of the Truce ceasefire but complied with the orders of IRA Chief of Staff Liam Lynch, who insisted on avoiding aggressive engagements with the National Army. Reports had come in that Free State soldiers were jostling and being aggressive with the townspeople and the 'discipline of Sligo [was] well tested at Griffith's meeting.'¹⁴² Pilkington's impossible situation was described by his colleagues. Tom Scanlon noted: 'Ginger O'Connell knew how disciplined Billy was and that he felt that he would not order his men to fire

¹³² John Pilkington pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 18.04.2023

¹³³ Plunkett Doherty pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 08.02.2022; Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 29.04.2022

¹³⁴ O'Carroll 2007: 9, 38

¹³⁵ O'Carroll 2007: 44-5

¹³⁶ O'Carroll 2007: 48-9

¹³⁷ O'Malley 1978: 51-2

¹³⁸ O'Malley 1978: 51-2

¹³⁹ O'Malley 1978: 50-3

¹⁴⁰ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

¹⁴¹ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133; *Weekly Telegraph*, 15.04.1922

¹⁴² Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT



Figure 8.13 The IRA takes possession of Finner Camp on 17 February 1922 (Ger Daly).

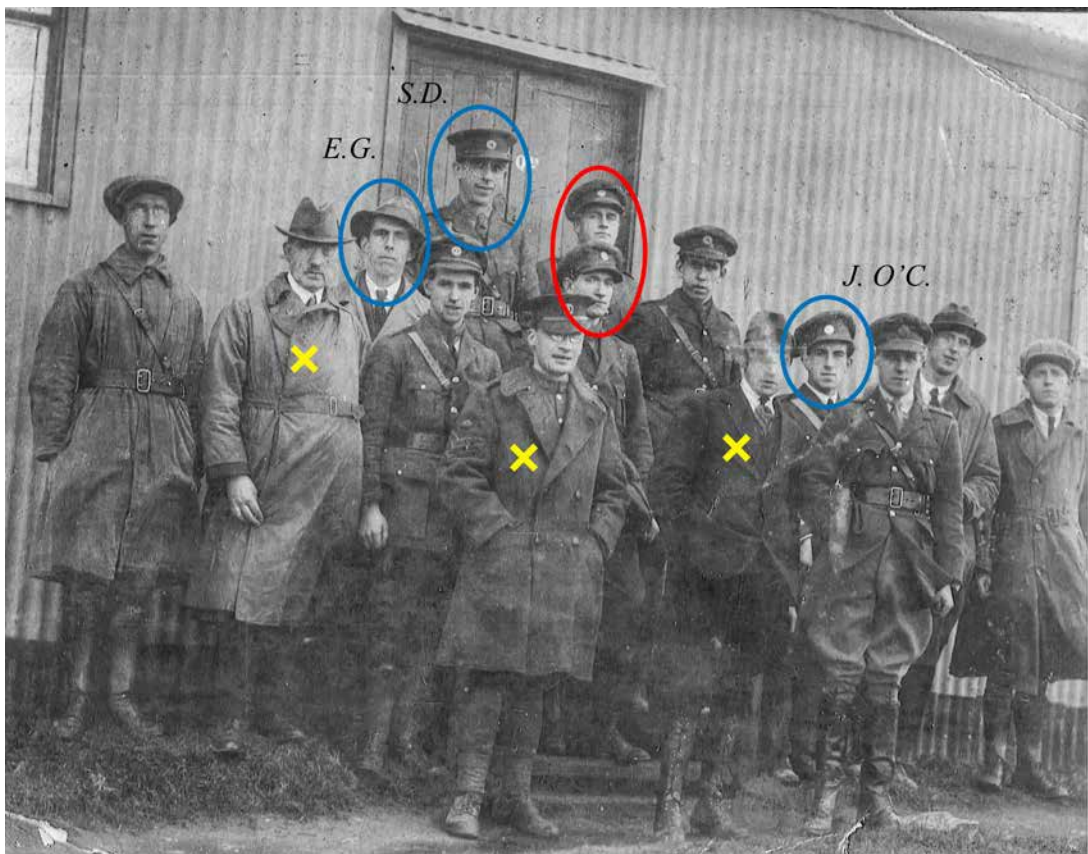


Figure 8.14 The British handover of Finner Camp to the IRA on 17 February 1922 (Colonel Declan O'Carroll). Those who can be identified are circled in blue. L-R: Eugene Gilbride, Seamus Devins and Jack O'Carroll. The three men marked with a yellow cross are unidentified members of the departing British forces. One of the two men circled in red is possibly Billy Pilkington (one of these may also be Tom Scanlon). If so, this is the only known photograph of Pilkington from the entire revolutionary period.

[when he had been forbidden to do so by Liam Lynch] and so there was no danger for the Staters at all.¹⁴³ Tom Deignan continued: ‘when they [National Army] knew there was not going to be a fight they careered [around] with armoured cars, but the discipline of the lads [IRA] held that day and only under protest was it maintained.’¹⁴⁴ Another contemporary witness noted that, only for Pilkington’s ‘coolness and the restraint which he imposed on his subordinate officers, lives would have been lost on this eventful and red-letter day.’¹⁴⁵

It was perhaps because of this dilemma that Pilkington remained secluded in his office on the day of the Griffith rally, refusing to speak to his officers. Tom Scanlon, OC 1st Battalion (Sligo Town), described the impact of Pilkington’s order on the IRA present in Sligo town: ‘It ruined us. We were powerless.’¹⁴⁶ The IRA’s inaction, according to Frank Carty, OC IV South Sligo Brigade, had a ‘disastrous effect ... on the morale of our troops.’¹⁴⁷ Speaking to Ernie O’Malley in 1957, Scanlon said ‘Billy’s word was law in his area’, but that ‘there was jealousy between Frank and Billy.’ During that interview, O’Malley added his own annotation as he transcribed Scanlon’s account: ‘[I] rather say Frank was jealous of Billy.’¹⁴⁸ In retrospect, the consequences of an assault on National Army troops and the government in Sligo town during the politically volatile Spring of 1922 would have been felt throughout the country and would likely have had the effect of catalysing the nation into civil war. A lack of restraint on Pilkington’s part would have led to bloodshed far beyond Sligo. In this respect, Pilkington did his utmost to prevent a civil war.

Civil War (28 June 1922–24 May 1923)

Though Billy Pilkington took a firm anti-Treaty stance in the Civil War, he was quite reluctant when it came to violence against his fellow Irishman (Figure 8.15). There were noticeably fewer fatalities in Civil War operations that he directly commanded; for instance, far fewer than those led by Frank Carty. *The Sligo Champion* later recorded: ‘Though he played a prominent part in matters now of rueful memory during the internecine war in the West, his conduct was ever and always guided by the desire to avoid bloodshed amongst brother Irishmen.’¹⁴⁹ Several months into the Civil

War, a British intelligence report documented the rise of Billy Pilkington through the IRA and the various posts he had held: Vice Commandant 1st Battalion Sligo Brigade (14 May 1921), Commandant 1st Sligo Battalion, Commandant Sligo Brigade, Commandant Sligo Brigade flying column, Division Commandant (5 January 1922) and Commandant-General and Officer Commanding of the 3rd Western Division. As of 20 September 1922, the report stated that Pilkington was ‘in command of a large body of Irregulars in Co. Sligo’. Then aged 28, Billy Pilkington was described as 5ft 11in (1.8m) in height with a ‘fresh complexion; brown hair; clean shaven; round face; sunken eyes; appears near sighted; weight about 11½ stone [73kg].’¹⁵⁰

The Pilkington family home on Distillery Lane (now Lower Abbey Street) continued to function as an intelligence hub and centre of operations in Sligo town. In 1986, Kathleen Carroll recalled that as young teenagers, she and her friend Lizzie Keaveney regularly delivered messages to Billy Pilkington. These messages were usually delivered to the house beside the Pilkingtons, occupied by the Hughes family. The Hughes were not in the IRA but assisted and supported Republican friends and neighbours. Leaving messages at Hughes ‘took the scent off’ the Pilkington family home. Kathleen’s brother Paddy, one of Sligo’s Noble Six, once gave her a message to deliver to Billy Pilkington. In the early days of the Civil War, if a dispatch had to be delivered to Billy Pilkington, it seemed he was never far away. Republican activist and Cumann na mBan president Eithne Coyle humorously recalled how she arrived in County Sligo with a message for Pilkington from GHQ in Dublin. She had no address for him and was beginning to despair. Taking a seat in a ‘small country pub and general store’ she ‘sat down to sip a glass of lemonade’. While there, a man at the counter asked the barman, ‘Have you seen Billy?’ Coyle continued: ‘My heart leapt: could this be Billy Pilkington? I waited until he had departed, and then, approaching the counter cautiously, I spoke to the shopkeeper – showing him my Cumann na mBan brooch at the same time – “By any chance were you talking about Billy Pilkington?”’¹⁵¹ She soon located Pilkington and delivered her message. True to form, Billy had no message or updates to return to Dublin.

Shouldering responsibility

Before the evacuation of Rahelly House on 18 September 1922, Billy Pilkington extended an invitation to an injured Michael V. O’Donoghue of the Cork I Brigade to

¹⁴³ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O’MN, P17b/133

¹⁴⁴ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O’MN, P17b/133

¹⁴⁵ Kilgannon 1926: 77

¹⁴⁶ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O’MN, P17b/137

¹⁴⁷ Farry 2000: 62

¹⁴⁸ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O’MN, P17b/133

¹⁴⁹ *The Sligo Champion*, 24.09.1932

¹⁵⁰ William Pilkington, Dublin Castle files, WO 35/207/162

¹⁵¹ Eithne Coyle in MacEoin 1980: 154-5

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Figure 8.15 Map of known actions Billy Pilkington was involved in during the Civil War (James Bonsall).

spend the night at Rahelly. O'Donoghue's testimony of the night provides an insight into the paternal aspects of Pilkington's character. In attempting to raise the spirits of his men, in a final night of song and music he endeavoured to instil a sense of normality, knowing the evacuation of Rahelly was imminent and the course of events wholly unsure. O'Donoghue recalled:

With Pilkington, merry and gay in manhood's prime, the life and soul and natural fear-an-tighe [*fear an tí* – man of the house], around the fire a social, a kind of ceilí-cum-concert was started off. It was great. It was the first time for many months I had had such a night of fun and entertainment. There was singing and step-dancing, fiddling and recitation. All had to contribute something. I, the passing stranger, was called on by Billy to do a turn, I could not sing, as the good God in his wisdom only equipped my voice with a "straight air", so I ventured a recitation or two.¹⁵²

Following the evacuation of Rahelly House, the IRA dispersed into the mountains, seeking refuge in Tormore Cave. While crossing the uplands, 'the GOC Liam Pilkington suffered a broken collar bone, immediately after the conflict' [at Rahelly].¹⁵³ Martin Brennan stated specifically that Pilkington had taken a fall, which caused the broken collar bone.¹⁵⁴ Another version suggests he fell when descending the rocky scree slope above Tormore Cave.¹⁵⁵ A medic named 'Dr Martin' reputedly set the break and Pilkington spent six weeks in Tormore Cave while his shoulder healed.¹⁵⁶ A narrative about the incident was passed down to a granddaughter of one of Pilkington's men:

Billy Pilkington broke his collar bone and was hiding out in the cave for weeks. The way they got it seen by a doctor was to carry him down from the cave, have him hide in the neighbour's [Mitchell's] bedroom. The RIC [*sic*, the National Army] accompanied the doctor anytime he was called out to see if they could catch any IRA volunteers. The doctor was told Mrs Mitchell was ill and they had her lay down in bed. The RIC [*sic*, the

National Army] came in with the doctor, thought it was clear, and then left. Then Billy Pilkington came out of hiding and was seen to.¹⁵⁷

While billeted in Tormore Cave, Billy Pilkington's sister-in-law, Bridget Pilkington, 'would have walked from her home in Sligo town to the Glencar road to provide him with food and other items. He had a broken shoulder when he was on the run and would have been supported by many local families in the Glencar and Drumcliff area.'¹⁵⁸

Billy Pilkington's leadership qualities while confined to Tormore Cave for weeks on end with up to 30 others cannot be underestimated, not least as he endured the pain of a broken clavicle. As OC he would have been responsible for keeping up the morale of those billeted in the cave. The group would have been numbed with shock and grief on hearing that six of their comrades had been fatally shot en route to the dugout. Brigadier General Seamus Devins had been a comrade of Pilkington's for several years. Together, they had orchestrated the Moneygold ambush and had worked closely on most, if not all, operations in North Sligo. Devins was several years older than Pilkington but under his command. There seems to have been a mutual respect, and probably friendship, between these two senior IRA leaders. That bond was maintained. In 1963, 40 years after the cessation of the Civil War and 41 years after Seamus Devins' death, his only son, Pearse Devins, attended a commemoration dinner with Billy Pilkington and other IRA veterans in Sligo town. Billy Pilkington also shared a close working relationship with Divisional Adjutant Brian MacNeill for the eleven months that he had been in County Sligo before his death on Slievemore. In several respects, Pilkington and MacNeill were quite similar in character: sound military strategists who were intelligent, quiet, measured, level-headed and respected. Billy Pilkington's personality and paternalism towards those under his command would have put him in a strong position to see his men through the ordeal of being confined to Tormore Cave for several weeks.

The final months of the Civil War (November 1922-May 1923)

Towards the end of 1922, Republican columns continued to operate in County Sligo in much reduced numbers. A group of about 20 men were based in the

¹⁵² BMH.WS1741, Michael V. O'Donoghue

¹⁵³ MSP34REF33559, John Patrick Brennan

¹⁵⁴ Martin Brennan, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

¹⁵⁵ Gene O'Carroll pers. comm. to M. Dowd and J. Bonsall, 27.01.2023

¹⁵⁶ Chris Branley, video and audio recording 2012

¹⁵⁷ Maura Branley pers. comm. to J. Bird, 24.11.2021 (as recalled by her father, Frank Branley)

¹⁵⁸ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 29.04.2022

Calry area under the command of Billy Pilkington.¹⁵⁹ As National Army troops continued to take large swathes of the country from Republican forces, Pilkington met with senior IRA Commander Seán Hyde, formerly a trusted aide to Michael Collins. Hyde oversaw attacks on Ballinamore, County Leitrim and the surrounding area in an attempt to undermine National Army control in the West of Ireland. Hyde marched west with two of Pilkington's men, Gildea and McLoughlin, and they engaged in skirmishes with National Army troops from Newport, County Mayo to the Ox Mountains on the Mayo-Sligo border.¹⁶⁰ Ultimately, however, Republican resources and spirits were depleted.¹⁶¹

On 23 March 1923, an IRA Executive meeting took place in the Nire Valley, County Waterford to discuss the IRA's ability to continue the war. Three main options were debated but no agreement could be reached. Chief of Staff Liam Lynch argued to continue the fight, but many felt his optimism for a successful outcome was misplaced. The remaining options were to negotiate with the government or to end the war. Lynch, who had been impressed by Pilkington's abilities, was convinced of the IRA's long-term success and anticipated a 'western resurgence under Pilkington.'¹⁶² Open to Executive Council members only, Pilkington was not present but Liam Lynch arranged for him to attend the following meeting, scheduled for 10 April 1923, which Pilkington attended. However, Liam Lynch was killed in action crossing the Knockmealdown Mountains en route to the meeting. Lynch's death, along with the capture in Dublin of Executive Council members Tom Derrig and Moss Twomey, meant positions needed to be filled on the IRA Executive Council.¹⁶³ A new meeting was scheduled for 20 April at Poulacapple, County Tipperary.

Twelve members of the IRA Executive attended the Poulacapple meeting. It began with the appointment of three new senior Executive leaders, who were to take responsibility for informing the Republican Cabinet on the agreed final decision as to the course of the IRA. The three selected were Tom Barry, Frank Aiken and Billy Pilkington.¹⁶⁴ Pilkington was promoted to Acting Quarter Master General.¹⁶⁵ Pilkington and P.J. Ruttledge cautiously drafted a proposal for ballot vote amongst members, a justification of ensuring peace, as follows:

We empower the Government and Army Council to make peace with F. S. 'Government' on the following basis:¹⁶⁶

1. The Sovereignty of the Irish Nation and the integrity of its territory are inalienable.
2. That any instrument purporting to the contrary is, to the extent of its violation of above principle, "null and void".¹⁶⁷

The resolution was passed by nine, with two against and one abstaining. In a follow-up motion, it was put forward that the Republican government and Army Council 'carry on the war' if the Free State government did not accept peace terms. The motion failed to carry, however, as voters were equally divided between 'for' and 'against'. Some seasoned combatants, such as Tom Barry, voted against. This is significant as, in the weeks following the IRA ceasefire, the Free State government refused to consider terms of settlement with the IRA.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, they continued to arrest and execute IRA men who were still on the run.¹⁶⁹ Pilkington and his five comrades who had voted in favour of the motion would have seen a return to fighting, based on the Free State's ambivalence to the proposal.

Following the Poulacapple meeting, Barry, Aiken and Pilkington travelled to Dublin to consult with Éamon de Valera and Republican Cabinet ministers. It was 'decided unanimously to authorise the President to make a public proclamation of the Republican peace proposals and to order a cessation, for the time being, of aggressive action.'¹⁷⁰ On 27 April 1923 the proclamation, accompanied by an Army Order to cease all offensive operations by noon of 30 April, was issued. This was followed, on 14 May 1923, by a 'dump arms' order issued by Frank Aiken. All units responded positively to the Republican Cabinet and Army Order. Pilkington noted 'the orders enforcing this decision have been faithfully and effectively carried out.'¹⁷¹ Despite Pilkington's central role in initiating the cessation of the armed conflict, he was reluctant. He likely sought to safeguard the inevitability of a ceasefire from the strongest possible Republican perspective, which he felt he could deliver. Shortly before the Convention he 'had been

¹⁵⁹ Farry 2012: 104

¹⁶⁰ John Joe Sheehy in MacEoin 1980: 477-8

¹⁶¹ MSP34REF16364, Seán Hyde

¹⁶² Sean Dowling in MacEoin 1980: 412

¹⁶³ Sean Dowling in MacEoin 1980: 417-9

¹⁶⁴ MS 10,973/7/43, National Library of Ireland

¹⁶⁵ MacEvilly 2011: 129

¹⁶⁶ In this context, 'Government' refers to the legitimate government as identified by the IRA, i.e., the anti-Treaty Republican Cabinet

¹⁶⁷ MS 10,973/7/43, National Library of Ireland

¹⁶⁸ MS 10,973/7/44, National Library of Ireland

¹⁶⁹ MS 10,973/7/44, National Library of Ireland

¹⁷⁰ BMH.WS1763, Dan Breen

¹⁷¹ Farry 2012: 93

hopeful of making a stand' along with Liam Lynch.¹⁷² His feelings apparently reflected the views 'of all ranks in the Division'. For decades to come, Pilkington bore a grudge against Éamon de Valera and the 'politicians' who wanted disarmament. More than 40 years later he would state that 'they could have kept fighting because they were at their very strongest'.¹⁷³

Throughout the revolutionary period Billy Pilkington was highly respected by the men under his command, not least because he 'minded them'.¹⁷⁴ During the War of Independence, Volunteer Harold McBrien took it upon himself to go to Dublin to purchase guns with money raised through the collection of dog licence fees, but he did not inform his OC, Billy Pilkington. Years later, McBrien recalled: 'A very poor view was taken there [in Dublin] of my action and he [Pilkington] was ordered to deal with me in a severe and proper manner. Pilkington undertook to have me court-martialled. I was never brought before a court; Pilkington would not do that to me.'¹⁷⁵ Pilkington had a reputation as a strict disciplinarian. He never smoked and on multiple occasions forbade his men to smoke while on IRA engagements. Similarly, he was a teetotaler and did not permit men under his control to drink while engaged in an operation. He was wholly intolerant of stealing or looting by men in his unit.¹⁷⁶ Pilkington apparently 'never raised his voice, never lost his temper, never swore, [and] never permitted a man in his company to swear'¹⁷⁷ – as evidenced by his conversations with Michael Collins (see above). GOC Pilkington was described as 'tough, quiet spoken and dedicated, a leader who would allow no strong language in his presence'.¹⁷⁸

Aftermath of the Civil War

In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, Billy Pilkington remained on the run. His seniority on the IRA Executive, and the long distances he had to travel to attend meetings (generally held in the south of the country), were undertaken at great personal risk. Ernie O' Malley described how, despite the ceasefire, 'arrests continued with renewed vigour ... our men who wished to avoid capture were hunted like foxes'.¹⁷⁹ In the July 1923 meeting of the Executive, it was decided to contest

the upcoming Dáil election. Pilkington agreed to put his name forward, along with Frank Carty and other Sligo IRA men, under a vote of 'peace for the country'.¹⁸⁰

As of Summer 1923, despite being Commandant of the 3rd Western Division, a senior IRA Executive Council member and a Dáil candidate, Billy Pilkington's whereabouts is not accounted for, except for his attendance at Executive meetings. Seán Dowling, who had been appointed Director of the IRA, recalled his visit to Pilkington in June or July 1923. Pilkington seems to have been spending considerable time in North Roscommon, in the environs of Boyle, which fell within the 3rd Western Division's remit. This was also where the IRA HQ had been located prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. During the Civil War, when the 3rd Western Division lost the Boyle Barracks HQ to the Free State, they established a secret divisional 'command dugout in Rockingham [estate] outside of Boyle'.¹⁸¹ The Rockingham dugout was described as being rat infested and grubby, but upon Dowling's visit, Pilkington had upgraded the secret divisional command. No doubt aware of the value of caves as dugouts from recent experience, Pilkington had lodged himself in a cave on the shores of Lough Key, which he accessed by boat. Dowling noted:

Billy was a forestry man, with a great knowledge of trees and the creatures of nature. He was very pious too, and many years after entered a monastic order. When I called this time, June or July 1923, they were still in the Rockingham dugout, though this one was a cave entered from Lough Key. Anyway, this day they were lucky enough to commandeer an excellent ham, but, for whatever reason Liam refused to have anything to do with it. He was too scrupulous although he said nothing. He just remarked that he had matters to attend to, got into a boat, and rowed off to the Ballyfarnon side.¹⁸²

Arrest and gaol

In 1957, in conversation with Ernie O'Malley, Tom Scanlon spoke of Billy Pilkington in 1923: 'Billy wouldn't allow himself to be taken ... he was captured after the cease fire when he was unarmed. Nothing could happen to Billy then.'¹⁸³ Pilkington was likely leaving,

¹⁷² Tom Heavy in MacEoin 1980: 412

¹⁷³ McManus 2012: 48; Fr Sean McManus pers. comm. to R. Mulraney, 14.12.2022

¹⁷⁴ Plunkett Doherty pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 19.10.2022

¹⁷⁵ BMH.WS0895, Harold McBrien

¹⁷⁶ Plunkett Doherty pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 19.10.2022

¹⁷⁷ Coyle 2008: 37

¹⁷⁸ Feehily 2013: 79

¹⁷⁹ O'Malley 1978: 229

¹⁸⁰ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 25.08.1923

¹⁸¹ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

¹⁸² Sean Dowling in MacEoin 1980: 412-3

¹⁸³ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133

or heading for, the Rockingham dugout when, on 3 August 1923, he was arrested. His capture, considered by the media as being ‘of great importance’, occurred when he was identified by a National Army patrol from Ballymote while cycling at the Cletty crossroads just north of Keshcorran Hill, approximately 23km northwest of Rockingham. Contemporary military sources confirmed he was arrested while not bearing arms.¹⁸⁴

Initially held at Newbridge Barracks, County Kildare, Billy Pilkington was soon transferred to Mountjoy Gaol in Dublin.¹⁸⁵ On 18 August 1923, while still in prison, he was formally nominated as a candidate for the Sligo-Leitrim area in the Fourth Dáil election, the first general election since the foundation of the Free State, with his address listed as Mountjoy Gaol.¹⁸⁶ In the poll results, he received 2,089 first preference votes and on the final count, with transfers included, held 3,154 votes, a 4.58% share of the votes, coming eighth place. Republican opposition votes accounted for less than 36% in the Sligo-Leitrim area, with 47% of the votes for Cumann na nGaedheal.¹⁸⁷ Pilkington had failed to get elected for the Sligo-Leitrim constituency at the General Election.¹⁸⁸ Despite popularity amongst his comrades, his poor performance in the elections might reflect his own lack of enthusiasm for taking on a political role. Much later in life he continued to privately express great disdain for former comrades who had taken the political route, including those who remained on the Republican side.¹⁸⁹ It is likely that the motivating factor behind Pilkington’s brief and half-hearted foray into election politics was merely as a means of maintaining opposition from within prison. During his time in Mountjoy he engaged more enthusiastically in matters that would prove to be of benefit in the years to come. Along with fellow prisoners Con Casey and Tom Derrig, Pilkington took lessons in Latin from Donegal activist Joe Mac Devitt who had studied at Maynooth.¹⁹⁰ IRA veteran Bertie Lambe later recalled to former comrade Jack ‘Trooper’ McHugh that a man named ‘Broderick’ had taught Latin to Billy Pilkington.¹⁹¹

For reasons unknown, Pilkington was moved to Arbour Hill Prison, County Dublin on 22 September 1923 for

thirteen days after which, on 5 October, he was returned to Mountjoy.¹⁹² At Mountjoy, he took part in what was called ‘the biggest hunger strike in history.’¹⁹³ By this time there were over 11,000 Republican prisoners incarcerated throughout the country, approximately three quarters of the IRA nationally. Beginning at midnight on 14 October, and following the successful hunger strike campaigns in women’s prisons, this new campaign saw as many as 8,000 prisoners take part. Barracks, prisons and internment camps across the Free State became the new battlefield and hunger strike its weapon. The hunger strikers were demanding the immediate release of Republican prisoners and an end to internment for those arrested and held without charge. At this stage, such prisoners had been interned for over a year. Michael Kilroy, who Pilkington had worked with in the taking of Ballina and the defence of Rahelly, was OC of the IRA prisoners in Mountjoy and led the strike from there.¹⁹⁴

Pilkington’s time on hunger strike is poorly documented but within a week, on 19 October, he was moved again, this time to Kilmainham Gaol in Dublin. The move was implemented to segregate and isolate IRA leadership in an attempt to break the resolve of the strikers. Republican newspapers at the time bemoaned the constant moving of prisoners on hunger strike and the detrimental effect of these upheavals on the health of strikers.¹⁹⁵ About 60 senior IRA officers were now held in Kilmainham Gaol. There were some positives. A defiant Ernie O’Malley described how the ‘Free State had helped to bring together men who had been parted for years ... we could talk at leisure and learn to know each other in ways we would not have dreamt of, had we met outside prison walls.’¹⁹⁶ In Kilmainham, Billy expressed to O’Malley his plans for the future, once released:

Billy came in with a Caesar in his hand. He was trying to learn Latin; he intended to join a religious order on release. I tried to remember my Latin, juggling the meaning of a sentence when I felt I knew every word of it. Billy often said: ‘I think I know as much Latin as you do yourself!’¹⁹⁷

¹⁸⁴ CW/RR/036; *Freeman’s Journal*, 08.08.1923

¹⁸⁵ CW/P/02/02/07

¹⁸⁶ *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 25.08.1923

¹⁸⁷ *The Sligo Champion*, 01.09.1923; <https://ElectionsIreland.org/result.cfm?election=1923&cons=154>

¹⁸⁸ MacEvilly 2009

¹⁸⁹ Fr Sean McManus pers. comm. to R. Mulraney, 12.12.2022

¹⁹⁰ Con Casey, audio recording 1980. This is the same Mac Devitt who was arrested alongside Linda Kearns and Seamus Devins in 1921.

¹⁹¹ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.04.2023

¹⁹² CW/P/06/05, CW/P/02/02/31, CW/P/01/02

¹⁹³ *Sinn Féin*, 03.11.1923

¹⁹⁴ MacEvilly 2011: 123; *Sinn Féin*, 03.11.1923; *Éire*, 24.11.1923

¹⁹⁵ MacEvilly 2011: 123; *Sinn Féin*, 03.11.1923; *Éire*, 24.11.1923

¹⁹⁶ O’Malley 1978: 254

¹⁹⁷ O’Malley 1978: 255; The Caesar in question most likely refers to the Classic Latin text *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* or *The Gallic Wars* written by Julius Caesar. It is perhaps no coincidence that Pilkington’s book of choice (although no doubt there was a limited selection available at Kilmainham) was one based on war, but one

Ultimately, the hunger strike was not endorsed by IRA leadership on the outside and failed to achieve its immediate goals. Under pressure, Michael Kilroy had little choice but to call it off. The strike ended on 23 November, after 41 days and with two casualties.¹⁹⁸ It had had a devastating effect on the health of prisoners, who had already endured appalling conditions during incarceration. In many cases the physical and psychological effects were lifelong. The authorities initiated a slow release of prisoners over the following month. The IRA leadership had hoped the hunger strike would see them released by Christmas, but they had to endure another nine months of internment.

Christmas 1923 was celebrated in Kilmainham Gaol by the 27 remaining IRA prisoners, a group that included Billy Pilkington. In a humorous and cheerful article in the newspaper *Sinn Féin*, prisoner Frank Gallagher described the day. Supporters on the outside saw to it that prisoners received generous food parcels, which amounted to eight turkeys, ‘brawny fellows from all over Ireland’, hams, a goose, cakes and tinned fruits.¹⁹⁹ On Christmas Eve, midnight Mass was celebrated in the wing:

Father Troy said Mass. Liam Pilkington served it – priest and acolyte well suited. Fr Troy the very embodiment of robust Christianity, with its kindness as well as its strength; Liam shy and boyish, a kind of mixture of Aloysius and Gerard Majella, though indeed there was behind that gentle face much of the Ignatius who refused to surrender Pamplona and walked on the battlements defying the French cannonade.²⁰⁰ ... [After Mass] The company was seated. Frank Casey put on a jazz record on the gramophone. The communal dinner had begun. That day we made up for the forty-one days on which our three meals consisted of salt and water and water and salt.

Following a great feast, a turn of recitals and songs broke out. After much pleading, Billy Pilkington

that was largely adopted by the Christian Brothers for schooling in the years following independence.

¹⁹⁸ MacEvilly 2011: 123; *The Irish Times*, 17.10.1923; *The Sligo Champion*, 20.10.1923

¹⁹⁹ *Sinn Féin*, 27.12.1924

²⁰⁰ Aloysius Gonzaga and Gerard Majella were two lay men beatified for their selfless dedication to those in need. Rather fittingly, the latter was a Redemptorist – the order which Pilkington later joined. Ignatius defied the French and refused to accept defeat in the successful siege of Pamplona in 1813.

eventually agreed to ‘sing some of the old fighting songs.’ Despite breaking down during his first song and ‘blushing like a girl’, he redeemed himself with a second, which proved a great hit.²⁰¹ Christmas 1923 in Kilmainham Gaol, following a 41 day hunger strike, appears to have been the quintessential definition of the spirit of Christmas, a day spent with ‘family’ and friends in prayer, reflection, feasting and fun. It was a day that undoubtedly raised the morale of prisoners, who assumed their conditions were not yet to improve.

On 3 January 1924, Billy Pilkington was transferred to Hare Park at the Curragh Internment Camp, County Kildare. By that stage many of the Sligo volunteers who had fought under Pilkington were there also, including his brothers, Fred and John, and Intelligence Officer Robert G. Bradshaw. Pilkington was categorised as a ‘D Class’ prisoner, ‘who cannot be released under any circumstances.’²⁰² Difficult conditions would ensue, as men were kept in the former cavalry stables ‘without proper protection from a bitter winter.’²⁰³ Prisoners reported dirty clothes ‘in rags’ and bed sheets that were never changed. Food was of a poor standard and in insufficient quantities; meals had to be supplemented by food parcels received from the outside. Hard labour was imposed for the slightest default. Political prisoners were often mixed with common criminals.²⁰⁴ During these difficult months in the Curragh, Billy Pilkington almost certainly took solace in prayer and his deeply held religious conviction.

By June 1924, 100 of the most ‘dangerous’ prisoners remained in the Curragh Internment Camp.²⁰⁵ Weary, they had begun plotting a desperate attempt to escape, though they had little confidence of success. Eventually, the Free State decided to release all remaining Republican prisoners in a piecemeal fashion. When the final 40 prisoners, the most senior IRA leaders, were released, it was done at a rate of two prisoners per day. These measures were taken to prevent Republicans organising meetings and parades upon release. In mid-July, Seán Russell and Ernie O’Malley were the last to be released. O’Malley recounted meeting a small group of prisoners at Kildare train station, including Billy Pilkington who had been released a few days earlier:

We laughed as we eyed our clothes; it was easy to pick out our men on the platform ... Later, our group of officers reached

²⁰¹ *Sinn Féin*, 27.12.1924

²⁰² CW/P/02/02/07

²⁰³ *Éire*, 11.06.1924

²⁰⁴ *Éire*, 14.06.1924

²⁰⁵ *Éire*, 14.06.1924

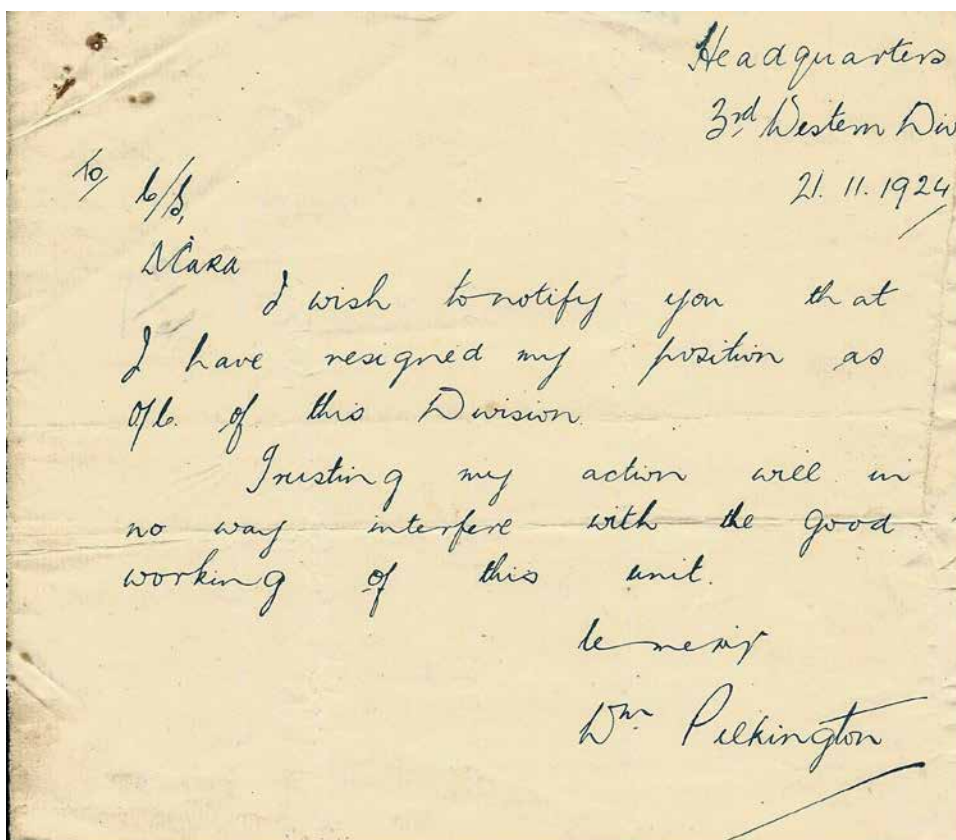


Figure 8.16 Billy Pilkington's letter of resignation as OC of the 3rd Western Division, dated 21 November 1924 (Anne Feehily).

the Kingsbridge Station [now Heuston Station], Dublin, where, after many firm hand grips, we, who had been beaten in the fight, who had withstood the jail war, parted to take up the threads of inscrutable destiny; some to begin life over.²⁰⁶

Having successfully evaded capture on the Sligo mountains for six weeks at the height of the Civil War, by the summer of 1924 Billy Pilkington had spent almost twelve months in prison.

Threads of inscrutable destiny

At the IRA Executive Council meeting held on 10 and 11 August 1924, which Billy Pilkington attended, the move from war to peace began to consolidate. The only statement on military activity was that the 'army [IRA] is in a healthy state' but it was agreed that members would neither deny nor confirm any notion of further armed conflict.²⁰⁷ Lacking the vivaciousness of previous

meetings, Pilkington gave no input and his attendance appears to have been to oblige Council formalities.

The following month, Billy Pilkington was present at the two year commemoration of his six former comrades who had been killed on the mountains of North Sligo on 20 September 1922. A procession, almost half a mile long, left from Sligo Town Hall and continued to the Republican plot in Sligo Cemetery where five of Sligo's Noble Six were buried. Also present were members of the IRA and Cumann na mBan, members of the ITWU trade union, families of the deceased, and large numbers of the general public. The procession proceeded under the careful watch of National Army soldiers who lined the cemetery with bayonets fixed. Despite being seated on a platform with other senior Republicans, Pilkington refrained from making a speech or passing comment.²⁰⁸ The commemoration, which came after a difficult two years, was the last IRA event of the 1920s that Billy Pilkington attended.

²⁰⁶ O'Malley 1978: 290

²⁰⁷ MacEvilly 2011: 137

²⁰⁸ Roscommon Herald, 27.09.1924

The first IRA Convention since 1922 took place in Dublin in November 1925. Billy Pilkington was not present.²⁰⁹ A year earlier, on 21 November 1924, he had submitted his letter of resignation as OC of the 3rd Western Division and wrote a second letter to IRA Chief of Staff Frank Aiken tendering his resignation from the IRA. These letters are published here for the first time (Figures 8.16 and 8.17).

Billy Pilkington had chosen a new path. Local narrative claims that he ‘promised God’ he would become a priest if he survived the ordeal in Tormore Cave and the Civil War.²¹⁰ In the closing months of the war, he had begun to openly express to colleagues his desire to undertake a dramatic life change.²¹¹ His letter indicates that he intended to leave Ireland in order to become a priest, suggesting that he had spent the four months between release from prison and his resignation examining his options. He attempted to join the Irish Redemptorists in Dundalk but was refused because of his Republican history.²¹² In 1986, Kathleen Carroll remembered that ‘he had to be ordained out of the country, you know. They wouldn’t let him be ordained here. I don’t like to say this but the priests and the nuns weren’t ... [trails off]’.²¹³ The most persistent recollection that survives about Billy Pilkington in County Sligo today is that the Catholic Church refused to allow him to train as a priest in Ireland, a story that is typically recounted with disdain and incredulity. One narrative that has passed down through the Pilkington family is that when he was first refused training to become a priest, Billy went to the library in Sligo town and cut out newspaper clippings and destroyed photographs that he had featured in. He was essentially destroying evidence of his IRA activities to minimise the negative impact on his application for entry into the priesthood.²¹⁴ While at first glance this might seem to be a humorous anecdote, despite extensive searches we have found no photographs of Billy Pilkington from the revolutionary period in print, in unpublished collections or in family archives (see Figure 8.14 for one possible exception).²¹⁵

None of the Pilkington family members that we have spoken to in the course of this project have ever seen an image of Billy Pilkington, their uncle or granduncle, from his time in the IRA. This is quite remarkable considering his senior status in the IRA. Many officers of lesser rank, such as Seamus Devins, Brian MacNeill and Frank Carty, were all well-photographed. Photos survive of many IRA volunteers who were active during the revolutionary period in County Sligo, but there are *none* of the GOC of the 3rd Western Division. This enigma is even more startling when one considers that there are more photographs of Billy Pilkington as a child than there are of his seven years as a senior IRA leader!

A day after he wrote his resignation letters, on 22 November 1924, Billy Pilkington entered the Redemptorists at Bishop Eton, Liverpool, a Roman Catholic missionary congregation. From that point onwards he chose to be known as Fr William; abandoning ‘Billy’ perhaps signified a departure from his military life and Republican past. He had to undertake further studies at the Redemptorist campus at Perth, Scotland before admission to the noviciate on 15 August 1927. Billy Pilkington was ordained a Roman Catholic priest at Hawkstone Hall Redemptorist seminary in Weston, Shropshire, England, on 15 September 1932, ten years after his stay in Tormore Cave (Figure 8.18). The ceremony was attended by ‘relatives and a large number of friends ... to offer congratulations and receive the first blessing of the young Sligo priest.’²¹⁶ President Éamon de Valera²¹⁷ sent a congratulatory message on Pilkington’s ordination.²¹⁸ This was a significant and proud occasion for Sligo town, his former comrades and his family. His first trip home after his ordination was a cause for public celebration (Figure 8.19). Bonfires were lit along the roadsides and large numbers of people gathered on the streets to welcome him into the town.²¹⁹ He was described at this time as ‘intimately known and highly esteemed by all classes of the people.’²²⁰ Ironically, one exception was the Irish clergy, who remained wholly

²⁰⁹ MacEvilly 2011: 151

²¹⁰ Chris Branley, audio recording 2014

²¹¹ O’Malley 1978: 255

²¹² MacEvilly 2009

²¹³ Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986

²¹⁴ Valerie Harrington pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 20.07.2022

²¹⁵ Several books and online sources have published a photo of Harry Doherty standing behind a seated man who has been identified as Billy Pilkington (e.g., Farry 1992: 290; Farry 2012: fig. 20). Harry’s son, Plunkett Doherty (pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 19.10.2022), is adamant that the seated man is not Billy Pilkington. On the reverse of the photo was written, possibly by Sadie Monaghan, ‘Tommy La, Harry Doherty on right’. Tommy Langan (one of Sligo’s Noble Six) was Sadie’s brother. The authors of this book do not believe that the seated man is Tommy Langan, but we can offer no alternative

identification. What is clear is that this is not Billy Pilkington. His grandnieces and grandnephews similarly do not believe the seated man is Billy Pilkington. This is further supported by the fact that the seated man holds a cigarette, but Billy Pilkington did not smoke and did not allow men under his command to smoke while conducting IRA business.

²¹⁶ *The Sligo Champion*, 24.09.1932

²¹⁷ Officially, de Valera was President of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State, a temporary position that existed from 1932 until 1937, with the introduction of the Irish Constitution of 1937.

²¹⁸ *The Sligo Champion*, 24.09.1932

²¹⁹ Plunkett Doherty pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 08.02.2022

²²⁰ *The Sligo Champion*, 24.09.1932

Sligo
21. 11. 1924

to: Chief of Staff,
Sligo,

You will remember the conversation we had together shortly after my release from internment. The reason that prevented me then from resuming my duties as O/C Third Western Division, now, makes it necessary for me to resign from the Army. In explanation: I am leaving the country to prepare for entry to the religious life.

With a knowledge of your worth, and a remembrance of much kindness from you to me, I pray that God will give you the grace and strength to continue faithful to the Republic, so dear to us all.

You will find with this my resignation
to care
 Wm Pilkington
 W.P.

Figure 8.17 'I am leaving the country to prepare for entry to the religious life.' Billy Pilkington's letter of resignation from the IRA, dated 21 November 1924 (Anne Feehily).

loyal to the Free State and refused to acknowledge him. Fr Pilkington was invited by the Mayor of Sligo town to attend for a special presentation, but at the urging of the Irish clergy, he was refused permission to accept the honour. Fr Pilkington was also banned by the

Catholic Church from saying Mass in Sligo Cathedral, a stance that continued until 1950.²²¹

Military archives reveal that during the 1930s, Billy Pilkington generally refused to clarify details of

²²¹ MacEvilly 2009

GENERAL OFFICER COMMANDING BILLY PILKINGTON



Figure 8.18 Billy Pilkington at Hawkstone Hall, Shropshire, England, probably on the day of his ordination, 15 September 1932 (Valerie Harrington).



Figure 8.19 The Pilkington family shortly after Billy's ordination as a priest in 1932. Back, left to right: Fred, Jack (John), Joseph (Josie), Jim (James), John (father), Billy. Front, left to right: Margaret (mother), Anna, Mary, kneeling child unidentified (Anne Feehily).

Military Service Pension applications made by his former comrades and their families.²²² In a reply to the Pensions Board dated 15 June 1933, Pilkington noted receipt of a letter seeking clarity about the death of Tommy Langan (one of Sligo's Noble Six) in relation to a pension claim sought by Tommy's mother, Bridget Langan. Billy returned the letter 'with the required information unsupplied.' He stated his reason for not cooperating as: 'Ten years absence obscuring my recollection of past events in Ireland'²²³ (Figure 8.20). It was commonly the case that pension applicants submitted details many decades after the actual events had occurred. Ten years after the war could not be considered a long period of time when many other applicants remained in contact with the Pension Board into their 70s and 80s. Fr Pilkington also more directly stated, '[it] is not fitting and, surely unnecessary, that I as a religious should concern myself with this firmly secular matter.'²²⁴ Pilkington's aversion to enquiries related to Military Service Pension claims might reflect a reluctance to divulge details of divisional and brigade activities, which was a prerequisite to any individual winning a successful pension claim. There is at least one exception to this general reluctance to become involved in pension applications. In September 1939, Fr Pilkington wrote a letter to the Pensions Board in response to their request for information regarding Peadar Glynn's application (Glynn was OC of the I Sligo Brigade ASU). It is noteworthy that in his brief communication, Fr Pilkington twice mentions difficulties recalling details of events. Further, his response came a full year after the board had requested his commentary. It may be relevant that Glynn's brother was also a priest, Reverend J.J. Glynn, at that time based in Castlerea, County Roscommon.²²⁵

Having presumably been approached to support many pension claims as OC of the 3rd Western Division, in 1937 Pilkington communicated his wish that Dr Martin Brennan of the IV South Sligo Brigade would act on his behalf for the entire division.²²⁶ In 1938, it was noted by Colonel J.J. O'Connell that 'there is a difficulty about clarifying the service of the [3rd Western] Divisional Staff due to ... the unwillingness of the former Divisional

Commandant – now Rev. W. Pilkington – to certify any claim whatever.'²²⁷ That said, Fr Pilkington appears to have informally discussed the topic with veterans on his return trips to Sligo. In a letter to the Pensions Board in 1939, Martin Brennan wrote, in support of the failed application of Andy Doocey: 'I was speaking to Fr. Billy Pilkington when he was home recently and he was very annoyed when he heard that this man was not getting a pension.'²²⁸

South Africa

The hostility of Irish clergy, and perhaps a desire to withdraw from a place with all too many reminders of war, meant that Fr Pilkington spent most of the 1930s in training and giving missions across England (Figures 8.21 and 8.22).²²⁹ By 1937 he was based at St Mary's Church in Clapham, London.²³⁰ In 1939, Fr Pilkington was posted as a missionary priest to Bergvliet, today a suburban district in Cape Town, South Africa (Figure 8.22). He was resident at the Church of the Most Holy Redeemer with an address of 'The Monastery', Bergvliet, Cape Town. Bergvliet was a farm that was developed into a mission. Perhaps mirroring his military organisational abilities, he was placed in charge of two missions in the Cape Town suburban districts of Retreat and Grassy Park, where he was well-liked by the impoverished and marginalised communities he served.²³¹ The Monastery specialised in helping South African servicemen who had returned from the Second World War. It is not clear if Fr Pilkington was involved in this work, but he would have been well-equipped as both a former soldier and a man of God. Around 1946 he was sent to Pretoria, South Africa to preach missions and hold retreats. In 1950 he was appointed rector at Heathfield, Cape Town – located some 1,500km from Pretoria.²³² Overall, little is known of Fr Pilkington's time in South Africa and it appears he kept his location private. He maintained contact with his brother Martin, however, who lived in Sligo.²³³ During his time in Cape Town, he was once visited by President Éamon de Valera, who apparently called to The Monastery to meet him. Pilkington refused to see him.²³⁴ In later years, when living in Liverpool, de Valera made a second attempt to meet

²²² MA/MSPC/RO/297

²²³ DP5273, Thomas Langan

²²⁴ DP5273, Thomas Langan

²²⁵ MSP34REF47091, Peadar Glynn

²²⁶ 34C484, Martin Brennan. A few days before Brennan stood against Frank Carty in the General Election of 1937, he circulated a letter to all military pension applicants informing them that Fr Pilkington had requested the transfer of responsibility for the division to him. Presumably Fr Pilkington was well aware of the political significance of this move. We are grateful to Michael Farry for bringing this point to our attention.

²²⁷ MS 22,120/5/13, National Library of Ireland

²²⁸ MSP34REF18708, Andrew Doocey

²²⁹ MacEivilly 2009

²³⁰ MSP34REF30117, Charles Gildea

²³¹ MacEivilly 2009

²³² MacEivilly 2009

²³³ In a fragment of a surviving letter to Martin Pilkington, dated 10.04.1952, Billy discusses another priest, Fr James O'Connor: 'what he did not know about soccer and Arsenal in particular was not worth knowing.' MS 31,421/12/55, National Library of Ireland

²³⁴ Fr Sean McManus pers. comm. to R. Mulraney, 14.12.1922

II C.B./257

HAWKSTONE HALL,
WESTON,
NR. SHREWSBURY.
15th June 1933

HODNET RD.
HODNET ST.
HAWKSTONE HALL,
WESTON-SHROPSHIRE.
HODNET G.W.R.

Dear,

Your letter to hand yesterday
It is with no wish to hinder the
good work of your Board, I am returning
the envelope with the required information
unsupplied. My reasons for so doing
are the following:-

- ① Ten years absence, obscuring my
recollection of past events in Ireland, make
me unable to give with accuracy the
details of time, place, and rank, required.
- ② It is not fitting, and surely,
unnecessary, that I as a religious should

concern myself with this purely secular
matter.

But my reply should, unwittingly,
smack of discourtesy to the members
of the Board I refer you to Michael
Hille, Finisklin, Sligo. He was Divisional
Police Officer for the Western Area, and
can supply you with the particulars
and proofs needed.

With regards,
Yours faithfully,
Fiam Pilkington G.D.R.

Figure 8.20 Letter from Fr Billy Pilkington to the Pensions Board in relation to a pension claim made by Bridget Langan, whose son Tommy was killed en route to Tormore Cave on 20 September 1922 (DP5273, Thomas Langan; Reproduced courtesy of Military Service Collection Project, Military Archives).



Figure 8.21 A young Fr Billy Pilkington (Dermot 1962).

up, but Fr Pilkington again refused.²³⁵ Fr Pilkington remained in South Africa until 1953.²³⁶

A hard nut to crack

In August 1952, Pilkington was as elusive to historians as he continues to be today. Former IRA intelligence officer and historian, Florence O'Donoghue, made numerous inquiries with former comrades about activities of the 3rd Western Division. In 1952, O'Donoghue was in correspondence with Moss Twomey, former IRA Chief of Staff. Twomey, in turn, was in contact with Tom Scanlon. By then Scanlon was running a motor sales company together with Billy's brother, Martin Pilkington. The latter forwarded a fragment of a letter from Billy with his missionary address in South Africa. This was sent by Scanlon to Twomey, who exclaimed to O'Donoghue: 'At last I have got Pilkington's address for

²³⁵ Michael Farry pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 08.07.2023

²³⁶ MS 31,423/10/11, National Library of Ireland

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT

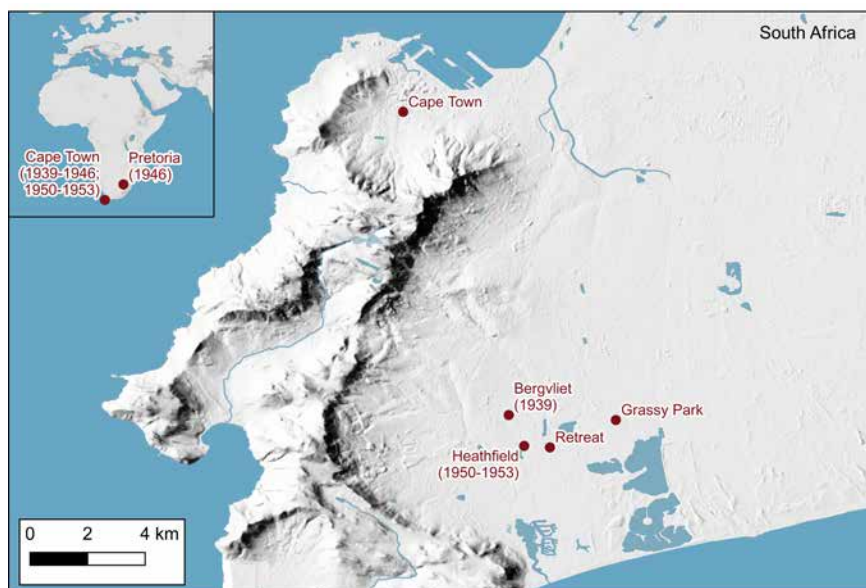
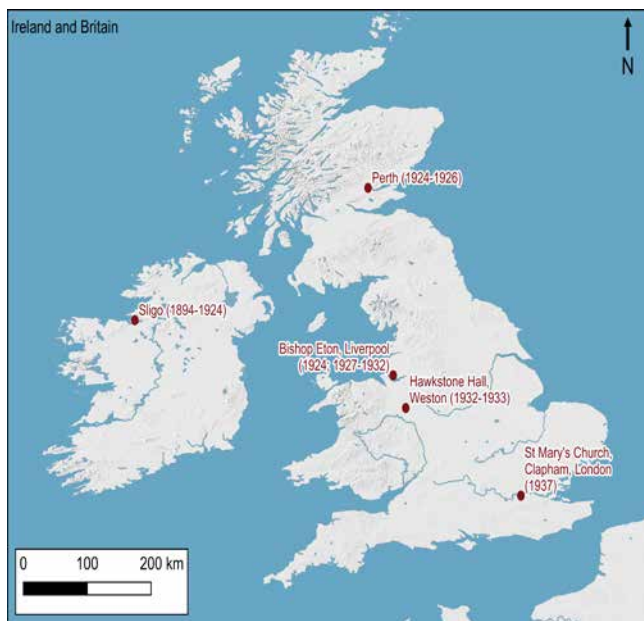


Figure 8.22 Officer Commanding Billy Pilkington resigned from the IRA in 1924 and followed a calling to the religious life. Fr. Billy Pilkington trained in Great Britain and spent much of his life in South Africa (James Bonsall).

you.²³⁷ Both Twomey and O'Donoghue enthusiastically wrote to Pilkington in South Africa. One year later, in October 1953, Twomey remarked that Pilkington had 'been in Ireland for some time ... I met him on Sunday last, for an hour or so. He did not mention having received our letters, and as he did not do so, I did not raise the matter. I felt that it was too late now for him to be of any use to you.'²³⁸ Pilkington had returned to Ireland from South Africa on holidays in July 1953. He

spent late summer and early autumn with his brother, Joseph, and sister-in-law, Bridget, at their home in Sligo town. His temporary return was considered newsworthy and was reported in *The Sligo Champion*.²³⁹

Fr Pilkington visited New York at least twice, apparently while he was based in Africa. Several of his siblings had moved there in the years following the Civil War. On both occasions he celebrated Mass

²³⁷ MS 31,421/12/55, National Library of Ireland

²³⁸ MS 31,421/12/87, National Library of Ireland

²³⁹ *The Sligo Champion*, 04.7.1953

in New York City; his nephew, John, served as an altar boy.²⁴⁰ Fr Pilkington was well-connected and well-liked by the Catholic Church in New York. He successfully raised funds on his visits there for the poor in Africa.²⁴¹ In 1954, he was guest of honour at a dinner in New York sponsored by Clan na Gael and IRA Veterans of America, an organisation established in the wake of the Irish Civil War.

The Confessor

On 5 October 1953, after approximately fourteen years in South Africa, Fr Pilkington returned to the UK to take up a position at Saint Mary's Monastery in Perth, Scotland.²⁴² Through the 1950s and 1960s, Fr Pilkington held various senior roles at St Benet's Church in Sunderland; the diocese of Monmouthshire in Wales; and Bishop Eton Monastery in Liverpool.²⁴³ In the late 1960s he returned to Hawkstone Hall near Shrewsbury, where he had been ordained in 1932. Now in his 70s, Fr Pilkington was a Confessor, a senior priest who would take the confessions of student priests, who referred to him affectionately as 'Pilkie' or 'Father Pilkie'.²⁴⁴ Well known Republican, civil rights activist and Redemptorist priest Fr Sean McManus, born in 1944 in Kinawley, County Fermanagh, became familiar with 'Pilkie' while a student priest. Hearing confessions was important to Fr Pilkington, and Fr McManus warmly described how: 'we would line up at his door, and when my turn would come, he would say, "Come on in Brother McManus and I'll clean your skillet" [absolve you of your sins].'²⁴⁵ Fr Pilkington was considered prudish but not without wit and humour. Occasionally, he would review student recitals of memorised sermons in front of the class. Fr McManus described the sermon he had learned, titled 'The Last Day by Father James Joyce'. McManus's text was lifted from James Joyce's novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. At that time Joyce was on the list of authors and books banned by the Catholic Church. The young Fr McManus was:

thinking that these English blokes wouldn't recognise Joyce's "sermon". But, ah man, didn't Pilkie come in to preside over my sermon ... On the way back I walked down the corridor with Pilkie and he told me it was the best

sermon on *The Last Day* he had ever heard in his life. He then asked me about the 'priest' who had written it. I certainly was not going to tell a lie to my Confessor, so I levelled with him. I thought he was going to have a heart attack. "That blackguard", he hissed. "He was as bad as Yeats, who couldn't believe in Jesus Christ but did believe in the fairies." And with that he turned on his heel and strode off in righteous exasperation, his military step more pronounced than usual.²⁴⁶

Fr Sean McManus was one of the few people who Fr Billy Pilkington spoke to regarding his time in the IRA, but it was difficult to tease information out of him: 'He never talked about his IRA years. When he used to talk to me, after a while his hands would shake, as is common with many old soldiers, and he would end the conversation.' Fr Pilkington found time to blast Michael Collins: 'the foulest mouth of any man he ever knew', no doubt thinking back to the time he silenced the 'Big Fella' in Devlin's pub in Dublin. Fr McManus continued: 'he was quite explosive' when he talked about Michael Collins' attitude. More surprisingly, perhaps, Pilkington took issue with Éamon de Valera, whom he never forgave for steering the IRA into politics. Fr Pilkington continued to believe 'that they did not need to sign the Treaty [i.e., that the IRA did not need to accept the authority of the pro-Treaty Free State], that they could have kept fighting the Crown forces because they were at their very strongest.' Many years later, while on mission to an unnamed parish in England, Pilkington walked by a military compound. On seeing the extent of the compound, he was reminded of the vast stores of resources available to the British forces. Despite holding true to this position, some doubt entered his mind, observing that as the British forces had 'acres and acres of munitions, we must have been mad to think we could beat them.' At one stage, Fr Pilkington related that he had reprimanded Dan Breen for becoming a politician. Similarly, he could not reconcile with de Valera and other IRA men who had gone on to become politicians.²⁴⁷

During his time as Confessor, Pilkington also became friendly with Fr Sean McManus's older brother, Jim, who is also a priest. Fr Jim McManus had first encountered Fr Pilkington in Perth (Scotland) from the mid- to late-1950s. At that time, Fr Jim McManus was a novice priest but, due to Pilkington's position as a senior priest, there was little occasion for both men to meet or to talk. In

²⁴⁰ Valerie Harrington pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 20.07.2022

²⁴¹ Valerie Harrington pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 20.07.2022

²⁴² MS 31,423/10/11, National Library of Ireland; *The Sligo Champion*, 04.07.1953

²⁴³ MacEvilly 2009

²⁴⁴ Fr Sean McManus pers. comm. to R. Mulraney, 12.12.2022

²⁴⁵ Fr Sean McManus and Fr Jim McManus pers. comm. to R. Mulraney, 12.12.2022

²⁴⁶ Fr Sean McManus pers. comm. to R. Mulraney, 12.12.2022

²⁴⁷ Fr Sean McManus pers. comm. to R. Mulraney, 12.12.2022

later years, however, Fr Jim would teach in the seminary of Hawkstone where Fr Pilkington was Confessor, and there was now ample time for friendships to develop. In one instance, Fr Pilkington told Fr Jim McManus of an ambush at Chaffpool, 5km outside Tubbercurry, County Sligo that had taken place on 30 September 1920 during the War of Independence.²⁴⁸ The IRA under Frank Carty had ambushed a Crossley Tender carrying nine RIC men. Two RIC constables were seriously injured as was District Inspector James Brady who succumbed to his injuries later that day. Neither Carty nor his men ever mentioned the presence of Billy Pilkington at that ambush, but during his conversation with Fr Jim McManus, Fr Pilkington claimed to have been present at Chaffpool.²⁴⁹ One of the injured men, Head Constable Michael O'Hara, was shot through the leg and foot.²⁵⁰ O'Hara eventually resigned and, in the 1930s, moved to County Down where he married and had eight sons and two daughters. In a highly unusual family history, all eight sons went on to become priests. One of the sons, Fr Conleth O'Hara, was ordained in Newcastle upon Tyne.²⁵¹ The Chaffpool ambush came full circle as described by Fr Sean McManus:

Many years later the Rector of Perth asked [Pilkington] to go on supply to a parish in Newcastle for two weeks [while the local] parish priest was taking a holiday. He [the parish priest] would be gone when the supply priest arrived, and at the end he [the supply priest] could leave on the morning before he came back from his holidays. But when the parish priest [Fr Conleth O'Hara] came back, he was surprised to find Fr Pilkington still in the presbytery. He was more surprised when Pilky got down on his knees and confessed that when he saw the photo of the RIC officer on the table, he had to ask forgiveness and a blessing because, he said, "I always had a bad aim and if I hadn't been a bad shot none of the O'Hara brothers would have come into this world."²⁵²

²⁴⁸ Billy Pilkington is noted, in various sources, to have taken part in many engagements throughout the county.

²⁴⁹ This is not in itself unusual as Carty, in his personal accounts, was often critical of Pilkington, downplayed the importance of his role, or simply left him out of the story, due to the persistent rivalry between the two men.

²⁵⁰ BMH.WS1313, Charles Gildea; *Dublin Evening Telegraph*, 01.10.1920; *The Sligo Champion* 02.10.1920

²⁵¹ Fr Jim McManus pers. comm. to R. Mulraney, 12.12.2022; *The Irish News*, 22.08.2015

²⁵² Fr Sean McManus pers. comm. to R. Mulraney, 12.12.2022

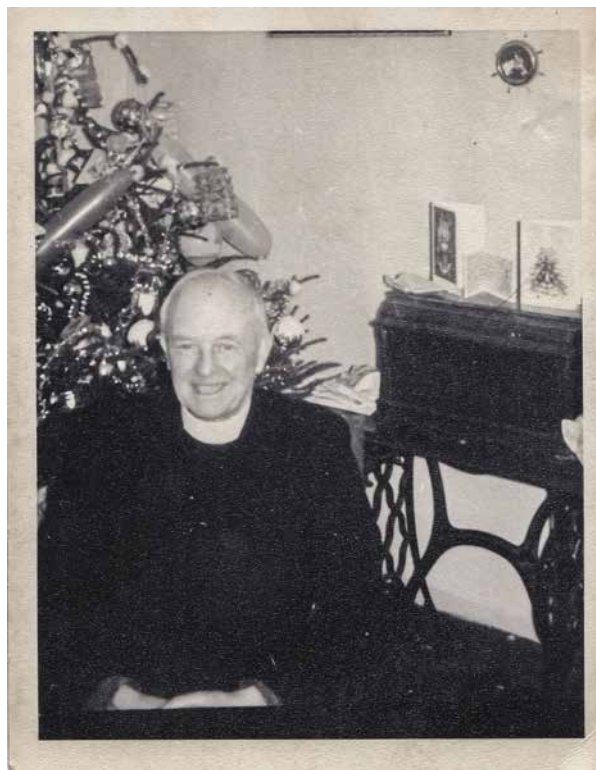


Figure 8.23 Fr Billy Pilkington visiting family in Sligo town, Christmas 1963 (Anne Feehily).

In another detail, Fr Pilkington told Fr Sean McManus about an incident that had occurred when he was a prisoner, most likely after the Civil War. Pilkington had informed the English Catholic prison chaplain that:

When Ireland was free, he was going to become a priest. The chaplain jokingly inscribed in Pilkington's prayer book the following lines, which Pilkie still got a great kick out of ... and would smile with delight: "May you achieve the goal you desire, instead of the gaol you deserve."²⁵³

Fr Sean McManus recalled Fr Pilkington's character when he was in his 70s (Figure 8.23):

He was a very striking looking man, handsome, very erect. He was a walker so he was still fit as an older man, a handsome man, always looking well, cleaned-up and presented well. He was, I'd guess we'd say in Ireland, a lovely man and a gentle soul but of course with a spine of steel. He was deeply

²⁵³ McManus 2012



Figure 8.24 Three of the Pilkington brothers in the late 1960s or early 1970s.
L to R: Martin, Mickey (Michael) and Fr. Billy (Anne Feehily).

spiritual, not a pious fool as we used to talk of in those days, [that is] someone who wore his religion on his sleeve too much. He wasn't like that at all, he was just profoundly spiritual. He was a deeply, deeply spiritual man, probably a saint in his own way. A very straight forward type of man, a simple man, in a proper sense. His room, there was hardly anything in it, which of course is typical for a Redemptorist, but he was frugal. I've no idea if he ever drank, my guess is probably not at all. But of course, he thought Joyce [James Joyce] was a blackguard! But he was a straightforward straight shooter, except of course, he said himself, he wasn't a straight shooter!²⁵⁴

Fr Pilkington returned home to Sligo on an annual basis, visiting family as well as his old IRA comrades (Figure 8.24). In 1936, together with a second priest, he visited Chris Branley and brought him to Tormore Cave.²⁵⁵ Chris' father, Paddy, had taken refuge there with Billy in 1922. In 1973, Fr Pilkington visited Jack 'Trooper'

McHugh in Treacy Avenue in Sligo town.²⁵⁶ Billy had also remained close friends with his sister-in-law, Bridget (married to Joseph Pilkington), who had brought him food and supplies during his time in Tormore Cave.²⁵⁷ On one occasion when Fr Billy visited Sligo, Bridget's young granddaughter, Anne, had a persistent wart on her hand. Bridget asked Fr Billy to bless the wart, which he did, and it disappeared shortly thereafter.²⁵⁸ Into the 1970s, Bridget and Fr Billy regularly visited families in Glencar and Drumcliff who had supported IRA men when on the run during the War of Independence and Civil War. Fr Billy often led the rosary in these houses during such visits. The help these families had given to the Pilkington men was respected, retold and recalled for younger generations.²⁵⁹ Fr Pilkington was treated with great respect and continued to be a commanding presence on return trips to Sligo. One nephew remembered him as a 'quiet man'²⁶⁰ (Figure 8.25). For decades, Fr Pilkington always walked with a pebble in his shoe as an act of penance.²⁶¹

²⁵⁴ Fr Sean McManus pers. comm. to R. Mulraney, 14.12.2022

²⁵⁵ Chris Branley, video and audio recording 2012

²⁵⁶ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.04.2023

²⁵⁷ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 29.04.2022

²⁵⁸ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 29.04.2022

²⁵⁹ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 23.11.2022

²⁶⁰ John Pilkington pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 18.04.2023

²⁶¹ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 29.04.2022



Figure 8.25 John Pilkington remembers his uncle, Fr Billy Pilkington, as a ‘quiet man’ (Marion Dowd).

Death of Fr Pilkington

Fr Billy Pilkington died on 26 March 1977 aged 82, at Bishop Eton Monastery, Childwall, Liverpool, where he is buried (Figures 8.26 and 8.27). A special commemorative Mass, requested by former IRA comrades, was celebrated at Sligo Cathedral on 30 April 1977.²⁶²

There are no public memorials specific to Billy Pilkington in Sligo town or county, but he is one of the 20 Republicans commemorated on the Countess Constance Markievicz Memorial in Rathcormac village, North Sligo. He is also one of the 52 ‘Prominent Sligo I.R.A. Volunteers, War of Independence 1919-1922 [sic]’ named on a memorial in the John Hume Peace Garden at Banada in South Sligo. Pilkington Terrace, a social

housing scheme in Sligo town, was incorrectly believed by many to have been named after Billy Pilkington, but in fact it was named in honour of his brother, Joseph Pilkington.²⁶³ Joseph had been a councillor in Sligo town from 1950 to 1955; he had also been active in the 3rd Western Division IRA during the revolutionary period.²⁶⁴ Billy Pilkington, however, continues to be remembered warmly by people who knew him in the latter decades of his life, and people who inherited memories from their fathers who had served under him during the revolutionary period. He was described by those who knew him in the 1960s and 1970s as a quiet and ‘decent’ man.²⁶⁵ Today, in the liturgical calendar of the Archdiocese of Cape Town, the anniversary of Fr William Pilkington’s death is remembered on 26 March every year, most recently at Mass celebrated on 26 March 2024.²⁶⁶

²⁶² *The Sligo Champion*, 29.04.1977

²⁶³ Harte 2014: 31; Gallagher 2008: 642

²⁶⁴ *The Sligo Champion*, 18.02.2013

²⁶⁵ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.04.2023

²⁶⁶ *Archdiocesan Directory 2024* for the Archdiocese of Cape Town

Historian and poet Michael Farry, who has written about Billy Pilkington from a historical perspective, penned the following poem, reproduced here with permission:²⁶⁷

Bishop Eton Churchyard, Liverpool

i.m. Rev William Pilkington, CSsR, formerly O/C 3rd Western Division, IRA

I had expected graven verses
 find grey concrete crosses
 row on row in mown grass

between church and street wall
 identical but for name and dates
 of entry, exit.

The Mass-goer who takes my photograph
 standing to attention by his cross
 remembers his confessional skills.

A priest recalls devotion to the Eucharist
 well aware of his turbulent history,
 gunshots and kindnesses,

his zealotry as at the Moneygold ambush,
 his later life of obedient service
 on foreign veldts,

his dedicated silence on his Irish past,
 an untended olive garden.
 I offer my book. It has a photograph.

The Great War memorial halts me as I leave:
 Christ crucified above
 a list of other dead

in some tended corner of a foreign field
 —a priest included, his contemporary—
 who died too soon for peace.

I see him pausing here in twilight,
 of your charity pray for the following,
 including them in evening prayer

at this faulty, broken world's end
 safe rest, quiet garden, mown lawn,
 fruit-fall in autumn, home.

Michael Farry



Figure 8.26 Fr Billy Pilkington's headstone at Bishop Eton Monastery giving his date of death as 26 March 1977; date of admission to the noviciate as 15 August 1927; and date of ordination as 15 September 1932 (Marion Dowd).

²⁶⁷ From Farry's collection, *Troubles* (2020)

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT



Figure 8.27 Fr Billy Pilkington's grave beside Our Lady of the Annunciation Church on the grounds of Bishop Eton Monastery, Childwall, Liverpool. His grave is fourth from right, front row (Marion Dowd).

Chapter 9

The men on the hills: the IRA billeted in Tormore Cave

We were all told to retire to a certain place¹

Jack 'Trooper' McHugh

In September 1923, on the first anniversary of their deaths, two wreaths were placed by IRA comrades on the graves of five of Sligo's Noble Six in the Republican plot at Sligo Cemetery.² The dedications on the wreaths read: *In undying memory of our dear dead Comrades, from the 'Men on the Hills'*. A separate dedication read, simply, *From the Men on the Hills*. An eyewitness remembered that one of the wreaths, made from heather, was in the shape of a harp.³ *Men on the Hills* was an affectionate term the North Sligo Republicans used to describe themselves, a term that belies their shared experience of the hardship, endurance and solidarity intrinsic to guerrilla warfare (Figure 9.1). Of the approximately 120 Republicans stationed at Rahelly House in September 1922, 40 or so were arrested following evacuation of the

base.⁴ The remaining men, approximately 80, went on the run seeking refuge in dugouts and safe houses until the National Army had withdrawn from County Sligo. Of these 'men on the hills', approximately 30 sought shelter in Tormore Cave following the execution of Sligo's Noble Six, where they stayed for up to six weeks.⁵

Men who stayed in Tormore Cave in September-October 1922

We present here biographies of three men known to have stayed in Tormore Cave during the Civil War, together with their GOC Billy Pilkington (see Chapter 8). These men are linked to the cave through family narratives; there are no written records to support the



Figure 9.1 Two unidentified Sligo Republicans in the shadow of Slievemore in 1922 (Tadhg Kilgannon Collection, Local Studies & Archive, Sligo County Library).

¹ Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1976

² *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 29.09.1923

³ Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986

⁴ Farry 2000: 85

⁵ Chris Branley, audio recording 2008; Chris Branley, video and audio recording 2012

association and the archaeological investigation did not reveal anything that could be tied to a particular individual, such as graffiti. These three men, Dominic Branley, Paddy Branley and Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, are in many ways representative of the entire group who stayed in the cave dugout. They were IRA volunteers who are scarcely mentioned in archival records (apart from Military Pension applications) and are almost invisible in historical publications, but their involvement is remembered by their families. The brief portraits included here currently comprise the most detailed biographies yet written of these three combatants. Following this are summary biographies of four IRA men who may also have stayed in Tormore Cave during the period under consideration: Thady Branley, Eugene Gilbride, John Kane and John Smyth.

The majority (over 60%) of the men who took part in County Sligo's Civil War were sons of farmers and fishermen.⁶ In Sligo town, active Republicans generally

came from marginally wealthier homes and families than those from the town who had joined the National Army. They were particularly drawn from the class of skilled tradesmen (39%) and labourers (23%). In comparison, new National Army recruits were often drawn from unskilled workers and landless farm workers.⁷ Of the four men known to have sought refuge in Tormore Cave, Dominic and Paddy Branley lived in the countryside and were sons of a farmer; two lived in Sligo town: Billy Pilkington was the son of a postman, while Jack 'Trooper' McHugh was the son of a docker who worked on the quays. When considering age profiles, 62% of Republicans in County Sligo were 20-29 years old when they fought in the Civil War; 22% were 15-19 years old; 14% were 30-39 years old; 1% were aged 40-49; and 1% were over the age of 50.⁸ Of the men known to have billeted in Tormore Cave, two were in the 20-29 year old group (Billy Pilkington and Jack 'Trooper' McHugh) and two were in the 30-39 year old category (Dominic Branley and Paddy Branley).

⁶ Farry 2000: 119-20

⁷ Farry 2000: 123

⁸ Farry 2000: 126

Dominic (Dominick, Domenick, Domnick) Branley (Brandley)

Born: 9 September 1891⁹

Childhood home: Tormore townland, County Sligo

Died: 27 August 1977 (aged 86)¹⁰

Buried: Drumcliff Churchyard, County Sligo

Early life

Dominic Branley was one of ten children born to Sarah (née Gonley/Gonnelly) and Thady Branley at their hillside home in Tormore townland overlooking Glencar Lake (Figure 9.2). In the 1901 census, ‘Dominick’, then aged 9, was attending school and could read.¹¹

War of Independence (21 January 1919–11 July 1921)

Little is known of Dominic Branley’s involvement in the War of Independence and Civil War (Figure 9.3). In Brigade Activity Reports, Dominic and his brothers, Paddy and Thady, were listed as volunteers in the Drumcliff Company, 2nd Battalion Sligo Brigade as of 11 July 1921 at the end of the War of Independence (Figure 9.4).¹² In his 1972 application for a Service (1917–1921) Medal, Dominic stated that he had been a member of the IRA in Drumcliff.¹³ In family memory, it is remembered that Dominic spent much of the War of Independence with a group of volunteers in Glenade, County Leitrim, including Timoneys, who were maternal relatives.¹⁴

Civil War (28 June 1922–24 May 1923)

As of 1 July 1922, Dominic Branley was listed in the North Sligo Brigade Activity Reports as an IRA volunteer who was in active service under Captain Michael Devins.¹⁵ It is remembered that Dominic stayed in Tormore Cave along with his brother Paddy.¹⁶ During the Civil War, Dominic ‘was on the run from the very word go’ according to family narrative.¹⁷ Apparently, he had not been able to attend his brother Paddy’s wedding on

22 January 1923 because he was on the run.¹⁸ Another family narrative recalls that during a shoot-out, one of Dominic’s comrades was wounded and left out in the open. Dominic ran out from cover, grabbed the man by the legs and dragged him to safety.¹⁹ Dominic was also involved in an attack at Manorhamilton.²⁰ The attack in question may have been an incident that took place on 17 November 1922 when a Republican unit arrived into the town with the intention of commandeering goods from shops and raiding the post office. National Army troops were on patrol and an exchange of gunfire took place. Philip Gilgunn, OC 4th Battalion, was shot and died the following day.²¹

Aftermath

In August 1923, three months after the Civil War had ended, Dominic Branley was arrested and brought to Sligo Gaol. From there, he was transferred to Newbridge Prison, County Kildare.²² Under a misspelled name and address, ‘Dom. Brindley, Thursmore, Glencairn’ was listed as a ‘D Class’ prisoner, ‘who cannot be released under any circumstances’.²³ Dominic was detained along with several senior members of Sligo’s IRA including Billy Pilkington, Robert G. Bradshaw, Dominic Benson (brother of Harry, one of Sligo’s Noble Six), Patrick McGowan, Fred Pilkington and John Pilkington. Dominic was released on 17 December 1923 having served four months in prison.²⁴

Dominic left Ireland on 1 March 1924. He arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada on 10 March as a third-class passenger on board the *Cameronia*. On the *Declaration of Passenger to Canada* form he wrote his name as ‘Domnick Branley’, his age as 31 (though he was 32), and described himself as single, Irish and Catholic. Dominic listed both his present and intended occupation as ‘farmer’. He stated his wish to remain permanently in Canada. His destination was to ‘J. Armstrong’ in Stratford, Ontario. He had brought with him a total of £1.²⁵ Dominic stayed in Stratford for two and a half years.

⁹ Birth Certificate, Sligo Registration District

¹⁰ Death Certificate, Sligo Registration District

¹¹ Census of Ireland 1901

¹² MA/MSPC/RO/277

¹³ MSPC MD48019

¹⁴ Maura Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 08.09.2022 (as recalled by her father, Frank Branley)

¹⁵ MA/MSPC/RO/277

¹⁶ Des Gilhawley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 23.11.2021 (as related to him by Chris Branley in 2003/4)

¹⁷ Chris Branley, audio recording 2008

¹⁸ Maura Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.07.2022 (as recalled by her father, Frank Branley)

¹⁹ Maura Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 10.12.2021 (as recalled by her father, Frank Branley)

²⁰ Maura Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 08.12.2021 (as recalled by her father, Frank Branley)

²¹ McGarty 2020: 121

²² Entry 7440 of the Civil War Prisoner Ledgers, CW/P/01/01

²³ CW/P/02/02/07

²⁴ CW/P/01/01

²⁵ *Declaration of Passenger to Canada*, March 1924; United States, Canadian Border Crossings, Roll 13, B652 Howard-C145 Yetta

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT



Figure 9.2 The Branley family home at Tormore. Glencar Lake is visible from the house (Marion Dowd).



United States immigration documentation reveals that a year later, in March 1925, Dominic applied to go to Butte, Montana seemingly on his first trip to the United States.²⁶ He noted that the purpose of the journey was a six-week visit to his brother, 'Bro John

²⁶ US Department of Labor Immigration Service, Form 548, 25 March 1925: Branley, Domenick

... 606 Alaska Street'. He was travelling with \$30. He wrote his name as 'Domenick Branley', described his birthplace as 'Thurmora, Ireland', and his occupation as 'farmer'. At this time Dominic was 33 years old. He described himself as 5ft 8in (1.72m) in height, with a 'fresh' complexion, dark hair and blue eyes. He listed his last permanent address as Gays River, Nova Scotia.

THE MEN ON THE HILLS: THE IRA BILLETED IN TORMORE CAVE

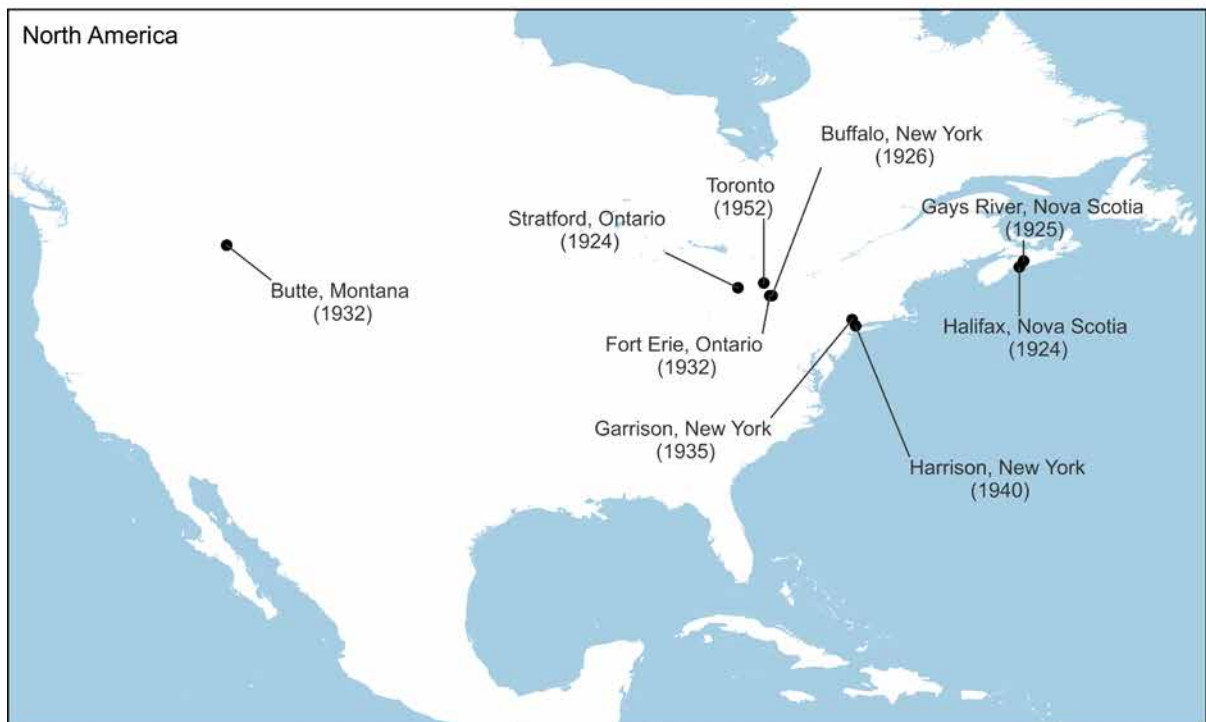
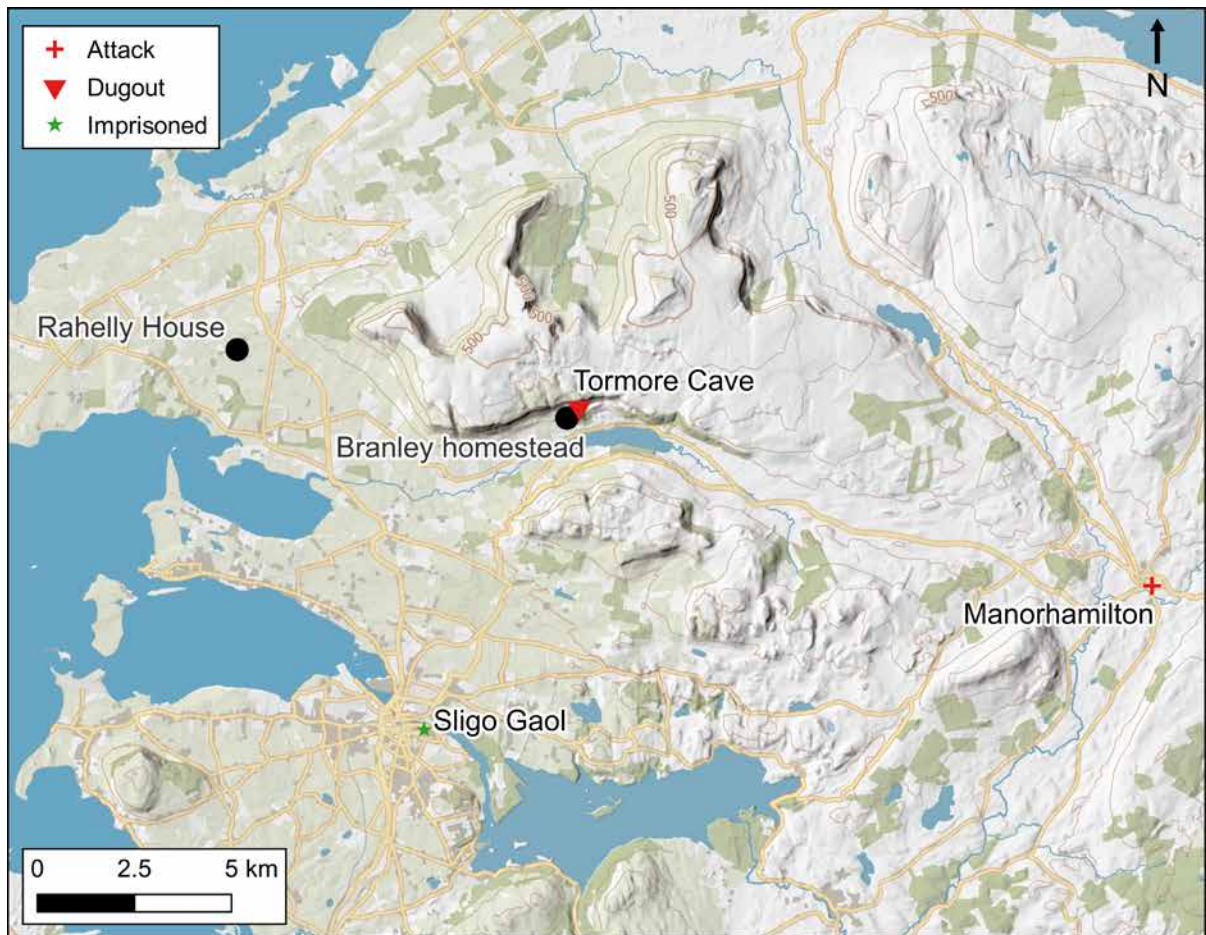


Figure 9.3 Top: Map of known actions Dominic Branley was involved in during the revolutionary period. Bottom: Known locations of Dominic Branley after he left Ireland in 1924 (James Bonsall).

Office of the Report.
 Giffith Barracks,
 South Circular Road,
 Dublin.

Castlegate.
 Drum P. O.
 Co Sligo.

A. Shora.

The following is a list of officers and men
 of (Drumcliffe) B. Coy. 2nd Batt. Sligo Brigade I. R. A.
 on July 11th 1921.

(24)

Captain Michael Devins Castlegate Drum P. O. Co Sligo,
 1st Lieut. Thomas Smyth Barnaribbon Castlegate Co Sligo.
 2nd Lieut. John Mc Flannagan Barnaribbon Castlegate Co Sligo,
 Volunteers Michael Haran. Barnaribbon Castlegate Co Sligo,
 .. ^{DOB 1920} James Kennigan Barnaribbon Castlegate Co Sligo,
 .. ~~Jack Kennigan~~ Barnaribbon Castlegate Co Sligo,
 .. John Smyth Barnaribbon Castlegate Co Sligo,
 .. Michael Conway Barnaribbon Castlegate Co Sligo,
 .. ~~John Kennigan~~ Barnaribbon Castlegate Co Sligo,
 .. ~~Michael Kennigan~~ Barnaribbon Castlegate Co Sligo,
 .. Charles Foley Barnaribbon Castlegate Co Sligo,
 .. Patrick Branley Thimone Glencar Co Sligo,
 .. ^{DOB 1920} Dominic Branley Thimone Glencar Co Sligo,
 .. Thady Branley Glen Upper Drum P. O. Co Sligo,
 .. Bernard Commons Thimone Glencar Co Sligo,
 .. Michael O'Connor Drum P. O. Co Sligo,
 .. James Devins Sugnagall Glencar Co Sligo,
 .. Charles Lynch. Drum P. O. Co Sligo,
 .. John Mc Gowan Ballygilgan Carney Co Sligo.
 .. John Mc Dermott Miltown Drumcliffe Co Sligo.
 .. James Mc Morrow America (address not known)
 .. Patrick McKean America (address not known)
 .. Thomas O'Connor America (address not known)
 .. Patrick Feeney Ballygilgan Carney Co Sligo,
 .. Harry Young Bloomen Drumcliffe Co Sligo,
 .. Frank Timoney address not known
 .. Michael Fallon (Deceased)

Figure 9.4 The three Branley brothers, Paddy, Dominic and Thady, are listed as volunteers in the Drumcliffe Company, 2nd Battalion I Sligo Brigade IRA at the end of the War of Independence (MA/MSPC/RO/277, I Sligo Brigade 2nd Battalion, 11/07/21; Reproduced courtesy of Military Service Collection Project, Military Archives).



Figure 9.5 Dominic Branley worked for many years at St Vincent's Retreat for the Insane, Harrison, New York, later re-named Saint Vincent's Retreat for Nervous and Mental Diseases; today it is known as St Vincent's Hospital Westchester (Photographed by William D. Hassler in 1914, courtesy of New York Historical Society).

His application was rejected on grounds that he was 'illiterate' and possessed 'no visa'. He was debarred on 6 April 1925. This did not stop Dominic Branley, however.

United States Border Crossing documentation reveals that Dominic arrived in Buffalo, New York on 24 September 1926. He signed his name 'Dominic Brandley'. This misspelling of his name (two years previous he had written 'Domnick Branley' and one year previous 'Domenick') was almost certainly deliberate and probably related to his previous visa rejection. Dominic had turned 35 two weeks earlier but listed his age as 34 (though his birth date was listed correctly). He again cited his occupation as 'farmer' and his place of origin as 'Thurmore, Ireland'. Dominic was travelling alone with \$60 in his pocket. He described himself as 5ft 8in (1.72m) in height, of 'dark' complexion with brown hair and grey eyes.²⁷

²⁷ National Archives at Washington DC; Manifests of Alien Arrivals at Buffalo, Lewiston, Niagara Falls and Rochester, New York 1902-1954.

On 27 February 1932, 'Dominic Brandley' appears again on Canadian Immigration Service documentation having arrived at Fort Erie North in Ontario from Alaska Street, Butte, Montana destined for Stratford, Ontario. By then he was 40 years old, described himself as single, and listed his occupation as 'labourer'. In the columns marked *Country or State of birth* and *Nationality*, Dominic wrote 'Irish Free State'.²⁸ By 1935, Dominic lived in Garrison, Putnam, in upstate New York.²⁹

The 1940 United States Federal Census records a 48 year old 'Dominic Brandley'. His birthplace is documented as 'Irish Free State'. He was single and lived at his

Record group no. 85; series no. M1480; roll no. 018

²⁸ Canadian Immigration Service. Report of Admissions and Rejections at the Port of Fort Erie North for the month ending 29 February 1932

²⁹ United States of America, Bureau of the Census. Federal Census 1940. Harrison, Westchester, New York. T627-02804: 4A; enumeration district:60-89

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Figure 9.6 Brothers Dominic and Thady Branley in the 1970s (Mary Branley, née Cummins).

place of employment, St Vincent's Retreat at Harrison, Westchester, in New York State. St Vincent's Retreat for Nervous and Mental Diseases was a psychiatric hospital, listed in the 1940 census as 'Insane Asylum' (Figure 9.5). The hospital had about 40 employees, 35 of whom were female nurses and Dominic was one of three farm labourers. Dominic worked 50 hours per week, 52 weeks per year, for a salary of \$560.³⁰

In 1953, Dominic sent a Mass card to the family of the late Kathleen Finnegan of Sligo, stating his address as Toronto, Canada.³¹

Dominic Branley never married. He returned to North Sligo on retirement, in May 1971, having spent 47 years in North America (Figure 9.6). He was initially based at Cloonmull, Glencar. A story passed down in the Branley family about a trip to Sligo town after his return reveals that he had not forgotten the tumultuous events of the 1920s: 'He [Padraic, Dominic's nephew] and Dominic were in town, and Padraic pointed out an old comrade of his [Dominic's]. But Dominic refused to greet him yelling how he 'broke the line' during a fire!'³²

Dominic applied for an IRA medal in 1971, by which time he was living at 6 St Patrick's Terrace in Sligo town and was considered a 'retired labourer'. He also applied for Special Allowance under the Army Pensions

³⁰ United States of America, Bureau of the Census. Federal Census 1940. Harrison, Westchester, New York. T627-02804: 4A; enumeration district:60-89

³¹ *The Sligo Champion*, 25.07.1953

³² Maura Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 10.12.2021 (as recalled by her father, Frank Branley)



Figure 9.7 Dominic Branley's grave in Drumcliff Churchyard where he is buried together with his brother, Thady, sister-in-law, Anne and nephew, Michael (Marion Dowd).

Acts in respect of illness, disability or infirmity. Both applications were refused, stating that Dominic was 'a helper, rather than a member' of the IRA.³³ It is recorded in the pension application that Dominic 'assisted in every way' with the local IRA company, but that he was not active for the entire period of April 1917 to July 1921. Thomas Smyth, 1st Lieutenant of the Drumcliff Company, of which Dominic was a member, acted as witness to Dominic's IRA activity, noting that:

'his brother [Paddy] was on the run and he [Dominic] had to keep the home'.³⁴ Not being active for the full period because he had been running the family farm gave sufficient grounds to disqualify awarding Dominic a medal.

Dominic Branley died in 1977 at the age of 86. He is buried in Drumcliff Churchyard in the same plot as his brother, Thady (Figure 9.7).

³³ MSPC DP52186, MD48019

³⁴ MSPC DP52186, MD48019

Paddy (Patrick/Pat) Branley

Born: 15 March 1890³⁵

Childhood home: Tormore townland, County Sligo

Died: 28 September 1935 (aged 45)³⁶

Buried: Drumcliff Churchyard, County Sligo

Early life

Paddy Branley was one of ten children born to Sarah (née Gonley/Gonnelly) and Thady Branley in their home at Tormore (Figure 9.2). His older siblings were Elizabeth (Lizzie), Mary J., John and Kate; his younger siblings were Dominic, Thaddeus (Thady), Joseph and Michael. The name of one further sibling is unknown. According to the 1901 census, Paddy lived with his parents, seven of his siblings and a three year old cousin, Agnes Timoney, in a three-roomed thatched house. Paddy's father, Thady, was a farmer. The farmstead included three cattle sheds and a barn. Paddy, then aged 11, was attending school and could read.³⁷

The first recorded suggestion of Paddy Branley's interest in politics is a newspaper report documenting his attendance at a nationalist meeting at Drumcliff on 21 May 1910, when he was 20 years old.³⁸

By the 1911 census, Paddy (aged 21) was living in the family home at Tormore with his parents, his brothers John, Dominic and Joseph, and his one year old niece, Mary Ellen Mitchell (whose mother was Paddy's sister, Lizzie).³⁹ Of the ten children who had been born to Sarah and Thady, only seven now survived. By this time the Branley home had four rooms. Paddy, John and Dominic worked on the family farm and must have played an active role as, by then, their father, Thady senior, was about 76 years old. An indication that Paddy may have assumed the role of head of household is that the dog licences were all in his name: licences for a brown sheepdog in 1917, a black sheepdog in 1918, and a brown collie in 1919.⁴⁰ Thady senior died from

'senile decay' on 29 January 1917, reportedly at the age of 90, which conflicts with the census returns of 1901 and 1911 where he was listed as 62 and 76 years old respectively.⁴¹ Paddy Branley was present when his father died.

War of Independence (21 January 1919–11 July 1921)

From 1 April 1917, Paddy Branley was a member of the Drumcliff Company, 2nd Battalion I Sligo Brigade IRA (Figure 9.8). A family narrative recalls that in 1917, when Countess Constance Markievicz came to Grange village seeking recruits, Paddy Branley was 'the first to step forward'.⁴² Paddy was active in the I North Sligo Brigade area, initially under the command of Ned Bofin, then subsequently Michael Carroll, and finally under the command of Michael Devins. Paddy documented the nature of his activities between 1917 and 1920: 'trained and equipped, carried out all orders of headquarters, resist[ed] conscription, obeyed all orders of superior officers and organized for election.'⁴³ At some point in 1920, Paddy Branley joined the Active Service Unit of the 2nd Battalion I Sligo Brigade.⁴⁴ From January to March 1920 he was involved in raids for arms. Paddy was on the run for most of the first year of the War of Independence, or as he called it, the 'Anglo-Irish fight', but worked on the family farm when possible.⁴⁵ During the winter of 1920, based on information received from a local spy, the Black and Tans raided a dance at the boathouse by Glencar Lake (Figure 9.9). Paddy Branley hid in a culvert beside the dance hall. According to family memory, Paddy was shot by the Black and Tans that night. Local narrative states that he was one of several men arrested, beaten and taken to Sligo Gaol.⁴⁶

Paddy Branley was involved in an attack led by Billy Pilkington on the RIC Barracks at Rosses Point on 12 May 1920.⁴⁷ The barracks was partly demolished and left uninhabitable.⁴⁸ Three weeks later, on 2 June 1920, Paddy was involved in an IRA attack on Fivemilebourne (Newtownmanor) RIC Barracks just across the Sligo

³⁵ Register of Baptisms for Parish of Drumcliffe, Diocese of Elphin. Patrick Branley was born to Thaddeus Branley and Sara Gonley on 15.03.1890, and baptised the following day, 16.03.1890, by Rev. M. J. Kelly. His godparents/sponsors were John Gonley and Mary A. Gonley.

³⁶ Death Certificate, Sligo Registration District. Paddy Branley's death certificate notes his date of death as 28.09.1935, but his gravestone records it as 29.09.1935.

³⁷ Census of Ireland 1901

³⁸ *The Sligo Champion*, 21.05.1910

³⁹ Census of Ireland 1911

⁴⁰ Ireland Dog Licence Registers, 31.03.1917; 30.03.1918; 29.03.1919

⁴¹ Death Certificate, Sligo Registration District

⁴² Branley 2023

⁴³ MA/MSPC/A/29; Letter from Paddy Branley to Dept. of Defence 21.05.1932; MSPC 23.01.1935

⁴⁴ MA/MSPC/RO-303A

⁴⁵ MA/MSPC/A/29; Letter from Paddy Branley to Dept. of Defence 21.05.1932; MSPC 23.01.1935

⁴⁶ Michael Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 10.12.2021; Gene O'Carroll pers. comm. to M. Dowd and J. Bonsall, 27.01.2023 (as related to him by Chris Branley on 04.01.2009); Rooney 2023: 30

⁴⁷ MA/MSPC/A/29

⁴⁸ Kilgannon 1926: 70; Farry 1992: 191



Figure 9.8 Map of known actions Paddy Branley was involved in during the revolutionary period (James Bonsall).

border in County Leitrim⁴⁹ (Figures 9.10 and 9.11). The attack was coordinated by Billy Pilkington and Seamus Devins. Armed with rifles and revolvers, the Sligo town

contingent left with Pilkington from the Republican Club on Teeling Street at 10.30pm, one man carrying a black bag with homemade hand grenades (filled with gelignite and detonators) and a petrol bomb. Bea Kilgannon carried parcels of arms and ammunition from Glynn's safe house in Sligo town (Figure 4.12) to

⁴⁹ Letter from Paddy Branley to Dept. of Defence 21.05.1932; MSPC 23.01.1935

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Figure 9.9 The boathouse at Glencar Lake, Largadoon townland, County Leitrim (Marion Dowd). According to family narrative, the Black and Tans opened fire on people attending a dance there during the War of Independence. Paddy Branley was shot but survived his injuries.

the shore of Lough Gill. These were then taken across the lake for the attack (Bea Kilgannon documented it as Grange Barracks, but likely confused it with Fivemilebourne Barracks).⁵⁰ The group of nine or ten men got on a boat at Carns, crossed Lough Gill to Hazelwood, and from there walked to Fivemilebourne. The men from Grange, led by Devins, were armed with rifles and shotguns. They isolated the barracks by cutting phone wires and blocking the road. Bottles filled with petrol were at hand to burn the barracks. Billy Pilkington climbed up onto the roof of the barracks, successfully broke a hole in the roof but then fell off the roof. He threw a grenade in the window but it failed to explode. A protracted engagement ensued with the sergeant and five constables who were inside the building. The ruckus saw rifles being discharged, grenades thrown at the building and windows shattered. Pilkington called off the attack and the IRA retreated. Within two weeks, the RIC had evacuated Fivemilebourne Barracks and it was burnt down by the Republicans on 16 June 1920.⁵¹

Paddy Branley took part in the Moneygold ambush of 25 October 1920, which was co-ordinated by Billy Pilkington, Seamus Devins and Martin Bernard McGowan (Figure 9.12). In the Military Service Pension Collection files, 'Patrick Branley' is listed as being a Lieutenant in the Drumcliff Company at the time of the ambush.⁵² A family narrative recalls that arms captured at Moneygold were stashed near the Branley homestead, probably in Tormore Cave.⁵³ The cave was located on land owned by the Branleys, a ten minute walk from their home. On 20 November 1920, 'Linda Kearns went in her car to Glencar to Paddy Branley's home where she met three of the local leaders, Séamus Devins, Andrew Conway and Eugene Gilbride.⁵⁴ District Inspector Russell later reported that 'she went to Glencar, 8 miles from Sligo, [and] picked those men and arms there.'⁵⁵ Eugene Gilbride noted: 'I started from Glencar from Paddy Branley's and the car met us at the end of his land.'⁵⁶ This detail is important as it reveals that the Branley homestead was an important

⁵⁰ MSP34REF54764, Bea Kilgannon

⁵¹ BMH.WS0895, Harold McBrien; MSP34REF18708, Andy Doocey; Anon. n.d.; Farry 2012: 55; McGarty 2020: 83

⁵² MA/MSPC/A/29

⁵³ Maura Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 27.10.2022 (as recalled by her father, Frank Branley)

⁵⁴ *The Sligo Champion*, 18.07.2002

⁵⁵ Ó Duígneáin 2002: 42

⁵⁶ Eugene Gilbride, UCDA O'MN, P17b/137

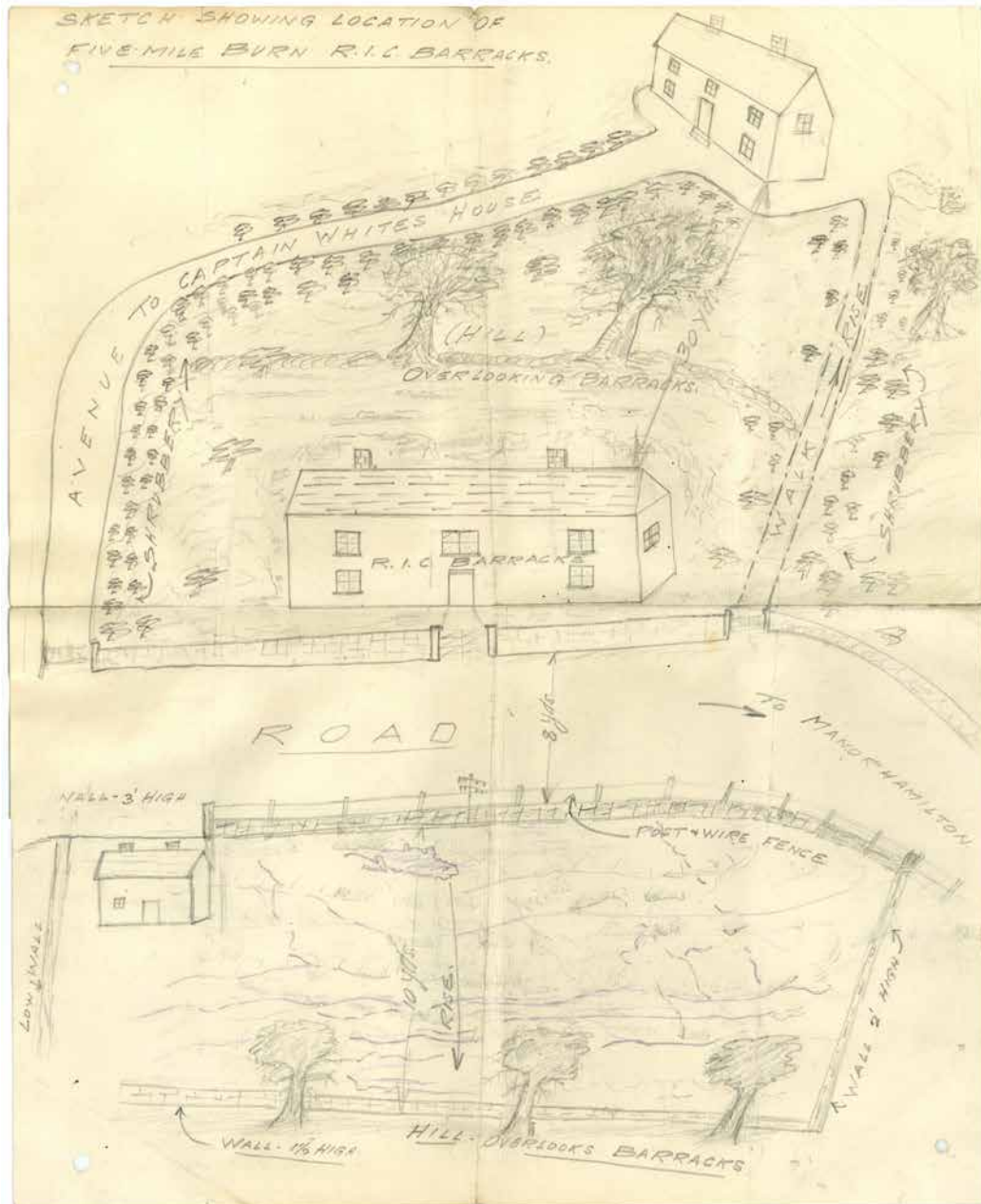


Figure 9.10 IRA sketch of Fivemileburne RIC Barracks related to the ambush of June 1920 (BMH A29-1 Brigade, 3rd Western Division; Reproduced courtesy of Military Service Collection Project, Military Archives).

safe house and meeting place for senior IRA leaders. The men apparently told Kearns, the driver, that she was near Lough Gill (rather than Glencar Lake) in case she was later caught.⁵⁷ This family narrative rings true as the various sources are inconsistent in terms of the lake and the route the car took. Kearns subsequently

mentioned that it was 'by the shore of Lough Gill'.⁵⁸ The arms were being transported to Ballysadare, with the intention of reinforcing an IRA column under Alec McCabe.⁵⁹ However, the car was stopped by Crown forces and all four occupants (including Linda Kearns) were arrested, violently beaten and imprisoned. There is some confusion as to where the car was stopped, but

⁵⁷ Maura Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 27.10.2022 (as recalled by her father, Frank Branley)

⁵⁸ Ó Duígneáin 2002: 37

⁵⁹ Tom Scanlon, UCDA O'MN, P17b/133; BMH/CD/057

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT



Figure 9.11 Now a private family home, this was formerly Fivemilebourne Barracks in Carrickfad townland, County Leitrim (Marion Dowd).

IRA volunteer Willie Devins recalled in 1986 that this took place at Sligo Cemetery with the capture of eight rifles, a shotgun and hand grenades.⁶⁰

Paddy Branley was arrested in January 1921, possibly because of his participation in the Moneygold ambush and perhaps specifically for hiding the captured arms.⁶¹ He was transported to Sligo Gaol in a motor lorry where he stayed for ‘about two months’ until 21 March. He then spent ‘about three weeks’ in Belfast Jail before being moved to Rath Camp at the Curragh Internment Camp in County Kildare (Figure 9.13). He was detained there from 11 July until mid-December 1921. Brigade Activity Reports note that as of July 1921, Paddy Branley was an IRA volunteer but under internment at the time.⁶² He had been interned without trial, a process introduced in late 1920 that led to thousands of men and women being imprisoned under emergency laws. Over 2,500 IRA internees were confined to the Curragh Camp and Ballykinlar Camp during this period.⁶⁴ Life in the Curragh was harsh and ‘by October [1921] the

ground in the camp had turned into mud, often knee-deep.’⁶⁵ Collective punishment was commonplace. The response to escape attempts was to withhold food parcels that had been sent by family members, shut down the canteen, and impose collective monetary fines on the hungry prisoners.⁶⁶ The huts were leaking, draughty and cold. At night, prisoners were kept awake by guards throwing stones at the huts and shining torches into their faces.⁶⁷ Rath Camp had ‘a reputation for brutality and repression.’⁶⁸ Paddy Branley was treated at the Curragh by the camp medic, Dr Byrne, for injuries sustained during his arrest at the hands of the Black and Tans (Figure 9.14).⁶⁹

Over 85 years later, one of Paddy’s sons recalled that a man known as Sapper Smith had been a friend of his father’s in the Curragh.⁷⁰ At Rath Camp, Paddy would have engaged with numerous influential and senior IRA men from various brigade regions including Sligo, such as Alec McCabe, OC of the Ballymote Battalion in the Sligo Brigade.⁷¹ In the coming year, McCabe and

⁶⁰ Willie Devins, audio recording 16.06.1986

⁶¹ Paddy Branley was arrested in February 1921 according to the *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 05.02.1921. According to a letter written by Paddy Branley to the Dept. of Defence on 21.05.1932, as well as in his Wound or Disease Pension application of 01.02.1933, he was arrested on 20.01.1921. A third date of arrest, 28.01.1921, is cited in Paddy’s Military Pension Service Application.

⁶² MA/MSPC/RO/277

⁶³ MA/MSPC/A/29

⁶⁴ Durney 2011: 7-8

⁶⁵ Durney 2011: 14

⁶⁶ Andrews 1979: 176

⁶⁷ Hegarty Thorne 2016: 286-7

⁶⁸ Durney 2011: 14

⁶⁹ W50APB459, Paddy Branley Wound or Disease Pension Application, 01.02.1933

⁷⁰ Gene O’Carroll pers. comm. to M. Dowd and J. Bonsall, 27.01.2023 (as related to him by Chris Branley on 04.01.2009)

⁷¹ Andrews 1979: 179

large crowds continued to assemble at the railway station and in the vicinity from eight o'clock onwards. About half-past eight o'clock a body of Volunteers Sligo Brigade I.R.A. some 200 strong, marched from headquarters to the station and took up a position on the platform for the dual purpose of providing a guard of honour and keeping order.⁷²

Paddy Branley was part of the IRA contingent present in Sligo town on Easter Sunday, 16 April 1922, when Arthur Griffith held a monster pro-Treaty rally.⁷³ Pro-Treaty and anti-Treaty forces flooded the town and an eruption of violence seemed imminent until Billy Pilkington ordered his men to stand down, allowing the rally to proceed (see Chapter 3).

Civil War (28 June 1922–24 May 1923)

On 1 July 1922, at the outset of the Civil War, Paddy Branley was listed in the I North Sligo Brigade Activity Reports as a volunteer under the command of Lieutenant John Smyth and Captain Michael Devins with the Drumcliff Company.⁷⁴

Paddy and his brother, Dominic, are the two men most closely associated with Tormore Cave. It is likely that it was one of the Branley brothers who first realised the dugout potential of the site. According to family narrative, Paddy and Dominic hid there in September 1922.⁷⁵ Years later, in his application for a Military Service Pension, Paddy described his activities during the Civil War: 'Defence of Rahilly September 1922. Kept guard over Divisional Commander Pilkington in my own house when he was hurted September 1922. Raids on mail car.'⁷⁶ This statement is significant as it correlates with multiple narratives that Billy Pilkington was nursing a 'broken shoulder' (clavicle) while staying in Tormore Cave.⁷⁷ Paddy's reference to 'my own house' likely reflects the close association between the Branley safe house and the cave billet; Pilkington probably came to the Branley home on occasions when it was safe to do so.

Paddy married Maggie (Margaret) Teresa O'Connor on 22 January 1923, approximately three months after his stay in Tormore Cave and in the midst of

the Civil War.⁷⁸ He was 32 and she was 21 or 22 at the time. Paddy and Maggie had grown up as neighbours in adjoining townlands. Decades later, Maggie recalled that her relationship with Paddy had begun when he was released from jail. Maggie's friend, Katie Connor, had a brother who told Katie and Maggie that it would be 'a nice gesture' if they could visit Paddy after he had returned home.⁷⁹ This family narrative probably relates to his release from the Curragh Internment Camp in December 1921. Paddy and Maggie married thirteen months later. As per tradition at the time, the newlyweds spent the first month of married life in the Branley house, only visiting the bride's family at the end of the first month.

According to family narrative, on their first visit to the O'Connor home (*circa* late February 1923), Paddy was arrested by the National Army and sent to Mountjoy Prison, Dublin.⁸⁰ This family narrative may be incorrect. In a 1935 application for a Military Pension, Paddy noted that he was active in the post-Civil War period (1 April to 30 September 1923) during which time he 'done guard for men on the run. Carried despatches and all general IRA work.' Similarly, in his pension claim of 1939, Andrew Conway, Captain of the Cliffoney Company, described his activities for that same period as helping 'to get work done for men in jail and on the run, and organised for the election.' In these specific actions, Conway cites Paddy Branley as one of his three witnesses, confirming that Paddy was active at this time, probably in the same activities.⁸¹ Had Paddy been imprisoned *circa* February 1923, it is unlikely that he would have been active from April to September that same year.

In his 1933 application for a Wound or Disease Pension, Paddy Branley recorded his period of service in the IRA as lasting from 1917 to September 1922, which suggests that the weeks spent in Tormore Cave marked the end of his career in the IRA.⁸² However, in 1934 the Military Service Pensions Act was amended to allow pension payments to be made to IRA combatants who had been active against the Free State during the Civil War. Most likely in response to this significant change in legislation, Paddy reapplied for a military pension. In his 1935 application, 'Patrick Branley' wrote that he had been active until the end of the Civil War, 31 March

⁷² *The Sligo Champion*, 17.12.1921

⁷³ MA/MSPC Paddy Branley, 23.01.1935

⁷⁴ MA/MSPC/RO277

⁷⁵ Chris Branley, audio recording 2008

⁷⁶ MA/MSPC Paddy Branley, 23.01.1935

⁷⁷ Chris Branley, video and audio recording 2012

⁷⁸ Marriage Certificate, Sligo Registration District. Witnesses were John J. Mitchell and Agnes O'Connor

⁷⁹ Maura Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 22.04.2023 (as recalled by her father, Frank Branley)

⁸⁰ Chris Branley, audio recording 2008

⁸¹ MSP34REF16258, Andrew Conway

⁸² MA/MSPC Paddy Branley, 08.02.1933

THE MEN ON THE HILLS: THE IRA BILLETED IN TORMORE CAVE

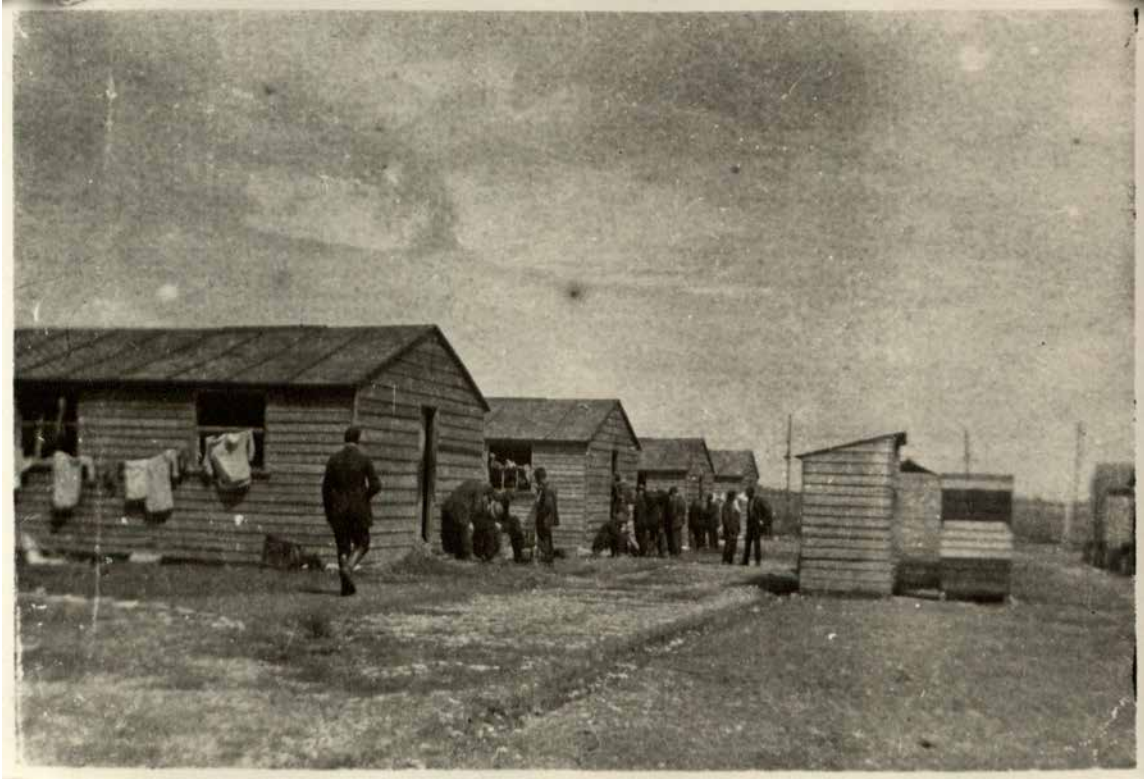


Figure 9.13 Prisoner huts in Rath Camp where Paddy Branley was interned for over five months in 1921 (Photographed by Joseph Lawless in August 1921, reproduced with the kind permission of the National Museum of Ireland).

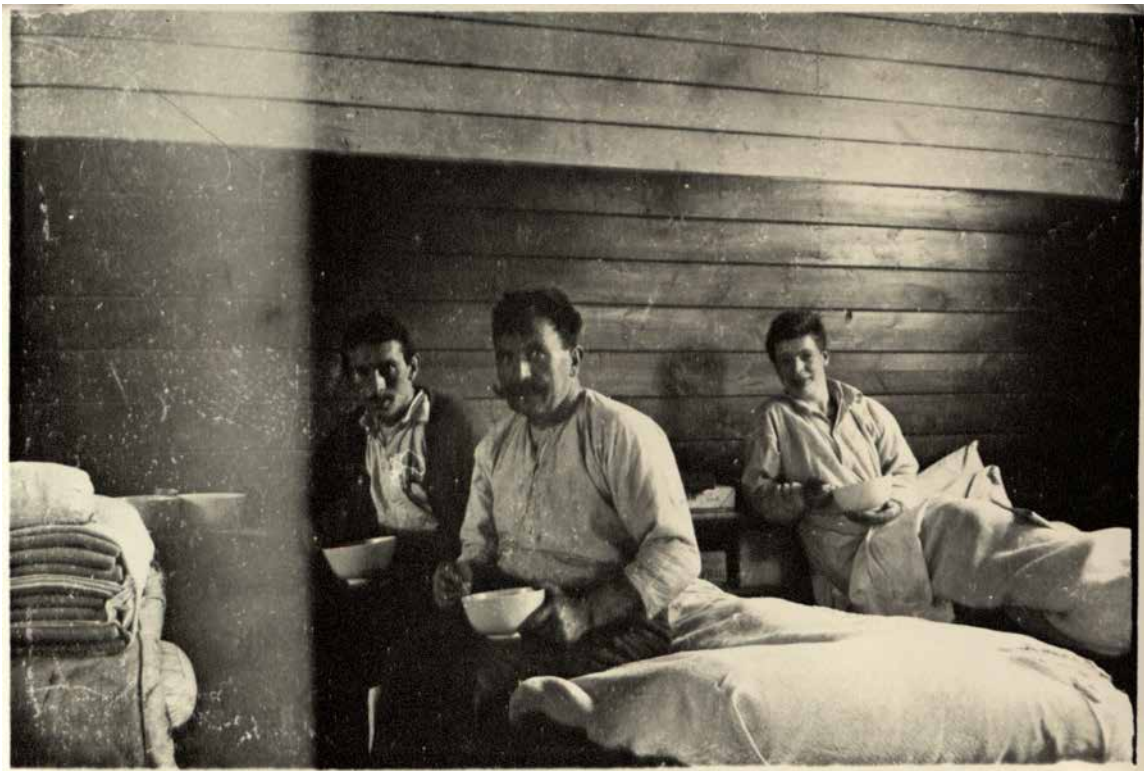


Figure 9.14 Internees at Rath Camp hospital in 1921 (Photographed by Joseph Lawless in 1921, reproduced with the kind permission of the National Museum of Ireland).

1923. By the mid-1930s it was no longer necessary for veterans to hide membership of the IRA during the Civil War, and the change of dates in this later application may reflect a more accurate representation of his period of IRA activity, though equally it may have been to increase his likelihood of securing a pension.

There are some inconsistencies regarding Paddy Branley's rank in the IRA. In the Military Service Pension Collection files, Paddy was listed as a Lieutenant in the Drumcliff Company (2nd Battalion North Sligo) at the time of the Moneygold ambush during the War of Independence.⁸³ In Brigade Activity Reports, Paddy and his brothers, Dominic and Thady, were all listed as volunteers with the Drumcliff Company under Captain Michael Devins.⁸⁴ At the end of the War of Independence, 11 July 1921, Paddy was again listed as a Volunteer with the Drumcliff Company.⁸⁵ In his 1933 application for a Wound or Disease Pension, Paddy described himself as 'Volunteer, North Sligo'.⁸⁶ In his application for a Military Service Pension, he described himself as 'Private Volunteer' with the Drumcliff Company during the War of Independence and Civil War. In at least two publications, Paddy Branley is incorrectly identified as Captain of the Glencar Company (4th Battalion Manorhamilton).⁸⁷ In Brigade Activity Reports, however, James McCann is listed as the Captain of the Glencar Company.⁸⁸ In Branley family narrative, Paddy became Captain of the Glencar Company during the Civil War. A chair that had been given to Paddy and Maggie on their wedding day by Maggie's parents was affectionately known in later decades as 'the Captain's Chair'.⁸⁹

Aftermath

Following the Civil War, Paddy and Maggie Branley went on to have seven children born between 1923 and 1935. There were four sons, Joe (Dominick), Padraic, Chris (Michael) and Frank; and three daughters, Maureen, Sarah (Lily) and Philomena (Figure 9.15). Paddy continued to farm 46 acres of poor land at Tormore. He had a small dairy herd and sold butter, milk and eggs in Sligo town once or twice a week. The family had a servant boy, grew their own vegetables, and were relatively comfortable.⁹⁰



Figure 9.15 Paddy and Maggie Branley, circa 1925, with their eldest son, Joe (Branley family).

Paddy Branley's arrest and detention at the Curragh Internment Camp during the War of Independence wreaked havoc on his health for the remainder of his life and contributed to his early death. In his application for a Wound or Disease Pension on 1 February 1933, he explained: 'my health broke while in jail and I'm suffering ever since ... due to the treatment I received from the black-and-tans that arrested me and the hardships I endured afterwards in jail.'⁹¹ He had sustained 'Injury to back caused by abuse from Black-and-Tans. In January 1921, after being arrested I was beaten and thrown from lorry which caused the injury.' His health was 'perfect before being arrested and I never had attended a doctor.' After his release from the Curragh, he was treated by two doctors in Sligo 'for injuries to my back' and was also treated in the 'Surgical Hospital, Sligo' between October 1931 and February 1932. Despite medical intervention, 'My health is completely broken and I have a wife and five children depending on me. I am unable to do any work

⁸³ MA/MSPC/A/29

⁸⁴ MA/MSPC/RO/302; MA/MSPC/RO/277

⁸⁵ MA/MSPC/RO/277

⁸⁶ MA/MSPC/Paddy Branley, Wound or Disease Pension Application, 01.02.1933

⁸⁷ Ó Duígneáin 2002: 28; Hegarty Thorne 2007: 468

⁸⁸ MA/MSPC/RO/302

⁸⁹ Rachael McGowan pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 09.05.2022

⁹⁰ Chris Branley, audio recording 2008

⁹¹ MA/MSPC/Paddy Branley, Wound or Disease Pension Application, 01.02.1933

or look after my bit of land.⁹² This application was submitted prior to the 1934 amendment to the Military Service Pensions Acts, which recognised compensation claims related to the Civil War era and from anti-Treaty IRA men. Paddy's health may have been just as adversely affected by his stay in Tormore Cave, but this would not have been pensionable in 1933, as it had occurred during the Civil War. On 19 April 1934, the Department of Defence refused his application for a Wound or Disease Pension on the grounds that: 'Your disability is not attributable to service.' Paddy then proceeded to apply for a Military Service Pension in January 1935. Two months later, on 14 March, he was awarded a Grade E Military Service Pension for three and a half years of IRA service between 1917 and 1921.

In 1935, Paddy left his home at Tormore for the last time when he was taken by ambulance to Sligo Hospital. En route, he stopped at the local National School to say a final goodbye to five of his children. Decades later, Nora Rooney, a family friend who had been to school with the Branleys, remembered the day that 'Paddy came to the school to say goodbye, and how heartbroken she felt to see Lily and Maureen [his children] sobbing and hugging him.'⁹³ Paddy's granddaughter, Mary B. Branley, captured the parting in her poem, *Firing Squad*, published here with her permission.⁹⁴

The ambulance stopped at Lugnagall
in nineteen thirty-five.
My father in his second week of school
was summoned to the gate where you
stood propped on sticks and leaning.
You had already said goodbye to wife
and new-born child, the toddler in the
puddle
outside the house.
Now the other five stood facing you,
worse than any firing squad-
those trembling tears

Your final words are framed
between the pillars of the gate:
Listen to your teachers
Do what your mother says.

Paddy succumbed to tuberculosis of the spine and died in September 1935 at the age of 45. His death certificate records that he had suffered spinal caries for four years and bronchopneumonia for two weeks.⁹⁵ Paddy was buried in Drumcliff Churchyard on 2 October 1935 (Figure 9.16). *The Sligo Champion* reported his death:

28th of September at the early age of 45 years, after a prolonged illness during which he had the very best medical aid and careful nursing in his own home ... The saddest part of it is he leaves an aged mother, a young wife and seven children to mourn the loss of a kind husband and loving father ... The funeral at 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon was largely attended. The coffin was wrapped in the tricolour and was borne on the shoulders of his old comrades in the I.R.A. from the church to the last resting place in Drumcliff Cemetery.⁹⁶

In January 1941, Paddy Branley was posthumously awarded a 1919-21 War of Independence Service Medal for IRA services during the period April 1917 to July 1921. It was issued to his widow, Maggie. She later passed it on to their youngest son, Frank, who is now proud custodian of the medal in Boston, USA (Figure 9.17).

Paddy Branley is one of 20 IRA men from County Sligo named on the Markievicz Memorial unveiled in Rathcormac village on 21 April 2003 (Figure 9.18).⁹⁷

⁹² MA/MSPC Letter from Paddy Branley to Dept. of Defence, 21.05.1932; Wound or Disease Pension Application 01.02.1933

⁹³ Maura Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 22.04.2023 (as recalled by her father, Frank Branley)

⁹⁴ Extract from the poem *Firing Squad*, first published in *Cyphers* magazine in 1999, and in Branley 2002.

⁹⁵ Death Certificate, Sligo Registration District

⁹⁶ *The Sligo Champion*, 05.10.1935

⁹⁷ *The Irish Times*, 21.04.2003

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT



Figure 9.16 Paddy Branley's grave in Drumcliff Churchyard where he is buried with his wife, Maggie, and one of their grandchildren (Marion Dowd).



Figure 9.17 A century later, in Boston, USA: Frank Branley, surrounded by his five children, holds his father's War of Independence Service Medal (1917-1921) for active involvement during the War of Independence. The painting of a traditional cottage in the shadow of Benbulbin provides an immediate connection to North Sligo (Maura Branley).



Figure 9.18 The Countess Constance Markievicz Memorial in Rathcormac village, North Sligo (Marion Dowd). The following comrades of Markievicz are named on the monument: Ned Bofin, Paddy Branley*, Mick Burns, Seamus Devins[^], Patrick J. Farrell, Dominick Joe Feeney, 'Big' Dominick Feeney, Jim Feeney, Johnny Friel, Eugene Gilbride[^], Kenny Gillen, Petie Gilmartin, Tommy Gorevan, Eamonn Harkin, Thomas Leonard, Thomas McCann, Petie McGowan, 'Trooper' McHugh*, Billy Pilkington* and Martin Savage (*billeted in Tormore Cave; [^]possibly billeted in Tormore Cave; *killed en route to Tormore Cave).

Jack ‘Trooper’ (John Francis) McHugh

Born: 5 June 1901⁹⁸

Childhood home: from 1901 – Cloysparra townland; from 1910 – initially Holborn Street and subsequently 9 Church Hill, Sligo town

Died: 27 January 1977 (aged 75)⁹⁹

Buried: Sligo Cemetery, Sligo town, County Sligo

Early life

John Francis McHugh, known throughout his life as Jack or ‘Trooper’ or ‘Mac’, was one of four children and the youngest son born to Sarah (née Rooney) and John McHugh in 1901. The 1901 census records that John (senior) and Sarah, together with their two children, Mary Kate and Patrick, lived with John’s father Patt McHugh in a three-roomed thatched cottage on the family farm in Clyspar (Cloysaprra) townland, located between the villages of Grange and Cliffoney.¹⁰⁰ By the time of the 1911 census, the McHughs had two more children, John (Jack) and Sarah. By then the family had moved to a five-roomed house on Holborn Street in Sligo town (Figure 9.19).¹⁰¹ Jack was ten years old, could read and write, and spoke Irish and English. His father, John McHugh, worked as a docker on the quays in Sligo town. One of his jobs was to board ships at Rosses Point that were too big to dock at Sligo Quay, and unload sacks of grain onto lighter vessels.¹⁰²

Jack joined the Irish Volunteers in August 1917 and joined Sinn Féin when he was about 17 years old, *circa* 1918.¹⁰³ As a young man he was employed by Sligo-Leitrim Railways and was a member of the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR).¹⁰⁴

War of Independence (21 January 1919–11 July 1921)

Jack ‘Trooper’ McHugh was active in the IRA from 1917 to the end of the Civil War (Figure 9.20). He was described by Joseph Pilkington as ‘one of the most active members in the Company Area’ and by Michael

Nevin as ‘most trusted by all his officers.’¹⁰⁵ He was one of about 65 men in the Sligo Town Company IRA during the War of Independence, ‘35 of them was active service men and the rest were staunch supporters.’ ‘Trooper’ described his position as ‘Section Commander’.¹⁰⁶

During the War of Independence, ‘Trooper’ took part in approximately fifteen raids, most likely pertaining to arms raids and sabotage actions.¹⁰⁷ He was part of an IRA contingent that raided Sligo Custom House on 3 April and destroyed Strandhill Barracks in May 1920, both attacks led by OC Billy Pilkington (see Chapter 8). He took part in blocking roads and destroying communications on about ‘two dozen occasions’. ‘Trooper’ provided armed guard for a documents raid on Sligo Courthouse. He was involved in enforcing the ‘Belfast Boycott’, which prohibited the purchase of goods manufactured in, or coming from, Belfast. In May 1921, ‘Trooper’ took part in an armed raid on the Goods Store at Sligo Railway Station and the burning of ‘three wagons of Belfast goods’. At the time of the attack he was an employee of the Sligo-Leitrim Railway. The following month ‘Trooper’ was fired because ‘they found out I was an I.R.A. man and railway men had taken part in the destruction of enemy property.’¹⁰⁸ In 1919 or 1920 he ‘was attending a class for the making of ammunition’. He was experienced at making ‘buckshot’ (lead shot used in firearms) and undertook this work ‘every time I got a chance at night ... on and off for about six weeks.’¹⁰⁹

On 2 June 1920, ‘Trooper’ was one of about 60 men under OC Billy Pilkington involved in an attack on the RIC Barracks at Fivemilebourne, County Leitrim (Figures 9.10 and 9.11). The attack lasted about an hour during which ‘Trooper’, armed with a shotgun, fired from his station, which was located 27m from the barracks. He also had in his possession a bomb but did not use it that night.¹¹⁰

A few weeks later, on 26 June, ‘Trooper’ was involved in the breakout of Frank Carty from Sligo Gaol (Figure 9.21).¹¹¹ He was armed with a .45 calibre revolver and was on outpost duty at the Imperial Hotel.¹¹² Over 55 years later, ‘Trooper’ described the rescue preparations:

The ladders was taken out of Hanleys

⁹⁸ Birth Certificate, Sligo Registration District

⁹⁹ Death Certificate, Sligo Registration District

¹⁰⁰ Census of Ireland 1901

¹⁰¹ Census of Ireland 1911

¹⁰² Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 09.12.2022

¹⁰³ Handwritten document penned by ‘Trooper’ listing his activities during the revolutionary period. Now in the possession of his son, Brian McHugh.

¹⁰⁴ MSP34REF4610, John McHugh

¹⁰⁵ MSP34REF4610, John McHugh

¹⁰⁶ Jack ‘Trooper’ McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1976

¹⁰⁷ MSP34REF4610, John McHugh

¹⁰⁸ MSP34REF4610, John McHugh

¹⁰⁹ MSP34REF4610, John McHugh

¹¹⁰ MA/MSPC/A/29; MSP34REF4610, John McHugh

¹¹¹ MA/MSPC/A/29; MSP34REF4610, John McHugh

¹¹² MSP34REF4610, John McHugh



Figure 9.19 John McHugh with his two sons, Jack (left) and Patrick (right), circa 1910 after the family had moved from Cloysparra to Sligo town (Danny McHugh).

[hardware store]. They were carried across by Lyons' [department store on Wine Street]. One night they came across an RIC man ... a guy that got in the way ... a fella called Willis. They scared the shit out of him anyway. He said he would do nothing for us, and he would do nothing against us, and he was let go. Them ladders had to be carried six nights, one after the other. And they were put up against the gaol walls. And there was a military ... there was a guard ... British soldiers in the gaol. Of course, there was our friends in the buckin' gaol too ... [like] Stephen O'Connor. They cracked the buckin' wall and got the key. Henry was the warden. He was in the IRA even though he was working for the Crown. I brought the ladders up and was down by the hotel to cover off every buckin' thing, you know. We had everything covered.¹¹³

¹¹³ Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1976

'Trooper' took part in an ambush on John Street in Sligo town on 25 September 1920, although no further details about the attack are known.¹¹⁴ In the following year, on 20 March 1921, 'Trooper' was involved in the bombing of Collooney RIC Barracks in an operation orchestrated and led by Billy Pilkington (see Chapter 8). 'Trooper' had volunteered to enter the barracks but was deemed too tall.¹¹⁵ A mine was successfully detonated at the front door but the arms and ammunition inside were not captured. The Auxiliaries opened fire. 'Trooper' was shot in the right leg (in later life he walked with a limp, which may have been caused, or exacerbated, by the gunshot wound).¹¹⁶ In 1976, he described the failed attack:

Billy Pilkington put the bomb to the buckin' door of the barracks ... He blew it up. He blew the whole buckin' thing. He went in himself and the whole buckin' army turned back, afraid to take the buckin' barrack. He was alone himself. He took the buckin' barracks, you know. I was at the back of the barracks. They [Crown forces] opened fire with every buckin' thing ... I got hit with a buckin' bullet. It was no buckin' accident. I had to walk home to Sligo with it buckin' bleeding.¹¹⁷

On 29 June 1921, 'Trooper' took part in the successful jailbreak and rescue of Charles Gildea, Frank O'Beirne and Tom Deignan from Sligo Gaol in another operation led by OC Billy Pilkington (see Chapter 8). 'Trooper' was on outpost duty for six nights, from 11.30pm through to 3am or 4am, stationed in front of the prison, and armed with a shotgun and a bomb.¹¹⁸

In the latter months of the War of Independence, 'Trooper' was one of two specially selected IRA men who escorted the I Brigade OC when he travelled between locations. Initially, the OC was Billy Pilkington but, on Pilkington's promotion to GOC of the divisional command, Seamus Devins took over the role of brigade OC. 'Trooper' escorted both men on trips in and out of Sligo town. He would scout the route unarmed and, if he met a patrol, he would give the OC a signal.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Undated handwritten document penned by 'Trooper' listing his activities during the revolutionary period. Now in the possession of his son, Brian McHugh.

¹¹⁵ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.04.2023

¹¹⁶ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 09.12.2022

¹¹⁷ Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1976

¹¹⁸ MSP34REF4610, John McHugh

¹¹⁹ MSP34REF4610, John McHugh



Figure 9.20 Map of known actions Jack 'Trooper' McHugh was involved in during the revolutionary period (James Bonsall).

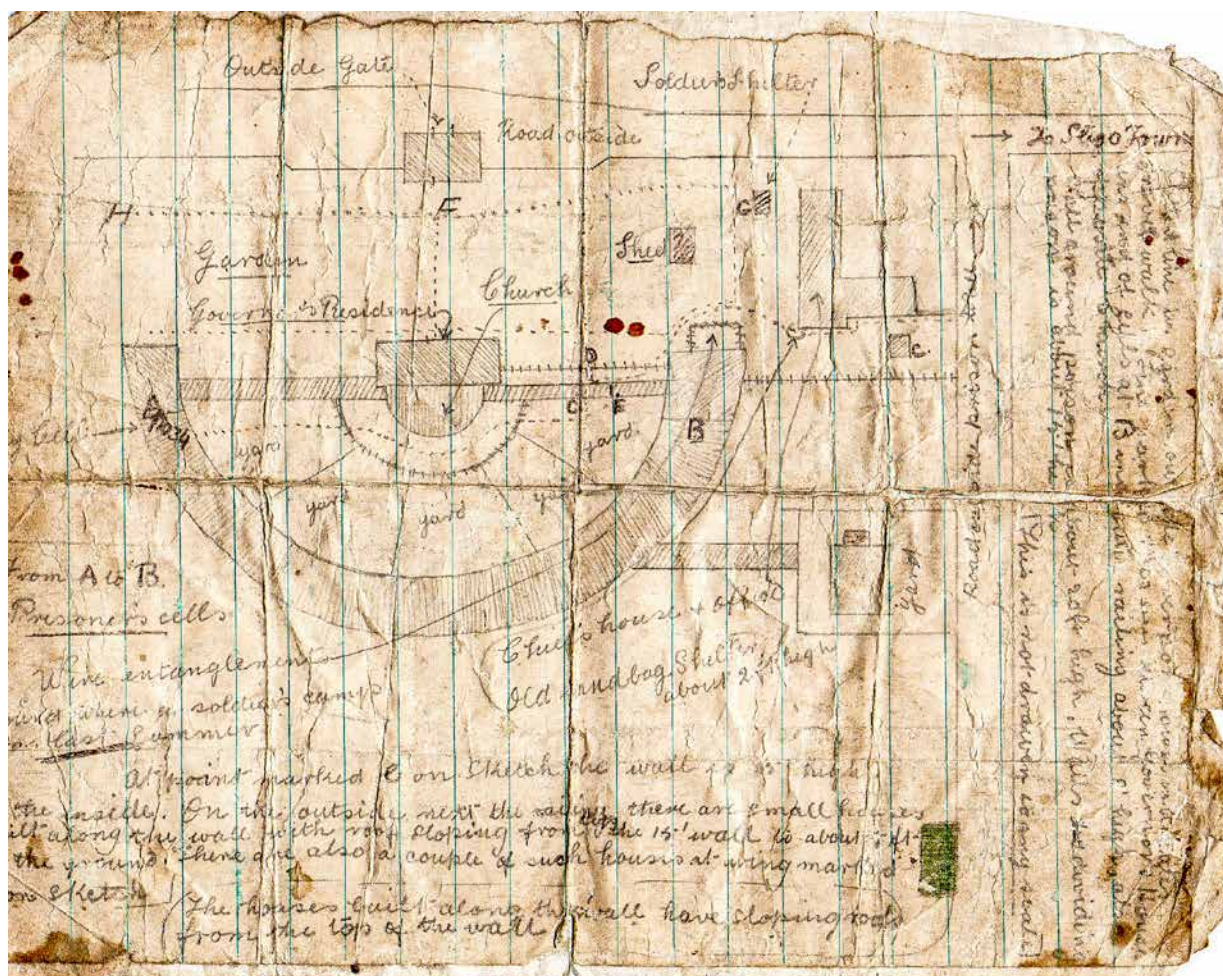


Figure 9.21 Drawing of Sligo Gaol by IRA volunteer Paddy (Patrick) Rogers from Ballymote, who was imprisoned there in 1918 (Rose Rogers-Regan). This, or a similar sketch, was used to plan the Carty jailbreak in 1920.

On one occasion during the War of Independence, while ‘Trooper’ was on the run, he returned to the family home at 9 Church Hill in Sligo town (Figure 9.22). Shortly afterwards, the house was raided by the Black and Tans and Auxiliaries, who had been tipped off by a local informer as to the return visit. ‘Trooper’ and his brother, Patrick (also an IRA volunteer), escaped through the back door of the house and ran across the green. The Auxiliaries searched the house, but to no avail. When they were leaving, a draught from the back door caused the front door to bang shut, trapping the informer in the house together with ‘Trooper’ and Patrick’s mother, Sarah. She was incensed with the spy and beat him severely with a crutch. The ‘Tans’ had to break in the front door to rescue him.¹²⁰ Another story ‘Trooper’ often recalled to his sons later in life related to the wedding day of one of his IRA comrades, which took place during the War of Independence when the

men were all living on the run. ‘Trooper’ was one of an IRA contingent that provided surveillance around the house where the wedding was being celebrated, somewhere in the vicinity of Grange village and Streedagh beach. ‘Trooper’ briefly left his post to visit the newly married couple and present them with a wedding gift of a salt and pepper set.¹²¹

Truce Period (12 July 1921–30 June 1922)

From the beginning of the Truce period, ‘Trooper’ was actively drilling and spent three weeks making buckshot in the Sinn Féin Club and in the Temperance Hall in Sligo town (Figure 9.23). From around August or September 1921 he was based at the divisional HQ at Kilnamanagh ‘on constant duty’ for four weeks. He spent four weeks in the Rahelly training camp and was also captured in a photograph at the Castlegal IRA camp

¹²⁰ Brian McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 21.04.2023

¹²¹ Brian McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 21.04.2023



Figure 9.22 'Trooper' McHugh's home in the 1920s, 9 Church Hill in Sligo town (blue house with blue door), was raided by the Black and Tans during the War of Independence (Marion Dowd).

on Cope's Mountain (Figure 3.3). Over 60 years later, his comrade Volunteer Andy Doocey warmly recalled one occasion when he saw 'Trooper' shooting a hare to provide food while they were living on the run.¹²² He spent an additional two weeks in the Strandhill training camp.¹²³ During the Truce period the IRA occupied the Temperance Hall and 'Trooper' was stationed there for two or three months but he transferred to the Military Barracks when it was taken over at the start of February 1922.

During the Truce period, 'Trooper' was attached to the Sligo Battalion ASU on active duty along the border with Northern Ireland. In April 1922 he was involved in an ambush of a party of B-Specials at Ballaghameehan (Ballymeehan) Bridge, located less than 4km by road from the border with Northern Ireland.¹²⁴ 'Trooper' was armed with a Lee Enfield rifle, which he used during the 30-minute attack. He rushed from there to Boyle Barracks, under Tom Scanlon's command, to come to the aid of Billy Pilkington and Brian MacNeill who were being held captive by 40 pro-Treaty IRA men of the III North Roscommon Brigade.¹²⁵ 'Trooper' then turned

north again and took part in a 'scrap' (presumably with the RUC or B-Specials) at Kiltyclogher Bridge, County Leitrim, circa 6 April 1922.¹²⁶ Kiltyclogher village is immediately adjacent to the border with Northern Ireland. The bridge in question, which crosses the border, was also a focus for paramilitary attacks in the 1970s.

'Trooper' was sent to Limerick in March 1922 when rival units of the IRA were contesting the right to take over evacuated barracks.¹²⁷ Violence appeared imminent and a substantial number of men were dispatched from the 3rd Western Division as reinforcements. The matter was eventually settled without bloodshed.¹²⁸ 'Trooper' returned to Sligo town on Good Friday (14 April) 1922 as part of anti-Treaty IRA reinforcements in advance of Arthur Griffiths' monster pro-Treaty meeting of 16 April (see Chapter 3). He also saw action at the Battle of Pettigo (27 May–8 June 1922) on the border between counties Donegal and Fermanagh (i.e., the border with Northern Ireland), where he and his

¹²² Andy Doocey, audio recording 1986

¹²³ MSP34REF4610, John McHugh

¹²⁴ Ballymeehan/Ballaghameehan Bridge is located in Druminargid townland, about 1km by road south of Rossinver village, County Leitrim and 1.5km from Gubalaun RIC Barracks, which is to the north of Rossinver. MSP34REF4610, John McHugh

¹²⁵ Tom Scanlon, UCD O'MN, Pb17/137; MSP34REF4610, John McHugh

¹²⁶ MSP34REF4610, John McHugh. The location of this school is uncertain, but was likely in Lattone townland, County Leitrim, midway between the villages of Kiltyclogher and Rossinver. The eastern boundary of Lattone forms the boundary with County Fermanagh and Northern Ireland.

¹²⁷ Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1976

¹²⁸ Farry 2000: 53



Figure 9.23 The Temperance Hall (now Gilhooly Hall) in Sligo town, the IRA battalion HQ for a time, where 'Trooper' McHugh made buckshot during the Truce period (Marion Dowd).

comrades were issued 'old Boer rifles and five rounds of ammunition.'¹²⁹

Civil War (28 June 1922–24 May 1923)

During the Civil War, Jack 'Trooper' McHugh was involved in almost all operations orchestrated and led by Billy Pilkington and was one of about 20 men in the Active Service Unit, often under the command of his good friend, Captain Harry Benson. 'Trooper' had been stationed in one of the barracks in Sligo town from the Griffith meeting of April 1922 until the IRA were forced to withdraw from the town on 2 July 1922, but not before burning the No. 1 RIC Barracks and the Military Barracks. As the Civil War progressed, 'Trooper' was involved in armed attacks on various buildings occupied by National Army troops: 'We opened fire on the courthouse. I think we had two rounds there apiece. There was a general volley on the Gaol. The Post Office was the destruction of telephones and things like that.'¹³⁰

'Trooper' was similarly involved in one of the Sligo IRA's most successful ambushes, the Rockwood ambush, on 13 July 1922. He served in Pilkington's unit, which captured the *Ballinalee* armoured car along with

National Army troops, immediately after Frank Carty had ambushed and killed four soldiers nearby (see Chapter 3). 'Trooper' was armed with a rifle, which he used during the ambush that lasted about 45 minutes. In 1976, McHugh recollected:

They were ambushed before they cut them off. Now, there was several killed in the ambush [by Frank Carty's unit] but in actual fact, the Sligo [Town] Company killed nobody. We captured the armoured car. But before that they were ambushed above at the short wall and Callaghan was killed. Callaghan and Farrell and a fella called [Sean Adair] ... a pal of ours. He was from Belfast ... He was a grand lad. He used to be with us, but he joined the Free State army. He was killed at the Dooney Rock ambush.¹³¹

'Trooper' was involved in the attack on the Ulster Bank in Sligo town on 4 August 1922: 'we blew in the door and rushed it. I was in charge of the party covering off the retreat.'¹³² On 15 August, he and several comrades were fired upon by the National Army after attending Mass in Rathcormac Church:

¹²⁹ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 09.12.2022

¹³⁰ MSP34REF4610, John McHugh

¹³¹ Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1976

¹³² MSP34REF4610, John McHugh

We were on the run. We had Rahelly [House]. We were parked and a Lancia car comes down. A surprise attack. We were after coming from Mass. We had the road blocked ... the Lancia came. There were roadblocks, you know ... They opened fire with a machine gun on us, you know. I got in behind the cordon. Now I could have got buckin' well away too, but you know, there's times you can't run. I got into the corner beside the old shed, next to Monaghans. And I fired at the Lancia. And then a bullet hit the shed. A ricochet bullet hit the wall and then hit me in the forehead ... So the blood ran down me ... I was full of blood and everything ... He took my rifle. He couldn't shoot no one, but he went down to this house. It was a Protestant one. I got dressed anyway and I went down to this fella. The doctor ... he didn't want to attend to any of us. He was on the other side [pro-Treaty]. The buckin' thing [shrapnel] was in me for a long time. Until one night I went out here to Doherty and this thing was bothering me ... And she took a needle, and she took out the buckin' bit of lead out of me forehead, you know. Put a drop of methylated spirits on it.¹³³

'Trooper' had to take three weeks off, 'by permission', to recover.¹³⁴ The shrapnel scar was visible on his forehead for the remainder of his life.¹³⁵ By the end of the summer, 'Trooper' had fully returned to combat. He was part of a small unit led by Billy Pilkington and Seamus Devins that captured Dromahair Barracks, garrisoned with 60 National Army soldiers, on 4 September 1922. He was in Captain Harry Benson's column and was one of the party covering off the retreat.¹³⁶

During the National Army round up of September 1922, 'Trooper' was armed and active in the three-hour 'running fight' at Rahelly House.¹³⁷ In the 1970s, 'Trooper' made an audio recording of his memories of the events of 18 and 19 September 1922 after the IRA had evacuated Rahelly House and had escaped into the mountains under pursuit from the National Army:¹³⁹

I was with Harry Benson ... We had our tents on the side of the mountain there. The previous Sunday was a very warm day and we all went to Mass in Rathcormac. On our way back we got word that the Free State troops was going to attack. Our column was to stop troops coming from the direction of Dromahair or Manorhamilton. We were on that road at Glencar. That was the orders we got. Everybody had certain orders. We had the IRA men in Finner Camp. They were supposed to retire to the mountains. To retire to the mountain. We were all told to retire to a certain place.

When the fighting started, we moved across from Lugnagall over to around Rahelly. Nothing happened that day. We stayed in houses up and down there in Barnarobin. Harry Benson was my pal (Figure 9.24). We always stuck together ... We were in the same house ... Conway [Michael] was the fella [scout] that gave the alarm that the Free State troops was coming up the road ... I went out the front door. And I went down the road with some other lads. I can't remember them now. Tommy Flanagan was one of them anyway. It was a false alarm anyways. So we went back to the house, we went back. Harry Benson was missing. We didn't know where the buckin' hell he went. He didn't come back all night. Tommy Langan was missing from a different house. It was a black, an awful black night. Next morning Harry Benson was missing. And so was Tommy Langan. So myself and Tommy Flanagan went out to search for them up the mountain. It was an awful wet night. The water was coming down south so we went up the mountain and up Benbulbin. We called and shouted, and we never got no answer. So, we come down, we couldn't get them. Billy Pilkington comes along then, and he organised. He said to Gilmartin, Tommy Gilmartin, "you go in there. You can stay there in this house and wait til ... They'll probably come back, you know. Wait for them." Then he changed his mind and said, "you better come along with us."

¹³³ Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1976

¹³⁴ MSP34REF4610, John McHugh

¹³⁵ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 09.12.2022

¹³⁶ MSP34REF4610, John McHugh

¹³⁷ MSP34REF4610, John McHugh

¹³⁸ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.04.2023

¹³⁹ Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1976



Figure 9.24 Captain Harry Benson (9.10.1899-20.09.1922), close friend and comrade of Jack ‘Trooper’ McHugh (Photograph from Sarah Monaghan’s Photograph Album, courtesy of Seamus Monaghan). Harry and ‘Trooper’ both departed Rahelly House on 18 September 1922, but Harry was killed by the National Army two days later on Benwisin Mountain. ‘Trooper’ outlived Harry by 55 years, but never forgot his friend and frequently spoke about him with emotion later in life.¹³⁸



Figure 9.25 Jack ‘Trooper’ McHugh, probably in the mid-to late 1920s (Vincent McHugh).

So, we went along the ‘Calla’.¹⁴⁰ Over and up the cross and over to Glencar. ‘Twas an awful buckin’ wet day. We had only a bit of bread or some buckin’ thing. We got to Glencar and we went down to the houses down around there. I went into this house ... We all got orders ... I didn’t go to bed. Some of them went to bed ... ‘The Lord Keaveney’ fired a few [warning] shots ... We got out anyway.¹⁴¹ We were going out the door. I was the last out. And Mrs Mitchell was under the table.¹⁴² There was no back door, we had to go out the front door. She was under the buckin’ table and she says for to come back for the rabbits [that she had cooked for them], and the bullets coming through the window. We got out, and Michael said, “All the boys, follow me!” Johnny Kenny ... went over across the ditch and a bullet took the heel off his shoe. We got up the mountain anyways ... We got up

the mountain and we got away. We got up there anyway and we seen the troops, about sixty ... I didn’t think Benson was killed.

After departing Mrs Mitchell’s house, ‘Trooper’ and a few other IRA men retreated back up the mountains, probably to Tormore Cave. A National Army soldier was firing a Thompson machine gun at them as they clambered up the wet and slippery hillside. ‘Trooper’ tried to return fire but lost his footing on the scree slope. His comrade, Tom McEvelly, caught him and pulled him back up. Another comrade, Silke, was with them.¹⁴³ ‘Trooper’ did not mention Tormore Cave in his 1976 recording, which conforms with the general trend of silence in relation to the cave occupation (see Chapter 11). Trooper continued, talking of his escape and the fate of his friends and comrades:¹⁴⁴

We didn’t know then that these fellas [Sligo’s Noble Six] was killed at all ... Devins ... They were killed. They were captured. They were taken prisoner, you know ... at the back of Rathcormac. A place, Scanlons ... Benson and Tommy

¹⁴⁰ The ‘Calla’ likely refers to the cliffs of Ballynagalliagh.

¹⁴¹ In later life, James Keaveney was known by the nickname ‘The Lord Keaveney’ in reference to his role as Mayor of Sligo (Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.04.2023).

¹⁴² Probably Mary Mitchell, born 1865, Glen Upper townland, Glencar; Census of Ireland 1911

¹⁴³ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.04.2023

¹⁴⁴ Jack ‘Trooper’ McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1976



Figure 9.26 Jack 'Trooper' McHugh in America circa 1929. At 6ft 4in (1.93m) in height,¹⁴⁶ he cut an imposing figure (Danny McHugh).

Langan was caught on their own ... They were shot on the mountains. Benson was shot through the legs. He was shot through the head. Tommy Langan was shot. And he was ripped open with a buckin' bayonet. And they were put head foremost into a bog hole. Devins, MacNeill and Joe Banks, they were shot at a different place.

In reply to the question as to who was responsible for the killing of Sligo's Noble Six, 'Trooper' responded:¹⁴⁶

The Free State troops. They were from Sligo and Donegal. That's who done it. A fella called Captain McGoohan ... and this fella Tony Lawlor. You know, that Colonel Lawlor ... He was in the buckin' Free State. He was a big shot in the Free State army up until lately.

'Trooper' was himself almost shot en route to Tormore Cave. An oral narrative that was passed down locally told that the National Army were on the mountain plateau firing down on 'Trooper' as he was running along the valley floor beneath Tormore Cave. He scrambled up the scree slopes and disappeared into the cave. The army later passed along the valley within 50m of the cave entrance but did not spot the dugout.¹⁴⁷ He may not have spent weeks in the cave, but possibly escaped back into Sligo town.¹⁴⁸ After the events of September 1922, 'Trooper' was transferred from the ASU of the 1st Battalion (Sligo Town) to the ASU of the 2nd Battalion (North Sligo), under Martin Bernard McGowan. He remained with the 2nd Battalion just a short time before being ordered back to the 1st Battalion.¹⁴⁹ While with the 2nd Battalion, 'some of our crowd were caught in a round up. We all got away with the exception of one wounded and two captured. I was in charge of the party trying to cover off the retreat. We were trying to

¹⁴⁵ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.04.2023

¹⁴⁶ Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1976

¹⁴⁷ As relayed to M. Dowd on various occasions by Des Gilhawley, Danny McHugh and Joe McGowan

¹⁴⁸ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.04. 2023

¹⁴⁹ MSP34REF4610, John McHugh



Figure 9.27 The wedding day of Jack 'Trooper' McHugh and Bridget McBrearty, 18 June 1936 (Vincent McHugh).

draw the attack on us.¹⁵⁰ 'Trooper' was also involved in the capture of the Town Hall on 9 December 1922, which was then occupied by the National Army. During the attack, Sergeant James Skeffington of the National Army was shot dead.¹⁵¹

Throughout the remainder of the Civil War, 'Trooper' was living on the run and did not stay at home (Figure 9.25). On one occasion, however, he returned to the family home to visit an ill relative. He was betrayed and the house was raided by the National Army. 'Trooper' avoided capture by hiding under the bed of the ill woman.¹⁵² On another occasion he visited Paddy Carroll's mother to sympathise with her.¹⁵³ Paddy, one of Sligo's Noble Six, was killed on Slievemore on 20 September 1922.

Aftermath

In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, one or two National Army soldiers were escorting an IRA prisoner when they were attacked by an IRA volunteer. The

prisoner escaped. The National Army consequently raided the McHugh family home on Church Hill and arrested Patrick (brother of 'Trooper') and brought him before the courts. The soldier who had been escorting the IRA prisoner was asked to identify the man before him. He observed, however, that Patrick McHugh was not the attacker as he was 'ginger' haired and 'too short'. Though the identity of the IRA man who rescued the prisoner is not known, there is a suggestion that it was 'Trooper'; when the National Army came to his home, they arrested the wrong brother.¹⁵⁴

'Trooper' was on the run until February 1924. During his five years of active IRA service, he was shot twice but was never captured, imprisoned or disarmed.¹⁵⁵ He left Ireland in 1924 under the alias of 'Patrick McHugh', his brother's name.¹⁵⁶ The day he left Sligo, 'Trooper' gave his 'revolver' to Micky Carroll and took the train to Cork. As a farewell gesture and in recognition of his time working on the railways, his friends placed 'bangers' (small warning devices) on the railway tracks leading out of Sligo.¹⁵⁷ With his mother's savings, he boarded a ship at Cobh, County Cork, destined for America. A few months later, Micky Carroll joined him in New Jersey,¹⁵⁸ presumably without the revolver! 'Trooper' lived at 10 Harmon Street in Jersey City. During his years in America (Figure 9.26) he worked a series of different jobs, including as a crane driver on Hoboken Docks, a stevedore, and an armed doorman on a speakeasy during Prohibition (a period that ended in 1933).¹⁵⁹

'Trooper' returned to Ireland in 1934 or 1935 on holidays but decided to stay.¹⁶⁰ He got a job as a Temporary Assistant Preventative Officer in the newly established Customs and Excise. He held this post for the remainder of his life, but was never promoted because, in his opinion, he did not speak proficient Irish and most of the senior staff there had formerly been on the pro-Treaty side during the Civil War.¹⁶¹

In the 1930s 'Trooper' was posted to the docks at Killybegs, County Donegal, where he worked in Customs and Excise. There he met Bridget McBrearty from Largynagreana townland, north of Killybegs. They married on 18 June 1936 when Bridget was 26 and

¹⁵⁰ MSP34REF4610, John McHugh

¹⁵¹ Farry 2000: 125

¹⁵² Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 09.12.2022

¹⁵³ Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986

¹⁵⁴ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.04.2023

¹⁵⁵ MSP34REF4610, John McHugh

¹⁵⁶ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 09.12.2022

¹⁵⁷ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 09.12.2022

¹⁵⁸ Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1976

¹⁵⁹ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 09.12.2022

¹⁶⁰ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 09.12.2022

¹⁶¹ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.04.2023



Figure 9.28 Jack ‘Trooper’ McHugh’s military medals, now in the care of his son and daughter-in-law, Brian and Breda McHugh (Marion Dowd). Medals, left to right: Truce Commemorative Medal 1971; 1919-21 War of Independence Service Medal, issued 1941-2; Emergency Service Medal 1939-46.

‘Trooper’ was 35 (Figure 9.27).¹⁶² ‘Trooper’ was stationed at the River Foyle where he used to inspect trains. By 1937, the couple were living in Porthall, County Donegal, on the border with Northern Ireland. The first child born to Bridget and ‘Trooper’, a daughter named Sarah, died when she was just three days old. The couple went on to have ten more children, all sons.¹⁶³ In April 1938, ‘John McHugh’ was awarded a Grade E Military Service Pension for IRA service between 1917 and 1923.¹⁶⁴

In July 1947, ‘Trooper’ was issued a 1919-21 War of Independence Service Medal with bar, frequently known as the ‘Black and Tan Medal’. The bar, inscribed with the word *Comhrac* (‘Struggle’), was restricted to IRA veterans who had been armed and had seen active military service during the War of Independence. In the late 1940s, ‘Trooper’ received an Emergency Service Medal 1939-46, with two bars reflecting six years service during the Second World War, known in Ireland as ‘the Emergency’ (Figure 9.28). This medal related to his work as an officer with the Local Defence Force, and specifically along the River Foyle, which

was a major gateway into Northern Ireland. ‘Trooper’ credited Éamon de Valera with keeping Ireland out of the Second World War; by then de Valera was Taoiseach (prime minister).¹⁶⁵

In 1946 or 1947, ‘Trooper’ was transferred to Clones, County Monaghan. His experience over the previous ten years in Customs and Excise would have prepared him for this transfer. However, his new job enforcing customs law on the border with Northern Ireland around Clones was very different to his coastal experience at Killybegs. The work was dangerous and his experience as an IRA soldier in the early 1920s may have played an important role. While it might seem trivial today, egg smuggling on the border was a significant and well-organised customs crime. It was carried out by clandestine and particularly violent operatives along the Monaghan and Tyrone borderland. At this time, the *Irish Independent* recorded three cases of egg smuggling across the border, the third of which resulted in a severe and violent encounter.

A ‘clash between customs officials and smugglers’ occurred on 19 May 1950 near the Free State border at Monaghan and the Northern Ireland border at Tyrone.

¹⁶² Marriage Certificate, Glenties Registration District

¹⁶³ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 09.12.2022

¹⁶⁴ MSP34REF4610, John McHugh

¹⁶⁵ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.04.2023



Figure 9.29 Jack 'Trooper' McHugh with nine of his ten sons in the early 1960s; missing from the photo is John, who was then in America. Back row, L to R: Dessy, Brendan, Danny, 'Trooper' and Myles. Middle row, L to R: Vincent, Eugene and Brian. Front row, L to R: Gerry and Dermot (Brian McHugh).

Three officers, including Jack 'Trooper' McHugh (then aged 48), were brutally attacked by a gang of fifteen to twenty men after they had held up two men suspected of smuggling eggs across the border at Drumfurriter, County Monaghan. The violent encounter left the three customs officers with head, facial and body injuries. They were pictured in the *Irish Independent* recovering in Monaghan hospital. The scene reported by the newspaper is reminiscent of the conflicts and particularly ambushes that would have been familiar to 'Trooper' during the War of Independence and Civil War; albeit he was now working to defend the border.¹⁶⁶

A reporter from the *Irish Independent* visited 'Trooper' in hospital:

[Patrick] Farrell and McHugh were sitting up and able to talk. Both men had blackened eyes, swollen noses and badly gashed faces. Officer McHugh, whose voice was barely audible, said that they were on ordinary patrol on the main Clogher-Monaghan road about 1:50am. They had come from the Northern Ireland direction towards Clones and were pulled up on the bend of the road when two men approached wheeling

bicycles, on each of which were two 30-dozen crates of eggs.

"As we approached them" he [McHugh] said, "Instead of following the normal procedure of smugglers and dropping their contraband and running, they stood their ground and faced us. They refused to hand over the eggs, and when I attempted to seize the machine of the man with whom I was dealing he held on and began to struggle. There was then a roar from men who 'came from nowhere', and in the sudden rush, sticks and weapons of all descriptions came down on us. One of the crowd shouted, 'Give it to them' and I saw some of the men jump on the banks and grab paling posts. One of the men struck me with one of these posts, but it broke and I'm sure if it had been solid it would have killed me. We fought back as best we could and I used my torch but it broke with the first blow. We were outnumbered, with two and three, and sometimes five or six men on top of us. They beat us with their weapons and when we were on the ground they kicked us like footballs.

¹⁶⁶ *Irish Independent*, 20.05.1950; *Irish Independent*, 22.05.1950



Figure 9.30 Assistant Preventive Officer Jack 'Trooper' McHugh in Sligo town circa 1962, with some of his sons and their friends (Danny McHugh).



Figure 9.31 Danny McHugh with the 1976 audio recording of his father, Volunteer Jack 'Trooper' McHugh (Marion Dowd). Danny's cassette preserves a first-hand account of his father's experiences during the revolutionary period in North Sligo and beyond.

We retreated to the car and got what weapons we could with which to defend ourselves, and the melee continued for a considerable time. The last I remember was a terrific blow across the forehead, and I fell on the side of the road and lost consciousness. I don't know how long I was lying there, and don't remember being brought out of it. It was a bloody combat, and the men apparently set out to beat us insensible."¹⁶⁷

Six years after this violent encounter, and after ten years working in Clones, 'Trooper' had an opportunity to transfer back to Sligo town. On return, he worked on the docks checking ships for contraband. *The Sligo Champion* reported on 'the occasion of his transfer from Clones to Sligo, Assistant Preventive Officer John F. McHugh, who is a keen angler, was presented by his colleagues with a fishing rod and tackle. The

presentation was made by Mr. John J. McClean, Chief Preventive Officer, Clones."¹⁶⁸

The McHugh family lived on Treacy Avenue in Sligo town from 1956 (Figures 9.29 and 9.30). In January 1959, Bridget McHugh died aged 48.¹⁶⁹ Her husband was left to raise their young family by himself.

'Trooper' had been excommunicated by the Church during the revolutionary period for being a member of the IRA and was never officially reinstated. Nonetheless, throughout his life he never missed Mass or religious devotions. He said the rosary in his kitchen in Tracey Avenue every night, regardless of who might be visiting. He felt betrayed by the Church: 'what kept these men going was their faith.'¹⁷⁰ 'Trooper' spoke little to his ten sons about his IRA past, possibly because of the nature of his job as a government official. Following his retirement in the late 1960s, however,

¹⁶⁸ *The Sligo Champion*, 01.12.1956

¹⁶⁹ Her death certificate incorrectly states her age as 46

¹⁷⁰ Brian McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 21.04.2023

¹⁶⁷ *Irish Independent*, 20.05.1950

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT



Figure 9.32 The funeral procession of Jack 'Trooper' McHugh en route from Sligo Cathedral to Sligo Cemetery (Danny McHugh). The hearse appears to be flanked by some of his former IRA comrades.



Figure 9.33 Jack 'Trooper' McHugh was the last of the 'Old IRA' in Sligo town to receive a firing party at his funeral (Danny McHugh).

he became more open about his years in the IRA.¹⁷¹ In 1971, 'Trooper' received the Truce Commemorative Medal 1971, awarded to veterans to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the War of Independence. His former OC, Billy Pilkington, visited 'Trooper' at Treacy Avenue in 1973.¹⁷²

On Christmas Eve 1976, Danny McHugh recorded an interview with his father, 'Trooper', regarding his memories of the War of Independence and Civil War (Figure 9.31). The importance of these audio recordings cannot be overemphasised. A century or more after the events in question, the recording allows us to hear first-

hand from one of the men directly involved in most of the key IRA operations in Sligo during the 1920s.

Jack 'Trooper' McHugh died in February 1977, aged 75 years. His coffin was draped with the tricolour and three volleys were discharged over his grave (Figures 9.32 and 9.33). He was the last of the 'Old IRA' in Sligo town to be honoured in this way.¹⁷³

Jack 'Trooper' McHugh is one of the 20 Republicans named on the Countess Constance Markievicz Memorial, which was unveiled at Rathcormac in 2003 (Figure 9.18).

¹⁷¹ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.04.2023

¹⁷² Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.04.2023

¹⁷³ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.04.2023

Men who may have stayed in Tormore Cave in September–October 1922

Four of the men who sheltered in Tormore Cave in September and October 1922 are known: Billy Pilkington, Dominic Branley, Paddy Branley and Jack ‘Trooper’ McHugh. The remaining 28 or 30 men remain unknown, but four men have been identified who *may* have been part of the Tormore Cave group based on information passed down to relatives. Each of these four men are either linked to cave dugouts (though not necessarily Tormore Cave) or are known to have been on the run in the mountains during the period in question. Summary biographies of these men, Thady Branley, Eugene Gilbride, John Kane and John Smyth, are included here. At present the evidence is meagre, but further information may clarify the activities of these men in late September and October 1922.

In local memory, four additional IRA volunteers were said to have been on the mountains and witnessed the execution of Sligo’s Noble Six: Joseph Gaffney, Mick McGowan, Eddie Wallace and Harry Young. Joseph Gaffney, a science and mathematics teacher in the Technical School in Sligo town, was said to have been on the mountains on 20 September 1922 and saw the killings take place; he lay in the heather concealed from view.¹⁷⁴ Mick McGowan (brother of Martin Bernard McGowan) was supposed to have been in the company of Harry Benson and Tommy Langan the day they were killed on Benwiskin.¹⁷⁵ Volunteer Eddie Wallace recalled in 1986 that he was ‘the only one that escaped that day ... they shot the other six.’¹⁷⁶ Harry Young, a Protestant IRA volunteer from Rosses Point, was said to have been in the company of Sligo’s Noble Six and narrowly avoided capture that day.¹⁷⁷ If any or all of these narratives are true, it is possible that Gaffney, McGowan, Wallace and Young also sheltered in Tormore Cave in September 1922, but at present the evidence is far too tenuous. Another man, ‘Silke, from Galway’, was a comrade of Jack ‘Trooper’ McHugh and it has been suggested that he was ‘probably in the cave too.’¹⁷⁸ The identity of this man is uncertain and there is no further evidence available at present to connect him to Tormore Cave.

¹⁷⁴ Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986

¹⁷⁵ Hugh Gallagher pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 24.03.2023

¹⁷⁶ Eddie Wallace, audio recording 1986

¹⁷⁷ Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986; Declan Foley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 02.11.2022

¹⁷⁸ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.04.2023

Thady (Thaddeus) Branley

Born: 17 November 1893¹⁷⁹

Childhood home: Tormore townland, County Sligo

Died: 6 February 1978 (aged 85)¹⁸⁰

Buried: Drumcliff Churchyard, County Sligo

Thady Branley, christened Thaddeus after his father, was born in 1893. He was raised along with his brothers, Paddy and Dominic, in the Branley homestead at Tormore and lived there during the War of Independence.

Limited details of Thady’s IRA activities survive in the Military Archives and there is a dearth of family narratives concerning this part of his life. During the War of Independence, he was an active volunteer in the Drumcliff Company (2nd Battalion North Sligo) under OC Ned Bofin.¹⁸¹ A family narrative about a raid by the Black and Tans on the family home during the War of Independence relates that ‘British soldiers came up the hill to raid the home and he [Thady] was able to dump all of the guns they had stored there into a wheelbarrow and brought them to the barn where he covered them in manure. The soldiers didn’t find them that day!’¹⁸² Towards the end of his life, Thady recalled that he had been tied to a bush by the Black and Tans.¹⁸³

In August 1921, during the Truce period, Thady moved from the family home to Glen Lower, immediately adjacent to Tormore townland.

There are no military records related to Thady Branley’s activities during the Civil War, but it is likely that his involvement was similar to that of his brothers. He was probably active locally and regularly on the run. Considering his brothers sought refuge in Tormore Cave in 1922, it is possible that Thady was also part of the group billeted there.

¹⁷⁹ There is some confusion regarding Thady’s birth date in the records. In his medal and pension claims, military documents refer to his birth date as either 17 or 26.11.1893. However, in a document dated 1962, it clearly states: *Dáta bhreithe 17/11/1893; Dáta bhaite 26/11/1893* [Birth date 17.11.1893; Baptismal date 26.11.1893]

¹⁸⁰ Death Certificate, Sligo District

¹⁸¹ DP35677, Thady Branley

¹⁸² Maura Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 08.09.2022 (as recalled by her father, Frank Branley)

¹⁸³ Mary Branley, née Cummins pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 23.02.2023. Mary’s husband, Dominic, was a son of Thady Branley. Thady lived with Mary and Dominic in the final years of his life.



Figure 9.34 Left: Thady Branley on O'Connell Street, Dublin, sometime between 1937 (when double-decker buses first appeared in Dublin) and 1966 (when Nelson's Pillar, in the background, was destroyed). Right: Thady Branley later in life (Mary Branley, née Cummins).

On 2 February 1925, Thady married Anne Feeney of Collingsford, Drum, in Drumcliff Church. His brother, Joseph, was a witness to the marriage.¹⁸⁴ The couple continued to live at Glen Lower where Thady's occupation was recorded as 'farmer'. Anne and Thady went on to have three sons and two daughters (Figure 9.34). One son, Michael, died in childhood from appendicitis. Anne died in 1942 at the age of 45, leaving Thady to raise their four surviving children.¹⁸⁵

In 1938, Thady made contributions to the National Folklore Collection regarding the Great Famine in County Sligo and 'a great plague of sickness' that had affected the town.¹⁸⁶ He also provided a description of traditional basket making.¹⁸⁷ Thady related a story about the supernatural 'water horse' that inhabited Glencar Lake 'long ago' and regularly emerged to eat grass on the lake shore. One evening, at sunset, a man

taking his horse to the lake for a drink saw the 'water horse', captured it, and took it home where it stayed for some time. When the man returned to the lake with the two animals, the supernatural horse galloped into the lake with the man who had taken him on his back, and they were never seen again.¹⁸⁸

In 1947 or 1948, Thady was awarded the 1919-21 War of Independence Service Medal for IRA activities. In 1962, aged 69, Thady received a Military Pension further recognising his IRA service. By then his health was in decline and his pension included an award for illness and disability. At this time, he lived in Cloonmull with one of his sons.¹⁸⁹ Thady was also awarded the Truce Commemorative Medal in 1971.

Thady Branley died in 1978, more than 35 years after his wife. They are buried together in Drumcliff Churchyard along with their son, Michael, and Thady's older brother, Dominic (Figure 9.7). Before he died,

¹⁸⁴ Marriage Certificate Branley/Feeney; DP35677, Thady Branley

¹⁸⁵ Death Certificate, Anne Branley

¹⁸⁶ NFCS0157: 257

¹⁸⁷ NFCS0157: 165

¹⁸⁸ NFCS0157: 205

¹⁸⁹ DP35677, Thady Branley



Figure 9.35 Thady Branley's IRA medals in the safe hands of his daughter-in-law, Mary Branley, née Cummins (Marion Dowd). On 20 September 2022, Mary proudly wore the medals to the unveiling of a commemoration plaque to Sligo's Noble Six at Cloonmull in North Sligo.

Thady gave his two IRA medals to his daughter, Mai. In accordance with Thady's wishes, the medals were then passed on to his grandson Eugene, the son of Thady's son Dominic. Dominic's widow and Eugene's mother, Mary Branley, née Cummins, is now custodian of the medals (Figure 9.35). Mary proudly wore Thady's medals at the unveiling of a commemorative plaque to Sligo's Noble Six at Cloonmull on 20 September 2022.

Eugene Gilbride

Born: 1 October 1892¹⁹⁰

Childhood home: Barnaderg townland, County Sligo

Died: 11 March 1972 (aged 79)

Buried: Ahamlish Graveyard, County Sligo

Eugene Gilbride was born and raised in Barnaderg townland, 2km southeast of Grange village. He was one of eight children and the youngest son born to John and Annie Gilbride: Michael, Patrick, John, Maria, Kate, Annie Bee, Eugene and Margaret Jane.¹⁹¹ The 1901 census records that the family of ten lived in a three-roomed thatched cottage. The farm had a stable, cow house, calf house, dairy, piggery and barn. By the time

of the 1911 census, Eugene was 18 years old and lived in the same house (now with a slate roof), together with his father and four sisters. His mother had died by then. The Gilbride farm had prospered and now included a coach house, fowl house and barn.¹⁹²

As a member of Sinn Féin, Eugene Gilbride was one of the men who provided a guard of honour for Countess Markievicz when she visited Sligo to attend a ceremony granting her the freedom of Sligo town on 23 July 1916.¹⁹³ Gilbride joined the IRA in 1919. In 1920 he became Captain of the Grange Company of the Sligo Brigade and progressed to Vice OC and then OC of the 2nd Battalion (Figure 9.36).

In January 1920, Gilbride, together with Willie Devins and Seamus Devins, carried out a raid for arms at the home of Major Eccles at Moneygold outside Grange village, where they captured a double-barrelled shotgun, a Brooks rifle, a revolver and ammunition.¹⁹⁴ Eugene was involved in the attack on Fivemilebourne Barracks, County Leitrim on 2 June 1920. The men from Grange, led by Seamus Devins, were armed with rifles and shotguns. The Republicans engaged with the six RIC men inside the building and though the attack

¹⁹⁰ Birth Certificate, Sligo District

¹⁹¹ Census of Ireland 1901

¹⁹² Census of Ireland 1911

¹⁹³ Farry 1992: 101

¹⁹⁴ McGowan 1993: 107



Figure 9.36 Eugene Gilbride in the 1920s (Veronica Gillen).

lasted some time, it was eventually stood down at daybreak.¹⁹⁵

Gilbride was a key figure in the Moneygold ambush of 25 October 1920, where four RIC men were shot dead and two others were injured.¹⁹⁶ During the retaliatory attacks by Crown forces, the Gilbride home was raided. Eugene later recalled:

My father was dying at the time and they came to burn the house. He was unconscious and he died the night after. On Friday they came to burn our house. The military [illegible] up to the house. The officer said, “the man is dead”. He wouldn’t let them burn the house. He was from the Sligo military and there was a decent old fellow in charge.¹⁹⁷

Gilbride was one of 30 Republicans involved in the Carrignagat ambush outside Collooney village, led by

¹⁹⁵ MA/MSPC/A/29; BMH.WS0895, Harold McBrien; Farry 2012: 55

¹⁹⁶ MA/MSPC/A/29; BMH.WS1383, Patrick McCannon; Farry 1992: 254

¹⁹⁷ Eugene Gilbride, UCDA O’MN, P17b/137. Account corroborated by his sister: MSP34REF41872, Annie ‘Bee’ Gilbride

Frank Carty in October or early November 1920. The men took position on the roadside and railway bridge where they waited for over eight hours. Carty called off the ambush when four lorries of military approached, a larger convoy than had been expected.¹⁹⁸

On the night of 20 November 1920, Eugene Gilbride, together with Seamus Devins and Andrew Conway, were transporting arms taken at the Moneygold ambush from the Branley homestead in Tormore to South Sligo, in a car driven by Linda Kearns. They were stopped by Crown forces outside Sligo town.¹⁹⁹ The car was ‘surrounded by a crowd of the most savage and undisciplined men ... all drunk ... a mixed lot, comprising military, police, and Black and Tans.’²⁰⁰ Ten rifles, four revolvers and 500 rounds of ammunition were discovered. The men were badly beaten and Gilbride was beaten unconscious. They were then brought by lorry to No. 2 RIC Barracks on Wine Street in Sligo town, where the men were again violently beaten. The following day they were taken to Sligo Gaol, transferred to Derry Jail a few days later, and from there transported to Belfast Prison where they remained until 1921. At the court-martial in Belfast, Gilbride was sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment and transferred to Dartmoor Prison in England. He was released in January 1922, during the Truce period, after fourteen months incarceration.²⁰¹

Eugene Gilbride was present when Finner Camp was handed over by the British to the 3rd Western Division IRA on 17 February 1922 (Figure 8.14).²⁰²

Eugene Gilbride’s daughter remembers hearing that her father was on the mountain with Seamus Devins and Sligo’s Noble Six the day they were killed, 20 September 1922. There can be little doubt that Eugene Gilbride was on the run across the mountains following the evacuation of Rahelly House. In one narrative he had taken up the rear to allow those who were less familiar with this upland landscape to go ahead.²⁰³ What is not clear is where he was billeted while the National Army scoured the mountains. One family narrative claimed that Gilbride hid in a culvert after the evacuation of Rahelly House.²⁰⁴ A culvert may have provided refuge for a short period, but certainly not

¹⁹⁸ Farry 1992: 251

¹⁹⁹ Willie Devins, audio recording 16.06.1986

²⁰⁰ Kearns 1922: 15-16

²⁰¹ BMH.WS1545, Martin Bernard McGowan; Kearns 1922: 15-18; Kilgannon 1926: 72

²⁰² O’Carroll 2007: 44-5

²⁰³ Gene O’Carroll pers. comm. to M. Dowd and J. Bonsall, 27.01.2023

²⁰⁴ Gene O’Carroll pers. comm. to M. Dowd and J. Bonsall, 27.01.2023 (as related to him in 2005 by Gilbride’s daughter, Sr. Mary)

for days or weeks. Another family narrative is that Eugene had hidden out in a cave. Gilbride may have used any of the cave dugouts in the Dartry Mountains (see Chapter 4) rather than Tormore Cave, though it is reasonable to assume that he would have selected the primary cave that Pilkington and his men had chosen, when refuge was needed. One of Eugene's sisters, Annie Bee (06.11.1890-07.11.1983), was Secretary of Cumann na mBan in Grange from 1918 onwards.²⁰⁵ Decades later, Annie Bee recalled taking food up the mountain to Eugene and other IRA men who were on the run; another sister refused to accompany Annie Bee as she was nervous of getting caught.²⁰⁶

After the Civil War, Eugene returned to farming at his home in Barnaderg. He married Nora Rose McSharry, a teacher, on 11 June 1928 at Grange Church.²⁰⁷ She died less than two years later from septicaemia.²⁰⁸ On 12 July 1933, Eugene married Bridget Feeney at Rathcormac Church.²⁰⁹ From the 1940s, Eugene Gilbride was a well-respected politician, locally and regionally. He was elected to Dáil Éireann as a Fianna Fáil TD for the Sligo-Leitrim constituency in 1948 and was re-elected at every subsequent general election until he retired from politics in 1969. He served as a member of Sligo County Council from 1925 until his death in 1972. Eugene Gilbride was a Peace Commissioner in Grange in the 1950s and wrote many letters of support for former IRA comrades in their applications for Military Pensions. Eugene was present at a reunion dinner of Sligo IRA veterans held 40 years after the end of the Civil War in 1963 (see Figure 11.3).

Eugene Gilbride died on 11 March 1972. He is buried in Ahamlish Cemetery, adjacent to the site of the Moneygold ambush, together with his sister, Annie Bee (Figure 9.37).

In 1988, the Eugene Gilbride Memorial Bridge was opened in Grange. He is also remembered via the Eugene



Figure 9.37 Headstone of Eugene Gilbride, IRA and Annie Bee Gilbride, Cumann na mBan in Ahamlish Cemetery (James Bonsall).

Gilbride Memorial Cup awarded by Feis Shligigh for Irish dancing. He is also one of the 52 'Prominent Sligo I.R.A. Volunteers, War of Independence 1919-1922 [sic]' named on a memorial in the John Hume Peace Garden at Banada in South Sligo. Eugene Gilbride is also named on the Countess Constance Markievicz Memorial at Rathcormac (Figure 9.18).

²⁰⁵ In 1958, Annie Bee Gilbride was awarded a Service Medal for her Cumann na mBan work from 1917-1921.

²⁰⁶ Veronica Gillen pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 10.05.2022

²⁰⁷ Marriage Certificate, Carney Registration District; married at Grange Church

²⁰⁸ Death Certificate, Ballyshannon Registration District

²⁰⁹ Marriage Certificate, Sligo Registration District

John Kane

Born: 1880

Childhood home: unknown

Died: 29 December 1946 (aged 66)

Buried: Assaroe Abbey, Ballyshannon, County Donegal

John (occasionally known as Séan) Kane was born in Glasgow, Scotland in 1880.²¹⁰ His father was George Kane. Little is known about the early years of John's life, and the date when the Kanes moved to Ireland is not known.

John Kane married Maggie (Margaret) Reynolds in Ballyshannon, County Donegal, on 9 January 1901. On the marriage certificate John was listed as a printer and Margaret as a servant.²¹¹ A few months later, the 1901 census recorded Margaret Kane as living in Kilbarron, Ballyshannon with her parents, John and Alice Reynolds. She described herself as 'soldier's wife'.²¹² By the birth of their son, Daniel, in July 1905, the Kanes lived on West Port Street in Ballyshannon town, and John continued to be employed as a printer.²¹³

By the 1911 census, Maggie Kane had given birth to three children, one of whom, Margaret, had died of whooping cough at about four years of age. John and Maggie now lived with their children, Daniel and Mary, in a five-roomed house with a stable and shed on East Port Street in Ballyshannon town.²¹⁴ The family later expanded with the arrival of three more children, Seamus, Winifred and John.

As a member of the Irish Volunteers, John Kane was associated with the procurement, storage and movement of arms and ammunition. After the funeral of Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa (Fenian and member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood) and discussions with Éamon de Valera on 1 August 1915, Tom O'Grady of the Irish Volunteers reported that 'a consignment of 12 single barrel shotguns came along for us by a man named Kane of Ballyshannon and Andy Lavin.'²¹⁵ Kane was also involved in transporting 29 single bore shotguns, four revolvers and ammunition to Cliffoney in 1915.²¹⁶ The dangers inherent in this type of work

were related by Patrick McCannon, Intelligence Officer for North Sligo:²¹⁷

The men were trained in the use of firearms in secret haunts, and towards the close of 1915 about twenty shotguns, single barrel, and a few revolvers were smuggled into the area and kept in secret hiding places until an opportune moment would arrive. Willie Gilmartin got instructions to collect the guns in Dublin. At that time motor cars were rare. At the same time, the only possible way to collect the guns and get them to Cliffoney was by road. Gilmartin and a Volunteer named John Kane went to a man named Millar in Ballyshannon who had the only motor car for miles around. Millar, being a Protestant and Loyalist, could not be made aware of the mission for which the car was required, so they told him that a relative of theirs had died in Dublin and it was necessary for them to get there immediately. Millar drove them to Dublin but when he discovered the nature of their business, he refused to drive them home. It then became necessary to compel him at the point of the revolver to proceed, later impressing on him what his fate would be if he gave any information about the episode.

During the War of Independence, John Kane was Captain of the Ballyshannon Company of the 1st Northern Division (Figure 9.38). The Kane home on East Port Street was regarded as the 'connecting centre' between the IRA in counties Sligo, Donegal and Derry (Figure 9.39).²¹⁸ Battalion meetings were regularly held in the family home and it operated as a safe house for 'men who were passing through the district and who used stay there for food and shelter for a night.'²¹⁹ Recently released prisoners and local men 'used also resort there but they could not stay very long.' The house had a secret room where men on the run could sleep safely. The space ran along the side of the stairs, concealed behind a false panel.²²⁰ As the house was 'used as a dump for the Company arms', raids 'were very frequent'.²²¹ The Kane family 'suffered much hardships, their home being continually raided by military and

²¹⁰ Census of Ireland 1911

²¹¹ Marriage Certificate, Ballyshannon Registration District

²¹² Census of Ireland 1901

²¹³ Birth Certificate, Ballyshannon Registration District

²¹⁴ Census of Ireland 1911

²¹⁵ BMH.WS0917, Tom O'Grady

²¹⁶ MA/MSPC/A/29

²¹⁷ BMH.WS1381, Patrick McCannon

²¹⁸ MSP34REF34890, Mary Gallagher

²¹⁹ MSP34REF34890, Mary Gallagher

²²⁰ Jim Kane pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 07.04.2023

²²¹ MSP34REF34890, Mary Gallagher

police in 1920 and afterwards by Free State forces.²²² During the War of Independence, John Kane had to go on the run, leaving his family to deal with the Crown forces. His daughter, Mary, was 'roughly handled by British Officers' for refusing to answer questions on the whereabouts of her father's rifle and arms.²²³

On 3 December 1920, John Kane, by then a Town Commissioner, was arrested at his premises on East Port Street by soldiers from Finner Camp and imprisoned in Derry Jail. No direct charges were made against him. He was interned without trial in Ballykinlar Internment Camp, County Down.²²⁴ Louis J. Walsh was interned in Ballykinlar for five months in 1921 and described the camp as 'four lines of huts with chapel, cook-house and dining-halls, hospital.'²²⁵ Each zinc hut held 25 men: 'our beds were composed of two wooden trestles ... with three boards laid on top, on which we placed our bedding, consisting of a mattress and bolster packed with coarse straw and four army blankets; and the other furniture comprised a long table, three or four forms, some shelving, a few buckets and a stove.'²²⁶ During his time at Ballykinlar Internment Camp, John Kane became head cook in the No. 1 Camp kitchen. He was ordered to leave the kitchen and return to duties in the camp hospital. He refused on the grounds that he only accepted orders from IRA officers.²²⁷

In her application for a Military Service Pension, Mary Gallagher listed several actions she was involved in during the War of Independence and Truce Period, which were signed off by the Company Captain, her father, John Kane. It is safe to assume that John Kane was also involved in these actions. For instance, on 29 June 1920, three military lorries were held up and burned and the drivers were disarmed. A two-hour attack was launched on Ballyshannon RIC barracks on 29 August 1920. Mary Gallagher was also involved in engagements with the Special Constabulary at Belleek in May 1922, during which a Lancia car was captured and the driver was killed. John Kane and his daughter were also active in the Battle of Belleek, County Fermanagh, in June 1922, when approximately 50 Republicans attacked 500 British military.²²⁸

John Kane and his family took the anti-Treaty side during the Civil War. Their home continued to be used as a central meeting point and safe house and



Figure 9.38 John Kane, Captain of Ballyshannon Company IRA during the War of Independence (Jim Kane).

was raided on multiple occasions by the National Army. Following the revolutionary period, John Kane worked as a farrier. He was awarded the 1919-21 War of Independence Service Medal.²²⁹ John Kane died on 29 December 1946. His death certificate records his profession as 'plant attendant', presumably as a machinery operator.²³⁰

In 1979 or 1980, Jim Kane, a grandson of John Kane, was working in a house at Milk Harbour (Mount Temple townland) on the Sligo coast mid-way between the villages of Cliffoney and Grange. The occupant was Mathious McCormack, then aged in his 80s or 90s. On hearing that Jim was from Ballyshannon, Mathious proceeded to tell him that 'he remembered two men from Ballyshannon who were in the IRA and were hiding in a cave' in the Sligo-Leitrim mountains. Mathious used to bring food and messages to the dugout during the revolutionary period. He remembered the men's names as 'John Kane and Ward' (possibly Seamus Ward who, like John Kane, was also a Town Commissioner

²²² MSP34REF34890, Mary Gallagher

²²³ MSP34REF34890, Mary Gallagher

²²⁴ Begley 2011: 370

²²⁵ Walsh 1921: 43

²²⁶ Walsh 1921: 44

²²⁷ Begley 2011: 371

²²⁸ MSP34REF34890, Mary Gallagher

²²⁹ Jim Kane pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 07.04.2023

²³⁰ <https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie>



Figure 9.39 Jim Kane stands outside the former home of his grandfather, John Kane, at East Port [then East Port Street], Ballyshannon (Marion Dowd). This house was a focal point in the network of IRA communications and intelligence during the revolutionary period and had a secret room to conceal men on the run.

in Ballyshannon and had been arrested with Kane and interned with him at Ballykinlar).²³¹ Like Eugene Gilbride, this oral narrative associates John Kane with a cave billet in the mountains of North Sligo, but whether this is Tormore Cave or one of the other caves discussed in Chapter 4, remains unknown.

John Smyth

Born: 7 November 1898

Childhood home: Barnarobin townland, County Sligo

Died: 12 February 1983 (aged 85)

Buried: Drumcliff Churchyard, County Sligo

²³¹ Jim Kane pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 07.04.2023

The 1911 census records that John Smyth was one of ten children born to John and Bridget (née Hennigan) Smyth. The family lived in a four-roomed dwelling in Barnarobin townland in the shadow of Benbulbin Mountain.²³²

John Smyth joined the IRA in April 1917 when he was 18 or 19 years old. He was active throughout the War of Independence and Civil War with the Drumcliff Company, 2nd Battalion (North Sligo) and was a member of the Active Service Unit until his arrest at the end of the Civil War. During the War of Independence, Smyth was involved in attending parades, drilling, training, organising resistance to conscription and preparing for elections. By early 1920, he had progressed to attacks on local barracks, raids for arms (about 30 houses), raids for dog licences, trenching of roads, raiding mail cars and transporting arms. In May 1920, Smyth was involved in the attack on Drumcliff RIC Barracks (Figure 9.40).²³³

John Smyth took part in the Moneygold ambush of 25 October 1920. Armed with a shotgun, he saw no action but helped transport men and arms to Moneygold in advance of the attack. Following the ambush, Smyth was stationed all night at Gortarowey close to Drumcliff Creamery in anticipation of reprisals from the Crown forces. A sizeable stash of arms was seized during the ambush, which Smyth brought 'to Benbulbin'. Later, on 18 November, Smyth transported the same weapons from Benbulbin to Ballynagalliagh, southeast of Barnarobin. The arms were collected with the intention of moving them to South Sligo for a planned attack.²³⁴ The weapons were delivered to Linda Kearns, Eugene Gilbride, Seamus Devins and Andrew Conway but their car was intercepted by Crown forces outside Sligo town on 20 November 1920 and they were arrested. Following this, the Black and Tans and RIC instigated a large round up of IRA men in the Grange area. John Smyth was in Rosses Point when he was surrounded by Crown forces. An exchange of fire took place but Smyth managed to break through the line and escaped into the 'Benbulbin mountains' along with a stash of 'valuable stuff' and 'provisions'.²³⁵ He described the aftermath: 'we were on the run ourselves in that area because it was not safe'; he 'went on the run in the mountains' with fourteen other volunteers.²³⁶

²³² Census of Ireland 1911

²³³ MSP34REF49273, John Smyth

²³⁴ MSP34REF49273, John Smyth

²³⁵ MSP34REF49273, John Smyth

²³⁶ MSP34REF49273, John Smyth



Figure 9.40 Drumcliff RIC Barracks in Drumcliff North townland is now a private residence (Marion Dowd).

A similar event occurred on 26 May 1921 when Smyth and a group of Republicans were camped at an old house at the foot of Benbulbin (Figure 9.41). They were informed by scouts of the approach of a squad of 30 members of mixed Crown forces personnel. An engagement occurred which saw Smyth, armed with a shotgun, in combat with troops just 55m away. Smyth was part of the ‘covering’ party that allowed a second team to retreat with ‘stores and equipment’ to a dugout in the mountains where the ‘valuable stuff was removed to safety.’²³⁷ Smyth eventually broke through the advancing line and followed the others up Benbulbin. He was on the run for the remainder of the War of Independence and ‘did guard for men on the run.’ Smyth was also involved in guarding local dugouts as well as raids on the local Glencar barytes mine, likely for gelignite. On another occasion in May 1921, while re-opening a trench at Milltown (Cullagh Beg townland) on the Sligo-Bundoran Road with his comrade, Willie Devins, a bomb went off ‘which nearly cost him his life.’ On 1 and 2 June 1921, John Smyth was involved in the destruction of Drumcliff Bridge.²³⁸

During the Truce period, John Smyth engaged in drilling and training at Rahelly House for a fortnight and was involved in the construction of dugouts in the locality. On the eve of Arthur Griffith’s meeting in Sligo town on 16 April 1922, Smyth blocked roads in his

area and joined his unit in the town on the day of the meeting.²³⁹

With the outbreak of Civil War, John Smyth was stationed at Rahelly House from 2 July to 18 September 1922. When the National Army attacked, Smyth, armed with a rifle, was involved in its defence under the command of Patrick McGowan. On 18 September, under attack from the National Army, the IRA evacuated Rahelly and retreated to Drumcliff Bridge to defend their position. Smyth fired about 20 rifle shots across the Drumcliff River. He described the scenario: ‘There was nothing practically between us but the river. It might be 100yd [91m] in some cases, across the river. We were on a footbridge there ... We retreated then to *Ballinalee* [armoured car] covering after the retreating party.’²⁴⁰

Years later, Smyth provided detailed information on the working of his Active Service Unit after the Rahelly evacuation:

Q. *Where did you go then?*

A. *We went back into the mountain.*

Q. *Did you join a flying column?*

A. *Yes, I was with the flying column.*

²³⁷ MSP34REF49273, John Smyth

²³⁸ MSP34REF49273, John Smyth

²³⁹ MSP34REF49273, John Smyth

²⁴⁰ MSP34REF49273, John Smyth

Considering the details of John Smyth's report in relation to the retreat from Rahelly House and action on Benbulbin Mountain, it is quite likely that he retreated to Tormore Cave, potentially along with the ASU Adjutant, Patrick McGowan. Based on the available evidence, however, this remains entirely speculative.

Similar to other men within his brigade, after eluding capture at Rahelly, Smyth remained with the flying column during which time his activities involved 'cutting wires ... blocking roads and keeping an outlook.'²⁴⁴ On 17 March 1923 he took part in an attack on Grange Hall. He was armed with a rifle and fired about ten rounds from a 100yd (91m) range. The attack lasted 30 minutes. John Smyth then went on the run but was arrested on 28 April 1923. He was transferred from Sligo Gaol to the Curragh Internment Camp. He was released in October 1923 after almost six months incarceration.²⁴⁵

Following the Civil War, John Smyth resumed life as a farmer. He occasionally signed his surname 'Smith'. His application for a Military Service Pension was rejected more than once. In June 1947, John Smyth married Mary Bridget McGuinness. They lived in Gortarowey, the townland where he had been stationed prior to the Moneygold ambush in 1920. John was eventually granted a Grade E Military Pension in October 1954 for IRA service over two years and eleven months.

John Smyth died in 1983 and is buried in Drumcliff Churchyard (Figure 9.42).

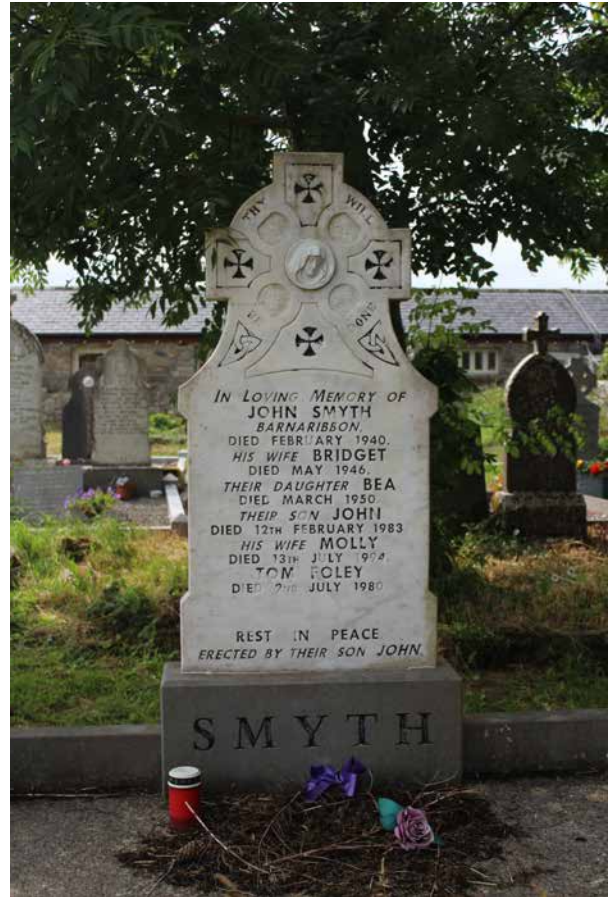


Figure 9.42 John Smyth's grave in Drumcliff Churchyard (Marion Dowd).

²⁴⁴ MSP34REF49273, John Smyth

²⁴⁵ MSP34REF49273, John Smyth

Men who did not stay in Tormore Cave in September/October 1922

One of the aims of this project was to identify the men who stayed in Tormore Cave in September and October 1922. It has not been possible to identify the majority of the 32 or 34 occupants, thus it is important to eliminate those who were definitely not billeted in the cave during the period in question. This includes men who were arrested by the National Army following the evacuation of Rahelly House who may have otherwise reached Tormore Cave, had their plans not been thwarted. The same also applies to the six men, Sligo's Noble Six, killed on the mountains en route to the cave. The following 22 men can thus be eliminated as occupants of Tormore Cave following the evacuation of Rahelly House: Joseph Banks, Harry Benson, Robert G. Bradshaw, Paddy Carroll, Seamus Devins, Andy Doocey, Fallon, Peter Glynn, Edward Gunning, Higgins, James Keaveney, Owen Kelly (Kinlough Company), Tommy Langan, Brian MacNeill, J. McEivilly, McGivney, Melley, Mulligan, Joseph Pilkington, Rooney, Sweeney and Alex Warnock (Kinlough Company).²⁴⁶

In the course of the *Tormore Cave Project* we were informed that Tom Daly and Kenneth Monaghan stayed in Tormore Cave during the period in question. We have been able to discount these men as occupants of the cave in late September and October 1922 and summarise the evidence here to prevent further confusion.

Tom Daly (28.08.1897-20.02.1957) In family memory, IRA volunteer Tom Daly from Belleek, County Fermanagh was billeted in Tormore Cave and was familiar with the Branley safe house further down the mountain.²⁴⁷ Daly appears to have been stationed at Rahelly House. After the planned evacuation, he was arrested by the National Army in September 1922 on his way to Ballyshannon to get petrol for 'an armoured car we had at Rahilly Camp.'²⁴⁸ He was detained in Finner Camp and released in March 1923. He could not, therefore, have been billeted at Tormore Cave during the period in question, though he may have used the dugout, or even spent time there on the run at an earlier date.

Kenneth Monaghan (02.06.1893-17.05.1969) A narrative in circulation in recent decades is that Kenneth Monaghan from Drumcliff had stayed in Tormore Cave and vowed to become a priest if he survived the ordeal.²⁴⁹ This story is typically associated with Billy Pilkington. With the passage of time these two Sligo men, who had both fought in wars and subsequently went on to become priests, appear to have become conflated. Kenneth Monaghan was never in the IRA and was not involved in the Irish War of Independence or the Irish Civil War. Monaghan had fought in the First World War in France and had spent time in German and Russian prisons. In September 1921, he entered the Passionist seminary at Enniskillen and received the Passionist habit, the first step towards becoming a priest in the order. In September 1922, Kenneth Monaghan was professing his vows towards ordination.²⁵⁰ He can thus be eliminated as an occupant of Tormore Cave that same month.

²⁴⁷ Ger Daly pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 20.01.2022

²⁴⁸ MSP34REF34967, Thomas Daly

²⁴⁹ In 2003, Chris Branley told Des Gilhawley that Michael James Monaghan was in the IRA during the War of Independence, stayed in the cave over Glencar Lake, and later became a Passionist priest thereafter known as Fr Kenneth Monaghan. Chris repeated the association between Fr Ken Monaghan and Tormore Cave in 2012 when recording for the RTÉ television documentary, *A Lost Son*. He repeated the same connection in 2014 while recording a radio documentary for Ocean FM. He cited the same information two years later (Feehily 2016: 78). However, the priest that accompanied Fr Pilkington to Tormore Cave in 1936 was not Fr Kenneth Monaghan. Chris was only eight years old and may have conflated the second priest with Fr Monaghan, who had been active in Europe during the First World War and was locally famous.

²⁵⁰ Tom Heneghan pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 24.11.2021

²⁴⁶ *The Irish Times*, 22.09.1922; *Sligo Independent and the West of Ireland Telegraph*, 23.09.1922; MA/MSPC/A/29

Chapter 10

Support infrastructure: civilian women, Cumann na mBan and Protestant families

*My services were all given voluntarily and ... when given,
instead of being chronicled, were forgotten about.¹*

Bea Kilgannon

The success of Tormore Cave as a refuge secured the lives of over 30 men. Cut off from their comrades, families and communities, they endured extreme conditions for weeks. In the Glencar Valley they received crucial help and support from members of the local community, some of whom were relatives and others who supported their plight. Over several weeks these local families sourced food and water, helped treat injuries such as trench foot, and dried damp, sodden clothes. Often overlooked in historical publications, these seemingly mundane but essential domestic activities placed the individuals and families who helped the IRA in grave danger. During the Civil War, wives, sisters and mothers of active Republicans carried a tremendous burden. They often had to take full responsibility for the running of family businesses (such as the home farm), were alone in the rearing of children, and struggled financially. The men in their families who were on the run resulted in a loss of labour and income, causing a strain in raising and supporting a family.

Most of the civilian women who provided help to IRA men on the run have been omitted from historical publications and forgotten with the passage of time. In relation to Tormore Cave, family narratives have enabled us to identify three women who were key in the support infrastructure that sustained the IRA men: Sarah Branley (née Gonley/Gonnely); Maggie O'Connor (later, Maggie Branley); and Bridget Pilkington (née Mahon). Bridget was a member of Cumann na mBan while Sarah and Maggie were civilians. Here we present pen portraits of these three women, who are representative of thousands of women across Ireland. We also explore the work of Cumann na mBan women in Sligo town, and the assistance provided by Protestant families to their Republican neighbours in North Sligo.

Sarah Branley (née Gonley/ Gonnely)

Born: uncertain, possibly *circa* 1852

Childhood home: Shanvaus townland, County Leitrim

Died: 21 July 1941 (aged *circa* 89 or 90)²

Buried: Drumcliff Churchyard, County Sligo

Early life

Sarah Branley (née Gonley/Gonnely) was a key figure in the success of the Tormore Cave dugout (Figure 10.1). She provided food and medical aid to the IRA, as well as opening her home as a safe house to men on the run. Sarah was born in Shanvaus (Shanvass), County Leitrim, 12.5km from Tormore. Her father, Dominick Gonley/Gonnely, was a farmer, while scant details survive about her mother, Myria. Sarah married Thady (Thaddeus) Branley on 2 May 1881 in the Roman Catholic Chapel at Glencar (their son, described in Chapter 8, was also named Thady). Details concerning Sarah's age are contradictory, although available records all suggest that she was much younger than her husband. Her 1881 marriage certificate records that she was 25 (born around 1856) while Thady was 36; the 1901 census records that she was 40 (born around 1861); she was 59 in the 1911 census (born 1852). Similar discrepancies are evident in three entries in the National Folklore Collection from 1937: one record mentions that she was 75, two records state she was 80, and three records state her age as 81. Depending on which, if any, of the official documentation is correct, Sarah was born sometime between 1852 and 1864 and was between 11 and 22 years younger than her husband.

¹ Bea Kilgannon, MSP34REF54764

² Drumcliffe Burial Register



Figure 10.1 Sarah Branley seated in front of her daughter-in-law, Maggie (widow of Sarah's son, Paddy) and her grandson, Joe (son of Maggie and Paddy), outside the Branley homestead at Tormore in 1936 or 1937. Sarah has her arm around another grandchild (Branley family).

Sarah and Thady Branley leased a farm at Tormore from Sir Gilbert King. The Court of the Land Commission fixed rental rates on 22 January 1884. Of the 149 cases heard, the court heard that Thady Branley's tenancy held a farm of 42 acres valued at a fixed rent of £20 per year. In 1901 the homestead had three cow houses and a barn but, by 1911, the barn was possibly gone and replaced by a dairy.³

In the 1901 census, Sarah and Thady lived in a three-roomed thatched cottage at Tormore with eight of their children: Mary J., John, Kate, Patrick (Paddy), Dominick (Dominic), Thaddeus (Thady), Joseph (Joe) and Michael. An older daughter, Lizzie, had by this time left the family home. A three year old niece, Agnes Timoney, also lived with the Branleys. Sarah and her

two daughters, Mary and Kate, could read and write; her husband and older sons could read but not write.⁴

The 1911 census records that Sarah (surname spelled 'Branly') had given birth to ten children, three of whom had died. Sarah's son, Michael, died of tuberculosis and meningitis in 1908 when he was eight years old.⁵ Sarah's daughter Kate also died of tuberculosis when she was about 22; her death occurred a little before the 1911 census. The third child that Sarah and her husband had lost is not named on either the 1901 or 1911 censuses. By 1911, Sarah and Thady had been married for 31 years and lived at Tormore with their sons John, Paddy, Dominic and Joe, and one granddaughter, Mary

³ Census of Ireland 1901; Census of Ireland 1911; *Sligo Independent and West of Ireland Telegraph*, 26.01.1884

⁴ Census of Ireland 1901

⁵ Death Register in District of Carney in the Union of Sligo, 1908 (no. 53)

Ellen Mitchell. The family home appears to have been extended and was described as four-roomed.⁶

War of Independence (21 January 1919–11 July 1921)

The Branleys were a politically active family during the War of Independence. Their home was a safe house where men on the run would stay ‘for weeks and months’.⁷ The house was raided by the Black and Tans on several occasions, and at least once they fired on the front door. In these instances, those on the run (including OC Billy Pilkington), ‘escaped way up into that cave.’⁸ The cave, Tormore Cave, is located 500m by foot northeast of the Branley homestead.

One of Sarah Branley’s grandsons, Frank Branley, remembers that Sarah had taken out a loan of £300 from ‘a British bank’ to purchase the land on which the cave was located, known then as ‘Cummins’ land’.⁹ The date when the loan was taken out is not known, but it was still being repaid into the 1940s. Sarah’s husband died on 29 January 1917, at the reported age of 90, after which the family farm was passed down to her son, Paddy. That Sarah took out the bank loan rather than Paddy or another son may reflect the men’s political activities, which may have negatively impacted on a loan application. Sarah’s efforts to purchase additional land may have been partially or entirely motivated by the presence of Tormore Cave and a desire to safeguard access to the dugout and protect knowledge of its location. It is entirely possible that the family’s intention was to acquire the cave, not necessarily additional farmland. If so, Sarah likely sought the bank loan sometime after her husband’s death in 1917 but before the outbreak of the Civil War in 1922. While Sarah’s political views are not known, her active engagement with the cave and the men hiding there, and the use of her home as a safe house, all suggest she was not a passive observer but an active supporter of, and participant in, the Republican fight.

Truce Period (12 July 1921–27 June 1922)

Sarah Branley’s sister, Elizabeth Timoney (née Gonnely), passed away on 21 November 1921 following a lengthy illness.¹⁰ Sarah was listed as one of the chief mourners at the funeral, held on 23 November, along with ‘Teddy’ (probably Thady) and Dominic Branley.¹¹

⁶ Census of Ireland 1911

⁷ Chris Branley, audio recording 2008

⁸ Chris Branley, audio recording 2008

⁹ Maura Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 08.09.2022 (as recalled by her father, Frank Branley)

¹⁰ Death Certificate, Dromahair Registration District

¹¹ *The Sligo Champion*, 03.12.1921

Her son, Paddy, was still at the Curragh Internment Camp and was released two weeks after his aunt’s burial. Among the sympathy notices published in *The Sligo Champion* was one from ‘Officers and Men B. Company, Dromahair 8th Bat., I.R.A.’ The sympathy expressed by the Dromahair Battalion suggests that the wider Gonnely family were sympathetic to the Republican cause.

Civil War (28 June 1922–24 May 1923)

By September 1922, when Tormore Cave was occupied by the IRA, Sarah Branley was aged between her late 50s and early 70s. Much of the pottery and domestic items recovered in the cave during the 2022 archaeological excavations likely originated from Sarah’s kitchen. When it was safe to do so, the men sometimes left the cave and were tended to by Sarah in her home: ‘the men came down to my great grandmother Sarah Branley’s house during the cover of darkness and during a rainstorm. She had a lamb slaughtered and fed them. And then they returned to the cave.’¹² A local narrative recalls that three or four men at a time would come down from the cave to the Branley house, where they were fed and looked after.¹³ Two of these men were almost certainly Sarah’s sons, Paddy and Dominic.

Aftermath

During the revolutionary period in Ireland, family members frequently took opposing sides. Sarah Branley, for instance, had a brother, Patrick, who had been in the RIC. In the years following the Civil War, he was remembered ‘huffing and puffing coming up the hill’ to visit Sarah at the Branley homestead.¹⁴ Despite Sarah’s involvement with the IRA, and Patrick’s work as an RIC officer, they remained close throughout their lives.¹⁵

In November 1937 and January 1938, six entries were transcribed for the National Folklore Collection (NFC) that were collected from Sarah Branley by two of her grandchildren, Mairín/Maureen Branley and Macken Branley, who were attending Lugnagall National School. Sarah contributed folklore pertaining to three ringforts located in Tormore townland.¹⁶ She recalled that fairies

¹² Maura Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 08.12.2021 (as recalled by her father, Frank Branley)

¹³ Gene O’Carroll pers. comm. to M. Dowd and J. Bonsall, 27.01.2023

¹⁴ Maura Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.07.2022 (as recalled by her father, Frank Branley)

¹⁵ Maura Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 02.06.2023 (as recalled by her father, Frank Branley)

¹⁶ Probably ringforts (SL009-005----), (SL009-013----) and (SL009-014---)



Figure 10.2 Sarah Branley with one of her grandsons outside the Branley homestead at Tormore, probably in the late 1930s, a traditional whitewashed cottage with hens in the background (Branley family).

had lived in these ringforts 'long ago'. Lights had often been seen and music had been heard, but the ringforts were never disturbed by the respective landowners.¹⁷ Another story collected from Sarah told of an old woman who was going up the mountain to collect her cows. She was taken by surprise to see the entire hillside 'covered with white home spun yarn washed out and spread on the heather to dry.' On her return journey the yarn had disappeared, 'and it is supposed to be fairies that did it'.¹⁸ Another folktale related to a 'water horse' that inhabited Glencar Lake. Sarah's son Thady had submitted the same story (see above), but in Sarah's version the water horse jumped on the farmer who had captured it and 'killed him dead'.¹⁹ Sarah also contributed folklore about wedding traditions and referenced her own parents' wedding *circa* 1842, which had been celebrated in the Gonnolly family home. Sarah noted that traditional weddings included 'plenty' *poitín*, oat bread and butter; brides wore a long cloak, a straw bonnet and a borrowed item; and grooms wore knee breeches, a long-tailed coat and a black silk hat.

Mondays and Thursdays were particularly lucky days to get married.²⁰ Sarah contributed information on cooking boxty dumplings, a local and traditional dish made from potatoes.²¹ Her contribution on children's play and craft activities of her childhood provides valuable insights into late 19th century Ireland:

the young girls used to string flowers together and the boys used to make tops from spools. They also used to make guns from elder branches. They also used to make bird cradles in which to trap birds. The old men used to make rod baskets on a dulls for catching rabbits. The women used to spin, and the big girls used to make dolls out of cloth.²²

The information that the elderly Sarah contributed to the National Folklore Collection in 1937 and 1938 via her grandchildren reveals her to be a rich (and presumably respected) source of knowledge on

¹⁷ NFCS0157: 139

¹⁸ NFCS0157: 156

¹⁹ NFCS0157: 202

²⁰ NFCS0157: 196

²¹ NFCS0157: 210

²² NFCS0157: 244



Figure 10.3 At home in Boston, USA, Maura Branley holds a photograph of her grandmother, Maggie, and great-grandmother, Sarah, both of whom played a central role in the success of the Tormore Cave dugout. Maura grew up hearing about these women and their participation in the revolutionary period from her father, Frank Branley, a son of Maggie and Paddy Branley (Maura Branley).

folktales, folklore and traditional customs (Figure 10.2). Sarah had grown up in an Ireland that had been decimated by the Great Famine (1845-52), with families struggling to recover from destitution, starvation and mass emigration. The difficult circumstances that Sarah experienced as a child in rural, post-famine Ireland may have subsequently informed her political opinions in adulthood and as a mother.

Sarah's son, Paddy (see Chapter 9), had taken over the family farm on the death of her husband, Thady, in 1917. After Paddy's early death in 1935, his widow, Maggie (see below), and their seven children moved

with Sarah into a small cottage on the shores of Glencar Lake. It had been difficult for Sarah to get up and down the hill to the Branley home, thus the move to the roadside cottage made life a little easier.²³

Sarah died in 1941, attended by her granddaughter, Maureen Branley.²⁴ She had outlived her husband by 24 years and had buried four of her ten children (Michael, Kate, Paddy and a child whose name is not recorded). Today, over 80 years later, Sarah is still remembered fondly by her grandson, Frank Branley, as having been 'a very kind woman'²⁵ (Figure 10.3).

²³ Maura Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.07.2022 (as recalled by her father, Frank Branley)

²⁴ Death Certificate, Carney Registration District

²⁵ Maura Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.07.2022 (as recalled by her father, Frank Branley)

Maggie (Margaret) Connor/O'Connor (later, Maggie Branley)

Born: circa 1901

Childhood home: Glen Lower townland, County Sligo

Died: 7 May 1993 (aged 91 or 92)

Buried: Drumcliff Churchyard, County Sligo

Early life

Maggie (Margaret) Teresa Connor/O'Connor was born and reared in Glen Lower, the townland adjoining Tormore to the west, immediately north of Glencar Lake. In the 1901 census, when Maggie was just one month old, the family was listed as 'Connor' but by 1911 and thereafter, the surname used was 'O'Connor'. Her parents were Michael and Bridget (née Fowley) Connor, and Maggie was the second youngest of twelve children: Michael, Mary, Francis, Daniel, Kate, James, Bridget, Hugh, Patrick J., Thomas, Maggie J. and Agnes. Maggie's father, Michael, was a farmer.²⁶ In 1901 the family lived in a three-roomed thatched cottage.

By the time of the 1911 census, Maggie was listed as 'Margaret', aged eight. This may represent an error in the age that was written down (it should have been ten), but it is also possible that Maggie J. had died and 'Margaret' was born subsequently and given the same name. By 1911, Maggie's father had died. She now lived with her widowed mother and five brothers: Michael, James, Hugh, Patrick and Thomas, and two sisters, Bridget and Agnes. Maggie could read and write. Their farm had a stable, coach house and cow house.

War of Independence (21 January 1919–11 July 1921)

Maggie O'Connor's family home was an IRA safe house, where men on the run could receive food and shelter. During a Black and Tan raid on the house, Maggie and her younger sister Agnes hid in a closet or cupboard but were discovered by the soldiers.²⁷ A family narrative recalls that Maggie used to carry a revolver with her when she went to Mass.²⁸ It is not clear whether this was during the War of Independence or the Civil War or both.

²⁶ Census of Ireland 1901

²⁷ Maura Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.07.2022 (as recalled by her father, Frank Branley)

²⁸ Michael Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 10.12.2021

Civil War (28 June 1922–24 May 1923)

The O'Connor home in Glen Lower continued to operate as a safe house during the Civil War. A family narrative recalls that 'one of Sligo's Noble Six hid out in my grandmother's (Maggie O'Connor) barn before ascending the mountain', which would have been September 1922.²⁹ It is noted that Billy Pilkington overnights in Glen Upper on 18 September, and it is possible he, and some of his men, stayed in the O'Connor household then (see Chapter 3). Decades later, one of Maggie's sons, Chris Branley, recalled that during the six weeks Republicans were hiding out in Tormore Cave, 'my mother fed them in the middle of the night ... yes, several times. She used to bring stuff to them. Ah, all at night.'³⁰ The O'Connor house was located approximately 30-40 minutes from the cave by foot, thus it is likely that Maggie either brought food to an arranged spot in the valley below the cave or took supplies to the Branley home. Maggie's son, Chris, recalled in 2012: 'My mother fed them here [the cave] into the middle of the night ... if it was safe.'³¹ Maggie also tended to the men's feet, which were in 'horrendous' condition due to trench foot.³² According to local narrative, the boots had rotted off the men's feet, and skin on the soles of their feet had fallen away.³³ Again, Maggie may have looked after such injuries in the Branley homestead, meaning that the men had a shorter distance to travel.

At the height of the Civil War, on 22 January 1923, Maggie O'Connor married Paddy Branley (see Chapter 9) in Rathcormac Church.³⁴ Maggie and Paddy had been neighbours, growing up less than 1km apart. The O'Connor home was 'three farms over from the Branleys.'³⁵ On their wedding day, the best man Dominic, one of Paddy's brothers, could not attend because he was on the run. A 14 year old relative, John Joe Mitchell, had to take his place. After the wedding, the couple and guests returned to the Branley home

²⁹ Maura Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 08.12.2021 (as recalled by her father, Frank Branley)

³⁰ Chris Branley, video and audio recording 2012

³¹ Chris Branley, video and audio recording 2012

³² Ger Daly pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 20.01.2022 (as related to him by Chris Branley in 2017)

³³ Joe Hunt pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 22.07.2015; Gene O'Carroll pers. comm. to M. Dowd and J. Bonsall, 27.01.2023

³⁴ Certificate of Marriage, Parish of Drumcliffe. Patrick 'Brannelly' married Margaret O'Connor on 22.01.1923, with John J. Mitchell and Agnes O'Connor serving as witnesses. Agnes was Margaret's younger sister.

³⁵ Maura Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 07.01.2022 (as recalled by her father, Frank Branley)

where they enjoyed a celebratory meal, drank *poitín* and spent the evening firing a revolver at a plank of wood in the garden.³⁶ As per tradition, Maggie moved into the Branley homestead after marrying Paddy.

One of Maggie and Paddy's grandchildren, Mary B. Branley, wrote a poem about their wedding, which not only recalls the day but reveals Maggie's practiced use of a firearm, a story that has passed down through the family. It is reproduced here with permission.

A pinch of snow in a black velvet glove

We came to our grandparent's home:
Thurmore, Glencar. Still roofed,
but hearthless—grooved in the valley,
and blind to the lake, the slopes, the bay.

We remembered the story of their
wedding day.

The church was ringed with soldiers.
On the run, the Best Man couldn't join
them
at the altar, so a modest labourer stood
in,
long socks to the knee.
The married couple jaunted home to the
table
spread with sweet cake and stout, a spray
of late roses
from the wild briar backed by fern.

The bride was shown how to hold a black
revolver
in her white wedding glove,
how to steady her eye, her hand,
and brace against her husband.

She practised on a plank of wood all day.

Mary B. Branley

Aftermath

Between 1923 and 1935 Maggie and Paddy Branley had four sons: Joe (Dominick), Padraic, Chris (Michael) and Frank; and three daughters, Maureen, Sarah (Lily) and Philomena (see Chapter 9). The family farmed 46 acres at Tormore and had a small dairy herd, selling dairy



Figure 10.4 Maggie and Paddy Branley in the mid-to-late 1920s, see Figure 9.15 for comparison (Rachael McGowan).

produce in Sligo town each week. They grew their own vegetables and were relatively comfortable.³⁷

Paddy's early death in September 1935, when he was just 45 years old, cast Maggie and their young family into destitution and poverty for the remainder of the 1930s. Maggie was left to raise seven children by herself. The youngest, Philomena, was just a few months old when Paddy died. One of their sons, Chris, described the impact of his father's early death: 'it left us in an awful, awful predicament. We were destitute ... nowhere and nobody to turn to ... no money.'³⁸ The Catholic Church made several interventions to separate the Branley children from their mother and place them in institutions. When Maggie refused to give up the younger children, the priest turned red with anger and stamped his feet, telling her 'You'll never survive! I came here to help you!' Maggie replied: 'When we leave, we leave together!'³⁹

³⁷ Chris Branley, audio recording 2008

³⁸ Chris Branley, audio recording 2008

³⁹ Maura Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 05.06.2023 (as recalled by her aunt, Lily, who witnessed the event)

³⁶ Chris Branley, audio recording 2008



Figure 10.5 Maggie Branley standing behind her mother, Bridget O'Connor. The O'Connor home was one of several IRA safe houses in the Glencar Valley. Bridget died on 31 July 1955, at Glen Upper, aged 98. This photo was probably taken some time between the 1940s and 1955 (Rachael McGowan).



Figure 10.6 Maggie Branley visiting three of her children in America. L to R: Joe, Lily, Maggie and Frank (Maura Branley).

After the Civil War, Paddy had secured a loan to buy livestock, a horse and a cart. The Branley family became heavily in debt and struggled to repay the loan. They lost the livestock, horse and cart, and the house became dangerous to live in as the roof had become unstable. Within a few years, Maggie was forced to abandon the family home and move into a small cottage on the northwest shore of Glencar Lake with her children and mother-in-law, Sarah. One of her sons, Chris, later described their new two-roomed home as a 'tin shed'.⁴⁰ Another son, Frank, remembers the family hauling their belongings down to the new house; presumably in the late 1930s. A third son, Padraic, remembered 'bare feet, cold and hunger.'⁴¹ Thereafter, the original Branley home 'up the hill' was abandoned and fell into ruins (Figure 9.2). The new home, though much smaller and more compact, was closer to the road. Here, a neighbouring Protestant family, the Hudsons, were a great source of support to Maggie. Maggie

dressed in black for decades after her husband's death (Figures 10.5 and 10.6).⁴² Together with her sons, she continued to work the family farm. The family had six cows that provided milk which was churned into butter. Each week, Maggie travelled to Sligo town to sell homemade butter and eggs to private customers and sold buttermilk to a bakery and a grocery shop.⁴³

Paddy had been in receipt of a Military Service Pension for six months before he died in 1935, which continued for one year after his death.⁴⁴ On 14 December 1953, Maggie applied to the Department of Defence for a pension based on her husband's IRA service. She received a reply on Christmas Eve 1953 saying she was not entitled to a pension because: 'The medical evidence and all the facts in connection with the case were fully and carefully considered ... however, the

⁴⁰ Chris Branley, audio recording 2008

⁴¹ Maura Branley pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.07.2022 (as recalled by her father, Frank Branley); Branley 2023

⁴² Rachael McGowan pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 09.05.2022

⁴³ Conry and Coulter 2014: 62

⁴⁴ DP440 Letter from Argue & Phibbs Solicitors to Dept. of Defence on behalf of Margaret Branley, MSPC

disability in respect of which Mr. Branley claimed was not attributable to service.’⁴⁵

Maggie made a similar application to the Department of Defence on 24 September 1962 following an advertisement in *The Sligo Champion* newspaper related to the Army Pensions Act 1962. This was 27 years to the month after Paddy’s death. Two weeks later, a letter dated 11 October similarly stated that Maggie was not entitled to a pension because Paddy was not in receipt of a Wound or Disability Pension (he had applied for one in 1933 but was refused).⁴⁶

Thirty-six years after Paddy’s death, the Army Pensions Act 1971 finally allowed for Maggie and other widows of War of Independence veterans to claim a monthly pension. Maggie was in receipt of this allowance from 1 October 1971 until her death more than 20 years later.

The Civil War and its aftermath was a painful period in Maggie Branley’s life. One of her sons, Chris Branley, recalled:

My mother was very reluctant to talk about *any* of it. Because, I would say, because she suffered so much during the time, and as a result of it afterwards, when my father ... she had no husband. So that’s not a good memory of any of the things that happened then.⁴⁷

Maggie had kept personal diaries during the 1920s but a few years before she died, ‘she took a notion one day and burnt the whole lot of it ... burnt the whole lot of it.’⁴⁸ Her son, Chris, believed this was because, ‘She suffered so much over the trouble. She hated it. She just hated that time.’ Chris conjectured that Maggie probably felt that her ‘family [would] be better they never seen it [the diaries]’ and that she wouldn’t have wanted people to know what she had experienced.⁴⁹ A granddaughter, Rachael McGowan, recalled that Maggie was angry and upset about the war in later years and it was about this time that she ‘tore up her diary.’⁵⁰ Another granddaughter recalled that in later life, Maggie felt aggrieved that the men were off ‘fighting wars’, leaving the women tasked with raising, and providing for, their families.⁵¹

Maggie died on 7 May 1993, aged 91 or 92. She had survived her husband, Paddy, by 57 years. They are buried together in Drumcliff Churchyard (Figure 9.16).

In 2022, one of Maggie’s granddaughters, Dorothy, visited the Tormore Cave excavations (Figure 10.7). It is not clear whether Maggie had ever been inside the cave. Like many other family members, she may have been kept in the dark as to its precise location for her own safety and the safety of the men in hiding.

⁴⁵ DP440 Letter from Argue & Phibbs Solicitors to Dept. of Defence on behalf of Margaret Branley, MSPC

⁴⁶ DP440 Letter from Dept. of Defence to Margaret Branley, dated 11.09.1962, MSPC

⁴⁷ Chris Branley, audio recording 2014

⁴⁸ Chris Branley, audio recording 2008

⁴⁹ Chris Branley, audio recording 2008

⁵⁰ Rachael McGowan pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 09.05.2022

⁵¹ Dorothy Bird pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 03.04.2022



Figure 10.7 Maggie Branley's granddaughter, Dorothy Bird, at Tormore Cave during the archaeological excavations together with her son, Charlie and husband, Jeremy (Robert Mulraney).

Bridget (Brigid, Bedelia) Pilkington (née Mahon/McMahon)

Born: 15 or 22 July 1900⁵²

Childhood home: Derrydarragh (Oakfield) townland, County Sligo

Died: 8 April 1988 (aged 87)

Buried: Sligo Cemetery, Sligo town, County Sligo

Early life

Bedelia Mahon (born Bedelia McMahon),⁵³ known throughout her life as Bridget/Brigid, was the second youngest of seven children born to Mary (née Toher) and John McMahon. John (also known as John Mahon) was a general labourer and the family lived in Derrydarragh (Oakfield) townland, about 3km southwest of Sligo town. Bedelia was listed as six months old when the 1901 census was collected. She was then living with her parents and five siblings, Mary Jane, Tom, Michael James, John and Sarah, in a three-roomed thatched cottage with an associated cow house.⁵⁴ The 1911 census records that the ten year old Bedelia was attending school and could read and write. By then another baby, Robert, had been born into the family. The family of nine still lived in the same cottage in Derrydarragh, which now had a stable and fowl house rather than a cow house.⁵⁵

In family memory, as a young woman Bridget was said to have had a fearless and rebellious nature (Figure 10.8). She used to sneak out of her bedroom window and cycle miles to dances in parish halls. One night she made a dress for a dance from her mother's curtains, wore the dress, then returned home to face her mother's wrath!⁵⁶

War of Independence (21 January 1919–11 July 1921)

Little is known of Bridget Mahon's life during the War of Independence. She was a member of Cumann na mBan, seemingly from April 1921.⁵⁷ A story that was passed down to Bridget's daughter, Ursula, tells that on one occasion, three IRA men rushed into the Mahon home

looking for somewhere to hide. By this time Bridget's mother, Mary, was suffering a physical disability and was confined to a chair. Mary concealed the three men under the voluminous skirts she was wearing. They went undetected when the Black and Tans searched the house shortly after.⁵⁸

Truce Period (12 July 1921–30 June 1922)

On 15 May 1922, during the Truce period, Bridget married Joseph (Josie) Pilkington in Sligo Cathedral.⁵⁹ Their marriage certificate records Bridget's occupation as a housekeeper. Joseph (1901-1955) was a younger brother of Billy Pilkington and was a lieutenant in the IRA. Bridget and Joseph began their married life together at 23 Lord Edward Street (Figure 10.9). They had a collection box 'for the cause' in their home.⁶⁰

Civil War (28 June 1922–24 May 1923)

Joseph Pilkington was based at Rahelly House in September 1922 as the National Army sweep of North Sligo commenced. Following the evacuation of Rahelly, he was one of dozens of Republicans arrested on 19 September. His brother, Billy, managed to escape up the mountains to the safety of Tormore Cave. In the weeks that followed, Bridget went to great lengths to help her brother-in-law and his men while they were billeted in the cave. She and other women from Sligo town would get a lift on a horse and trap to Rathcormac Church. These horse-drawn 'taxis' worked for free. From the church, some of the women would walk to Lenihan's safe house on the lower slopes of Benbulbin Mountain. Supplies and communications thus reached the men in the cave through a network of sympathetic families living in the Glencar Valley. Bridget and the other women brought with them milk, bread and supplies. It is remembered that the men 'had to have tea and tobacco.'⁶¹ On occasion, Bridget had to make the journey from Sligo town to Drumcliff by foot, which is a round trip of 14km. Bridget was known to have carried guns on her person, hidden in her skirts, and she also carried communications.⁶²

Decades later, Bridget recollected that the revolutionary period 'was all very exciting in the beginning, fighting the English and getting freedom. But the mood soured in the Civil War.'⁶³ Her granddaughter, Anne Feehily,

⁵² 22 July is Bridget's birth date according to her birth certificate, but she and her family always celebrated her birthday on 15 July. It is not clear which date is correct.

⁵³ Birth Certificate, Sligo Registration District

⁵⁴ Census of Ireland 1901

⁵⁵ Census of Ireland 1911

⁵⁶ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 23.11.2022

⁵⁷ BMH.DP32762, Bridget Pilkington

⁵⁸ Ursula Pilkington pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 25.04.2023

⁵⁹ Marriage Certificate: Bridget is listed as 'Brigid Mahon'

⁶⁰ Ursula Pilkington pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 25.04.2023

⁶¹ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 29.04.2022

⁶² Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 23.11.2022; Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 29.04.2022

⁶³ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 23.11.2022



Figure 10.8 Bridget Mahon (centre) with unidentified friends, date unknown but probably the 1920s (Anne Feehily). She was described by friends from that time as a beauty and a great dancer.⁶⁴



Figure 10.9 No. 23 Lord Edward Street where Bridget and Joseph Pilkington lived during the Truce period and Civil War (Marion Dowd).

remembers that ‘she enjoyed the game of outwitting the ‘other side’ in the Civil War.’⁶⁵ In later life Bridget regularly used the phrase ‘working for the cause’ when speaking of her involvement in the revolutionary period.⁶⁶

Aftermath

Bridget and Joseph Pilkington had twelve children born in the family home between 1923 and 1943: Maureen, William (Billy), Philomena, Betty, John, Ursula, Ronald (Ronnie), Josephine, Christina (Deina), Sadie, Trixie (died in infancy) and another baby whose name is unknown as s/he died in infancy (Figure 10.10). When Sadie contracted tuberculosis, the doctors wanted to remove her from the family home to protect the other children. Her father refused, however, as he wanted

her to die at home surrounded by her family.⁶⁷ Joseph Pilkington was an elected member of Sligo County Council and an independent Labour councillor. He was the driving force behind a campaign for affordable social housing: Pilkington Terrace in Sligo town is named in his honour (though in the past it was frequently misattributed to his brother, Billy). Bridget remembered that for many years after the Civil War, Joseph was always writing ‘chits’ for people who could not afford food and fuel:⁶⁸ ‘He never ate a hot meal uninterrupted in his home, people were always calling to the door with requests for letters, chits or petitions.’⁶⁹ Billy Pilkington always visited his sister-in-law and his brother on return trips to Sligo⁷⁰ (Figure 10.11).

By 1950, the Pilkingtons had moved from Lord Edward Street to 49 Treacy Avenue, a larger house that had

⁶⁴ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 29.04.2022

⁶⁵ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 23.11.2022

⁶⁶ Ursula Pilkington pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 25.04.2023

⁶⁷ Ursula Pilkington pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 25.04.2023

⁶⁸ Ursula Pilkington pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 25.04.2023

⁶⁹ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 23.11.2022

⁷⁰ *The Sligo Champion*, 04.07.1953



Figure 10.10 Bridget and Joseph Pilkington in 1954, together with their children Philomena, Deina (Christina) and Ronnie (Anne Feehily).



Figure 10.11 Fr Billy Pilkington visiting Bridget, Joseph and their family in 1953. Standing, left to right: Fr Billy, Phil (Philomena), Betty, Bridget, Joseph and Josephine holding her daughter, Teresa. Kneeling, left to right: Ronald (Ronnie), Ursula and Deina (Christina) (Anne Feehily).

three bedrooms and a bathroom.⁷¹ In the words of their granddaughter, Anne:

Bridget was resourceful and thrifty and ran her sizable family household on a very small budget, as she and Joseph were generous to those less well off. They placed no value on possessions and were spartan in their needs (tea and tobacco were the exceptions). They were both forward-thinking and committed to support for the poor and working classes. Their Republican ideals were closely aligned to improving life, standards, housing, recreation and education opportunities for citizens.⁷²

In 1950, Bridget Pilkington applied for a Military Service Pension but was unsuccessful. She was, however, awarded a Service Medal in 1960.⁷³ She and her husband shared a vehement dislike of Éamon de Valera, one that persisted to their dying days.⁷⁴

Joseph Pilkington died on 16 April 1955, aged 53. He was described by *The Sligo Champion* as ‘Sligo’s best-loved public representative for several years.’⁷⁵ Joseph Pilkington’s coffin, draped with the tricolour, was accompanied from Sligo Cathedral to Sligo Cemetery by some of his former IRA comrades (Figure 10.12). A volley of shots was fired over Joseph Pilkington’s grave. The funeral Mass was celebrated by his brother, Fr Billy. Bridget dressed in black for three years after her husband’s death.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 29.04.2022

⁷² Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 23.11.2022

⁷³ BMH.DP32762, Bridget Pilkington

⁷⁴ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 23.11.2022

⁷⁵ *The Sligo Champion*, 31.12.1955

⁷⁶ Ursula Pilkington pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 25.04.2023



Figure 10.12 Bridget Pilkington and her children follow the coffin of Joseph Pilkington as it leaves Sligo Cathedral in April 1955. Their son, John, is on the front right, carrying the coffin. Their daughter, Maureen, is in front of the pillar leaving the church; Bridget, in black, walks beside her (Anne Feehily).



Figure 10.13 Bridget Pilkington (Ursula Pilkington).



Figure 10.14 Ursula Pilkington holding a photograph of her mother, Bridget, who provided crucial support to the men billeted in Tormore Cave in 1922 (Marion Dowd).

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT



Figure 10.15 Bridget (Bedelia) Pilkington's grave in Sligo Cemetery (Marion Dowd).

Joseph had kept a stack of papers related to IRA business in his bureau, which Bridget burned after he had died.⁷⁷ Their granddaughter recalls: 'My grandmother burned everything when her husband died. I often asked her why, and she used to say she didn't want to remember those things ... I know when she and Fr Billy were together, they talked about the past and the people they both knew.'⁷⁸ Fr Billy and Bridget regularly visited families in Glencar and Drumcliff who had supported the IRA while they were on the run during the War of Independence and Civil War.

Bridget Pilkington is remembered by her daughter, Ursula, as 'a great woman for making happiness ... she had a great sense of humour'⁷⁹ (Figures 10.13 and 10.14). Bridget's granddaughter, Anne, described her as:

intelligent, well-read and not at all afraid to challenge authority ... She had a strong sense of Irish nationalism and social activism. She had an encyclopaedic knowledge of "who did what" during the Civil War ... she never forgot actions, good and bad, committed by people in the local community during the 20s, 30s and 40s. She may have forgiven but she never forgot.⁸⁰

Bridget Pilkington died in 1988 at the age of 87, almost 33 years after her husband's death. She is buried in the family plot in Sligo Cemetery (Figure 10.15).

⁷⁷ Ursula Pilkington pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 25.04.2023

⁷⁸ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 19.10.2022

⁷⁹ Ursula Pilkington pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 25.04.2023

⁸⁰ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 23.11.2022

Republican women and girls from Sligo town

Women and teenage girls from Sligo town, most of whom were related to men on the run and some of whom were members of Cumann na mBan, organised food and supplies that were transported from the town to the villages and rural regions of North Sligo. Initially, supplies were taken to Rahelly House when the IRA were stationed there, and later to Rathcormac village and houses in the Glencar Valley (Figure 10.16). From the piecemeal descriptions that survive, it appears that supplies passed through multiple hands before reaching their final destination, probably to reduce the distance any one woman had to travel and to make their work less conspicuous. There can be little doubt that none of the women from Sligo town, whether or not they were members of Cumann na mBan, ever went directly to Tormore Cave. That final stage in the transportation of supplies would have been the most dangerous, and maintaining secrecy about the location of the dugout was paramount. Some local women, namely Maggie O'Connor or Sarah Branley, probably undertook the last leg of the journey to the cave or, more likely, left packages at an agreed point on the valley floor where the men could collect them.

Kathleen Carroll, whose brother Paddy was one of the six killed on the mountain, was interviewed in 1986 by Danny McHugh.⁸¹ Kathleen recalled that on Sundays a 'crowd of women' from Sligo town would bring 'basket loads of stuff' to men on the run. A brand of cigarettes known as 'Primrose' was the preferred smoke as it was, apparently, an Irish brand. It is not clear whether Kathleen was speaking specifically about the period around September 1922 or more generally during the revolutionary period. When asked who was involved in this support network, she gave the following names: Mrs Bofin, Mrs Monaghan, Nano Mullen (Annie McCrann, née Mullen), the Keaveney sisters: Beatrice, Nell and Julia, Mrs McGarry, the 'two Kelly's who worked in Woolworths', Annie Kelly and Kathleen's sister Nancy Carroll. Many of these women were members of Cumann na mBan. Kathleen and her pal, Lizzie Keaveney, also 'went a few times with stuff to them', transporting 'mostly shirts'. Kathleen was about 13 and Lizzie was about 16 years old at the time. They would take supplies to a Mrs Rooney and a Mrs Mooney, and these two women then transported the goods outside the town. Kathleen recalled that the women, 'used to hide things under the cocks of hay



Figure 10.16 The Glencar Valley, facing east. Food parcels and dispatches were brought through the valley by women from Sligo town and North Sligo to the men billeted in Tormore Cave and safe houses along the valley (James Bonsall).

⁸¹ Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986

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in the field.⁸² IRA volunteer Andy Doocey recalled in 1986 that ‘the women’ used to walk from Sligo town to Rathcormac village to Monaghan’s Pub (now *Yeats’ Local* pub),⁸³ which was a known drop-off point for messages and supplies that were then carried to the men on the mountains.

Kathleen also recalled an occasion in 1922 when she and her pal were sent to collect ‘stuff’ from Hargadons and convey it to the ‘Cemetery House’.⁸⁴ The Hargadons operated a public house and grocery on O’Connell Street and were related to the Pilkington family. ‘It was a very warm day and we went up the line and of course the military were outside’ recalled Kathleen. ‘It was Mrs Hargadon who was in on it.’ They were told to take the baby out of the pram and wait outside. Indoors, the ‘stuff’ was placed in a void at the base of the pram. They were warned not to talk to anyone and told ‘don’t be stopping for sweets along the way or anything. We’ll give you something when you come back.’⁸⁵ Kathleen, then aged about 12, wheeled the heavy pram to the cemetery. On returning to Mrs Hargadon, Kathleen delivered her a message from the Cemetery House. When Kathleen and her friend returned home with the

baby and pram, the houses of Republican families were being raided. She later learned that the ‘stuff’ they had been transporting was ammunition.⁸⁶ Years later, Maureen (the baby in the pram), who had developed a stammer, returned briefly from her home in England. When Kathleen told Maureen she used to babysit her and that they had ammunition hidden underneath her in the pram, Maureen joked ‘it’s no bloody wonder I’m stuttering!’⁸⁷

Kathleen claimed she had been carrying IRA dispatches from the age of ten, often missing school to do so. One dispatch was sewn into her Sunday hat, others she memorised and repeated. On some occasions she walked from Sligo town to Drumcliff with messages, a round trip of 16km.⁸⁸ Prams and babies were successfully deployed for such purposes on multiple occasions. During a raid on her home in Sligo town by the Black and Tans during the War of Independence, Bridget Clancy concealed a ‘case of specimen bombs’ under a baby in a cot. Bridget rocked the cradle for the duration of the raid. The explosives were never discovered.⁸⁹

⁸² Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986

⁸³ Andy Doocey, audio recording 1986

⁸⁴ This was probably the cemetery caretaker’s house located within the grounds of Sligo Cemetery. The Pilkingtons had been caretakers and once lived there, although it is not clear whether they were caretakers during the revolutionary period.

⁸⁵ Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986

⁸⁶ Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986

⁸⁷ Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986

⁸⁸ *The Irish Press*, 20.09.1972

⁸⁹ MSP34REF60500, Bridget Clancy

Cumann na mBan

Like elsewhere in Ireland, the Sligo branch of Cumann na mBan played a significant role in supporting the IRA and facilitating guerrilla warfare. They have scarcely featured in any historical publications related to County Sligo's Civil War, but thanks to the Military Service Pensions Collection held in the Bureau of Military History, it is possible to gain access to their testimonies and experiences. Of the period relevant to the use of Tormore Cave as a dugout, Sarah Friel wrote that 'during that period the feeding of the column depended on me and a few others.'⁹⁰ Members of Cumann na mBan were involved in organising food for the men hiding in Tormore Cave, as they had done when Rahelly House was occupied and the Castlegal tent camp was in operation (Figures 10.17 and 10.18). They also probably delivered dispatches between Billy Pilkington in the cave and units outside, as well as administering medical aid when required. It is highly unlikely that any of the Cumann na mBan women actually visited Tormore Cave. Food was probably dropped at the Branley home or other adjacent safe houses and from there brought by locals to a point near the dugout or collected from safe houses by the IRA men.

Annie 'Nano' Mullen from Church Street in Sligo town was imprisoned from January to October 1923 for her Republican work during the Civil War. She was then aged 24.⁹¹ During the war she nursed wounded and ill IRA men. She also purchased ammunition, food, clothes (including overcoats), 'swords' and boots from National Army soldiers, as well as from a man who worked 'in the store-room' (presumably the National Army stores) to pass on to Republicans. With £10 she bought 20 uniforms.⁹² Later in life, Nano proudly kept a gun over the mantelpiece in her home as a reminder of her activities during Sligo's revolutionary period.⁹³ Nóra Malone similarly purchased ammunition, uniforms, leggings and bandoliers from National Army soldiers to equip the IRA. She stored arms and ammunition in her house and in the shop where she worked. From the shop she distributed weapons to men 'going on jobs'. Nóra was arrested in January 1923, aged 23, and interned for nine months.⁹⁴

Jennie Meldrum lived with her aunt at 62 John Street, next door to the home of Vice OC James Keaveney. During the Civil War, then aged 20, she was one of the women who took supplies to Rahelly House. On her last visit there, she 'happened to meet Fr Liam Pilkington.' That was a day or so before the killing of Sligo's Noble Six on 20 September 1922. Jennie recalled 'a little brother of mine was a scout and brought down parcels to them. It was he and another lad who found the men dead on the mountains.'⁹⁵

Mary Anne 'Maura' McHugh from Emmet Place in Sligo town was a schoolteacher during the Civil War and risked dismissal from her post due to her Republican work. At that time, she was about 35 years old. She was involved in the manufacture of a landmine in the Technical School on Quay Street, specifically mixing the materials to make the bomb. She also visited prisoners in Sligo Gaol, delivered dispatches to Rahelly House, scouted for men on the run and carried out intelligence work.⁹⁶ Ellen Hand brought dispatches, clothes and petrol for the *Ballinalee* to Rahelly House.⁹⁷ Sarah Millar 'rendered service' to Rahelly camp in 1922 and carried out First Aid and dispatch work.⁹⁸ Mary Gorevan lived in Cashelgarron in the vicinity of Rahelly House. She sheltered men on the run, supplied them with clothes and food, and carried out scout duties. Mary, aged 22, was ready to provide medical aid to the men stationed at Rahelly House.⁹⁹

The three Keaveney sisters mentioned previously were all members of Cumann na mBan and sisters of Vice OC James Keaveney. The family lived on John Street and the house next door acted as a 'covering address' for dispatches destined for the IRA. During the Civil War, Beatrice McMurray (née Keaveney) and her sister, Julia Keaveney, received dispatches for their brother and Billy Pilkington and delivered these to Rahelly House approximately three times per week. On one occasion, while travelling to Rahelly with a dispatch, Julia's bicycle was confiscated by the National Army. Beatrice carried arms in the bottom of a pram, wheeled these outside the town and gave them to Tom Scanlon. She transported arms and ammunition on three occasions during the Civil War. Julia additionally mentioned transporting grenades and bombs to the

⁹⁰ MSP34REF41715, Sarah Friel

⁹¹ Born 11 September 1898. Birth Certificate, Sligo Registration District

⁹² MSP34REF23419, Annie 'Nano' McCrann (née Mullen)

⁹³ Hugh Gallagher pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 03.03.2023

⁹⁴ Born in Scotland in 1900, 1901 England, Wales and Scotland Census. She appears in the Irish 1911 Census, living in Sligo. MSP34REF42418, Nóra Carty (née Malone)

⁹⁵ Born 7 February 1902. Birth Certificate, Sligo Registration District. MSP34REF54896, Jennie O'Rorke (née Meldrum)

⁹⁶ MSP34REF54923, Mary Anne 'Maura' MacCusker (née McHugh). Mary Anne's sister, Nellie, was the sweetheart of Paddy Carroll, one of Sligo's Noble Six.

⁹⁷ MSP34REF54807, Ellen Hand

⁹⁸ MSP34REF57441, Sarah Teyhan (née Millar)

⁹⁹ Born 5 November 1900. Birth Certificate, Carney Registration District. MSP34REF43077, Mary Gorevan

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Figure 10.17 Approximate routes that Cumann na mBan and civilian women took from Sligo town to deliver food and supplies to the anti-Treaty IRA men stationed at Rahelly House, the Castlegal tent camp and Tormore Cave during the Truce period and Civil War (James Bonsall).



Figure 10.18 Sligo women visiting the IRA tent camp at Castlegal, Cope's Mountain, probably in 1922. L to R: unidentified, L. Scanlon (Tom Scanlon's sister) and Lena Benson (Bea Kilgannon's Civil War Collection, courtesy of Pádraig Kilgannon).

'boys in Rahilly'. The sisters also gathered intelligence about National Army soldiers in the town, passing on the information to Rahelly House.¹⁰⁰ Julia raised funds to buy arms and clothes for men on the run by organising bazaars, dances and social functions. She purchased boots from her own pocket.¹⁰¹ During the Civil War Julia also sent food, clothing and cigarettes to Sligo Republican prisoners detained in Hare Park and Tin Town internment camps. She secretly delivered dispatches concealed in a flask when visiting prisoners in Sligo Gaol. Julia Keaveney also mentioned that, on a weekly basis, 'I visited and brought food to the camp in Glencar mountains from the start of the fight in 1922 until the attack on Rahilly' (Figure 10.18). Julia continued to be active after the evacuation of Rahelly. She was one of the women who formed a guard of honour when the bodies of Sligo's Noble Six were brought to Sligo Cathedral and subsequently to Sligo Cemetery. She also claims to have accompanied the body of Brian MacNeill on the train to Dublin.¹⁰² Julia would have been about 28 years old at this time.

Bridget 'Bea' Kilgannon, originally from Dromore West, lived with her aunt, Ms McSharry, at 26 St Patrick's Terrace, Temple Street in Sligo town (Figure 10.19). Ms McSharry was sympathetic to the IRA but 'did not know everything that was happening' under her roof.¹⁰³ During the War of Independence, battalion meetings took place in the house, which was next door to Tom Scanlon's home. Billy Pilkington and Tom Scanlon were in Bea's house almost every night. Dispatches were delivered to Bea, who then brought them to Pilkington, Scanlon, James Keaveney and Frank O'Beirne, amongst others. During the Civil War, Bea Kilgannon continued conveying dispatches to and from Pilkington and Scanlon. Pilkington occasionally gave her dispatches to take from Sligo town to Dromore West, a round trip of over 80km, which she cycled. Bea also carried out intelligence work and acted as a direct liaison between 'sympathetic' National Army soldiers and Billy Pilkington. The 'boys' continued to call to her home, but by then it was too dangerous and there had been a few 'narrow escapes'.¹⁰⁴ Her home on St Patrick's Terrace was raided several times by National Army soldiers, who knew it had operated as a safe house during the War of Independence.

Bea was Adjutant of the Sligo branch of Cumann na mBan, becoming OC of the Sligo branch from

January 1923, aged 28.¹⁰⁵ Her Civil War duties included visiting prisoners in Sligo Gaol; raising funds; delivering dispatches, food, clothing and cigarettes to the men at Rahelly House; transporting arms and ammunition; arranging billets for the ASU; setting up field dressing stations; administering medical aid to wounded Republicans; and sending food parcels to men interned at the Rath Camp and Curragh Camp. Bea also approached National Army soldiers who 'had volunteered to help' the Republican movement and brought them to be interviewed by Tom Scanlon and Billy Pilkington, 'with a view to securing arms.' She also couriered dispatches between Sligo town and Dromore West, from the 3rd Western Division to the 4th Western Division, cycling a distance of over 40km each way. On one occasion she was held up by the National Army at Ballysadare Bridge.¹⁰⁶

When local training camps were organised, Bea regularly visited them. She wrote: 'I visited weekly the IRA while they were camped in Castlegal mountains, brought them food and clothes.' She also referred to this as 'a camp at Glencar, 5-7 miles distant' (from Sligo town), which she visited twice a week on Wednesdays and Sundays during the Truce period and first months of the Civil War (Figure 10.20). When challenged as to her degree of activity during the Truce period, she wryly replied: 'we had many a blister on our heels over the camps' [i.e., from walking to and from the camps]. Bea noted that no cooking took place at the camp. Cooked food was brought from Sligo town: 'We used to get friends and kids to take parcels out of the town and we would go then and get the parcels.' Bea Kilgannon formed part of the guard of honour at the funerals of Sligo's Noble Six. This is particularly poignant as one of the slain was her sweetheart, Captain Harry Benson (Figure 10.19).

Bea Kilgannon's application for a Military Service Pension was rejected. In a letter appealing that decision, written in February 1942, Bea made a comment applicable to the overwhelming majority of female activists in Ireland's Civil War, stating 'My services were all given voluntarily and accordingly, when given, instead of being chronicled, were forgotten about.'¹⁰⁷ Bea's appeal was also denied. She never received a military pension though she was one of the most senior Cumann na mBan leaders in Sligo, and one of the most active women of Sligo's revolutionary period.

¹⁰⁰ MSP34REF49786, Beatrice McMurray (née Keaveney)

¹⁰¹ MSP34REF50649, Julia Travers (née Keaveney)

¹⁰² MSP34REF50649, Julia Travers (née Keaveney)

¹⁰³ MSP34REF54764, Bridget 'Bea' Kilgannon

¹⁰⁴ MSP34REF54764, Bridget 'Bea' Kilgannon

¹⁰⁵ Born 22 May 1894. Birth Certificate, Easkey Registration District

¹⁰⁶ MSP34REF54764, Bridget 'Bea' Kilgannon

¹⁰⁷ MSP34REF54764, Bridget 'Bea' Kilgannon



Figure 10.19 Bea Kilgannon, Adjutant and later OC of the Sligo branch of Cumann na mBan, photographed here on the far right with her sweetheart, Harry Benson, on the left and an unidentified woman in the centre. This photograph was taken on 12 September 1922; Harry was shot dead eight days later (Bea Kilgannon's Civil War Collection, courtesy of Pádraig Kilgannon). Bea was a key figure in the IRA's intelligence and communications network during the revolutionary period.

Mary Pilkington had at least three brothers on the run, Billy, Fred and Joseph (Figure 10.21). Her work during the Civil War, when she was aged 18, was similar to that of most of her comrades in Cumann na mBan, reporting nightly to HQ; receiving dispatches from GHQ in Dublin and delivering these to the divisional base at Rahelly House; and bringing petrol and arms to Rahelly House. Following the Civil War, Mary moved to Long Island, New York. Her subsequent application for a Military Service Pension cited her brother, 'Rev. Fr. W. Pilkington', as a referee for Civil War activities and for the post-war period. In an unusual twist, in 1957 she surrendered her military pension and refunded all the pension monies that had been paid to her from the first payment on 1 October 1934, explaining 'I wish to give up this pension as I do not need it. Any funds coming to me please put back in the pension funds.' Six months later she elaborated that 'I have wanted to

do this for a long time ... I never earned this award.'¹⁰⁸ Her rejection of the Military Service Pension may have been influenced by her brothers, and particularly Fr Billy, as none of the Pilkington brothers appear to have applied for a military pension.

Several applications for Military Pensions mention help given by Cumann na mBan to the IRA in the immediate aftermath of the evacuation of Rahelly House when the men were escaping to the mountains and retreating to dugouts such as Tormore Cave. Margaret McCannon mentioned that she 'saved ammunition in September 1922' in her home at Creevykeel, near Cliffoney village.¹⁰⁹ These were presumably supplies that were moved out of Rahelly as the National Army closed in.

¹⁰⁸ Born 11 July 1904. Birth Certificate, Sligo Registration District. MSP34REF57632, Mary Hugo (née Pilkington); 34E6910, Mary Hugo

¹⁰⁹ MSP34REF47948, Margaret McCannon (née Gilmartin)



Figure 10.20 Unidentified Sligo women visiting the IRA tent camp at Castlegal during the Truce period or Civil War (Seamus Monaghan).

Margaret was then about 18 years old.¹¹⁰ Similarly, Sarah Friel noted in 1942 that ‘During the Civil War after the camp was broke up at Rehally [sic] it was me kept the arms and ammuniton for the column and secreted it in an old house of my fathers. I only succeeded in having it removed in the evening and the Free State troops burnt it down the following morning.’ She also regularly supplied food and clothes to the column, carried dispatches and billeted men. Sarah, aged 25, was also on First Aid duty while the IRA were stationed at Rahelly House and on two occasions she attended ‘a volunteer named Banks’. If her recollection of the surname is correct, this was almost certainly Volunteer Joe Banks who was killed some days later on Slievemore. Brigadier Seamus Devins was killed with Banks and Sarah relayed notice of his death to Seamus’ wife, Mary Devins.¹¹¹

Another Cumann na mBan comrade, Annie Bee Gilbride, took part in the removal of rifles, shotguns, ammuniton and a machine gun from Rahelly House and their transferral to a barn beside her home. Ten

minutes after she had departed Rahelly, the National Army arrived. Bee, aged 30, took charge of the weapons in the barn over the following weeks and provided other duties while the men were hiding in the mountains. She wrote in 1953:

After Rahelly was broken up and all the boys were on the run, I attended to them, carried dispatches and guns and ammuniton and everything that could be possible. Got the guns, rifles etc. removed to a safe place in the face of terrible danger ... until the big round up was over.¹¹²

Food stocks had also been removed from Rahelly and stored in the Gilbride barn. While the men were hiding in the mountains, Annie Bee supplied them with food. They would come to her home to eat, but never stayed overnight as it was too dangerous. Annie Bee also helped recover the bodies of Sligo’s Noble Six from the mountains following their execution. In recognition of this, in June 1940 Agnes MacNeill,

¹¹⁰ 1911 Census

¹¹¹ Born 17 June 1897. Birth Certificate, Cliffoney Registration District. MSP34REF41715, Sarah Friel

¹¹² MSP34REF41872, Annie Bee Gilbride



Figure 10.21 Fr Billy Pilkington with his sister, Mary Hugo (née Pilkington), date unknown (Valerie Harrington).

mother of Brian MacNeill, wrote a letter in support of Annie Bee's application for a Military Service Pension, acknowledging her kindness at the time of her son's death. This endorsement was likely crucial to Bee's application, which was successful.¹¹³ Annie Bee Gilbride is buried together with her brother, Eugene Gilbride of the North Sligo IRA, in Ahamlish Cemetery (Figure 9.37).

Local Protestant families

Several narratives and memories have been passed down over the last century about the help given by Protestant families in the Glencar Valley to IRA men on the run, and specifically those associated with Tormore Cave. One recollection was that a local Methodist Protestant family, the Hudsons, who lived on the shores of Glencar Lake in Glen Upper townland, roasted a pig and hung it in the woods near the cave to feed the

men. This act of kindness was believed to be one of the reasons why the Catholic and Protestant communities of Glencar, Rathcormac and Drumcliff have traditionally had such a good relationship.¹¹⁴ Following the death of Paddy Branley in 1935, the Hudsons also provided much needed help and support to his widow, Maggie, and her children. Local narrative recalls that the Hudsons and the Siberrys, a Church of Ireland and Methodist family living in Largandoon townland beside Glencar Lake, County Leitrim, supported men on the run by leaving out packages of food that were hung from trees. The supplies included potatoes, cabbage, blackberries, lamb and pig.¹¹⁵ The Siberrys lived 2.5km east of Tormore Cave where they had a Tea House (Figure 10.22).

The Siggins family of Cashelgarron sheltered Lieutenant Paddy Carroll (one of Sligo's Noble Six) on more than

¹¹³ MSP34REF41872, Annie Bee Gilbride; Born 1892, 1911 Census

¹¹⁴ Jeremy Bird pers. comm. to M. Dowd, May 2013 (as relayed to him by Chris Branley)

¹¹⁵ Gene O'Carroll pers. comm. to M. Dowd and J. Bonsall, 27.01.2023



Figure 10.22 The Siberry Tea House at Glencar (circa 1900) is about a 2.5km walk through the mountains from Tormore Cave (Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland).

one occasion, in August and possibly also in September 1922, 'even though it was against all laws.'¹¹⁶ During the Civil War, Martin Bernard McGowan, OC 2nd Battalion Sligo Brigade, stayed in McClures, a Protestant family who lived in Tawley on the Sligo-Leitrim border just north of Ballinrillick village.¹¹⁷

The Henrys, a Church of Ireland family in the Grange and Benbulbin area, are also remembered as having looked after the men on the run and provided a safe house.¹¹⁸ When the IRA were digging trenches at night in the Drumcliff area, probably in the days and weeks prior to the evacuation of Rahelly House, Georgina Henry, aged 41, provided them with lights and lanterns, food and refreshments. She also supplied food to the IRA when the *Ballinalee* was outside her family's home

at Cullagh Beg and 'sheltered IRA men while Free State troops were firing from Drumcliff' after the evacuation of Rahelly. Georgina sought compensation for the costs of feeding the IRA, stating 'we were sorry for them, and ran the risk of been [*sic*] burned out.' Revealing her neutral stance to Civil War politics, Georgina Henry also provided accommodation and food to National Army troops at this time.¹¹⁹

William Barber is an example of how the Civil War impacted on Protestant civilians. He emigrated to New York as a young man in March 1925. Decades later, he related to his family that one of the reasons he left Sligo was because of the 'senseless killing' that happened 'up on Ben Bulben', referring the killing of Sligo's Noble Six.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986

¹¹⁷ Hugh Gallagher pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 03.03.2023

¹¹⁸ Veronica Gillen pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 10.05.2022

¹¹⁹ 1911 Census; MSPC49SP538, Georgina Henry

¹²⁰ Bill Barber pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 30.07.2022

Chapter 11

Aftermath and legacies

*The people who were involved never talked about it,
and the people who weren't involved talked about it all the time!*

Jim Verdon

The Irish Civil War was over within eleven months. As a county in which Republican activities were slow to develop during the War of Independence, County Sligo saw a large recruitment to the IRA during the Truce period. Despite the exceptional organisation of senior veterans such as Billy Pilkington and Frank Carty, many of the County Sligo battalions lacked the experience of the earlier conflict, thus finding themselves somewhat unprepared for an intricate and protracted Civil War. County Sligo remained predominately anti-Treaty and Republican throughout the Civil War which, together with west Mayo and parts of Leitrim, posed a significant threat, not least in terms of land mass, to the Provisional Government that the war might move north. The guerrilla warfare tactics that had served the IRA to great effect during the War of Independence were once more adopted by the 3rd Western Division. The National Army's sweep of North Sligo in September 1922 was successful in largely quelling Republican activities. The brutal extrajudicial killings of Seamus Devins, Brian MacNeill, Harry Benson, Paddy Carroll, Joseph Banks and Thomas Langan (Sligo's Noble Six) on 20 September 1922 horrified not only the people of County Sligo but the entire country. This was the single largest loss of life in the county during the Civil War. There were other less documented horrors, such as the four men who were killed over two days in early November 1922, civilians and National Army soldiers, but these deaths did not have the same impact regionally or nationally.² Overall, the Civil War was responsible for 49 deaths in County Sligo: 22 National Army soldiers, eighteen Republicans and nine civilians.³ In County Sligo, as elsewhere, the fall-out from the Civil War devastated families and communities for decades. In some cases, the repercussions continue to be evident

to the present day, socially, politically, economically and personally.

Political disillusionment

In County Sligo, as elsewhere, the Civil War became a topic of acute sensitivity that left a legacy of residual bitterness.⁴ In the course of this project, several people told us of animosities that continued between individuals and families in County Sligo that had taken opposing sides during the war, animosities that sometimes continued well into the 1970s and 1980s. In the years and decades following the Civil War, the sense of political disillusionment amongst those who had fought on the anti-Treaty side was palpable. Chris Branley, son of Volunteer Paddy Branley, recalled the general feeling amongst Republicans:

They were disappointed, let's say, because the people that done the fighting and suffered and never slept in their own bed for four or five years before that, got nothing out of it. Like, when it was over, they thought we'd have a free Ireland and that they'd have a great ... we'd have a great ... everything would be great. And instead of that it went the very opposite way. 'Twas like handed over to the politicians rather than to the people that had done the fighting. And the men got nothing out of it. And that was a ... That was something we were very sore about.⁵

Many Republicans in Sligo harboured a deep resentment for Éamon de Valera in the decades after the Civil War. Jack 'Trooper' McHugh described him in 1976 as 'the greatest villain in the buckin' world.'⁶ Decades after the Civil War, Fr Billy Pilkington refused

¹ Jim Verdon pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 21.06.2022

² Civilians James McPartland (aged 27) and Matthew Hunt (aged 50), and National Army soldier J. O'Connor (aged 27), were killed on 05.11.1922; civilian Frank Scanlon (aged 41) was killed the following day (Gillen 2023).

³ Farry 2012: 110

⁴ Farry 2000: 1

⁵ Chris Branley, audio recording 2014

⁶ Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, audio recording 24.12.1976

to meet with de Valera when he visited his monastery in South Africa: ‘He had a very strict code ... he never made up with Dev.’⁷ Bridget and Joseph Pilkington similarly shared a vehement dislike of Éamon de Valera, one that persisted to their dying days.⁸ The mood amongst many Republicans in North Sligo was that de Valera hid behind politics and abandoned the military struggle: ‘He didn’t fight or need to fight, he was at the devilment with the pen.’⁹

The state Military Pension Service, set up in 1923, denied pensions to men who had taken the anti-Treaty side during the Civil War, as well as women of the overwhelmingly anti-Treaty Cumann na mBan. This changed when Éamon de Valera and Fianna Fáil came into office in 1932. Republicans could now make an application for a military pension, almost a decade after pensions had been made available to National Army soldiers. But by then, many of those on the losing side, unrepresented in politics and shunned by society, had emigrated or were already living on the margins of poverty. Not only had they lost the war, but to add insult to injury they had been denied military pensions in the 1920s, at a time perhaps when they were most in need of financial respite. Even in the 1930s and 1940s the majority of applications for military pensions submitted by anti-Treaty men and women were rejected, effectively denying, downplaying or dismissing their involvement in the Civil War. In North Sligo, John Smyth, who may have been billeted in Tormore Cave (see Chapter 9), was scathing in his response to the Department of Defence’s refusal to grant him a Military Service Pension in 1942:

[As] a man who spent six years, the best years of my life, in the cause of my country, I lost all that was near and dear to me, my health, and then left penniless when all was over. It is nice treatment to be marched out to men and be told that I am not the person [to] whom the Act applies.¹⁰

Sligo-born Margaret Currid joined the Glasgow branch of Cumann na mBan in 1917 and was involved in IRA activities in Scotland, including the attempted rescue of Frank Carty from a prison van in Glasgow in May 1921. Margaret returned to Ireland in May 1923 when the Civil War had ended. Almost 20 years later, by then married and living in Ballinrillick in North Sligo,

Margaret wrote of her political disillusionment and her experience of being ostracised:

I severed my connection [with the Republican movement] in 1924 after failing to bring together the remains of a glorious past. As then I was still pursued by British forces, I was forced to fly to the highlands of Scotland broken-hearted, as I had all lost then: position, home, mother, as I was only an outcast when I returned.¹¹

Margaret references the perception held by many Republicans: that their fight and sacrifices had been in vain. Like John Smyth, she too was scathing of the pension process and the questioning applicants had to endure, in particular having to prove they were ‘active’:

if [by ‘active’] you mean shooting, raiding, ambushing etc. you must definitely state same for the benefit of poor unfortunate intellects who know no better than to work unceasingly for the freedom of the land they love without a thought of reward or compensation ... I want you to know that if I suffered in the past for the love of my country, I have suffered more within the past few months in a vain effort to secure an army pension.¹²

Exclusion from the Catholic Church

In the aftermath of the Civil War many IRA men, Cumann na mBan women and Republican families were, to a greater or lesser extent, ostensibly ‘othered’ within their communities. This was compounded by condemnation from the Catholic Church. From October 1922, the Catholic hierarchy sanctioned that Republicans would not be absolved in confession and could not receive communion. During Mass in Kilgarvan, County Kerry, several IRA men were refused communion by the priest, Fr David Breen, who told them: ‘Holy Communion isn’t for the likes of you. You get “hole and corner” absolution’, i.e., absolution that was not genuine or not correctly given.¹³ Some priests would not say the funeral Mass for IRA men who were killed in combat, and their bodies were not allowed into the church. The sacrament of baptism was at times denied to babies born to Republican parents.¹⁴

⁷ Fr Sean McManus pers. comm. to R. Mulraney, 12.12.2022

⁸ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 23.11.2022

⁹ McGowan 1993: 146

¹⁰ MSP34E10005, John Smyth

¹¹ MSP34REF24084, Margaret Gilmartin (née Currid)

¹² MSP34REF24084, Margaret Gilmartin (née Currid)

¹³ John Joe Rice in O’Malley and Horgan 2012: 316

¹⁴ Ted O’Sullivan in Bielenberg *et al.* 2015: 159

Republicans on hunger strike in internment camps were told by the Church that they would ‘go to hell’.¹⁵ School teachers who were members of Cumann na mBan often lost their jobs as, with few exceptions, almost all Catholic schools were under the control of a pro-Treaty Catholic clergy. Sympathetic civilians who had provided safe houses and food to the IRA were sometimes also denied communion at Mass. Bishops and the majority of priests took to the pulpit in ‘vocal and vehement hostility’ towards those who had taken the anti-Treaty side.¹⁶ Sligo veteran Willie Devins recalled that the bishops were ‘down on us’.¹⁷ The IRA and Cumann na mBan were denounced for causing chaos and murder, thus jeopardising the stability of the new Free State, a stability that had restored the status of the Catholic Church in Irish society.¹⁸

Republicans, while powerless to oppose the Church, occasionally attempted to use the Church’s pivotal social standing to their advantage. In one instance in October 1922, Sunday Mass attendees in Strandhill, Sligo, arrived to discover three young men, who had been accused of robbery, chained to the gates of the church for the duration of the Mass.¹⁹ Similarly, when the IRA killed two alleged informants in Tubbercurry in November 1922, they posted bills on the front door of Moylough Catholic Church warning members of the congregation of the fate that awaited spies and informants.²⁰ Generally, however, the response of the Catholic Church had a profoundly negative impact on Republicans. Some felt it so severely that it caused them to resign from the IRA.²¹

In 1920s Ireland, religion was central to the lives of Catholics, not least during times of war. To be shunned by the Church was a devastating blow to many, leading to feelings of despair, worry and guilt. The power of the Catholic Church is particularly apparent in its treatment of GOC Billy Pilkington. Even after he resigned from the IRA he was not permitted to train as a priest in Ireland. The irony that only an English seminary would accept him cannot have been lost on the trainee priest. Even up to the 1950s, more than 25 years after the Civil War had ended, the Catholic Church intervened to deny Fr Pilkington the opportunity to say Mass in Sligo Cathedral.²² He was good enough to provide religious

service in South Africa, Scotland and England, but he was not yet good enough to say Mass in Sligo town.

There were other ways in which the Catholic Church negatively intervened in the lives of Republicans in the aftermath of the Civil War. Volunteer Paddy Branley died in 1935 leaving his widow to raise their seven young children on her own. The local priest came to Maggie Branley’s home at Tormore on more than one occasion attempting to take her children away to be adopted or sent to industrial schools. On each occasion, Maggie ran the priest from the door.²³ Her response indicates how unwelcome the priest’s interference was; he was not perceived as helpful. While priests may have intervened in a similar manner with any Catholic family where a parent had died and left behind young children, Republican families may have been particularly vulnerable to unwanted Church interference.

Other equally sinister ways existed by which the Catholic Church punished children of Republicans. Kathleen Carroll described how she and other siblings of some of the IRA men who had been killed on the mountains of North Sligo in September 1922, were disallowed by the Catholic Church to return to their schools that autumn. This became a cause of great concern for the mothers of the targeted children. One of the women, Lizzie ‘Granny’ McLynn, aged 51 or 52 and mother of Christy McLynn, driver of the *Ballinalee* armoured car, took on the Church. Described as ‘a holy terror’ she vowed, ‘We’ll get ye taught somewhere.’ She considered sending her children to the Protestant Model School on the Mall in Sligo town. The nuns in the Ursuline Convent, however, who had provided food to IRA men on the run during the Civil War, took children from the various Republican families into their school and were ‘very good altogether’ to these families. Not surprisingly, many children from Republican families in the town were transferred to the Ursuline School. The first Sunday after the start of the new school year, however, the priest, Fr Butler, denounced the Ursuline nuns from the pulpit stating that he was the school manager and the nuns ‘had no right’ to accept the children. Fr Butler visited Lizzie ‘Granny’ McLynn to inform her that her children would have to leave. She argued vehemently with him and refused to remove her children from the Ursuline School, repeatedly telling him ‘No way!’ and that ‘the other women are the same’ [i.e., they also refused to remove their children]. ‘Granny’ was scathing in her criticisms to

¹⁵ Willie Devins, audio recording 16.06.1986

¹⁶ O’Shea 2022: 138

¹⁷ Willie Devins, audio recording 16.06.1986

¹⁸ O’Shea 2022: 140

¹⁹ *Roscommon Herald*, 14.10.1922

²⁰ Bonsall *et al.* 2022: 49

²¹ O’Shea 2022: 141

²² Despite the Church’s continued opposition to Pilkington, his occasional return to Sligo was often reported with much excitement

by local newspapers of the time, demonstrating that his popularity amongst lay people was undiminished.

²³ Branley 2023

the priest about the biased education the children had been receiving, and that it did not represent the Republican side. She was furious that he had spoken from the pulpit in Sligo town against the children from Republican families but had failed to castigate the National Army soldiers who had ‘murdered’ Sligo’s Noble Six ‘with British guns’. ‘Granny’ McLynn, however, emerged the victor, and she saw her children complete their education at the Ursuline School, against the priest’s expressed permission.²⁴ We see here, again, the strength of women, mothers and nuns, in defying the formidable patriarchal institution that was the Catholic Church in its attempts to ostracise and shame the children of Republican mothers and fathers.

Employment opportunities

Soldiers in the National Army, in contrast to the IRA men, were paid for their role in the Civil War.²⁵ The conditions IRA men endured while living on the run contrasted starkly with the lifestyle of National Army soldiers. Kathleen Carroll, who delivered messages and transported ammunition for the IRA in Sligo town during the Civil War, used the terms ‘featherbed soldier’ and ‘chocolate soldier’ when speaking of two particular National Army soldiers from the town.²⁶ These disparaging terms alluded to the perceived comfortable living conditions enjoyed by Free State soldiers who saw little or no real action; they were not believed to have made the same sacrifices as IRA soldiers. The differentiation was even evident in the clothing, as noted by one Republican sympathiser in South Sligo:

dressed in khaki uniforms and wearing Sam-Browne belts and brown leather leggings ... These were the pro-Treaty or ‘Free Staters’ as we called them. They paraded around like peacocks in their fine clothes and peaked caps, over which was a badge in brownish metal. The boys who were against the Treaty wore trench coats and caps.²⁷

While the differences between National Army soldiers and IRA soldiers were known and noted during the Civil War, in the years and decades that followed the disparity between those who fought on opposing sides

became even more apparent economically, socially and politically. IRA men and their families were at an economic and financial disadvantage, one that continued long after the Civil War had ended. Farm work and paid employment had been neglected for a year or more, leaving many Republican families grappling with acute poverty and hardship. When Chris Branley was asked in 2012 to what extent his family were involved in the Civil War, he replied: ‘Oh they were very much involved. Aye. In fact, they lost everything. When the Trouble was over, they had nothing.’²⁸ The Branley family had been relatively comfortable in the years immediately after the war, but the death of Chris’ father left the family destitute.

The choices men and women made in 1921 and 1922 bore consequences for their families, consequences that were rarely favourable for those on the Republican side. Several relatives we spoke to in the course of this project believed that Republican families generally experienced greater levels of poverty and were socially and economically disadvantaged compared to families on the National Army side or families who were entirely uninvolved in the Civil War. Republicans often had to emigrate for several years or, if they were married with children during the Civil War, stayed in a country where they were despised by many and overlooked for ‘government jobs’. The opportunities for these men were limited in the new Free State; they and their families bore the economic and financial brunt of being on the losing side of the Civil War. The anti-Treaty stance they had taken was believed by many Sligo IRA and Cumann na mBan veterans to have negatively affected their subsequent careers and associated financial security. In her application for a Military Service Pension, Mai Trainor documented that in the aftermath of the war she was ‘refused job applications’ because of her Cumann na mBan activism and probably also because her brother, Tom Deignan, had been OC II Arigna Brigade IRA.²⁹

The years after the Civil War became ‘a very sad time for Republicans. If you applied for a job you had to have a reference from some local Free Stater so there was nothing for it only emigration.’³⁰ England, Canada and the United States provided the only promise of a better future. In some rural areas, up to 85% of the men who had been active in the IRA and 60-70% of women who had been members of Cumann na mBan were forced to emigrate.³¹ Of the men associated with Tormore Cave,

²⁴ Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986

²⁵ Albeit there were many issues surrounding the prompt and proper payment of National Army soldiers’ wages as well as much discontent amongst their ranks with regard to their employment conditions.

²⁶ Kathleen Carroll, audio recording 1986

²⁷ Jennings 1989: 45

²⁸ Chris Branley, video and audio recording 2012

²⁹ MSP34REF60115, Mai Trainor

³⁰ Jennings 1989: 68-9

³¹ O’Shea 2022: 159-60

Dominic Branley and Jack ‘Trooper’ McHugh emigrated to Canada and America respectively. Dominic only returned to Ireland on retirement, having spent 47 years in North America. ‘Trooper’ returned to Sligo after more than ten years in the United States. At 30 years of age, Billy Pilkington moved to England to train as a priest. He never lived in Ireland again, spending the next 52 years of his life in South Africa and Britain.

Physical health impacts

Many of Sligo’s IRA combatants suffered ill health in the decades that followed the revolutionary period, caused or exacerbated by the months and years spent living on the run, sleeping in dugouts, and enduring cold and wet conditions for prolonged periods. A persistent oral narrative that still circulates in Sligo town today relates to the horrific state of the IRA men’s feet from the time spent in Tormore Cave in 1922. The ‘skin and flesh were falling off their feet.’ This was a description of undiagnosed trench foot, a serious medical condition that can have physical and mental repercussions for decades (see Chapter 7).³²

After the Civil War Volunteer Paddy Branley suffered a decade of ill health, which he and his surviving family attributed directly to maltreatment at the hands of the Black and Tans, as well as the terrible conditions he had endured while living on the run and during internment. Paddy had been shot during the War of Independence and had been violently beaten by the Black and Tans and thrown from a lorry. His back was injured during the attack causing him serious back pain and problems for years. When he died, aged just 45, his death certificate listed ‘tuberculosis of the spine’ as the cause of death.³³

During a shoot-out with the National Army in 1922, Jack ‘Trooper’ McHugh’s face was sprayed with shrapnel. A scar from the attack was visible on his forehead until he died in 1977. ‘Trooper’ was also partially deaf in his right ear from firing without ear protection.³⁴ Billy Pilkington had broken an ankle in Sligo Abbey while escaping from a raid on the family home by Crown forces during the War of Independence. In the Civil War, he broke a clavicle while on the mountains escaping

the National Army. Though both injuries healed, they may have caused problems later in life.

Trauma

None of the men who sheltered in Tormore Cave in 1922 left written records of their experiences, thus we can only speculate as to the emotional and psychological trauma they experienced. Indeed, trauma may be a contributing factor as to why the cave was never spoken about by those who had been billeted there. While in the cave, some if not all of the men may have experienced bouts of anxiety, periods of hopelessness, depression, feelings of sadness and grief. They probably missed their families and loved ones. Hours may have been spent worrying about how their families were coping and whether they had suffered consequences at the hands of the National Army. With so little to do and so little to occupy their minds, rumination and worry may have filled the vacuum. Boredom must have been intense. Confined to a cramped space in unpleasant conditions for such a long period with so many others would have been incredibly difficult. The lack of personal space must have been incredibly difficult to tolerate and likely led to tensions at times. The men hiding in Tormore Cave were fleeing the National Army, who far outnumbered them and were far better armed and equipped. On discovering that six of their comrades had been shot on the mountains en route to the cave, those hiding in the dugout were left in no doubt as to their fate should they be discovered: incarceration or execution. This must have been a terrifyingly real preoccupation. For some, this real or perceived life-threatening cave experience may have subsequently contributed to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The Civil War was over before Chris Branley was born, but he grew up hearing about it from his mother and two grandmothers. He described it as a ‘hidden’ topic associated with ‘a lot of grief’.³⁵ In many cases, the profound and varied emotional impacts of the two wars on the women and men who were directly involved has resonated through subsequent generations and continues to be felt by some sons, daughters, grandchildren, grandnieces and grandnephews today. These are the keepers of family narratives and memories about this period in Sligo’s history, and often

³² Joe Hunt pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 22.07.2015

³³ Death Certificate, Sligo Registration District

³⁴ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 22.05.2023

³⁵ Chris Branley, audio recording 2014



Figure 11.1 Anne Feehily, grandniece of Billy Pilkington, holds his original letter of resignation from the IRA dated 21 November 1924 (Marion Dowd).

the inheritors of residual inter-generational family trauma, grief and sadness.

Forgetting

In her application for a Military Service Pension in 1938, Bea Kilgannon contributed one of the most comprehensive accounts of the revolutionary period from the perspective of a Sligo-based member of Cumann na mBan. She detailed her intense activities during the War of Independence, Truce period and Civil War. Her final ambiguous statement in this lengthy submission, however, perhaps says it all: 'I forget everything.'³⁶ Bea was unsuccessful in securing a Military Service Pension, an insult to such a senior and active figure in Cumann na mBan. Margaret Currid similarly struggled with the conflict of memory; trying to forget events of the revolutionary period, while at the same time being forced to recall these for the purposes of applying for a Military Service Pension.

³⁶ MSP34REF54764, Bea Kilgannon

Margaret wrote in 1940: '20 years or more is a long time to go back for dates of deeds or acts we were trying to forget.'³⁷

It has long been accepted that the Civil War was rarely if ever spoken about following the ceasefire of 1923. The War of Independence was not shrouded in the same silence, primarily because the enemy was 'other' and 'foreign'. The devastation of the Civil War is best summed up in the Irish phrase for the conflict, *Cogadh na gCarad*, literally, the 'War of Friends'. It was a war that destroyed families and communities. Little wonder then that there was an enduring reluctance to speak of it. In the 1950s, Ernie O'Malley collected testimonies from over 450 veterans of the Irish Civil War, primarily men who had taken the anti-Treaty side. The title of one of his books (published posthumously) based on some of these first-hand accounts, *The Men will Talk to Me*, speaks to the reluctance of veterans to recount their memories and experiences, even to their own children. Recent research is consistent with the notion that, for decades afterwards, the Civil War was not spoken about.³⁸

Historian Síobhra Aiken has recently challenged the notion that the Irish Civil War was shrouded in silence, suggesting that this claim has been exaggerated. She points towards the abundance of novels and short stories that, though fictional, contain details about the experiences of combatants during the Civil War. Aiken contests that there are multiple narratives hidden in plain sight if only the historian would look closer, that these are essentially autobiographical accounts.³⁹ We approached the *Tormore Cave Project* with no preconceptions about how much or how little the Civil War had been a taboo subject in County Sligo. We spoke to numerous families and researched all available relevant published and unpublished material. Our research results, however, do not support Aiken's narrative. There are no published short stories or novels that fictionalise events of Sligo's Civil War, nor any known surviving written accounts (published or unpublished) by male or female veterans associated with Tormore Cave who were active in the county during the Civil War. We have identified just two people who kept personal records of the war, Maggie Branley and Bridget Pilkington. Both women deliberately destroyed their private papers and writings before they died, having never revealed them to anyone else, least of all their children. Excluding photographs, the

³⁷ MSP34REF24084, Margaret Gilmartin (née Currid), letter written 09.12.1940

³⁸ For example, O'Shea 2022: 231-39

³⁹ Aiken 2022

Tans.⁴² Tom Daly from Belleek, who knew the Branley safe house and was familiar with Tormore Cave, never spoke about the Troubles to his family.⁴³ Harry Doherty did not speak about the revolutionary period to his family, apart from one memory he shared with his wife, Anna, about delivering a message to Billy Pilkington in Sligo Cemetery during the War of Independence.⁴⁴ Jack ‘Trooper’ McHugh rarely talked about the Civil War to his sons, perhaps because he considered it was not a ‘smart’ thing to do while employed in a ‘government job’.⁴⁵ Upon retirement, however, ‘Trooper’ became a little more open about his experiences, particularly when encouraged in social situations. On Christmas Eve 1976, the year before he died, his sons persuaded him to share his memories of his time as an active IRA volunteer, which they recorded. ‘Trooper’ had always been reluctant to speak about the Civil War, but throughout his life he recalled with great sadness the loss of his close friend, Harry Benson, who was killed in September 1922.

Billy Pilkington had no children but had many nieces and nephews; he never discussed the Civil War with any of them.⁴⁶ As a man of the cloth, exiled and amongst a closed religious order, he still chose not to discuss the Civil War, except on rare occasions with a small number of individuals who shared his ideology. Indeed, Billy Pilkington himself represents the concept of ‘forgetting’ better than anyone else. In abandoning politics for spirituality, once he had crossed the threshold he refused to be drawn back. Military archives reveal that he refused to act as a witness to activities carried out under his orders in support of pension applications of his former men. On at least one occasion he quickly assigned responsibility to his second-in-command. He refused to meet Éamon de Valera in South Africa and he ignored letters from historians looking to glean his view about events of the 1920s. The discipline he was renowned to possess as a military commander was competently applied to his religious life. Perhaps his choices were less about forgetting and more about ‘letting go’.

Not everyone was able to let go, however, and it is evident in the military pension applications from Sligo just how many combatants ended up living in mental health care facilities. Harry Cooper, Frank Rooney and James McLoughlin are three such Sligo IRA men whose

final addresses were state institutions.⁴⁷ Following the end of the Civil War, Republican women were subject to institutionalisation more readily than men. Female activists against the state, as well as victims of state violence, were kept out of sight by the use of mental asylums as prisons in which sentences did not have to be handed down by a court.

The women who were associated with Tormore Cave tended to be more open about their experiences during the Civil War. Bridget Pilkington, Sarah Branley and Maggie Branley related memories of the conflict to their children and grandchildren. It is thanks to Maggie Branley, in particular, that knowledge of the role of Tormore Cave survived to the present day. In contrast, Cumann na mBan activist Annie Bee Gilbride rarely spoke about her role in Sligo’s Civil War to her nieces and nephews.⁴⁸

Several families we spoke with in 2022 and 2023 provided an explanation as to why they believed their IRA relatives had remained silent about this part of their life. It was that they wanted to ‘move on’ and ‘put the past behind them’. By actively maintaining a silence around those years of turbulence, many veterans surely shielded their children from the horrors they had been part of and witnessed. Many fathers sought to discourage their own sons from following a similar path by never speaking about their war experiences and never romanticising or glorifying their own political past. The Civil War had impacted on every aspect of their lives: their job prospects, their financial situations, their personal relationships, their friendships, their health and their peace of mind. These men did not want their children to suffer as they had; they wanted their sons and daughters to have a better future. Chris Branley believed: ‘That was the biggest reason why the people didn’t want to talk about it, because they didn’t want to get their younger families involved in what they had gone through.’⁴⁹ The men who chose not to speak about their involvement in the Civil War in some ways wrote themselves out of history. In hiding this part of their lives, they may have shielded their children but an enormous volume of information has been lost. Families, even a century later, are left with many questions while also bearing the weight of past silences. There can be no doubt that the men involved certainly did talk amongst themselves, in some capacity, about the events they lived through and shared. To suggest that such private conversations amounted to dialogue or the meaningful

⁴² Mary Branley, née Cummins pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 23.02.2023

⁴³ Ger Daly pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 20.01.2022

⁴⁴ Plunkett Doherty pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 08.02.2022

⁴⁵ Danny McHugh pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 06.04.2023

⁴⁶ Anne Feehily pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 29.04.2022

⁴⁷ MA/MSPC/RO/298; MA/MSPC/RO/303

⁴⁸ Veronica Gillen pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 10.05.2022

⁴⁹ Chris Branley, audio recording 2014

expression of the men's feelings to a wider audience is a different matter, however. Perhaps the frustration of not knowing exactly what happened has been intentionally bestowed upon our generation by the men and women who had seen too much of the horrors of war. IRA veteran Todd Andrews, who published a biography of his involvement in the revolutionary period, was clear about his feelings of talking about the subject:

I certainly do not want my children to inherit any part of the bitterness and hatred with which I have lived so long. I am never certain that, even in my old age, my views or feelings on any aspect of Irish life are not distorted by the lesions that this hatred and bitterness has created in my mind.⁵⁰

We have found that in North Sligo, at least, the Civil War was most certainly a taboo topic shrouded in silence; a silence that persisted for decades despite efforts by many children of veterans to induce their parents to speak of their wartime experiences. Tormore Cave was also enveloped in silence. Nothing is known about the departure of the IRA from the cave in late October 1922, other than that they left the dugout in small numbers at night. When the Civil War ended, the possibility that another war would break out remained a distinct possibility. It would have been important to those who knew about Tormore Cave to maintain its secrecy, thus ensuring it could continue to operate as a dugout if needed, having already proved to be most effective. Knowledge of the precise location of Tormore Cave was maintained by a small core of Republicans centred on the Branley family, Billy Pilkington and some of the I North Sligo Brigade.

There is an entirely separate reason as to why memories of Tormore Cave may have been erased. In the context of Republican narrative, the idea of seeking refuge in a cave did not, perhaps, sit well with the martyrdom, bravery and blood shedding of Republican lore. In much the same way that stories of Civil War violence were not as digestible as violence against British forces, stories of hiding would not be spoken of as quickly as those of combat or military successes. Even in 1922 the use of dugouts could be manipulated to infer cowardice or inaction. To cite one example, Frank Carty stated of Charles Gildea, with whom he had a serious long-term falling out: 'throughout practically [all] of August 1922, until the date of his arrest, Gildea remained in a dugout in Cloonaughil. He got this dugout constructed

for himself.'⁵¹ While this is an untruth, Carty contrasts Gildea's supposed lack of appetite for war with his own pro-activeness, continuing: 'I was engaged myself for a considerable time in [the same area].' Similarly, the media often reported men on the run to be 'hiding in their dugouts.' By its nature, guerrilla warfare depends on guerrillas to lay low in dugouts when not actively on the attack. The validity of such behaviour was easily manipulated by sleight of mouth, perhaps drawing on masculine feelings that 'hiding' was an ignoble activity compared to action. It may have become ingrained in the men at Tormore Cave that in seeking refuge to preserve their lives and their organisation, they were acting in a dishonourable or even cowardly way. For this reason, in pension claims IRA men regularly referred to such periods as time spent 'on the run', which conjures a far more romantic, active and 'presentable' version of reality.

Anyone who stayed in the cave for a prolonged period must have grappled with an array of emotions that would have stayed with them for the rest of their lives. It is telling that Fr Billy Pilkington made a return trip to Tormore Cave thirteen years after the Civil War had ended, suggesting that it continued to be a place of significance for him, despite his best efforts to move on.

Remembering

While the Civil War in North Sligo was rarely if ever mentioned to family members, it is likely that men and women who had fought together as comrades and friends remembered their experiences when speaking privately to one another. Silences could be broken in private conversations with old comrades. This likely helped veterans cope with any resultant trauma. Civil War experiences that were withheld from family and the wider community could be remembered with those who had also survived the conflict. An event held in Sligo town on the fortieth anniversary of the end of the Civil War was surely one such occasion.

In late June 1963, a reunion dinner of the 'Old Brigade' took place at the Imperial Hotel in Sligo town (Figures 11.3 and 11.4). Fifteen of the nineteen men who attended the dinner had been in the 3rd Western Division IRA and had fought together during the Civil War, and several had held senior leadership positions. A photograph of the event published in the newspapers suggests a certain recognition of former ranking. Close friends Billy Pilkington and Tom Scanlon were seated together: GOC of the 3rd Western Division and OC of

⁵⁰ Andrews 1979: 252

⁵¹ MSP34REF30117, Charles Gildea

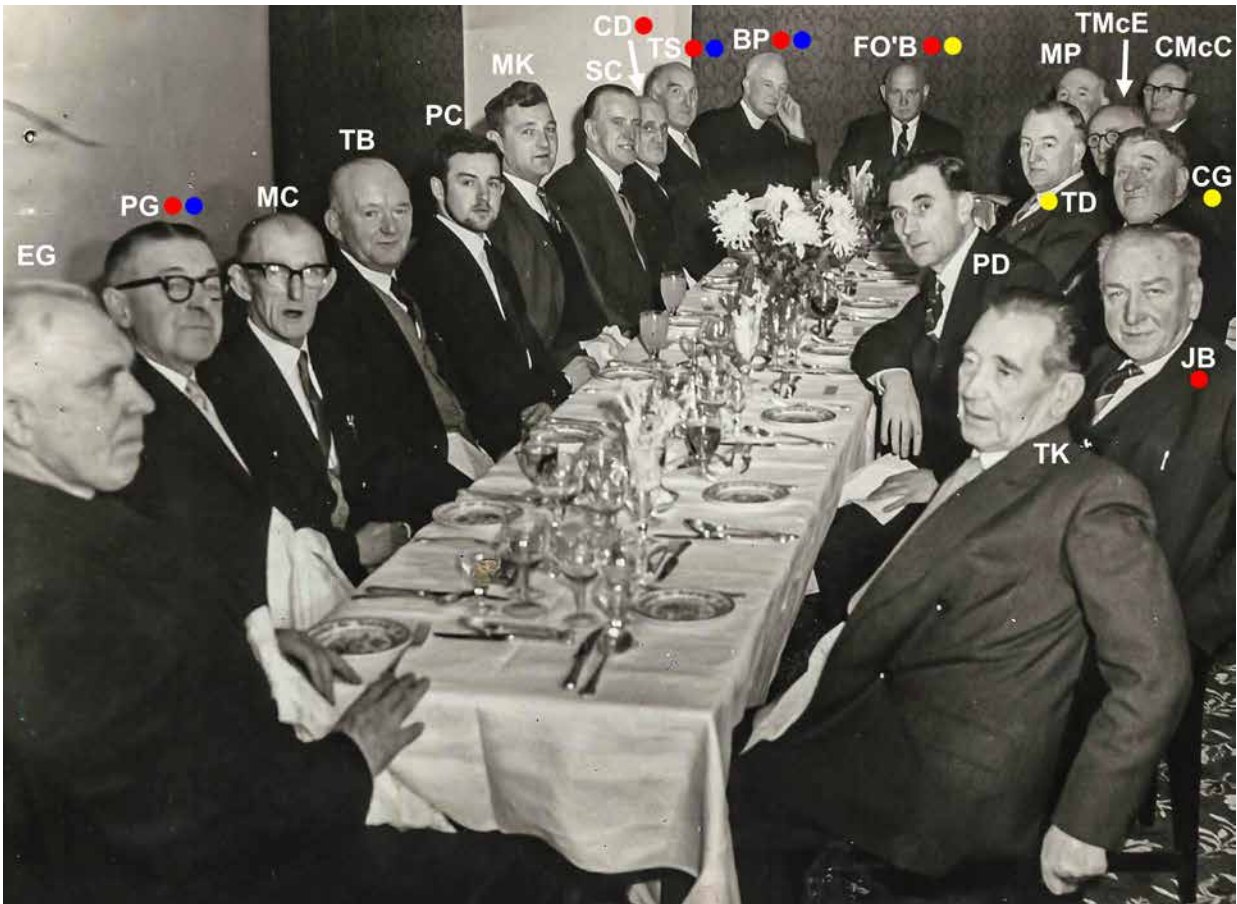


Figure 11.3 Reunion dinner of the 'Old Brigade' and some of their sons at the Imperial Hotel, Sligo town, in 1963, forty years after the end of the Civil War (Anne Feehily). Clockwise from left: Eugene Gilbride, Peadar Glynn, Mickey Crowley, Tommy Burgess, Paddy Crowley, Mícheál Kilcawley (son of Matt Kilcawley, who had died by then), Séan Carroll, Charlie Dolan, Tom Scanlon, Fr Billy Pilkington, Frank O'Beirne, Martin Pilkington, Charlie McCarthy, Tom McEville, Tom Deignan, Charles Gildea, Pearse Devins (son of Brigadier General Seamus Devins), Jack Brennan and Tommy Kilcawley. Those marked with a red dot were involved in the rescue of Frank Carty from Sligo Gaol in June 1920. Those marked with a yellow dot were rescued from Sligo Gaol in June 1921 by those marked with a blue dot.

the 1st Battalion (Sligo Town) respectively. Three men in the photograph were sons of veterans. Significantly, Pearse Devins was present. Pearse was three years old when his father, Brigadier General Seamus Devins, was killed by National Army forces on Slievemore in September 1922 en route to Tormore Cave. His execution had deeply impacted the IRA leadership in Sligo as well as the men who had fought under his command. It is perhaps a mark of the high esteem in which Seamus Devins continued to be held that, 41 years later, his only son was included in the reunion dinner. Pearse Devins' father was still remembered, still respected and still included.

We can only speculate as to the topics of conversation that were covered at the 1963 dinner table. Did the men recall the irony of dining in the same hotel that they had occupied as active Republicans in April 1922 during

Arthur Griffith's visit to Sligo town? Did they talk about the difficult period in Tormore Cave and the loss of their comrades? The dinner event attracted local media attention and, in reporting upon it, a caption in *The Sligo Champion* revealed that it was organised in honour of Reverend Pilkington. It noted further that 'tribute was paid to his organisation of the sensational escape from Sligo Prison 42 years ago ... of Frank O'Beirne, Tom Deignan and Charlie Gildea.'⁵² Did they joke about the rescue in which the three freed men were now, 42 years later, seated alongside one another on the right-hand side of the table. Did they notice that opposite them were three of the men who had rescued them? It must have been a relief for veterans to have opportunities like this to come together and speak about shared experiences of difficult events and, no doubt, reminisce

⁵² *The Sligo Champion*, 06.07.1963

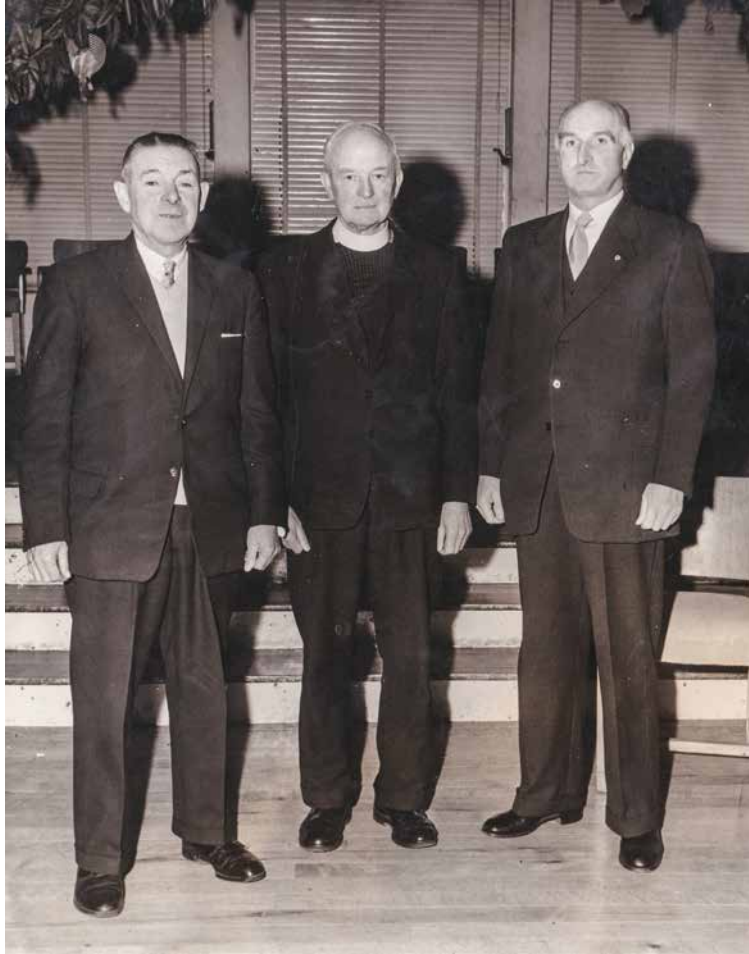


Figure 11.4 Former 3rd Western Division IRA comrades at a reunion dinner in Sligo in 1963 (Anne Feehily). L to R: Peadar Glynn (OC of the 1 Sligo Brigade ASU and Divisional Adjutant after the death of Brian MacNeill), Billy Pilkington (GOC 3rd Western Division) and Tom Scanlon (OC 1st Battalion Sligo Town). These three men orchestrated and led the Frank Carty jailbreak of 1921.

and laugh about some of the lighter moments of the war.

Keeping the past alive

Civil War era personal possessions, of those associated with Tormore Cave, are scarce. Almost all the artefacts we could locate related to Sligo's Noble Six. A gold signet ring recovered from the body of Brigadier General Seamus Devins is now worn by his grandson, Jimmy Devins (Figure 11.5). The ring had been gifted to Brigadier Devins in May 1922 by Francis Nelson's Jewellers, Gunsmiths and General Merchants at 42 Castle Street in Sligo town. It was a gesture of appreciation to Devins who would not permit his men to take jewellery during a raid on the store for weapons and ammunition. The ring is inscribed with the words, *Presented to Brigadier Seamus Devins I.R.A. May 1922.*

Lieutenant Paddy Carroll was killed by the National Army alongside Seamus Devins on 20 September 1922. A crucifix recovered from Lieutenant Carroll's body, apparently clutched in his hand as he was shot, was curated for decades by his sister, Kathleen Carroll (Figure 7.5). A note written by Paddy to another sister, Nancy, pertaining to an arms dispatch has also survived (Figure 11.6). Two further artefacts relate to the immediate aftermath of Paddy Carroll's death, the flag that draped his coffin and an embroidered memorial created by an unknown hand. This precious collection of artefacts is now in the safe hands of Jack Kelly (Figures 11.7 and 11.8). The flag that covered Tommy Langan's coffin when he was buried in Sligo Cemetery on 3 October 1922 also remains with his family.⁵³

⁵³ Bonsall *et al.* 2022: 137



Figure 11.5 Seamus Devins' ring, inscribed with the words: Presented to Brigadier Seamus Devins I.R.A. May 1922. Now worn daily by his grandson, Jimmy Devins (James Bonsall).

Photographs and military medals typically comprise the only material culture related to the majority of IRA men and Cumann na mBan women associated with Tormore Cave. These have become cherished items and continue to be carefully curated (Figures 11.9 and 11.10).

Artefacts from Ireland's Civil War that are displayed in museums and interpretative centres across Ireland primarily comprise military items such as uniforms and weapons. In contrast, the artefacts recovered during archaeological excavations in Tormore Cave

represent a less glamorous aspect of Ireland's Civil War but are arguably more representative of guerrilla warfare. These objects provide a tangible insight into life on the run: the dishes filled with food that women brought into the Glencar Valley; the fish, chicken and rabbit bones that reveal some of what the men ate; the handle of a billy can that provided drinking water; the iron skillet pot that served as a portable toilet; the clay pipe, one of few pleasures available in the dugout; and the sod of turf that provided relief from the darkness of the cave.

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Figure 11.6 Paddy Carroll's last written note. It reads: Nancy [his sister] Bring up the other parcels here to Scanlons & wait here until I see you. P (Marion Dowd).



Figure 11.7 The flag that was draped over Lieutenant Paddy Carroll's coffin before his burial in Sligo Cemetery in September 1922 (Marion Dowd). The black band sewn diagonally across the flag is relatively rare; during the Civil War it apparently served to dissociate anti-Treaty Republicans from pro-Treaty soldiers.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ We are grateful to Pádraig Óg Ó Ruairc for his insights on this.



Figure 11.8 Jack Kelly holds an embroidered commemorative piece to Paddy Carroll, maker and date unknown (Marion Dowd). Jack's mother, Annie, was great friends with Billy Pilkington, and was one of the women from Sligo town who transported messages for the IRA during the revolutionary period.⁵⁵



Figure 11.9 Jim Kane holds a photo of his grandparents, Maggie and John Kane. During the War of Independence and Civil War, their home in Ballyshannon was an important safe house central to the IRA intelligence network. John Kane may have been one of those who stayed in Tormore Cave in September 1922 (see Chapter 9).



Figure 11.10 Brian McHugh with his treasured copy of the IRA tent camp in Castlegal townland on Cope's Mountain, which was photographed by Tadhg Kilgannon in 1922. Brian's father, Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, is one of the men sitting in the centre (Marion Dowd).

⁵⁵ Jack Kelly pers. comm. to M. Dowd, 20.04.2023

Looking Forward

Chapter 12

Towards an archaeology of the Irish Civil War

The material residues of the past have restorative and redemptive potential¹

Joanna Brück and Damian Shiels

Over the past century, the Civil War has been the most difficult aspect of Ireland's revolutionary period for people to discuss, in sharp contrast to the 1916 Rising or the War of Independence. The collective silence that followed the cessation of hostilities in 1923 reveals a national effort to forget. The pro-Treaty and anti-Treaty sides both suffered, while the civilian population, which exerted little control over the events, was left traumatised. There were no winners. Outside of intermittent academic scholarship, it is only in recent decades that the silence surrounding the Civil War has begun to be challenged. New questions and conversations have emerged, allowing for a diversity of sometimes uneasy but varied perspectives being aired. In tandem, the Civil War is now being approached by researchers from disciplines other than history: psychology, gender studies, environmentalism, sociology, economics and law. Archaeologists are also beginning to play a key role in the documentation and recording of relevant buildings, structures, material culture and artefacts of this tumultuous period. Archaeological approaches can offer fresh perspectives, highlighting the often-overlooked physical reminders of the revolutionary period that silently surround us and that often just as silently disappear. This sub-discipline of Irish archaeology remains an understudied field of research, but archaeological approaches consistently add considerably new information and insights to existing scholarship.

Archaeologist Damian Shiels has been at the forefront of championing conflict and battlefield archaeology in Ireland, including the events of 1916-1923.² One of his early projects involved mapping and documenting the War of Independence heritage of Knockraha, County Cork. Clustered around this small village was a network of IRA bomb factories, dumps, dugouts, execution sites and prisons. The holistic approach adopted, combining historical, archival, archaeological and cartographic research with local oral narratives, has provided a template for approaching the revolutionary period

heritage of other villages and landscapes across the country. Shiels established the *Landscapes of Revolution Project* as a 'response to an urgent need to identify, analyse, interpret and map the sites and landscapes relating to Ireland's revolutionary decade' of 1913-1923.³ As part of this project, several studies have been carried out on key revolutionary landscapes in counties Cork, Limerick, Tipperary and Roscommon, including ambush sites, RIC barracks and guerrilla landscapes. Engagement with local communities has been a key element in deciphering our rich but often neglected revolutionary heritage.

In their survey of the Battle for Cork (9 August 1922), Joanna Brück and Damian Shiels highlighted the hundreds of 'forgotten landscapes' that currently receive no statutory protection, an issue 'compounded by the particular challenges around remembering and coming to terms with this contentious period.'⁴ Their survey honed in on the 'battlefield gate', an iron gate riddled with bullet holes, still *in situ*, that serves as a reminder of the ferocious fighting that took place at that location a century ago. The same is true for the bullet impact scars that survive on many of the buildings in the village of Passage West; signs of repair to a road bridge at Rochestown that was blown up by the IRA; and the doctor's house that served as a field hospital and is now incorporated into the community sports centre. Innocuous features of the landscape, such as the field boundaries that provided cover to Republican troops, were of vital importance to guerrilla warfare, yet like so much of the military landscape, their role in the Civil War has been largely forgotten. Brück and Shiels contend that this forgetting has political consequences, which 'paper over dissonances in memory and experience in an effort to create a past that is uncontentious.' By engaging with local landscapes and recording the surviving physical remnants of conflict, archaeologists can contribute to ensuring that 'discourse around difficult histories remains in the public sphere.' Physical sites have the potential to 'act

¹ Brück and Shiels 2022: 214

² For example, Shiels 2006; Shiels 2015; Brück and Shiels 2022

³ <<https://landscapesofrevolution.com/>>

⁴ Brück and Shiels 2022: 208-9

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Figure 12.1 Local historian Joe McGowan, son of IRA veteran Petie McGowan, points to a cavity concealed within a stone field wall where he discovered a long wooden box about 20 years ago, in Kilkilloge townland, beside Mullaghmore village in North Sligo. Remnants of the wooden box still survive in the cavity (Marion Dowd). Joe surmises that the box was used to conceal guns in the 1920s, supported by the fact that the IRA drilled in the field behind Joe during the War of Independence. Note Benbulbin Mountain in the background.

as pivots around which to recount and come to terms with difficult histories, through practices of meaning-making, recognition and accountability that facilitate social repair.⁵

The Civil War is just one aspect of archaeological research on the events that occurred in Ireland between 1916 and 1923. Though the Civil War came at the end of this revolutionary period, it poses more challenges than investigating the Easter Rising and War of Independence because of its internecine nature. The ‘enemy’ was not a ‘foreign’ force, but family and friend. For many, it continues to evoke deep emotional responses. The Civil War was an incredibly traumatic time for many people, both civilians and combatants. Some of their pain continues to be felt by surviving family members today, an aspect that researchers need to be sensitive to. Laura McAtackney’s work on the historic graffiti of Kilmainham Gaol involved surveying and photographing an aspect of the historical record

that is in gradual decay.⁶ Her analysis provides insight into the religious, political and personal lives of some of the (predominately Republican) female and male prisoners, ‘revealing lived experiences of the civil war.’ The physical evidence also bears witness to the well-documented silence that followed the Civil War with some ‘targeted whitewashing of graffiti ... often because of references to sensitive matters relating to the civil war (mainly partition and executions).’⁷

The value of oral history cannot be overstated when attempting to document the numerous sites associated with guerrilla warfare (Figure 12.1). These places have been largely ignored in historical accounts and are only beginning to be catalogued by archaeologists, but many continue to be remembered locally. Over several decades collecting oral narratives about the revolutionary period in County Clare, Tomás Mac Conmara located dugouts across seven townlands. One at Labasheeda had been dug into a natural hillock,

⁵ Brück and Shiels 2022: 214

⁶ McAtackney 2019; McAtackney 2022

⁷ McAtackney 2022

reinforced with timber and contained a bed. The Kilcorney Caves, Toomeen Caves and an early medieval souterrain at Ballyvaughan were also remembered in local memory as having served as dugouts.⁸ Without this local knowledge, the scant physical evidence of occupation would not, by itself, be sufficient to demonstrate that these places had been appropriated during the revolutionary period. Oral narratives also link particular places and buildings with specific events or individuals. Liam Mellows, for instance, was remembered to have spent several days hiding in the Toomeen Caves during the War of Independence.⁹

Physical reminders of the Irish Civil War continue to silently surround us. These include the post offices and shops where Cumann na mBan members collected dispatches; the thousands of safe houses hidden in plain sight in rural and urban settings; bridges, roads and railways that were blown up and repaired or, as in Sligo, *not* repaired; gaols and internment camps; barracks; training camps; streets and fields where drilling practice occurred; ambush sites; and locations where men and women were violently killed. This book has centred on another physical expression of guerrilla warfare: the dugout. Hundreds if not thousands of dumps and dugouts utilised by the IRA during the War of Independence and Civil War once dotted remote parts of the Irish rural landscape. In West Cork, for instance, approximately 100 dumps for stashing arms were constructed in 1921 alone.¹⁰ The overwhelming majority of dumps and dugouts have long since been destroyed or forgotten. Only recently have there been efforts to document these sites. Marion Dowd has catalogued 41 natural caves and artificially constructed features (referred to as ‘caves’) that functioned as dugouts during the revolutionary period.¹¹ These inconspicuous subterranean or semi-subterranean spaces, typically in remote mountainous and coastal locations, were appropriated for storing arms and ammunition or as places for short-term occupation. Dowd’s catalogue is far from exhaustive; additional sites continue to be identified, including during the course of this project.

Identifying Civil War sites is the first step, fieldwork involving survey and archaeological excavation is the next. It is also worth revisiting older archaeological

excavations that resulted in the inadvertent discovery of material related to the revolutionary period. One such example is a Bronze Age wedge tomb in Baurnadomeeny townland, County Tipperary, which functioned as a dugout during the period 1916-1922. When archaeologically excavated in 1959, glass bottles, iron fragments, pieces of coal and ‘other rubbish’ were encountered in the main chamber, which had been dug up by the IRA to increase the available head space.¹² Over the course of this project, we have found that artefacts of a non-military nature rarely survive from the Civil War period (Figure 12.2). Many relatives treasure the medals that were issued to veteran relatives, but these post-date the period of conflict by several decades. The traditional emphasis on, and fascination with, military artefacts contributes to the neglect of more mundane artefacts related to guerrilla warfare. This is where archaeological excavation can make a real difference. The book *Making 1916: Material and Visual Culture of the Easter Rising*, edited by Lisa Godson and Joanna Brück, illustrates the importance of material culture in providing a tangible link to the revolutionary period, while also creating a deeper appreciation of a variety of lived experiences.¹³

The centenary of the Irish Civil War brought the conflict to a wider audience and inspired new studies of place, landscape and people. Recent archaeological projects have added depth and detail to historical narratives, offering valuable insights into how rural and urban landscapes were used, and inviting participation from local communities and families of veterans. Much of this archaeological research has been made accessible in a timely manner through project websites such as the *Landscapes of Revolution Project*, *The Archaeology of 1916* and *The Archaeology of Conflict: Wexford in the Civil War, 1922-1923*.¹⁴ For instance, in a relatively short period of time the *Archaeology of the Irish Revolution in East Limerick* project has documented approximately 200 sites, including arms dumps, RIC barracks, roadblocks, execution sites, ambush sites, checkpoints and dugouts. As the data grows, so too does the associated ‘storymap’, allowing local communities to more fully appreciate, and engage with, their revolutionary period heritage.¹⁵ As projects become more embedded

⁸ Mac Conmara 2019: 168; Self 1993. Ten short caves (known variously as Toomeen, Twomeen and Tomeen) are located along the Tomeen River (also known as the Kiltannon River), which forms the boundary between the townlands of Kiltanon and Milltown.

⁹ Mac Conmara 2019: 161

¹⁰ Liam Deasy in Bielenberg *et al.* 2015: 180

¹¹ Dowd 2017; Dowd *et al.* 2017

¹² Wedge tomb (TN038-009----), Baurnadomeeny townland; O’Kelly 1960

¹³ Godson and Brück 2015

¹⁴ *Landscapes of Revolution* <<https://landscapesofrevolution.com/>>; *The Archaeology of 1916* <<https://thearchaeologyof1916.wordpress.com/>>; *The Archaeology of Conflict: Wexford in the Civil War, 1922-1923* <<https://wexfordcivilwararchaeology.com/>>

¹⁵ *Archaeology of the Irish Revolution in East Limerick* <<https://landscapesofrevolution.com/2023/01/26/archaeology-of-the-irish->



Figure 12.2 A pair of First World War military field glasses brought to Sligo after the war, and subsequently acquired by the IRA and used in North Sligo during the War of Independence and Civil War (Marion Dowd). The field glasses have remained in the Gallagher homestead through the years and are now in the possession of P.J. Gallagher, son of IRA volunteer John Gallagher.

within communities, more and more people will come forward with their stories, memories and experiences. In the course of the *Tormore Cave Project*, a common phrase we heard was ‘I know very little’, but this rarely proved true. Frequently, the people we spoke with had valuable information which, when pieced together with other data sources, served to create a richer and more nuanced understanding of an event or person or place.

In 2022, an online public conference organised by the UCD School of Archaeology and the Landscapes of Revolution Project sought to highlight past and current archaeological projects from across Ireland. Titled *Material Legacies: The Archaeology of the Irish Revolutionary Period*, many of the aforementioned archaeological projects were included, such as McAtackney’s work on the graffiti of Kilmainham Gaol and Brück and Shiels’ work on the Battle of Cork.¹⁶ Additional conference presentations included Joanna Brück’s archaeological excavation and survey of Frongoch Internment

Camp in Wales, where almost 2,000 Irishmen were imprisoned in the wake of the Easter Rising of 1916. The archaeological approaches of Franc Myles’ survey of the Dublin streetscapes of the 1916 Rising, Barry Lacey’s study of County Wexford’s War of Independence, and Mick Drumm’s analysis of Annacarty RIC Barracks in County Tipperary all demonstrate the value of archaeology in providing fresh approaches on both a regional and local level.

The archaeology of the Irish Civil War has also been captured in the course of commercial archaeological projects. In 2018, Mountrivers Bridge in County Clare was demolished as part of a road safety project. Prior to this, the bridge was architecturally and archaeologically surveyed and recorded in detail by Archaeological Management Solutions. In the process, graffiti reading ‘FREE StATER’ was discovered etched into the concrete of the parapet wall. This section of the bridge was carefully removed, registered with the National Museum of Ireland, and preserved.¹⁷

revolution-in-east-limerick/>

¹⁶ University College Dublin School of Archaeology, in association with Abarta Heritage and the *Landscapes of Revolution Project*, hosted a one-day online public conference titled, *Material Legacies: The Archaeology of the Irish Revolutionary Period*, on 26.03.2022. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/@ucdarchaeology4558>>

Sites associated with Ireland’s revolutionary period are vulnerable. Countless urban sites have not survived development works of the past century, they have been

¹⁷ Bartlett 2018



Figure 12.3 Memorial cross on Benwisikin Mountain commemorating the location where two of Sligo's Noble Six, Captain Harry Benson and Volunteer Tommy Langan, were killed by National Army soldiers on 20 September 1922 (James Bonsall). These extrajudicial killings essentially marked the end of Sligo's Civil War

demolished or repurposed and renovated beyond all recognition. In 2020, for instance, O'Rahilly House at Herbert Park in Dublin, former home of 1916 Rising leader Michael Joseph O'Rahilly ('The O'Rahilly'), was demolished without authorisation. Other buildings have been continuously occupied and modernised, thus obliterating the 1920s phase of usage. Some sites, such as dugouts, were only ever temporary structures that were subsequently destroyed, infilled or forgotten. Many battlefield and ambush sites have been modernised or redeveloped. Often, work carried out for the purpose of commemorating an event or site occurred without prior archaeological survey or excavation. In many instances sites were unintentionally destroyed or irreversibly damaged. Memorials constructed to mark significant events often become the focus of modern-day attention (Figure 12.3), and rightly so, but sometimes the wider landscape context is forgotten. In some cases, efforts at memorialisation have infringed upon the potential archaeological footprint of a site, as evidenced by the high degree of development at the Kilmichael and Béal na Bláth ambush sites in Cork.

In 2007, the designation of National Monument status to the 1916 'battlefield site' of Dublin's Moore Street was enthusiastically received by the general public. Following years of uncertainty and indecisiveness however, in 2016 a High Court ruling expanded the area under protection to cover additional buildings and laneways relevant to the broader battlefield site. A subsequent appeal by the government led to the recension of the area under protection, limiting National Monument status to just four buildings.¹⁸ Attempts by commercial interests to hastily develop this historically and culturally sensitive area led to at least one site with a revolutionary period background, adjacent to the 2016 protected area, undergoing development.¹⁹ Despite recent positive progress which has seen the development of a 'Moore Street Culture Quarter Bill', the 1916 battlefield site has continued

¹⁸ RTÉ, 18.03.2016, <<https://www.rte.ie/news/2016/0318/775798-moore-street/>>; RTÉ 14.02.2018, <<https://www.rte.ie/news/dublin/2018/0214/940666-moore-street/>>; *The Irish Times*, 29.03.2017

¹⁹ Bailey and Mulraney 2020

to fall into dilapidation.²⁰ Though a relatively recent period in Irish history and with a rich archaeological heritage, thousands of revolutionary period sites have already been obliterated or lost. Many more await, and deserve, detailed study and attention. As this book goes to print, the *Historic and Archaeological Heritage and Miscellaneous Provisions Act* has just been signed into Irish law. The inclusion in this new legislation of sites of historic events and battlefields in the definition of 'relevant things' will strengthen the capacity of the legislation to afford protection of sites associated with the revolutionary period.²¹

It is within the context of this emerging sub-discipline of Irish archaeology, namely the archaeology of the revolutionary period, that the *Tormore Cave Project* was conceived. This was the first dedicated archaeological excavation of a Civil War site in Ireland. People in Sligo had heard of the 'Glencar hideout' but its isolated location in rough mountain terrain, coupled with the fact that modifications had been made to conceal the entrance, meant that very few had visited it since 1922. The paucity of visitors ensured that the Civil War

archaeology had remained largely intact with little or no disturbance. Modern debris recovered during the excavations was scarce, consisting only of a plastic wrapper, an English penny (1984), a cigarette filter and an aluminium soft drink can. Few sites from this period can claim the same level of preservation and survival. Tormore Cave is essentially a Civil War time capsule; it remains as the men had left it in October 1922, offering a realistic insight into the nature of dugouts and life on the run. By focusing on one small inconspicuous site, it has been possible to gain insights into guerrilla tactics on a local scale and to better understand the military landscape on a regional scale. The traditional historical research approach, which makes use of published research, unpublished archives and contemporary media sources, has been carefully and cautiously combined with collected family memories and oral narratives. These historical records and personal memories have been further enhanced by the application of an archaeological perspective, which interrogates and demonstrates the very human aspect of the impact of war on a community and on a people.

²⁰ An Bille um Cheathrú Chultúir 1916, 2021 <<https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/bill/2021/36/eng/initiated/b3621d.pdf>>

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- Hugh Gallagher, 2014. Audio recording conducted by Niall Delaney (Ocean FM), 15.12.2014. Part of this recording was included in a radio documentary, *Sligo's Noble Six*, first aired on Ocean FM in 2015. Full recording kindly provided by Niall Delaney.
- Jack 'Trooper' McHugh, 1976. Audio recording conducted by his son, Danny McHugh, 24.12.1976. Recording kindly provided by Danny McHugh.
- Eddie Wallace, 1986. Audio recording conducted by Danny McHugh, 1986. Recording kindly provided by Danny McHugh.

Interviews

- Mary Branley, née Cummins – daughter-in-law of IRA veteran Thady Branley. Interview with M. Dowd, 23.02.2023.
- Plunkett Doherty – son of IRA veteran Harry Doherty. Interview with M. Dowd, 08.02.2022, 19.10.2022 and 21.06.2023.
- Anne Feehily – granddaughter of Cumann na mBan member Bridget Pilkington and grandniece of IRA veteran Billy Pilkington. Interview with M. Dowd, 29.04.2022 and 03.06.2022.
- Declan Foley – Sligo man who grew up hearing stories about Sligo's revolutionary period. Interview (video interview) with M. Dowd, 02.11.2022.
- Hugh A. Gallagher (not related to Hugh Gallagher below) Arigna, County Roscommon. Interview with R. Mulraney, 13.03.2023.
- Hugh Gallagher – son of IRA veteran John Gallagher. Interview with M. Dowd, 03.03.2023 and 24.03.2023.
- Veronica Gillen – daughter of IRA veteran Eugene Gilbride. Interview (by phone) with M. Dowd, 10.05.2022.
- Valerie Harrington – grandniece of IRA veteran Billy Pilkington. Interview (video interview) with M. Dowd, 20.07.2022.
- Jim Kane – grandson of John Kane. Interview with M. Dowd, 07.04.2023.
- Jack Kelly – curator of IRA Lieutenant Paddy Carroll's memorabilia. Interview with M. Dowd, 20.04.2023.
- Francis Mahon, Cope's Mountain. Interview with M. Dowd, 06.08.2023 and 23.10.2023.
- Rachael McGowan – granddaughter of Maggie Branley (who supported the men in the cave) and IRA veteran Paddy Branley. Interview with M. Dowd, 09.05.2022 and 27.06.2022; interview with R. Mulraney, 26.06.2022.
- Brian McHugh – son of IRA veteran Jack 'Trooper' McHugh. Interview with M. Dowd, 21.04.2023.
- Danny McHugh – son of IRA veteran Jack 'Trooper' McHugh. Interview with M. Dowd, numerous meetings across 2022 and 2023.

- Fr Jim McManus – colleague and friend of Fr Billy Pilkington. Interview with R. Mulraney, 12.12.2022.
- Fr Sean McManus – colleague and friend of Fr Billy Pilkington. Interview with R. Mulraney, 12.12.2022 and 14.12.1922.
- Rory O’Beirne – son of Michael James O’Beirne and nephew of Frank O’Beirne and Lizzie O’Beirne. Interview with M. Dowd, 26.05.2023 and 01.09.2023.
- John Pilkington – son of Cumann na mBan member Bridget Pilkington and nephew of IRA veteran Billy Pilkington. Interview with M. Dowd, 18.04.2023.
- Ursula Pilkington – daughter of Cumann na mBan member Bridget Pilkington and niece of IRA veteran Billy Pilkington. Interview with M. Dowd, 25.04.2023.
- Jim Verdon – son of IRA veteran James Verdon. Interview with M. Dowd, 21.06.2022.
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Public lectures

- Andy Bielenberg, 2022, ‘The Dead of the Civil War’, Public lecture at the National Library of Ireland, 13.10.2022.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Archaeological context register

Context	Area	Grid	Description
1	1	0-2m	Entrance boulder. Wedge-shaped; wide at base and tapers towards top. Long axis runs N-S. Boulder tilts inwards into cave. This is natural collapse from cave roof or cave walls that has been deliberately manoeuvred into position to obscure entrance. Bounded to N by C.2 and to S by C.8. Measurements: 1.28m high x 0.78m wide (N-S) x 0.79-1.05m wide (E-W). Not excavated, remains <i>in situ</i> .
2	1	0-2m	Stony mortared deposit N of entrance boulder (C.1). Comprises a firm, compacted deposit of limestone stones in a matrix of mortar and calcified earth. This was deliberately consolidated and banked up to block the gap between the cave wall and the entrance boulder. Measurements: 1.97m high x 1.16m E-W x 0.84m N-S. Entry into the cave is through a narrow gap (0.26-0.45m wide x 0.64m high x 0.82m deep) between this deposit and the entrance boulder (C.1). C.2 was not excavated and remains <i>in situ</i> . Ecofacts: mortar sample (22E0030:S15).
3	1	2-4m	Deposit loose blackish-brown silty clay with occasional small limestone stones. Uppermost deposit sloping down from cave entrance immediately inside the entrance boulder (C.1) to cave floor beneath, concealing stone steps (C.12). Heavily disturbed by traffic through cave and comprises material tracked in from outside as well as sediments tracked out from cave interior. Produced occasional hazelnut shells and snail shells. Measurements: 2.4m E-W x 0.98m N-S x 0.12m thick. Finds: chert cores (22E0030:40, 50), chert flake (22E0030:41), chert flake fragments (22E0030:47, 48, 49), unclassified chert pieces (22E0030:43, 45, 54), glass shard (22E0030:52). Ecofacts: 5 animal bones (22E0030:S2), including sheep and rabbit.
4	1	3-8m	U-shaped setting of sixteen stones firmly set upright and on edge to form a wall or boundary along N and S walls of cave, connecting at E end which is best preserved. Parts of S portion bonded with mortar. There is a gap in S section in front of the Cubby (C.18). Part of N section has collapsed into void beneath cave wall. Measurements: 4.7m long (E-W) x 0.11-0.25m wide x 0.38m high. This walling encloses an area 4.7m E-W x 0.86m N-S. C.4 was not excavated and remains <i>in situ</i> .
5	1	6-8m	Flagstone floor/surface of ten loosely set flat limestone slabs covering an area 1.34m N-S x 0.94m E-W x 0.10m thick. These occur within the U-shaped setting (C.4) and rest on top of C.10. The stones vary in size from 0.58m x 0.38m to 0.30m x 0.18m. These flagstones have clearly been disturbed in recent years. A further six stones located between C.5 and the cave entrance are likely to have been displaced from this paved area. C.5 was removed, the underlying C.10 was excavated, then C.5 was replaced on the surface of the mortared floor (C.15) in the same position as originally found. Ecofacts: eight chunks of mortar floor (22E0030:S11).
6	De-listed		
7	All	0-18m	Surface finds The majority of artefacts recovered during the excavation were surface finds. All surface finds are listed as C.7. Finds: chert flake (22E0030:109), fragments of an iron three-legged skillet pot (22E0030:1, 3, 4, 131, 134, 142), sherds of a glazed red earthenware dish (22E0030:6, 7, 10, 14, 15, 16, 24, 25, 26, 30, 32, 33, 35, 36, 116, 129), sherds of a black-glazed red earthenware crock (22E0030:18-23, 27-29, 31, 34, 37, 110, 130, 141), glass bottle shard (22E0030:5), copper alloy mesh (22E0030:2), twisted copper alloy wire in cotton sleeve (22E0030:8), iron fragments (22E0030:17, 57-59, 78, 79), threads (22E0030:139, 140), plastic Noodles wrapper (22E0030:9), cigarette butt (22E0030:13), Fanta drink can (22E0030:39). Ecofacts: 706 animal bones (22E0030:S1), including horse, cattle, sheep/goat, hare, rabbit and bird; 3 lumps of unidentified orange material (22E0030:S14).

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT

Context	Area	Grid	Description
8	1	0-2m	Stoney deposit abutting S side of entrance boulder (C.1), unclear if entirely natural or partially humanly constructed. Comprises a firm, compacted deposit of limestone stones in a matrix of calcite and calcified earth. This is natural collapse from the cave wall but may have been deliberately consolidated and banked up. Mortar may also have been used (similar to C.2). Vegetation growth obscures this deposit. C.8 was not excavated and remains <i>in situ</i> .
9	2	11-12m	Loose stone rubble at E end of Area 2, some of which (approximately 40 stones) may have been thrown down from Area 1. Measurements: 2.2m N-S x 1.2m E-W x 0.30m thick. C.9 was not excavated and remains <i>in situ</i> .
10	1	6-8m	Dark brown silty clay under flagstone surface (C.5), over mortared floor (C.15) and contained within the U-shaped setting of stones (C.4). Relatively compact dark brown silty clay with moderate pebbles. Measurements: 1.35m N-S x 0.95m E-W x 0.02m thick. Finds: handle of billy can or tin (22E0030:60), copper wire in cotton sleeve (22E0030:62), iron fragment (22E0030:63, 69). Ecofacts: 46 animal bones (22E0030:S3), including rabbit.
11	1	2-4m	Yellowish-brown silty and gravelly clay into which stone steps (C.12) were set. Measurements: 1.6m E-W x 0.34-1.30m N-S x 0.25m thick. Finds: unclassified chert piece (22E0030:97), flint flake (22E0030:98).
12	1	2-4m	Stone steps Four flat limestone slabs set into C.11 to form a set of steps leading from inside the entrance boulder (C.1) down into the cave interior. Slabs ranges in size from 0.45m x 0.20m to 0.15m x 0.10m and 0.17m x 0.10m. C.12 was not excavated and remains <i>in situ</i> .
13	1	4-5m	Uppermost deposit in Cubby , a mid-brownish grey sandy clay of medium compaction. Frequent small stones and pebbles. It overlies C.17. C.13 is potentially the same as C.14 but contains a greater concentration of finds, possibly reflecting how the Cubby was used. Measurements: 1.10m x 0.86m x 0.12m thick. Finds: chert flakes (22E0030:86, 106), copper rivets set in iron sheet (22E0030:61, 71, 73), sherd of a slip-decorated glazed red earthenware dish (22E0030:65, 66, 115), sherds of a glazed red earthenware dish (22E0030:74-77, 117), shard of glass bottle (22E0030:64, 72, 111), clay pipe bowl fragment (22E0030:70), iron fragments (22E0030:137). Ecofacts: 10 animal bones (22E0030:S4), including cattle, bird, fish; burnt turf fragments (22E0030:S6); 5 chunks of mortar floor (22E0030:S12).
14	1	4-6m	Greyish brown silty clay , unprotected western extension of C.10. Loose compaction with moderate pebbles and occasional stones. Measurements: 1.35m N-S x 0.95m E-W x 0.10m thick. Finds: chert flakes (22E0030:88, 95, 107), possible chert roughout for Late Mesolithic butt-trimmed flake (22E0030:96), unclassified chert piece (22E0030:90), shard of glass bottle (22E0030:113), sherd of a slip-decorated glazed red earthenware dish (22E0030:118-128), thirteen copper rivets set in iron (22E0030:133), iron buckle fragment (22E0030:135), iron fragments (22E0030:136, 138), 1p coin (22E0030:132). Ecofacts: 19 animal bones (22E0030:S5), including cattle, sheep/goat, bird, fish; burnt turf fragments (22E0030:S7); eight pieces of bog deal (22E0030:S10); 3 chunks of mortar floor (22E0030:S13).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT REGISTER

Context	Area	Grid	Description
15	1	4-8m	Mortared floor. Underlying C.10, stratigraphically later than U-shaped stone setting (C.4) as it is contained within the setting and partially extends up the inner faces of the stones. Measurements: c. 4.6m E-W x 0.86m N-S. C.15 was not excavated and remains <i>in situ</i> .
16	De-listed		
17	1	4-5m	Deposit in Cubby Moderately compact mid-orangey brown sandy clay underlying C.13 in Cubby. A series of possibly intentionally placed small limestone stones occur along walls of Cubby, surrounded by C.17. Measurements: 0.86m x 0.50m x 0.30m thick. Finds: indeterminate chert piece (22E0030:91), convex scraper fragment (22E0030:93), unclassified chert piece (22E0030:94), shard of glass bottle (22E0030:112), sherd of a slip-decorated glazed red earthenware dish (22E0030:114). Ecofacts: two partially burnt sods of turf (22E0030:S8); burnt turf fragments (22E0030:S9).
18	1	4-5m	Cubby Natural sub-rectangular niche in S cave wall. Contained deposits C.13, C.17 and C.19. Measurements: 1.58m x 0.86m x 1.10m high. Remains <i>in situ</i> .
19	1	4-5m	Stone deposit Deepest stratum in Cubby (C.18). C.19 was not excavated and remains <i>in situ</i> .

Appendix 2

Archaeological finds register

Find number*	Context	Grid	Material	Conserved	Description
22E0030:1	7	-3m outside	IRON	X	Three-legged cast iron skillet pot fragment
22E0030:2	7	5-6m N	COPPER ALLOY	X	Mesh
22E0030:3	7	3-4m S	IRON	X	Three-legged cast iron skillet pot fragment
22E0030:4	7	4-5m S	IRON	X	Three-legged cast iron skillet pot fragment
22E0030:5	7	4-5m S	GLASS		Green glass bottle shard
22E0030:6	7	4-5m S	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:7	7	4-5m S	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:8	7	7-8m S	COPPER ALLOY and TEXTILE	X	Twisted copper wire in a cotton sleeve, looped at one end
22E0030:9	7	4-5m S	PLASTIC		Instant noodles wrapper
22E0030:10	7	4-5m S	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:13	7	8-9m N			Cigarette butt
22E0030:14	7	8-9m N	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:15	7	8-9m N	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:16	7	10-11m S	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:17	7	10-11m S	IRON		Amorphous fragment
22E0030:18	7	11-12m N	CERAMIC		Black-glazed red earthenware crock chips
22E0030:19	7	11-12m N	CERAMIC		Black-glazed red earthenware crock sherd
22E0030:20	7	11-12m N	CERAMIC		Black-glazed red earthenware crock sherd
22E0030:21	7	11-12m N	CERAMIC		Black-glazed red earthenware crock sherd
22E0030:22	7	11-12m N	CERAMIC		Black-glazed red earthenware crock sherd
22E0030:23	7	11-12m N	CERAMIC		Black-glazed red earthenware crock chip
22E0030:24	7	13-14m N	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:25	7	11-12m N	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:26	7	11-12m S	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:27	7	12-13m N	CERAMIC		Black-glazed red earthenware crock sherd
22E0030:28	7	12-13m N	CERAMIC		Black-glazed red earthenware crock sherd
22E0030:29	7	12-13m N	CERAMIC		Black-glazed red earthenware crock sherd
22E0030:30	7	12-13m N	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:31	7	12-13m N	CERAMIC		Black-glazed red earthenware crock sherd
22E0030:32	7	11-12m N	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:33	7	13-14m S	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:34	7	13-14m S	CERAMIC		Black-glazed red earthenware crock sherd
22E0030:35	7	12-13m N	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:36	7	13-14m S	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:37	7	13-14m S	CERAMIC		Black-glazed red earthenware crock sherd
22E0030:39	7	Rockshelter outside	ALUMINIUM		'Fanta' soft drink can
22E0030:40	3	2-3m	CHERT		Third-phase bipolar core
22E0030:41	3	2-3m	CHERT		Regular flake

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS REGISTER

Find number*	Context	Grid	Material	Conserved	Description
22E0030:43	3	2-3m	CHERT		Unclassified piece
22E0030:45	3	2-3m	CHERT		Unclassified piece – possible core
22E0030:47	3	2-3m	CHERT		Flake – distal fragment
22E0030:48	3	2-3m	CHERT		Flake fragment
22E0030:49	3	2-3m	CHERT		Flake fragment
22E0030:50	3	2-3m	CHERT		Third phase bipolar core
22E0030:52	3	2-3m	GLASS		Green glass bottle shard
22E0030:54	3	2-3m	CHERT		Unclassified piece
22E0030:57	7	6-7m N void	IRON	X	Circular sheet fragment, perforated
22E0030:58	7	6-7m N void	IRON	X	Circular sheet fragment, perforated
22E0030:59	7	5-6m N void	IRON	X	Circular sheet fragment
22E0030:60	10	6-7m S	COPPER ALLOY	X	Handle of a billy can or similar
22E0030:61	13	4-5m Cubby	COPPER	X	Copper rivet set in iron
22E0030:62	10	6-7m S	COPPER ALLOY and TEXTILE	X	Twisted copper wires in a cotton sleeve, in three fragments
22E0030:63	10	6-7m S	IRON		Amorphous fragment
22E0030:64	13	4-5m Cubby	GLASS		Green glass bottle shard
22E0030:65	13	4-5m Cubby	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:66	13	4-5m Cubby	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:69	10	6-7m S	IRON		Iron object
22E0030:70	13	4-5m Cubby	CERAMIC		Clay pipe fragment
22E0030:71	13	4-5m Cubby	COPPER	X	Copper rivet set in iron
22E0030:72	13	4-5m Cubby	GLASS		Green glass bottle shard
22E0030:73	13	4-5m Cubby	COPPER	X	Copper rivet set in iron
22E0030:74	13	4-5m Cubby	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:75	13	4-5m Cubby	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:76	13	4-5m Cubby	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:77	13	4-5m Cubby	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:78	7	3-4m	IRON		Amorphous fragment
22E0030:79	7	3-4m	FERROUS?		Amorphous fragment
22E0030:86	13	4-5m Cubby	CHERT		Irregular flake
22E0030:88	14	4-6m	CHERT		Irregular flake
22E0030:90	14	4-6m	CHERT		Unclassified piece
22E0030:91	17	4-5m Cubby	CHERT		Indeterminate piece
22E0030:93	17	4-5m Cubby	CHERT		Convex scraper fragment
22E0030:94	17	4-5m Cubby	CHERT		Unclassified piece
22E0030:95	14	4-6m	CHERT		Flake fragment
22E0030:96	14	4-6m	CHERT		Possible roughout for butt-trimmed flake
22E0030:97	11	2-4m	CHERT		Unclassified piece
22E0030:98	11	2-4m	FLINT		Irregular flake
22E0030:106	13	4-5m Cubby	CHERT		Flake fragment
22E0030:107	14	4-6m	CHERT		Irregular flake

AN IRISH CIVIL WAR DUGOUT

Find number*	Context	Grid	Material	Conserved	Description
22E0030:109	7	4-5m	CHERT		Regular flake
22E0030:110	7	Area 3	CERAMIC		Black-glazed red earthenware crock sherd
22E0030:111	13	4-5m Cubby	GLASS		Green glass bottle shard
22E0030:112	17	4-5m Cubby	GLASS		Green glass bottle shard
22E0030:113	14	4-5m	GLASS		Green glass bottle shard
22E0030:114	17	4-5m Cubby	CERAMIC		Slip-decorated glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:115	13	4-5m Cubby	CERAMIC		Slip-decorated glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:116	7	Area 3	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:117	13	4-5m Cubby	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:118	14	4-6m	CERAMIC		Slip-decorated glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:119	14	4-6m	CERAMIC		Slip-decorated glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:120	14	4-6m	CERAMIC		Slip-decorated glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:121	14	4-6m	CERAMIC		Slip-decorated glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:122	14	4-6m	CERAMIC		Slip-decorated glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:123	14	4-6m	CERAMIC		Slip-decorated glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:124	14	4-6m	CERAMIC		Slip-decorated glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:125	14	4-6m	CERAMIC		Slip-decorated glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:126	14	4-6m	CERAMIC		Slip-decorated glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:127	14	4-6m	CERAMIC		Slip-decorated glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:128	14	4-6m	CERAMIC		Slip-decorated glazed red earthenware dish sherd
22E0030:129	7	Area 1	CERAMIC		Glazed red earthenware dish sherd; recovered by Marion Dowd 10.05.2013
22E0030:130	7	Unknown	CERAMIC		Black-glazed red earthenware crock sherd; recovered by Joe McGowan in the 1980s
22E0030:131	7	Unknown	IRON	X	Three-legged cast iron skillet pot fragment; recovered by Danny McHugh in 1985
22E0030:132	14	4-5m	COPPER ALLOY	X	Penny coin (1986)
22E0030:133	14	4-5m	COPPER	X	14 copper rivets set in iron
22E0030:134	7	10-11m S	IRON	X	Three-legged cast iron skillet pot fragment
22E0030:135	14	4-5m	IRON	X	Buckle fragment
22E0030:136	14	4-5m	IRON	X	Object in eighteen fragments
22E0030:137	13	4-5m Cubby	IRON		Fragments x 7
22E0030:138	14	4-5m	IRON		Fragments x 76
22E0030:139	7	Area 3	TEXTILE		Thread
22E0030:140	7	Area 3	TEXTILE		Thread
22E0030:141	7	-3m outside	CERAMIC		Black-glazed red earthenware crock sherd
22E0030:142	7	Unknown	IRON		Three-legged cast iron skillet pot fragment; recovered by Danny McHugh in 1985

*Some find numbers were de-listed at post-excavation stage as natural/non-archaeological items following specialist analyses.

Appendix 3

Archaeological ecofact register

Sample number	Context	Grid	Description
22E0030:S1	7	0-18m	Animal bones (n. 706)
22E0030:S2	3	2-4m	Animal bones (n. 5)
22E0030:S3	10	6-8m	Animal bones (n. 46)
22E0030:S4	13	4-5m Cubby	Animal bones (n. 10)
22E0030:S5	14	4-6m	Animal bones (n. 19)
22E0030:S6	13	4-5m Cubby	Burnt turf fragments
22E0030:S7	14	4-5m	Burnt turf fragments
22E0030:S8	17	4-5m Cubby	Two sods of turf
22E0030:S9	17	4-5m Cubby	Burnt turf fragments
22E0030:S10	14	4-5m	Bog deal (n. 8)
22E0030:S11	5	7-8m	Mortar floor fragments (n. 8)
22E0030:S12	13	4-5m Cubby	Mortar floor fragments (n. 5)
22E0030:S13	14	4-5m	Mortar floor fragments (n. 3)
22E0030:S14	7	6-7m N	Lumps of unidentified orange material (n. 3)
22E0030:S15	2	0-2m	Mortar sample

Appendix 4

Photogrammetry, cave survey and laser scanning

Robert Mulraney, James Bonsall and Liamóg Roche

Surveying of underground environments is challenging due to the inability of being able to directly apply satellite-led survey techniques to enclosed environments. However, traditional cave surveying techniques can be combined with a vast array of emerging three-dimensional modelling technologies to help visualise and model spaces that are difficult to access. The *Tormore Cave Project* took advantage of these developments to capture Tormore Cave in a 3D photogrammetric model, a cost-effective technique simply using cameras and survey stations.¹ This project has benefited from the use of both photogrammetry and traditional cave survey methods to create accurate maps of Tormore Cave for the first time.

Photogrammetry

Photogrammetry combines the disciplines of photography, computer vision and geometry to reconstruct the spatial details of an object or scene. The technique accurately measures and creates three-dimensional models of objects or environments by collating and processing photographic images. Its purpose is to extract precise geometric data by examining multiple photographs taken from different perspectives. The technique relies on triangulation, which involves identifying corresponding points in various images to determine the object's spatial position and shape. By analysing the variations in parallax and perspective among multiple images, software algorithms can deduce information such as distance, size, shape, and relative positions within the captured environment. This methodology is applied in various fields such as surveying, architecture, archaeology, engineering, entertainment and virtual reality, serving functions such as land surveying, 3D modelling, object measurement and visual effects production. Despite restricted access to some areas, it was possible to conduct a photogrammetry survey in Tormore Cave.

To create the photogrammetric model, R. Mulraney captured 731 photographs of the cave interior, while J. Bonsall captured 255 photographs of the cave exterior

and the local environment (Table Ap4.1). An additional 20 minutes of video was filmed, slowly traversing through the cave from the exterior, through the entrance and to the back of the cave, and then repeated in reverse order, to provide two perspectives ('inwards' and 'outwards'). The video was split by L. Roche into individual frames that were used to supplement the still images. All the images were imported by L. Roche into Agisoft Metashape Professional v.173 to create a photogrammetric model.²

Table Ap4.1 Details of cameras used to photograph Tormore Cave.

Environment	Camera	No.	Pixels	Dots per inch
Cave interior	Sony Alpha 7 III	731	6000 x 4000	300
Cave exterior	Canon EOS 1200D	255	5184 x 3456	72

Orthorectification of the model was undertaken using local coordinates recorded during the cave survey as reference points. The orthorectified section captured the entire length of the cave, while the plan focused on the entrance and main excavation area, captured as 'Area 1' in the survey plans.

Cave survey

The cave survey was carried out by R. Mulraney prior to excavation, using a 'DISTO-X2' cave survey device. This is a commercially available distance laser measure which has been modified by cavers to record distance, inclination (slope) and azimuth (compass bearings). The device also contains a Bluetooth chip allowing for an in-cave connection to a mobile device. Measurements recorded by the 'Disto' are then sent to the mobile device where they were logged and a real-time 'map' drawn, by use of a stylus, in the Qave v2.5 application. This data was subsequently processed in Aven v1.4, a tool of the 'Survex' suite of cave survey processing software, which corrects for distance relative to inclination. A highly accurate map

¹ Alessandri *et al.* 2019; Nadel *et al.* 2008; Lerma *et al.* 2010

² Agisoft 2021

could then be produced in Autodesk's AutoCAD and Adobe Illustrator. The final result was self-graded for accuracy. The Tormore Cave survey is graded as a UISv2 5-4-A, which proposes a survey grade of '5', signifying compass and inclination accuracy to within 1° and distance accurate to within 0.05m. The map details are considered Grade '4', signifying that all cave details in the drawing have been measured. These grades are to the standards set by the International Union of Speleology (UIS).³ For the area of excavation (Area 1), a conventional archaeological ground plan was drawn by R. Mulraney using the traditional archaeological method of tape measure, baseline and off-sets. This was then digitised in Adobe Illustrator and superimposed over the cave survey, adding highly accurate details to the stone structures built in the outer section of the cave.

Laser scanning

During the excavation of Tormore Cave, a portion of the internal southern wall of the cave was identified as having several markings with potential to be of human origin. This portion of the cave wall was subject to a combination of photogrammetry and laser scanning.

Laser scanning, also known as LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging), is a technology extensively employed in archaeology to examine landscapes and objects in order to obtain precise three-dimensional data. Through the analysis of the laser signals, the scanner can determine the distance to the target with exceptional accuracy. It also allows archaeologists to digitally preserve and document an object with precision (in this case, a piece of the cave wall), examine architectural elements, and aid in the reconstruction and visualization of past environments.

At Tormore Cave, the photogrammetry used a Sony Alpha 7II with 35mm lens and the laser scanning used an Artec Eva handheld laser scanner (Figure Ap.4.1). A photogrammetric 3D model was generated using Agisoft Metashape Professional, and the laser scanning data were processed using Artec Studio Professional 16, from which a 3D model was generated. Both models were imported into Blender (Figure Ap.4.2), a free open-source computer graphics software, where the visibility of any surface features captured within both models were accentuated.

Description of markings (possible graffiti)

The markings consist of a series of at least six diagonal lines, which appear to be incised into the cave wall and covered by moonmilk. Three of the lines run parallel to each other from northeast to southwest, the longest of which is approximately 11cm with the lowest in the sequence being the shortest, at approximately 4cm. The remaining three also run parallel to each other but from northwest to southeast and cross the initial three perpendicularly. The longest in this series is approximately 7cm with the shortest once again being the lowest in the sequence, at approximately 5cm. The lines are relatively symmetrical, with each line being spaced between 2.2cm and 3.2cm from other parallel lines. This forms three rough diamond shapes between the intersections of the lines. The depth of the markings varies and is impacted by the presence of moonmilk; however, a maximum of 2.2mm depth was measurable. Although it was possible to examine the markings with more clarity, no further insight into their potential human origin could be determined.

³ <http://www.uisic.uis-speleo.org/UISmappingGrades.pdf>

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Figure Ap4.1 Liamóg Roche carries out laser scanning over the portion of the cave wall with markings (James Bonsall). The data acquired is entered into the notebook computer seen in the background.

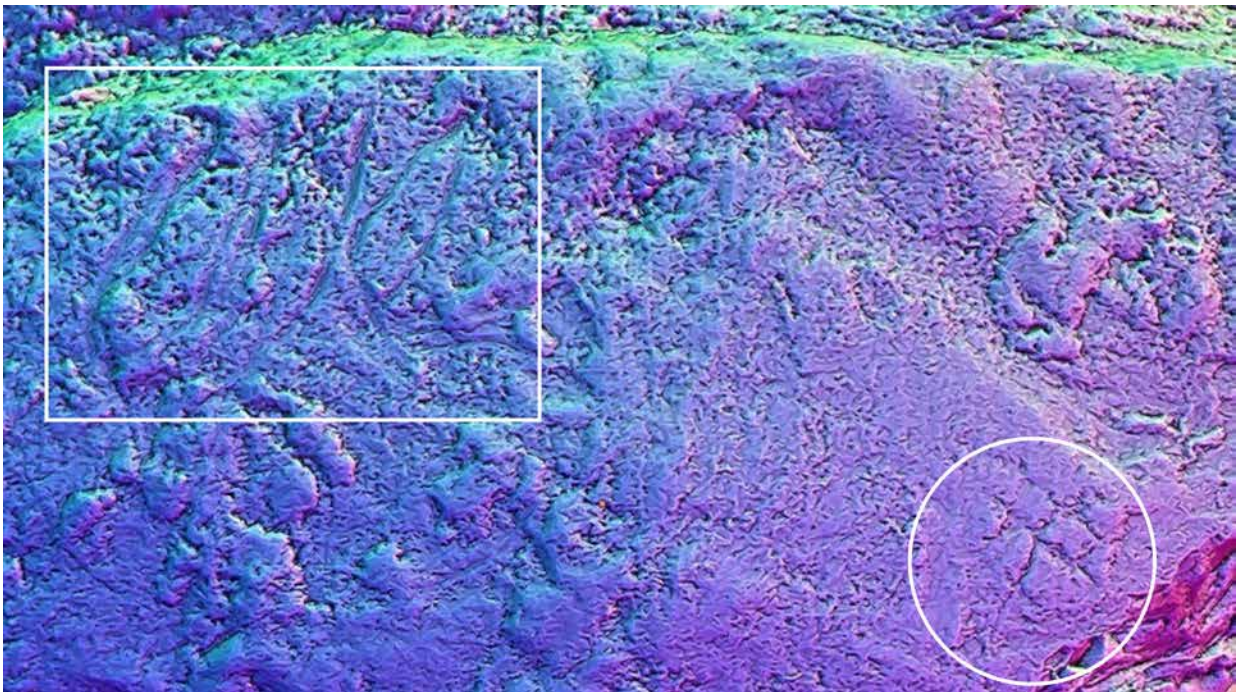


Figure Ap4.2 Laser scan model displayed in Blender showing the markings (Liamóg Roche).

Appendix 5

Geomorphological and geological setting, and mortar analysis

John G. Kelly

Tormore Cave is located at the base of a series of cliff scarps located along the northern edge of the Glencar Valley. The Glencar Valley is a classic U-shaped glaciated valley, formed by glacial action during the last ice advance, with steep cliffs on the north and south valley sides, and a broad flat valley floor with the post-glacial Glencar Lake formed in the valley floor. The cliffs immediately above Tormore Cave show evidence of sequential valley side collapse, with blocks of limestone displaced downwards to the south along joints or vertical planes of weakness in the limestone rock mass. This sequential collapse would have occurred during end-glacial ice melt, as the over-steepened valley side lost the support of the glacial ice mass as it melted. The base of the cliffs is marked by large scale boulder scree, formed from valley side collapse, freeze-thaw spalling and ongoing weathering of the cliffs. A forested ridge (mapped by Teagasc as

exposed karstified limestone) to the south of the cliffs may represent a displaced block of Dartry Limestone, which slipped from the cliff front on loss of ice support (Figure Ap5.1).

The cliffs above Tormore Cave expose limestones of the Dartry Limestone Formation. The Dartry Limestone is composed of two limestone facies in the area, with the uppermost part of the cliffs composed of massive mudbank limestones underlain by a succession of medium-bedded cherty limestones. The Dartry Limestone is underlain by the interbedded calcareous shales and cherty limestone beds of the Glencar Limestone formation, locally exposed along the base of the cliffs. Tormore Cave is developed within bedded cherty limestones of the Dartry Limestone immediately above the contact between the Dartry Limestone and the Glencar Limestone (Figure Ap5.2).



Figure Ap5.1 The Tormore Cave area as seen from the N16 Manorhamilton to Sligo Road (John G. Kelly). The upper part of the cliffs is formed in massive mudbank limestones, the middle and lower part of the cliffs is formed in bedded cherty limestones of the Dartry Limestone Formation. The cave is hidden behind the forested ridge which sits in front of the cliffs, with a valley formed between the base of the cliffs and the forested ridge. The ridge is mapped by Teagasc as karstified limestone and may be a large, displaced block which slipped south from the cliffs on loss of ice support.

The cave formation has been controlled by this geological contact: the cave developed within the more soluble Dartry Limestone Formation and the floor of the cave was controlled by the very low permeability insoluble shales of the Glencar Limestone Formation. The cave passage dips northwards into the cliff face following the dip of the rock sequence, which was probably originally horizontal but has been modified by rotation of the rock mass at the cliff base due to the displacement of the blocks of rock during valley side collapse.

The cave is a remnant cave, likely formed as a horizontal cave during warm interstadial periods during the glaciation, with much of the cave system truncated and eroded away by the Glencar Valley glacier. When the cliffs began to collapse following the loss of valley side ice support, the cave system was likely broken into sections within each failed block of rock, and the back of the cave likely terminates against one of these failure surfaces. Tormore Cave therefore represents a small remnant of a previously more extensive cave system that has been significantly eroded and truncated by glacial erosion and then by valley side collapse during and after the end of the last glaciation.

Mortar analysis

A mass of limestone blocks (C.2) was identified that had been placed in an organised way at and just inside the cave entrance. These stones appeared to have been bound by a fine-grained material, which has the appearance of a typical cement/sand mixed mortar-type material bound in a Silica CaO, Alumina-rich substrate. Geochemical (XRF) analysis of two samples of this mortar-like material revealed a characteristic composition of a cement-type material mixed with a limestone/silica (chert) sand, which is typical of the bedrock inside the cave. Analysis of the samples is interesting as there is significant variability, which would be expected from small-scale localised mixing of material for mortar. Based on its appearance and geochemical composition, it is reasonable to assume that the mass of material investigated consists of limestone stones from the immediate cave entrance area, bound by a cement/sand mortar produced at the site, utilising cave clays mixed with a sand material not native to the site.



Figure Ap5.2 Base of cliff exposure at Tormore Cave (the cave entrance is immediately right of the photograph) (John G. Kelly). The yellow line marks the upper limit of the shale bed of the Glencar Limestone Formation, with thicker-bedded cherty limestones of the Dartry Limestone above this line. The geologists hammer (0.4m length) rests on a thinly-bedded sequence of calcareous shales and cherty limestones of the Glencar Limestone Formation.

Appendix 6

Prehistoric lithics

Cian Hogan

Sixteen prehistoric lithics were recovered during excavations in Tormore Cave, in addition to another six chert pieces that may be archaeological but could also be natural (Table Ap6.1). The assemblage contains debitage cores (12.5%), debitage products (75%) and indeterminate pieces (12.5%). Fragments account for 43.7% of the assemblage, with complete objects accounting for 56.3%. The two core objects, while fragmented, are counted as complete as their state is the result of the reduction process.

Methodology

The site was excavated by trowel. Dry sieving of 100% of excavated material was carried out, with the smallest mesh being 5mm. This methodology provides for a higher recovery rate of material, especially chips and small fragments. The collection was catalogued using a database constructed in Microsoft Access 2010; with analytics performed and figures produced in Microsoft Excel 2010. The material was recorded, analysed, interpreted and presented using established guidelines.¹ The collection was assessed using the following equipment:

Equipment	Range	Accuracy
Callipers	0.1–180mm	1mm
Precision scales	0.05–2000.00g	0.01g
LFM LED Magnifying lamp	127mm lens, 5 dioptré	-

Natural material was excluded by an assessment of certain aspects:

- If a piece presented itself in very fresh condition, e.g., sharp edges, unabraded surfaces;
- If a piece lacked any suggestion of intentional reduction or shaping;
- If the form of a piece did not fit prescribed understandings of lithic forms and/or reduction;

- If the nature of a piece did not appear conducive to reduction, e.g., a greater portion of it was exterior surface.

These criteria are not absolute nor exclusive. They are applied in a subjective and relative manner by the analyst.

Geological data

Two rock types were identified in the lithic assemblage: 21 pieces are of chert and one is of flint. Tormore Cave occurs in a bedrock geology of Dartry Limestone Formation (Appendix 5). Chert is naturally abundant in this rock type and chert seams are visible within the cave and on the rock face outside.

One flake (22E0030:98) was made from flint. There are several places along the edges where differing material can be seen. This could be cortex, though the possibility of internal inclusions also arises. The remaining fifteen artefacts were recorded as tertiary, displaying no evidence of cortex or exterior surface. With rock types other than flint, the identification of cortex or its coverage is not as clear. Chert nodules may have an exterior surface or weathering surface rather than the chalky outer layer that is associated with flint.² Elsewhere, the exterior surface may simply appear as more weathered or abraded.

There is some colour variation across the collection. The majority of chert pieces (68%) are black; another group (18%) are black-grey to varying degrees, some with a banded appearance; and two pieces are grey, including the flint artefact. An unclassified chert piece (22E0030:45) is unusual in colour. It appears white or white-grey when wet. This could be the natural colour of the material; white chert is not common but it has been recorded.³ Alternatively, it may be the result of heat exposure (though it does not bear other signs of burning) or may represent a form of desiccation.⁴

² Driscoll *et al.* 2016a

³ Ó Ríordáin 1967: 70

⁴ Gijn 1990: 51, 52

¹ Ballin 2017; Woodman *et al.* 2006; Odell 2003; Inizan *et al.* 1999

Four chert pieces (22E0030:41, 86, 95, 109) and the flint piece (22E0030:98) are translucent at their edges, which indicates high quality raw material. All four chert pieces are recorded as being reduced. Translucent chert occurs in the Bricklieve Limestone Formation Upper located to the south of Tormore Cave.⁵

Condition

The assemblage is in mixed condition overall. Some pieces have a very fresh condition. All pieces have been affected by extensive edge-damage and abrasion, most likely due to the impact of disturbance related to the Civil War occupation of the cave. This later damage affects the interpretation of the prehistoric production and use of the pieces, as marks left by natural and/or unrelated causes can confuse or obscure those made by humans. Some of the edge-damage may be the product of prehistoric usage, but it is not possible to establish here.

Patination of some form is visible on 56% of the artefacts. On one piece (22E0030:48) this appears as a small fleck of iron stain. Calcium carbonate accretion is visible on eight pieces (50%), a deposit that naturally accumulates when material is exposed within caves. There is variation in the degree that this appears on pieces, with some heavily coated while others much less so. A difference is also seen in the colour. On one piece (22E0030:95) the accretion is brighter, giving the impression of a more recent formation. On two pieces (22E0030:96, 107) the accretion appears more faded and eroded.

Signs of abrasion were noted on nine artefacts. On one piece (22E0030:96) the accretion has been rubbed away on arrises and bulging parts of faces. This indicates that the artefact lay exposed on the cave floor for some time allowing the accretion to accumulate, it was then later moved or disturbed and the accretion was rubbed off. None of the lithics displayed rolling, exposure to heat or gloss.

One artefact, and possibly two others, were noted as having a defect. Flake (22E0030:41) is likely missing its proximal zone. The possible roughout for a butt-trimmed flake (22E0030:96) may be missing its distal tip. Flake (22E0030:109) may be missing part of its right distal lateral zone. Eight of the artefacts were recorded as broken, with two others possibly broken, accounting for 62.5% of the assemblage. Given the level of later disturbance in the cave, this is to be expected. In some cases, breakage may have occurred in antiquity, for

instance a convex scraper (22E0030:93) is broken in such a way as to fit a pattern of behaviour in prehistory.

Assemblage

Core debitage (22E0030:40, 50)

Fragments of two third-phase bipolar cores were present. The characteristic triangular cross section, alongside two faces displaying removals and a third face that appears sheared, are present. However, there is a lack of developed *écaillé* retouch at the ends. There is a possibility that these are pseudo-artefacts produced by more recent disturbance.

Roughout for a possible butt-trimmed flake (22E0030:96)

This is a very tentative identification, but it resembles descriptions of other examples of this type of object.⁶ The blank is irregular in shape. The form is under-developed, lacking the defining retouch extent. There appears to be a striking platform with associated dorsal scars and some retouch scars in the left proximal zone. These extend in a continuous line approximately 10mm in length.

Convex scraper fragment (22E0030:93)

This is broken lengthways along its central axis. On the broader end, two retouch scars are visible.

Flakes

Twelve pieces of product debitage were identified: three regular flakes (22E0030:41, 96, 109), four irregular flakes (22E0030:86, 88, 98, 107) and five flake fragments (22E0030:47 – distal fragment, 22E0030:48, 49, 95, 106 – indeterminate fragments).

Indeterminate (22E0030:91)

One piece was not assigned a class due to a lack of reduction markers and its fragmentary nature. It displays two radial breaks occurring at a right angle to each other. Another edge may display damage. There appears to be some crushing on one edge and a possible negative bulb on one face, which have led to it being interpreted as a knapping product.

Unclassified material (22E0030:43, 45, 54, 90, 94, 97)

Six pieces in the collection are unclassified and it is not clear whether these are archaeological or natural. Of

⁵ Driscoll *et al.* 2016a

⁶ Woodman 2015: 129-31; Woodman *et al.* 2006: 120-23

this group, 22E0030:45 and 22E0030:90 are most likely to be archaeological. The former appears similar to a core with several removals apparent, though there are no other signs of reduction. The latter has the appearance of a medial fragment, though the diamond cross section is unusual. The heavily abraded feel, compared to the rest of the collection, implies it has been subject to greater disturbance, possibly over a longer period of time. On 22E0030:54, there are no clear reduction markers. However, the absence of calcium carbonate accretion along the thin edge is notable. This could imply the edge has been utilised, thus removing or preventing accretion – though other explanations may apply.

Technology

Primary technology was recorded for eight of the sixteen pieces. The reduction technology for the remaining eight pieces was indeterminate. Conchoidal and non-conchoidal fracture patterns were observed. The interpretation of technological attributes was impeded by the nature of the geological material. The development of fracture characteristics on chert can be obscured by bedding planes and other geological traits of the rock. Bipolar reduction was identified on the two cores (22E0030:40, 50) and on a flake fragment (22E0030:49). Freehand reduction was identified on two irregular flakes (22E0030:98, 107), on an indeterminate fragment (22E0030:48), and possibly also on a regular flake (22E0030:41) and an irregular flake (22E0030:88).

Date

No date can be suggested for the Tormore Cave lithic assemblage as a whole due to the level of stratigraphic disturbance and the lack of diagnostic features. It is likely that more than one period of activity is present. Two artefacts suggest possible dates. One artefact (22E0030:96) is potentially diagnostic. If this is accepted as a butt-trimmed form, either as a roughout or an abandoned attempt, it can be dated to the Late Mesolithic.⁷ Convex scrapers occur across a range of periods. They are found occasionally in the Mesolithic and are commonly found in the Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age.⁸ They possibly even extend into historic periods.⁹ The Tormore Cave scraper (22E0030:93) has been broken along its long axis, which may confine its range. Deliberate breaking of scrapers in this fashion

has been identified in the Neolithic¹⁰ and confirmed in Bronze Age assemblages up to the Middle Bronze Age.¹¹

Discussion

The assemblage of sixteen prehistoric chert and flint lithics from Tormore Cave presents a challenge in analysis and interpretation, primarily because of anthropurbation – the result of disturbance caused by occupation of the cave during the War of Independence and Civil War. Levelling off Area 1, the construction of steps, mortaring the floor and the daily movements of many individuals all impacted on earlier prehistoric layers. Archaeological and non-archaeological lithics would have been subjected to prolonged trampling. With non-archaeological material, this can produce pseudo-artefacts.¹² On archaeological artefacts, effects can include breakage and the formation of edge-damage and pseudo-retouch.¹³ Radial breaks, which are associated with trampling, were identified on three pieces (22E0030:47, 48, 91). The edge-damage seen on the scraper fragment (22E0030:93) is also likely to be the result of trampling. It was formed subsequent to the break on the long axis and interrupts the larger retouch scar.

The convex scraper fragment (22E0030:93) and five flakes (22E0030:41, 95, 98, 107, 109) are identified with confidence due to the form of the retouch and the nature of the initial break on the scraper, and the feathered terminations, waves of percussion, dorsal scars and platforms on the flakes. The two third-phase bipolar cores (22E0030:40, 50) bear most of the characteristics associated with this typology, but the lack of developed crushing or *écaillé* retouch at the ends raises doubt. The fresh feel of these pieces could indicate recent production or a lack of disturbance. Bipolar material can be produced by accident or unintentionally.¹⁴ The development of such pseudo reduction to this extent is not thought likely, however, as it requires repeated blows along the same axis.

The identification of a potential roughout for a butt-trimmed form (22E0030:96) is very speculative. The overall form appears similar,¹⁵ though the thickness may be greater than other examples. A line of retouch was noted on the left proximal zone. An older deposition date – Late Mesolithic, for this object was inferred

⁷ Woodman 2015: 129-31

⁸ Woodman *et al.* 2006: 114, 115, 156-61

⁹ Harper 1973: 37-9

¹⁰ McDevitt 2010: 17; Warren *et al.* 2009: 12; Dillon 1997: 179

¹¹ Hogan 2021: 124, 125

¹² Drift 2010; Manninen 2007

¹³ Driscoll *et al.* 2016b; Weitzel *et al.* 2014; Eren *et al.* 2010; Peña and Witelson 2018; Asryan *et al.* 2014

¹⁴ Drift 2010

¹⁵ Woodman *et al.* 2006: 122

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from the degree of calcium carbonate accretion – an attempt to produce a butt-trimmed form that was more extensive, but also more faded, alongside the abandoned. This example may be much more abraded condition. This example may be

Table Ap6.1 Catalogue of lithics

Find number		Length (mm)	Width (mm)	Thickness (mm)	Weight (g)	Edge-damage	Patination	Abrasion	Broken	Fracture Pattern	Technology	Notes
Cores												
22E0030:40	Third-phase bipolar core	44	13	11	8.38	Y	Other	N	X	Non-conchoidal	Bipolar	Dubious identification. Hints of opposed crushing, but not conclusive. Sheared face has bedding plane evident.
22E0030:50	Third-phase bipolar core	39	12	8	4.89	Y	N	N	X	Non-conchoidal	Bipolar	Dubious identification. Very fresh – modern product?
Modified artefacts												
22E0030:96	Rough-out for a possible butt-trimmed flake	50	28	16	19.47	Y	Other	Y	X			Greyish-white staining on dorsal and ventral surfaces. Possible calcite accretion. Abraded through on arrises and bulging portions of faces. Possibly pre-form or attempted form. Lacks defining retouch, but overall form is similar to recorded examples. Some retouch on left proximal edge prior to deposition as some staining in scars. Scars on dorsal proximal zone have staining.
22E0030:93	Convex scraper fragment	26	9	7	1.91	Y	Other	Y	Y			Spots of white staining on three surfaces. Possible calcite accretion. Broad, rounded end displays two retouch scars; one is interrupted by later edge damage. Broken along central axis – known to occur in prehistory.
Flakes												
22E0030:41	Regular flake	11	31	3	1.08	Y	N	Y	X		?Freehand	Core-surface preparation. Platform likely missing. Straight edge looks like flat platform, but possible break. Finial opposite striking edge. Removal is perpendicular to dorsal scars.
22E0030:109	Regular flake	21	22	3	1.57	Y	Other	Y	?			White coating on ventral surface – possibly calcite accretion. Possibly broken at right distal lateral point.
22E0030:86	Irregular flake fragment	22	18	6	1.56	Y	Other	Y	Y			Some white staining on dorsal and ventral surfaces. Possible calcite accretion. Quality of chert varies considerably across piece. Right distal lateral portion is translucent. Left proximal lateral portion similar to exterior surface.
22E0030:88	Irregular flake	12	20	2	0.81	Y	Other	Y	X		?Freehand	White staining on ventral surface. Possible calcite accretion. Hinged termination. Plain platform. Slight lip on platform - hertzian fracture?

PREHISTORIC LITHICS

Find number		Length (mm)	Width (mm)	Thickness (mm)	Weight (g)	Edge-damage	Patination	Abrasion	Broken	Fracture Pattern	Technology	Notes
22E0030:98	Irregular flake (flint)	15	17	2	0.62	Y	N	N	X	Conchoidal	Freehand	Translucent around edges. Proximal zone displays three areas of differing fabric - cortex? Interior flaws. Different in character from all other material recovered.
22E0030:107	Irregular flake	24	18	3	1.52	Y	Other	Y	X	Conchoidal	Freehand	Greyish-white stain on dorsal surface. Possible calcite accretion. Platform partially collapsed. Parasitic flake scar at ventral proximal edge.
22E0030:47	Distal flake fragment	10	11	3	0.42	Y	N	Y	Y			Scar on dorsal surface abraded. Two radial breaks at right angle - very fresh. Indication of hinged termination.
22E0030:48	Flake fragment	11	10	2	0.26	Y	Iron-stain	N	Y	Conchoidal	Freehand	Hinged termination. Remnant of platform. Bending and radial break on right lateral.
22E0030:49	Flake fragment	16	16	3	1.00	Y	N	N	Y	Non-conchoidal	Bipolar	Right lateral appears broken off. Two small parallel dorsal scars. Large plain platform.
22E0030:95	Flake fragment	20	24	4	1.68	Y	Other	N	Y			White staining on ventral surface. Possible calcite accretion.
22E0030:106	Flake fragment	10	16	2	0.32	Y	N	Y	Y			Calcite crystal present on one edge.
22E0030:91	Indeterminate fragment	18	12	5	1.58	Y	N	N	Y			Two radial breaks at right angle.
Unclassified material												
22E0030:43	Unclassified piece	26	20	7	5.10	Y	N	N				Appears to have waves of percussion - could be result of natural bipolar reduction. Could be proximal fragment - break across medial zone. Very fresh edges.
22E0030:45	Unclassified piece	26	18	11	5.59	Y		Y	N			Possibly burnt? White - appears grey when wet. Reminiscent of a core with several removals. No obvious striking platform or indications of strikes. Possible ventral surface.
22E0030:54	Unclassified piece	38	11	4	1.59	Y	Other	Y	Y			White stain on dorsal surface - possibly calcite accretion. No strong indications of reduction. Possible dorsal scar. Clean edge on thin lateral seems to interrupt stain - utilised?
22E0030:90	Unclassified piece	13	25	9	3.82	Y	Other	Y	Y			White staining on several faces - possibly calcite accretion. Very heavily abraded compared to rest of collection. Medial fragment? Diamond cross-section.
22E0030:94	Unclassified piece	29	14	7	4.53	Y	N	N	N			Bears some resemblance to third-phase bipolar core. Likely to be natural - condition very fresh
22E0030:97	Unclassified piece	29	14	8	4.02	N	N	N	N			Appears very like a third-phase bipolar core. Indications of removal and sheared face.

Appendix 7

Pottery and glass

Clare McCutcheon

A total of 72 pottery sherds, many of them very small chips and fragments, were recovered during excavations. Following identification and some reassembly, this was reduced to 54 sherds that derived from three distinct vessels – two shallow glazed red earthenware dishes and a black-glazed ware jar or crock. Sherds from individual vessels were scattered through several different archaeological layers indicating a level of disturbance, and many were found lying on the surface of the cave floor. Nine shards of a green glass wine bottle were also retrieved. All four vessels date broadly to the 19th century, pre-dating the 1920s occupation by many decades. The sherds were identified visually and recorded, detailing the identification, weight and type of sherd (i.e., body, base, chip).

Glazed red earthenware dish

The rim and base of a glazed red earthenware dish is represented by seven sherds and nine chips. Glazed red earthenware was the more commonly used dairy and kitchen ware rather than the black-glazed wares. The fabric is generally sandy earthenware, usually oxidised buff to light orange through to brown. The clear lead glaze takes its colour from the fabric with variations due to firing conditions.¹ These are also known as brownwares and were made widely in England and Ireland in the later 17th and 18th centuries.² A typical kiln was excavated at Tuam, County Galway with milk pans and dishes comprising a majority of the vessels.³

Slip-decorated glazed red earthenware dish

The rim and base of a slip-decorated glazed red earthenware dish is represented by fourteen sherds and eleven chips. Glazed red earthenware dishes were sometimes decorated by the addition of white slip or thin clay under the clear lead glaze. This resulted in yellow decorations on the rich brown background. While only some of the Tormore Cave sherds have traces of slip under the glaze, all fragments are clearly

from the same vessel. There appears to be slip around the rim, possibly in a continuous wavy pattern with occasional trails down to the centre of the dish.

Black-glazed red earthenware jar

The rim and base of a black-glazed red earthenware jar is represented by ten sherds and five chips. Black-glazed wares, the so-called Buckley wares, are commonly found in Dublin and the east coast, originating from Lancashire and north Wales. Both black-glazed and glazed red earthenwares are large vessels used for the dairy, kitchen and toilet. Black glazing results from the addition of iron to lead glaze on the red earthenware fabrics. The fabric is often highly fired to a near stoneware purple, although other varieties have a white marbled appearance. The fabric of the black-glazed wares made in Ireland appears to be a less highly fired red earthenware.⁴

The interior of the Tormore Cave jar has been completely glazed. The accretion on the interior of many sherds is likely calcium carbonate, which naturally accumulates on materials that are exposed in a cave for any length of time. When found only on one surface, this is the surface that was exposed while the other surface without accretions would have been embedded in sediment and thus protected. The exterior of this jar, in contrast to the interior, is glazed to about two-thirds down the wall of the pot. The lower third and base of the jar are free of glaze as this was unnecessary to the functioning of the jar.

Green glass wine bottle

The base of a green glass wine bottle is represented by seven shards and two chips. As the base does not have mould marks, it would appear to date to pre-1821 when Ricketts invented the moulded glass bottle in Bristol. The form of the blown green glass bottle changed over the years from the early 17th century onion shape, similar to a decanter, to the straight sided bottle of today. The capacity of most of these bottles was the c. 0.75l we are familiar with, the measure that a standard

¹ Jennings 1981: 157

² Dunlevy 1988: 24-5

³ Carey and Meenan 2004

⁴ Meenan 1997: 349

glass blower could make. While the bottle probably dates from the early 19th century, there is no reason why it could not have survived to a much later date and still be in use.

Date

The glazed red earthenware dish and slip-decorated glazed red earthenware dish were manufactured widely across Ireland. In terms of proximity to Tormore Cave, this type of 'coarse pottery is made near Dromahaire and Leitrim, in quantities merely sufficient to supply the domestic demand', that is, it was not produced in large enough quantities for exportation.⁵ The production of lead-glazed coarse earthenware vessels continued throughout the 19th century, with potters established in several towns across the country.⁶

Promoters of an Irish-based fine earthenware industry, however, usually denigrated the manufacture of coarse earthenwares, even though these vessels formed part of a long-standing and important industry.⁷ The pottery found at Tormore Cave was probably still in use in the local area during the early 1920s, though long out of production. The dishes, jar and bottle might simply have been to hand in one of the local safe houses that fed the men in hiding. It is curious that large portions of just three vessels were recovered, implying that the cave had not been used for hideout occupation prior to the 1920s, and that just a few items were left behind when the men departed in October 1922. The concept of disposing of chipped or cracked items is a late 20th century phenomenon; prior to this, items were rarely discarded unless no other function could be found for them.

⁵ Lewis 1837: 255

⁶ Dunlevy 1988; Westropp 1913; Westropp 1935

⁷ Orser 2006: 74

Appendix 8

Mammal bones

Fiona Beglane

An assemblage of 789 fragments of bones and teeth were recovered during the 2022 archaeological excavations in Tormore Cave. This yielded a number of identified specimens present (NISP) of 252 mammal elements, representing cattle, sheep and goat, horse, hare and rabbit. Four of these have been radiocarbon dated, with results ranging from the early medieval period (7th or 8th century AD) through to the 20th century. Three bird and two fish bones were also retrieved and are discussed in Appendix 9; the interpretation of these has also been integrated into the discussion here.

Methodology

Mammalian faunal remains were identified using comparative collections and by reference to Hillson (1992) and Schmid (1972), amongst others. Remains were quantified in as much detail as possible. Ribs and vertebrae, apart from the axis and atlas, were not identified to species, however; along with other fragments, these were quantified as number of fragments in categories of large mammal (LM), medium mammal (MM), small mammal (SM) and very small mammal (VSM). In an Irish context these can be equated to animals in the general size ranges of cattle, sheep, cat and mouse respectively. The number of identified specimens (NISP) was calculated for each species based on these identifications. The minimum number of individuals (MNI) for sheep/goat and for rabbit/lagomorph/SM was calculated taking into account the side of the body but not states of fusion, sizes of bones and toothwear. In some cases, however, individual animals could be identified, and where this was the case it has been noted. Sheep and goat bones were separated where possible.¹ Sexing was carried out using the shape of the pelvis of cattle.²

Fusion data and toothwear was based on established criteria.³ Measurements were carried out to an accuracy

of 0.1mm.⁴ Estimated withers heights were calculated using established criteria.⁵

Evidence for chopping, cutting and sawing were recorded, as was gnawing by canids and rodents. Burnt material was classified as singed for bone with only partial blackening; burnt for blackened bones; or calcined for those bones that were predominantly white/blue-grey in colour. Where pathologies, developmental defects and non-metric traits were identified on bones, these were examined and recorded in further detail.

Throughout the text the common names for species have been used. A translation of common to taxonomic names is shown in Table Ap8.1.⁶

Table Ap8.1 Translation of taxonomic to common names.

Common Name	Taxonomic name
Cattle	<i>Bos sp.</i>
Sheep/Goat	<i>Ovis sp./Capra sp.</i>
Horse	<i>Equus sp.</i>
Hare/Rabbit/ Lagomorph	<i>Lepus timidus/Oryctolagus cuniculus/Lagomorpha</i>
Bird	Aves
Fish	Pisces

Results by species

A total number of fragments (TNF) of 789 bones, bone fragments and teeth were recovered during archaeological excavations in Tormore Cave. Of this total, the number of identified specimens present (NISP) included 252 mammal bones, three bird bones and two fish bones. No human bones were recovered. The mammalian species represented were horse, cattle, sheep, goat, hare and rabbit (Tables Ap8.2 and Ap8.3). Sheep/goat bones were most common (63.1% of the identifiable elements) and most if not all of the medium-sized mammal bones are also likely to

¹ Using Boessneck 1969, Kratochvil 1969, Payne 1969, and Payne 1985, amongst others.

² McCormick 1992

³ For fusion see Silver 1963 and Reitz and Wing 1999, 76. For toothwear in cattle see Grant 1982 and Higham 1967 after Silver 1963. For toothwear in sheep see Payne 1973 and 1987.

⁴ von den Driesch 1976; Boessneck 1969; Payne and Bull 1988, fig. 1

⁵ Tiechert for original (ur) and early (früh) or unimproved sheep and Schramm for goat, both cited by von den Driesch and Boessneck 1974.

⁶ Schmid (1972) and other sources

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be sheep/goat. Rabbit was the next most common species (26.6%), with hare only yielding one bone. This suggests that the vast majority of the lagomorph and small mammal elements are also likely to be rabbit. Almost all the animal bones came from the surface of the cave floor and were not buried in sediment. The bones were generally in very good condition, showing few signs of damage or surface degradation. Some bones had deposits of calcite adhering to them, which is common in material recovered from caves. Calcite can build up relatively quickly and cannot be taken as a sign of antiquity.

Radiocarbon dating has revealed that the animal bones relate to several different periods of activity in the cave. Two bones date to the early medieval period. A butchered large mammal rib, probably cattle, dates to the 7th or 8th century AD and a horse metapodial or 'cannon bone' dates to the 10th or 11th century AD. Two butchered sheep or goat bones relate to activities that took place sometime between 1660 and 1950. A small number of bones from relatively secure archaeological contexts, including cod and chicken (Appendix 9), appear to relate to 1920s usage of the cave as a dugout.

Horse

One horse bone was found on the cave floor in Grid 12-13m. This was a partial metapodial ('cannon bone') from the foot. It was noticeably darker in colour than

the majority of the other bones recovered, suggesting that it may formerly have been buried in soil. It was radiocarbon dated to 1071±24 BP, which calibrates to AD 895–1024. There were no signs of butchery or human modifications, and no signs of animal gnawing.

Cattle

Eleven cattle bones were identified in the assemblage and represent at least two individuals. Foetal calf bones came from C.7, C.13 and C.14, concentrated in Grids 4-8m. The size of the remains suggests a single individual aged between 185 and 255 days gestation, which compares to an average of 283 days total gestation.⁷ This indicates that the calf was likely to have been between one and three months premature. There was no evidence of butchery on any of these bones.

A second group of cattle bones occurred on the cave floor in Grid 12-13m (C.7). Three loose maxillary teeth were from a single maxilla, and were recorded as a group, with the state of eruption indicating an older juvenile. There was also a fragment of unerupted molar or premolar tooth, again indicating a juvenile and potentially from the same individual. A left pelvis included the acetabulum and most of the ilium. This was male by form⁸ and had a round foramen present at the point of fusion of the pubis and the ilium at the acetabulum, which was recorded as a non-metric trait. These are differences from the normal development

Table Ap8.2 Summary of fragments by archaeological context.

Context	Cattle	Sheep/Goat	Horse	Lagomorph	Hare	Rabbit	Large mammal	Medium mammal	Small mammal	Very small mammal	Indeterminate size	Bird	Fish	Total
C.3		1				1		1	1		1			5
C.7	7	156	1	2	1	40	6	297	3		192	1		706
C.10				2		26			17	1				46
C.13	1			3				1	1		2	1	1	10
C.14	3	2		5				2			5	1	1	19
C.17				1			1	1						3
Total	11	159	1	13	1	67	7	302	22	1	200	3	2	789
%	4.4	63.1	0.4	5.2	0.4	26.6								

⁷ Irish Cattle Breeders Federation 2020

⁸ Grigson 1982

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Table Ap8.3 Number of identified specimens present (NISP) and total number of fragments (TNF).

Element	Cattle	Sheep/Goat	Horse	Lagomorph	Hare	Rabbit	Large mammal	Medium mammal	Small mammal	Very small mammal	Indeterminate size
Horn		1									
Skull	2	10		2		13	1	49			18
Mandible		16		2		1		2	1		
Loose mandibular tooth	1	12		1							
Loose tooth	1	4		4		7					
Loose maxillary tooth		17									
Atlas VC1		1									
Axis VC2		2									
Scapula		7				2		3			
Humerus		5				2		1			
Radius		6			1	2					
Ulna		2				2					
Metacarpal		4				2					
Pelvis	1	11		1		2			1		
Femur	1	9		1		1					1
Patella											
Tibia		6		2		2					
Fibula						1					
Calcaneus		3				2					
Astragalus	1	1				1					
Metatarsal	2	9				7					
Carpal/tarsal/ sesamoid	2	6						5	1		
Metapodial		4	1								
Phalanx 1		7				8					
Phalanx 2		6				5					
Phalanx 3		7				4					
Rib							5	76	10		
Vertebra						3		56	4		2
Long bone								40		1	
Flat bone							1				
Petrous		3						3			
Sternum								1			
Unidentified								66	5		179
Total	11	159	1	13	1	67	7	302	22	1	200
Total NISP %	4.4	63.1	0.4	5.2	0.4	26.6					

of the skeleton, with genetic or developmental causes, but which generally have little or no adverse effect on the well-being of the animal. This fused pelvis came from an individual aged over ten months, and so could potentially have come from the same individual as the teeth. The cattle bones are a little darker in colour than most of the sheep/goat remains, suggesting that they may formerly have been buried in soil.

Large mammal

Seven large mammal bones were recovered. These could not be identified to species but are likely to be from horse or cattle. Four rib fragments lay on the cave floor in Grid 10-11m, while a rib fragment with butchery marks came from Grid 12-13m, and a cranial fragment was found on the surface of the cave floor in Grid 13-14m. One of these rib fragments was radiocarbon dated to 1284±23 BP (UBA-48127), which calibrates to AD 670-774. This had at least three deep chopmarks and two lighter chopmarks, all related to dismemberment and crude butchery. Considering the presence of identifiable cattle bones in Grid 12-13m, and that this rib fragment and the cattle fragments were generally darker in colour than, for example, the sheep/goat bones, it suggests that at one point they may have been buried. It is also likely that the early medieval butchered rib is from cattle.

A calcined unidentified fragment of a large mammal flat bone came from C.17 in the Cubby. Two spots of green staining suggest it was in contact with a copper alloy object.

Sheep/Goat and medium mammal

A total of 159 sheep and goat bones were recovered during excavations and, of these, 156 lay exposed on the cave floor (C.7) and are discussed in detail below. At least five individuals are represented in the assemblage.

Lagomorph/Hare/Rabbit and small mammal

The assemblage included one hare bone (a radius) and 67 rabbit elements. An additional thirteen lagomorph elements could not be classified to species and mainly comprised loose teeth and small skull and mandible fragments. Twenty-two small mammal fragments, mainly ribs and vertebrae, are also likely to have been rabbit. Based on the pelvis bones, at least two rabbits were present in the overall assemblage, with a further very young individual also represented, giving a total of at least three rabbits, as well as one hare.

A total of 40 rabbit elements as well as two lagomorph and three small mammal elements were found on the surface. All but five were from a single cluster in Grid 7-8m, in the gaps between paving slabs. A further 26 rabbit elements came from a single concentration of bones under one of these paving slabs, while two lagomorph loose teeth and a small mammal mandible fragment were found under other paving stones within that grid. Together, all of these appear to be the remains of a single individual, with almost all body parts represented. No butchery marks were observed, and any broken bones did not appear to have been deliberately broken. One possibility is that these represent the remains of an individual that died from natural causes and the skeleton was later partly covered by the paving slabs. Perhaps more likely is that the rabbit was trapped or shot, but was never processed for food, and again, the skeleton was later partly covered by the paving slabs. The primary butchery process for rabbits and hares usually involves skinning the animal using a knife; however, this is not likely to leave marks on the bones. This is because the head and feet, where the skin is close to the bone, are left attached to the skin and can easily be separated from the rest of the carcass using a twisting motion. These have no food utility value and, unless the pelt is being kept for processing, will be disposed of immediately, along with the intestines. The main carcass can then be spit roasted, which would be expected to leave charring marks on the limb bones. It can also be dismembered using a knife or a twisting motion and then the portions cooked, for example, by boiling in a stew. Overall, therefore, the finding of a whole carcass, including head and foot elements, indicates that the rabbit was never dismembered to be processed for food.

Rodents and very small mammals

Only one bone was from a very small mammal. This was a long bone fragment from C.10 in Grid 7-8m. Three bone fragments, however, showed signs of rodent gnawing, indicating the presence of rodents in the cave.

Results by context

Five archaeological contexts produced animal bones: C.3, C.10, C.13, C.14 and C.17. The largest quantity of bones, however, lay exposed on the cave floor (C.7).

C.3 Five identified elements came from C.3, which was a disturbed mound of sediment that sloped from the base

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Table Ap8.4 Mammalian number of identified specimens present (NISP) from C.3.

Element	Sheep/ Goat	Rabbit	Medium mammal	Small mammal	Indeterminate
Loose tooth	1				
Pelvis		1			
Rib				1	
Vertebra					1
Petrous			1		
Total	1	1	1	1	1
Total %	50.0	50.0			

Table Ap8.5 Mammalian number of identified specimens present (NISP) from C.10.

Element	Lagomorph	Rabbit	Small mammal	Very small mammal
Mandible			1	
Loose tooth	2			
Scapula		2		
Radius		2		
Metacarpal		1		
Tibia		2		
Calcaneus		2		
Astragalus		1		
Metatarsal		7		
Carpal/tarsal/sesamoid			1	
Phalanx 1		5		
Phalanx 2		3		
Phalanx 3		1		
Rib			7	
Vertebra			3	
Long bone				1
Unidentified			5	
Total	2	26	17	1
Total %	7.1	92.9		

of the entrance boulder to the cave floor immediately inside the entrance (Table Ap8.4).

C.10 was a deposit overlying the mortared floor (C.15) and sealed by flagstones (C.5). It contained 46 bone fragments, most of which were found in a concentration under one of the flagstones. Almost all the bones seem to derive from a single individual rabbit, distributed between C.10 and the surface C.7 (Table Ap8.5).

C.13 was the uppermost deposit in the Cubby and contained a range of artefacts and burnt material. Notably, this deposit was very diverse and included a foetal cattle femur – probably from the same individual as found in C.14 and C.7, two bones from a rabbit kitten or hare leveret, a bird bone that was probably from a chicken, and a fish bone (Table Ap8.6). While some of the other bones could be natural accumulations, the fish bones indicate human or predator/scavenger activity and the bird bone was burnt, clearly indicating human activity (see Appendix 9).

Table Ap8.6 Mammalian number of identified specimens present (NISP) for C.13.

Element	Cattle	Lagomorph	Medium mammal	Small mammal	Indeterminate
Pelvis				1	
Femur	1	1			
Tibia		2			
Rib			1		
Unidentified					2
Total	1	3	1	1	2
Total %	25.0	75.0			

C.14 was the western extension of C.10 but was not sealed by the paving slabs (C.5). It was equivalent to C.13 within the Cubby, and the faunal remains were very similar. C.14 contained foetal cattle remains, sheep/goat and lagomorph bones, as well as one probable-chicken bone and one fish bone (Table Ap8.7).

C.17 underlay C.13 in the Cubby and contained only three fragments of bone, but notably these included one calcined fragment of a large mammal flat bone, which was partly stained with a green colour that may indicate contact with copper (Table Ap8.8). Other burnt material was also recovered from this context.

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Table Ap8.7 Mammalian number of identified specimens present (NISP) for C.14.

Element	Cattle	Sheep/Goat	Lagomorph	Medium mammal	Indeterminate
Skull	1		2		
Mandible			1		
Loose mand. tooth	1				
Loose tooth		1	1		
Radius		1			
Pelvis			1		
Metatarsal	1				
Rib				2	
Vertebra					1
Unidentified					4
Total	3	2	5	2	5
Total %	30.0	20.0	50.0		

Table Ap8.8 Mammalian number of identified specimens present (NISP) for C.17.

Element	Lagomorph	Large mammal	Medium mammal
Mandible	1		
Rib			1
Flat bone		1 (calcined)	
Total	1	1	1
Total %	100.0		

C.7 produced the vast majority of the faunal remains – all surface finds recovered lying on the cave floor. They provide significant evidence for human activity in the cave, probably mainly in the recent past. This context contained the remains of at least five sheep/goat as well as foetal cattle remains that were also distributed through C.13 and C.14. There were also the remains of one essentially whole rabbit, which was also distributed in C.10, plus some individual rabbit/lagomorph elements and a single horse bone (Table Ap8.9).

Over 75% of the bones recovered from C.7 were sheep and goat. Based on mandible data, at least five individuals are represented in the assemblage. Survival of the different skeletal elements was examined by relating the quantity of a particular bone to the minimum number of individuals (MNI). Theoretically, it should be possible to recover all parts of an animal that was butchered on a site. Some bones, however, may be used in craftworking; joints of meat may be

Table Ap8.9 Mammalian number of identified specimens present (NISP) from C.7.

Element	Cattle	Sheep/Goat	Horse	Lagomorph	Hare	Rabbit	Large mammal	Medium mammal	Small mammal	Indeterminate
Horn/Antler		1								
Skull	1	10				13	1	49		18
Mandible		16				1		2		
Loose mand. tooth		12		1						
Loose tooth	1	2		1		7				
Loose max tooth		17								
Atlas VC1		1								
Axis VC2		2								
Scapula		7						3		
Humerus		5				2		1		
Radius		5			1					
Ulna		2				2				
Metacarpal		4				1				
Pelvis	1	11				1				
Femur		9				1				1
Patella										
Tibia		6								
Fibula						1				
Calcaneus		3								
Astragalus	1	1								
Metatarsal	1	9								
Carpal/tarsal/sesamoid	2	6						5		
Metapodial		4	1							
Phalanx 1		7				3				
Phalanx 2		6				2				
Phalanx 3		7				3				
Rib							5	72	2	
Vertebra						3		56	1	
Long bone								40		
Flat bone										
Petrous		3						2		
Sternum								1		
Unidentified								66	173	
Total	7	156	1	2	1	40	6	297	3	192
Total %	3.4	75.4	0.5	1.0	0.5	19.3				

brought to or removed from a site; soil conditions may lead to differential levels of preservation; and butchery techniques and animal gnawing may result in fragmentation or removal of some bones.⁹ At Tormore,

⁹ Davis 1987: 27-8

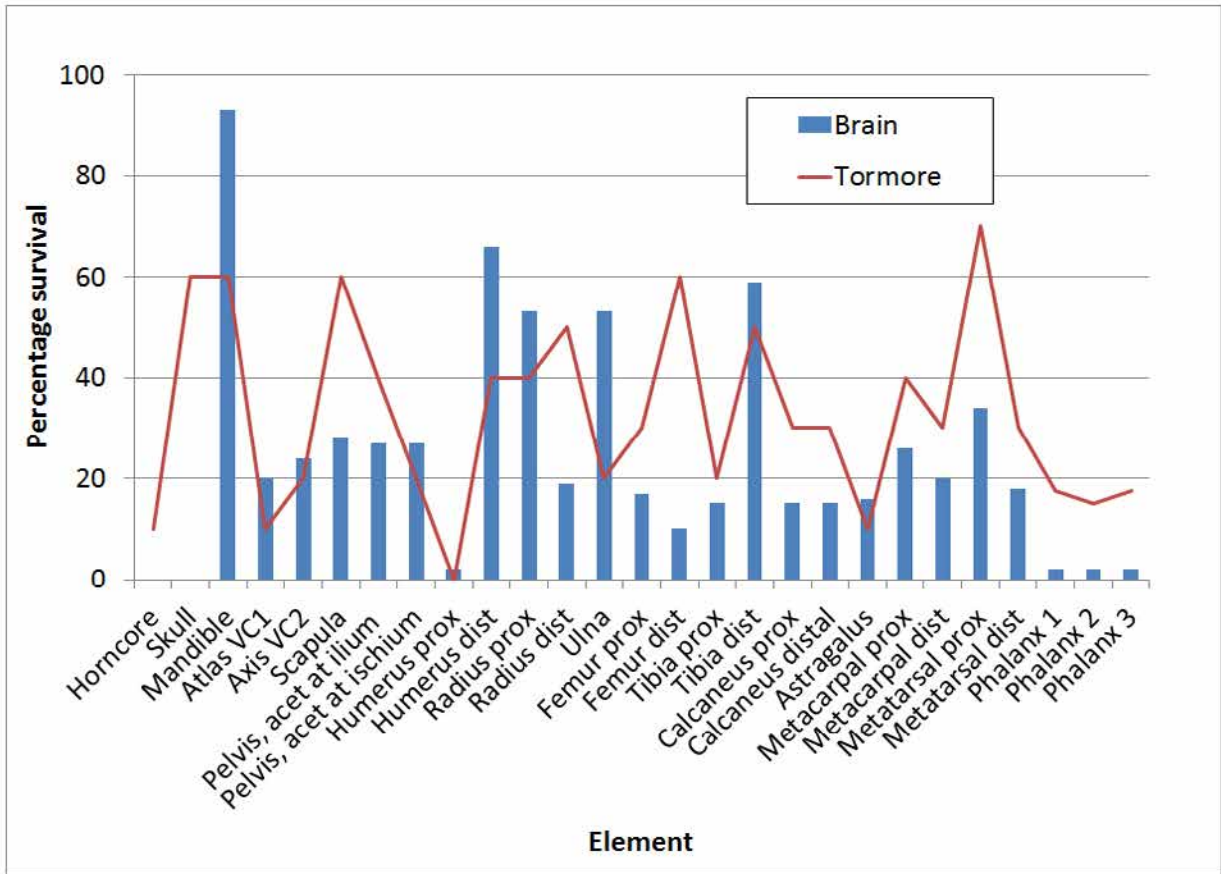


Figure Ap8.1 Survival of sheep/goat elements from C.7 in Tormore Cave in comparison to goat remains at a waste disposal area in a Khoikhoi village in Namibia.

an added issue is that the cave was not fully excavated. Brain compared proportions of different goat bones from waste disposal areas around a Khoikhoi village in Namibia.¹⁰ He found that the more robust bones survived best and would, in time, form part of the archaeological assemblage. By comparing the sheep bones from Tormore Cave with Brain's figures, no significant discrepancies are evident. Figure Ap8.1 demonstrates that almost all body parts of sheep/goat are represented in the cave assemblage. Preservation levels are generally high, and are particularly high for the scapula, femur and foot bones. Good levels of preservation are to be expected in a protected environment such as a limestone cave, and in this case there is no evidence of scavenging by carnivores. The results suggest that the remains in the cave were essentially entire carcasses with all body parts originally present. There is no indication that parts

of sheep/goat carcasses, such as joints of meat, were removed from the cave.

Generally, it is very difficult to differentiate between sheep and goat. At Tormore Cave, it was possible to distinguish 23 sheep bones and seven goat and probable-goat bones from C.7, while the remaining 126 bones could be either sheep or goat. This gives 77% sheep and 23% goat for those elements that could be determined to species (Table Ap8.10). Six of the seven goat bones seem to derive from a single adult individual. These were recovered from Grid 14-15m and consisted of four articulating elements from the right front limb as well as a left scapula and tibia. A small juvenile goat horncore also came from the same grid, but must have been from a different individual. Grid 14-15m also yielded the partial skulls of two hornless sheep – one juvenile and one older individual. This indicates that of the minimum number of five sheep/goats, at least two were goats (one adult and one juvenile) and at least two were sheep (one adult and one juvenile).

¹⁰ Brain 1967

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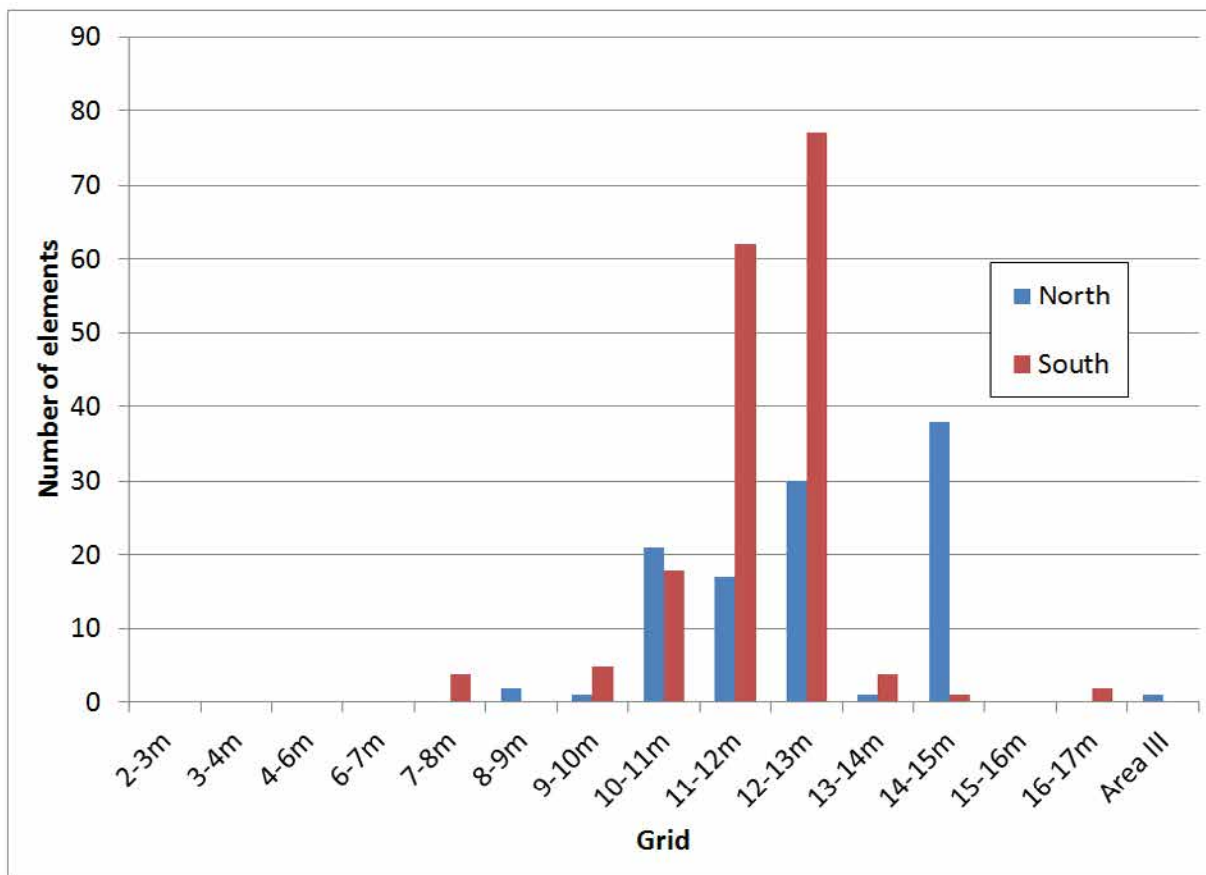


Figure Ap8.2 Distribution of sheep, goat and medium-sized ribs and vertebrae from C.7.

Table Ap8.10 Differentiation of sheep and goat for C.7.

Number			Percentage		
Sheep	Goat	Sheep/goat	Sheep	Goat	Sheep/goat
23	7	126	14.7	4.5	80.8

The sheep/goat bones from C.7 were not evenly distributed across the cave floor (Figure Ap8.2). Clusters of these, and of medium mammal ribs and vertebrae, which, given the absence of other species of similar size, are likely to be sheep/goat, occurred in Grids 10-13m (Area 2), particularly concentrated along the south side of the cave passage. Many of the remains here appear to have been deposited in an articulated or semi-articulated state, although many also had butchery marks indicating skinning, dismemberment and filleting. All the butchered sheep/goat bones in the assemblage were found between 10m and 13m. The medium mammal bones with butchery all came from between 8m and 13m. A further cluster of sheep/goat bones in Grid 14-15m has already been identified above as containing all of the goat remains from the site, however one sheep skull and one sheep scapula

were also present in this grid, as well as sheep/goat fragments that could not be identified to species.

Bone fusion data indicates that 29% of the sheep/goats were adults (over 42 months), with 67% aged less than three years old at the time of death. Similarly, six mandibles were from individuals aged less than three years at the time of death, with one old animal aged six to eight years (Figure Ap8.3 and Table Ap8.11). On a settlement site, these results would be typical of animals being killed for prime meat, with a smaller breeding stock retained into maturity and then slaughtered as they aged. In the case of Tormore Cave, however, the partially articulated nature of some of the bones, and the unusual location, complicate the interpretation.

Table Ap8.11 Sheep/goat mandible ageing data.

Age				
<1yr	1-2 yrs	6mth-2yrs	2-3yrs	6-8yrs
1	2	1	2	1

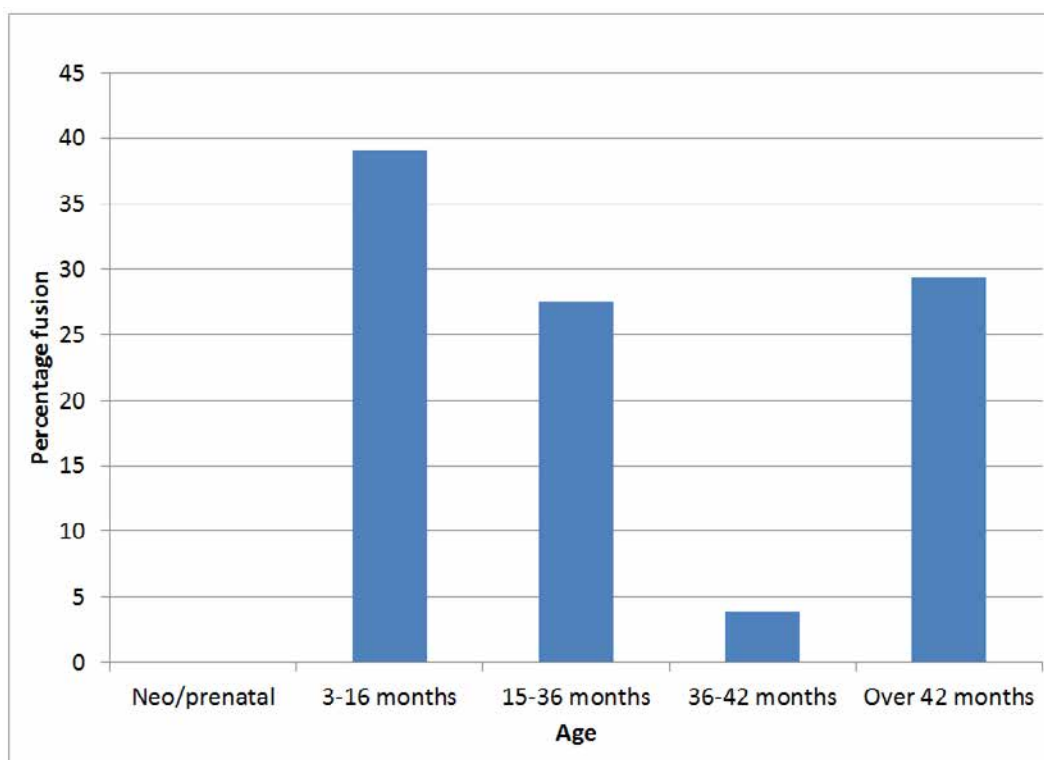


Figure Ap8.3 Sheep/goat age at death based on fusion data for C.7.

Two adult bones were suitable for calculating withers heights – one was sheep/goat and the other was a goat. These yielded withers heights of 55.8cm and 63.7cm respectively, both of which are within the range for post-medieval and modern individuals.

One out of four (25%) of the sheep/goat metacarpals had a lesion on the medial surface of the proximal articular surface. This is a form of osteochondrosis, caused by growth defects, herniation, or rupturing of the cartilage at the articular surface of the bone. There are a number of forms, including osteochondritis dissecans.¹¹ Both Thomas and Johannsen (2011) and O'Connor (2008) have cautioned that in archaeological specimens it is not possible to differentiate between the forms, therefore preferring to use the more general term 'osteochondrosis'. One distal sheep humerus from Grid 11-12m had a distinctive spiral fracture of the midshaft, while another from the same grid, seemingly a matching pair with the first, had a fracture that was part way between a transverse and spiral fracture. Spiral fractures are associated with a twisting motion on fresh bone.¹² They can happen pre-mortem, peri-mortem or post-mortem. These fractures can be the

result of a fall, of deliberate torsion, trampling of bone on a surface, or large carnivore activity.¹³ At Tormore Cave it is difficult to determine the cause, but one possibility is that a sheep fell in this mountainous environment, breaking one or both of its front legs, and it was then slaughtered, potentially for meat, and the carcass disposed of in the cave.

Butchered bones from C.7

A total of 37 bones from C.7 had evidence of butchery in the form of chopping or cutting: 30 medium-sized mammal bones (mainly ribs and vertebrae), six sheep/goat bones and one large mammal rib (Table Ap8.12). The marks indicate a number of butchery processes including skinning, dismemberment, and filleting of meat from the bone. All butchered bones were found lying on the cave floor. All of the butchered sheep/goat bones were found between Grids 10-13m, while butchered medium-sized mammal bones were more widely dispersed and found scattered between Grids 8-13m.

A sheep astragalus (ID.98) and a sheep/goat metatarsal (ID.166) both displayed multiple cutmarks associated

¹¹ Rajkovača 2009

¹² Wieberg and Wescott 2008

¹³ Haynes 1983; Wieberg and Wescott 2008

with dismemberment to remove the hind foot. After cutting the throat of an animal and bleeding it out, this is usually the first stage in the process of skinning and dismembering an animal. This astragalus, along with a tibia and a scapho-cuboid, was part of a group of three formerly articulated elements. This indicates that this part of the lower limb was disposed of while still fleshed, or at least with connective tissues still attached. The metatarsal may have been part of the same group, but this could not be definitely confirmed due to damage on the bone. The astragalus was radiocarbon dated to 177 ± 23 BP, which calibrates to AD 1660–1950. A medium mammal long bone fragment (ID.187), probably also sheep or goat, was found on the surface of the cave floor in Grid 10–11m quite close to the sheep astragalus. This bone also displayed a chopmark across the line of the shaft. It was radiocarbon dated to 117 ± 23 BP, which calibrates to AD 1683–1937. These two dated bones plausibly relate to the same period of activity, but they may also relate to two different events separated by over two centuries. Nevertheless, the quantity of sheep/goat bones in this area, the evidence that they were found on the surface, are relatively unbroken, and in many cases seemed to have been articulated, suggest that these are relatively recent, and probably post-date intensive use of the cave in the early 1920s. Two other medium mammal long bones (ID.150, 213) also had chops across the line of the shaft, while another (ID.303) had a series of cut marks and a possible chop-through across the shaft. These sorts of chop and cut marks can be caused during removal of the meat from the bone, during portioning of the meat, and, if chopped through, as part of dismemberment of the carcass.

Three fragmentary sheep/goat mandibles (ID.111, 188, 212) all had cut marks on their lateral surfaces, which can be caused during skinning or during removal of cheek meat. One of the mandibles (ID.212) also had a cut on the mesial surface, which can be created while accessing the tongue meat. As all of these were left mandibles, it indicates that at least three sheep/goats were subject to butchery.

Two right sheep/goat scapulae had been subject to butchery, with one (ID.211) chopped at the shoulder articulation as part of the dismemberment process while the other (ID.77) had a cut mark consistent with filleting to remove meat. A sheep humerus (ID.202) had a cut mark at the distal 'elbow' end that was consistent with dismemberment. A further fragment of a medium mammal scapula (ID.248) had possibly been chopped through as part of dismemberment of the carcass. A sheep/goat pelvis (ID.302) had a slight chop on the

ilium that may be due to dismemberment or may be an incidental mark where the cleaver accidentally hit the bone, while a fragment of medium mammal bone (ID.155), possibly pelvis, had been chopped.

Thirteen pieces of medium-sized mammal rib bone fragments showed evidence for chop or cut marks. Where these are relatively light, and particularly where they are on the medial (inner) surface, they are usually associated with removing meat from the bone. Those on the lateral (outer) surface can be associated with skinning or with meat removal.

Seven medium mammal vertebrae (ID.86, 87, 88, 243, 244, 304, 305) and one medium mammal sternal fragment (ID.306) had butchery marks. Three of the vertebrae (ID.88, 304, 305) and the sternal fragment had been chopped through to form two 'sides' of meat. Usually when this is carried out, the carcass is hung by the hind legs and split from the hind quarters towards the head. In this case, however, one of the vertebrae (ID.304) has been chopped from the cranial end, which suggests that the siding took place on a partly dismembered carcass. Two vertebrae (ID.86, 87) had been chopped through on one side of the centrum, removing the transverse processes, while two further vertebrae (ID.243, 244) had been chopped from other directions, again as part of a dismemberment process.

One large mammal rib fragment (ID.246) from Grid 12–13m had multiple deep chop marks angled along the edge of the rib. These were more substantial than a filleting process and suggest crude dismemberment. This rib fragment was radiocarbon dated to 1284 ± 23 BP, which calibrates to AD 670–774.

Discussion

The mammal bone assemblage from Tormore Cave has a number of unusual features, and its association with political events of the 1920s provides a backdrop for their interpretation. The faunal assemblage is dominated by the remains of sheep/goat and of rabbit; in the case of sheep/goat remains, there is considerable evidence that these were introduced to the cave by humans.

With the exception of a few fragments, sheep/goat bones were concentrated in Area 2, lying on the surface of the cave floor between Grids 10–13m, and in Grid 14–15m. The sheep/goat bones are generally in good condition, and in many cases were found in groups of articulating bones. This suggests that they were not subjected to excessive trampling, which would

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Table Ap8.12 Butchered bones - all were recovered from the surface of the cave floor (C.7).

Grid	ID	Butchery	Taxa	Element	Side	Part present	Comments
11-12mS	98	Cut	Sheep	Astragalus	R	Proximal + distal	Multiple cut marks across midline of dorsal face. Dismemberment. UBA-48124: 177±23BP (AD 1660-1950)
10-11mS	202	Cut	Sheep	Humerus	L	Distal	Slight cut across medial side at very distal end - disarticulation at 'elbow'.
10-11mN	188	Cut	Sheep/ goat	Mandible	L	Proximal	Three cut marks across the branch on the lateral side - dismemberment.
10-11mS	212	Cut	Sheep/ goat	Mandible	L	Proximal	Several fine cut marks on the lateral surface and one on the medial surface. Dismemberment.
11-12mS	111	Cut	Sheep/ goat	Mandible	L	Proximal	Three cut marks on the lateral surface. Dismemberment/skinning.
10-11mN	166	Cut	Sheep/ goat	Metatarsal	R	Proximal + shaft	Series of cut marks across the medial side of the shaft at the proximal end - dismemberment of foot.
12-13mS	302	Chop	Sheep/ goat	Pelvis	L	Ilium	Slight chop or heavy cut across dorsal edge of ilium.
10-11mS	211	Chop/cut	Sheep/ goat	Scapula	R	Collum + blade	Chopped/cut several times on dorsal surface and chopped through diagonally from articular surface to remove the processus coracoideus - probably a cleaver. Dismemberment.
11-12mS	77	Cut	Sheep/ goat	Scapula	R	Glenoid + blade	Cut running along the thoracic side of the margin between the blade and spine.
10-11mN	187	Chop	MM	Long bone	U	Shaft	Fragment chopped across shaft. UBA-48125: 117±23BP (AD1683-1937)
10-11mS	213	Chop	MM	Long bone	U	Shaft	Two heavy chops across the shaft.
11-12mS	150	Chop	MM	Long bone	U	Shaft	At least six chop marks on surface of bone - filleting.
12-13mS	303	Chop/cut	MM	Long bone	U	Shaft	At least seven cut marks running across the line of the long bone, plus possible chop-through across the bone at the same location.
8-9mN	155	Chop	MM	Poss. pelvis	U	-	Fragment with possible rodent gnawing. Two chop marks at right angles to the bone - probable dismemberment of carcass.
11-12mN	66	Chop	MM	Rib	U	-	Fragment. Cut or fine chop on medial surface - filleting.
11-12mN	67	Chop	MM	Rib	U	-	Fragment. Chopped through at 90° to line of rib.
12-13mN	245	Chop	MM	Rib	U	-	Chop-break from the medial face midway along length of rib. Dismemberment.
12-13mN	247	Chop	MM	Rib	U	-	Two chops and a break from the medial surface. Filleting.
12-13mS	307	Chop	MM	Rib	U	-	Chop on cranial edge at 90° to line of rib.
11-12mN	76	Chop/cut	MM	Rib	U	-	Fragment with two cuts and a chop through at right angles to line of rib on medial surface. Plus one slight cut at an angle to the line of the rib close to rib head.
10-11mN	185	Cut	MM	Rib	U	-	Fragment. Possibly two cut marks at 45° to the line of the bone on the lateral surface. Skinning/filleting?
11-12mN	69	Cut	MM	Rib	U	-	Fragment. Scraped on medial surface.
11-12mN	75	Cut	MM	Rib	U	-	Fragment. Two diagonal cut marks on lateral surface - skinning.
11-12mS	127	Cut	MM	Rib	U	-	Fragment. At least four cuts on lateral surface - filleting/skinning.
11-12mS	128	Cut	MM	Rib	U	-	Fragment. Deep cut at head on medial surface. Slight diagonal cut on medial surface.
11-12mS	129	Cut	MM	Rib	U	-	Fragment. Diagonal cut.
12-13mS	308	Cut	MM	Rib	U	-	Two fine cut marks on lateral surface at 60° to line of rib. Filleting/skinning.
12-13mN	248	Chop	MM	Scapula	U	Blade	Fragment. Possibly chopped through.
12-13mS	306	Chop	MM	Sternum	U	-	Sternal fragment. Chopped through to side it.
11-12mS	88	Chop	MM	Vertebra	R	-	Chopped through centrum to side it.
11-12mS	86	Chop	MM	Vertebra	U	-	Chopped through to remove transverse process.
11-12mS	87	Chop	MM	Vertebra	U	-	Chopped through to remove transverse process.
12-13mN	243	Chop	MM	Vertebra	U	-	Chopped obliquely through centrum.
12-13mN	244	Chop	MM	Vertebra	U	-	Cervical vertebra. Chopped twice and chopped through from ventral surface, removing part of the processes and the caudal surface of the centrum. Dismemberment.

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Grid	ID	Butchery	Taxa	Element	Side	Part present	Comments
12-13mS	304	Chop	MM	Vertebra	L	-	Lumbar vertebra. Chopped through to side it from the cranial end, which is atypical.
12-13mS	305	Chop	MM	Vertebra	R	-	Sacrum - cranial portion. Chopped through to side it.
12-13mN	246	Chop	LM	Rib	U		At least three deep chops at 45° to line of rib and two lighter chops at 60° to line of rib along the edge of the rib. Dismemberment. Calcite encrustation. UBA-48127: 1284±23BP (AD 670-774)

* MM = medium mammal; L = Left; R = Right; U = Unknown

result in significant breakage and would cause them to be pressed into soft deposits on the cave floor and thus covered. This almost certainly indicates that the sheep/goat bones post-date the intensive use of the cave in the early 1920s. This is not incompatible with the radiocarbon dates, which indicate that a butchered sheep astragalus dates from AD 1660–1950, while a butchered medium mammal long bone fragment dates from AD 1683–1937.

The presence of butchery marks on 36 sheep/goat and medium-sized mammal bones further indicates that these are not the remains of animals that wandered into the cave to die, but that human actions led to their incorporation into the cave assemblage. If all the marks were associated with skinning, then these could have been individuals that died of natural causes that were then brought to the cave to be skinned and disposed of. At Tormore Cave, however, some of the butchery marks relate to dismemberment and filleting, suggesting that meat was removed from the carcasses. The presence of a full range of body parts strongly suggests that sheep and goats were slaughtered either at the cave or very nearby. It is possible that Area 1, which is relatively flat and bright, may have been used for carcass processing, before the carcasses were disposed of towards the back of the cave in Area 2. At least five individuals were present and, based on butchery marks on three left mandibles, at least three of these had been butchered.

This is an isolated location, so the reasons for butchering multiple animals here is difficult to determine; however, it is likely to post-date the intensive occupation of the cave in September/October 1922, during the Civil War. There is a small, ruined stone building near the cave: one possibility is that when this was occupied, the cave may have been used as extra working space. However, it would seem unusual to leave the remains of carcasses there for any length of time as these would have resulted in odours, flies etc. Another possibility is that the carcasses post-date the use of the stone building and the intensive occupation of the cave in 1922, and were the result of clandestine activities such as poaching, which could have occurred at some later

time in the 1920s or 1930s. A third possibility is that these animals were slaughtered in the 1920s or 1930s by the owner, due to illness or injury, and then disposed of in the cave rather than being brought away for formal disposal. In this scenario, the sheepskins may have been harvested, and meat from animals that had been injured may have been removed for consumption, but presumably meat from those that died of disease would not have been consumed. Support for this possibility comes in the form of a sheep humerus with a distinct spiral fracture that occurred on fresh bone, and that may potentially be the result of a fall in this rocky landscape of loose scree.

Among the minimum of five sheep/goats were at least two goats, one adult and one juvenile, as well as at least two hornless sheep, again one adult and one juvenile. The overall data indicated 77% sheep and 23% goat elements for those that could be determined. In combination, this suggests that while both species were present, sheep were more common than goat. Goats are relatively unusual in Irish archaeological assemblages and in modern Irish agriculture but were relatively common in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For example, at the post-medieval site of Bective Abbey, County Meath, only 9.6% of the sheep/goat elements that could be identified to species were goat,¹⁴ while excavation of 16th to 19th century deposits at Eyre Square, Galway City yielded values of 16% goat.¹⁵ Nationally, in the years since 1847, goat numbers peaked at 282,000 in 1891, dropping to 15,000 by 1996.¹⁶

The second taxon that dominates the assemblage is rabbit, but again the elements from this species are clustered, with three individuals likely to be represented. These were essentially one whole individual found in gaps between flagstones and immediately under a flagstone; two bones from one very young individual found in the Cubby; and a few other fragments within

¹⁴ Beglane 2016

¹⁵ Beglane 2008

¹⁶ CSO 1997

the overall assemblage. A fundamental question is whether the whole rabbit pre-dates or post-dates the intensive use of the cave in the early 1920s. There are no signs of butchery or dismemberment, thus this may be the remains of an individual that died from natural causes, or alternatively may be a carcass that was brought to the cave but never processed for food. The remains lay between the mortared floor and the flagstones, therefore it must have been skeletonised before being covered by the flags. The rabbit bones are in excellent condition, suggesting that they were not subject to trampling before, or crushing after, being covered.

Although the contexts and grids in and around the Cubby yielded few faunal remains, these are potentially the most relevant to the 1920s use of the cave. This area yielded two fish bones, one burnt probable-chicken bone and one fragment of a burnt large mammal flat bone. While it is possible that the fish bones were the result of carnivore/scavenger activity, there is no other potential evidence of these types of activities, so it is most likely that fish were brought to the site by humans. Similarly, the burnt bones are evidence of human activity and are most likely to be the results of cooking and/or the disposal of food waste into a fire – though it should be noted that no evidence of a hearth or burning activities within the cave was encountered.

The cattle, horse and large mammal remains from the cave add another level of complexity. A number of cattle

elements from adults/older juveniles and a crudely hacked large mammal rib all came from the surface of the cave floor, but were all darker than, for example, the sheep/goat bones and so were probably formerly buried in soil. The rib was radiocarbon dated to the 7th or 8th centuries AD. Similarly, the horse metapodial, which was dated to the 10th or 11th century AD, was also darker than the sheep and goat bones and so had probably been buried at one point. Both radiocarbon dates indicate early medieval activities in the cave, separated in time by several hundred years. The foetal calf was probably born prematurely either nearby or maybe in the cave if it was previously used as an animal shelter. In that case it would have to pre-date the boulder blocking the entrance. A range of body parts was present and, if the calf was not born in the cave then, while there is no evidence for butchery, it is possible that the carcass may have been brought there for processing, for example, to be skinned, and then informally disposed of in the cave.

There is considerable evidence for sheep/goat, rabbit and foetal cattle entering the cave essentially whole and being deposited on the surface of the cave floor. Even if these were defleshed before being abandoned, there would still be connective tissues present, but remarkably, there is no evidence of scavenging by dogs/foxes despite the suitability of the immediate landscape for foxes, and there is very little evidence for rodent activity. It is likely that the enclosed nature of the cave has protected the remains from scavenging.

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MNI values and breakdown of skeletal elements

Bone	Rabbit/Lagomorph/SM						Sheep/Goat/MM		
	C.7 and C.10			All contexts			C.7		
	L	R	U	L	R	U	L	R	U
Horn/Antler									1
Skull	1	1		2	2		2	4	
Mandible		1			1	1	4	2	
Loose mand tooth			1			1			12
Loose tooth			10			11			2
Loose max tooth									17
Atlas VC1									1
Axis VC2									2
Scapula	1	1		1	1		2	4	
Humerus prox.									
Humerus dist.	1	1		1	1		2	2	
Radius prox.	1	1		1	1			4	
Radius dist.	1	1		1	1			5	
Ulna	1	1		1	1		1	1	
Metacarpal 1 prox.							3	1	
Metacarpal 1 dist.							2	1	
Metacarpal 2 prox.									
Metacarpal 2 dist.									
Metacarpal 3 prox.	1			1					
Metacarpal 3 dist.	1			1					
Metacarpal 4 prox.									
Metacarpal 4 dist.									
Metacarpal 5 prox.						1			
Metacarpal 5 dist.			1			1			
Pelvis, acet at ilium		1			2		1	3	
Pelvis, acet at ischium		1		1	1		1	1	
Femur prox.		1			1			3	
Femur dist.							2	4	
Patella									
Tibia prox.							1	1	
Tibia dist.	1	1		1	1		3	1	1
Calcaneus prox.		1			1		1	2	
Calcaneus dist.	1	1		1	1		1	2	
Astragalus		1			1			1	
Metatarsal 1 prox.							4	2	1
Metatarsal 1 dist.							2	1	
Metatarsal 2 prox.	1	1		1	1				
Metatarsal 2 dist.	1			1					
Metatarsal 3 prox.	1	1		1	1				
Metatarsal 3 dist.	1	1		1	1				
Metatarsal 4 prox.	1	1		1	1				
Metatarsal 4 dist.	1	1		1	1				
Metatarsal 5 prox.	1			1					
Metatarsal 5 dist.									
Phalanx 1			8			8			7
Phalanx 2			5			5			6
Phalanx 3			4			4			7
MNI	1			2			5		

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Sheep/goat fusion data

Skeletal Element	Age at fusion (months)	C.7	
		Fused	Unfused
Metapodium prox.	Prenatal	10	0
Humerus dist.	3-10	2	0
Radius prox.	3-10	4	0
Scapula	6-8	3	1
Pelvis acet at ilium	6-10	2	0
Pelvis acet at ischium	6-10		
Phalanx 1 and 2	6-16	3	8
Tibia dist.	15-24	3	1
Metapodium dist.	18-28	2	6
Calcaneus prox.	30-36	0	3
Ulna prox.	36-42	1	1
Femur prox.	30-42	1	2
Humerus prox.	36-42	0	1
Radius dist.	36-42	1	3
Femur dist.	36-42	1	4
Tibia prox.	36-42	1	1

Sheep/goat age at slaughter from fusion data for C.7

Age group	Number Fused	Number Unfused	Total	% fused	% unfused	% killed
Neo/prenatal	10	0	10	100.00	0.00	0.0
3-16 months	14	9	23	60.87	39.13	39.1
15-36 months	5	10	15	33.33	66.67	27.5
36-42 months	5	12	17	29.41	70.59	3.9
Over 42 months	-	-	-	-	-	29.4

Sheep/goat tooth metrical data (mm)

Rec ID	Context	Grid	Species	Side	Element	dp4L	dp4W	M1WA	M1WP	M1L	M2WA	M2WP	M2L	M3L	M3WA
112	7	11-12mS	Sheep	U	Loose mand tooth	17.3	6.4								
156	7	9-10mN	Sheep	U	Loose mand tooth	17.1	7.0								
227	7	12-13mN	S/G	U	Loose mand tooth									17.7	6.6
195	7	10-11mS	S/G	L	Mandible			7.2	7.5	12.8	7.6	6.9	15.5	19.4	5.1
296	7	12-13mS	Sheep	R	Mandible	17.9	6.6	6.8	6.4	16.1					
326	7	13-14mS	S/G	L	Mandible	15	6.4	6.8	7.2	13.1	6.5	6.1	17.3		
333	7	14-15N	S/G	L	Mandible			6.7	7.7	10.3	8.8	8.5	12.2	21.8	8.7
359	7	Area III	Sheep	L	Mandible	16	6.8	7.2	6.7	14.5	6.2	5.4	16		

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Sheep/goat tooth eruption and wear

Rec ID	Context	Grid	Species	Side	Element	I	dp2	dp3	dp4	P2	P3	P4	M1	M2	M12	M3	MWS	Age
112	7	11-12mS	Sheep	U	Loose mand tooth				16L									
113	7	11-12mS	S/G	U	Loose mand tooth										U			
151	7	8-9mN	S/G	U	Loose mand tooth										2A			
152	7	8-9mN	S/G	U	Loose mand tooth		p											
156	7	9-10mN	Sheep	U	Loose mand tooth				14L									
199	7	10-11mS	S/G	U	Loose mand tooth							8A						
200	7	10-11mS	S/G	U	Loose mand tooth	U												
201	7	10-11mS	S/G	U	Loose mand tooth	U												
226	7	12-13mN	S/G	U	Loose mand tooth										5A	U		
227	7	12-13mN	S/G	U	Loose mand tooth											4A		
299	7	12-13mS	S/G	U	Loose mand tooth										P			
321	7	12-13mS	S/G	U	Loose mand tooth	U												
167	7	10-11mN	S/G	L	Mandible					A	p	8A					E	2-3 yrs
195	7	10-11mS	S/G	L	Mandible								9A	5A		4A	E	2-3 yrs
296	7	12-13mS	Sheep	R	Mandible		p	p	16L				7A	U			C	6-12mths
297	7	12-13mS	S/G	R	Mandible		A	A	14L				9A	A			CD	6mth-2yrs
298	7	12-13mS	Sheep	L	Mandible		A	p										
326	7	13-14mS	S/G	L	Mandible				22L				9A	5A		C	D	1-2yrs
333	7	14-15N	S/G	L	Mandible					p	p	15A	15A	14A		11G	H	6-8yrs
359	7	Area III	Sheep	L	Mandible				16L				8A	4A		E	D	1-2yrs

Foetal/neonate metrical data (mm) (excl. epiphyses for fusing elements)

Rec ID	Context	Grid	Species	Element	GL	GLI	BP	SD	Bd	DL
402	13	4-5mS Cubby	Lagomorph	Femur	24.9					
403	13	4-5mS Cubby	Lagomorph	Tibia	27.2					
2	7	7-8mN	Cattle	Astragalus		22.9			15.2	13.7
1	7	7-8mN	Cattle	Metatarsal			17.6	9.4		
408	13	4-5mS Cubby	Cattle	Femur						
409	14	4-6m	Cattle	Metatarsal			~17.1			

Appendix 9

Fish and bird bones

Sheila Hamilton-Dyer

Two fish bones were recovered from Tormore Cave. The larger of these can be identified as a right ceratobranchial. These paired bones are part of the numerous elements of the gill apparatus and are not generally identified to taxon in archaeological material, in part because they are not usually distinctive in comparison to other elements and are often in fragments. This bone was compared with those of the most commonly found species in assemblages from Ireland. Several species can be ruled out on grounds of much smaller size and others by shape. The most similarities were found with the Gadidae and with cod (*Gadus morhua*) in particular. The other fish bone is a fragment that is most likely to be a cranial element from a similar sized fish but could not be determined to exact element or species.

The three bird bones are all of different preservation states and represent three different taxa. The most

complete and best-preserved bone is a sternum (breastbone) of a passerine. This is an extremely large group of birds commonly known as the perching songbirds. With the large number of species, it is not usually possible to make an exact identification from a single bone, but the shape and the size match well with birds such as blackbird and thrushes. The second bone is also a sternum, but in this case is damaged and only the cranial half is present. This is also passerine but of a different group and a larger bird; the best match is with jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*). The damage to the bone is likely to be a result of gnawing, by fox for example. The final bird bone is a small burnt fragment. The best match is probably with the distal end of a domestic chicken (*Gallus gallus*) humerus.

Appendix 10

Radiocarbon dates

T. Rowan McLaughlin

Four radiocarbon dates (Table Ap10.1) from unstratified animal bones from Tormore Cave empirically demonstrate early medieval and post-medieval activities in the cave.¹ The dated bones were all surface finds, and as such indicate multiple instances of when the site was in use, but cannot be related directly to stratified finds or deposits. Associated laboratory measurements of stable carbon-13 indicate that all four bones were from herbivores consuming terrestrial food sources, and therefore may be calibrated using the IntCal20 calibration curve.²

Early medieval dates

Turning first to the two early medieval dates, these have special significance because no other finds from this period were forthcoming from the excavations (though it should be noted that excavations were not extensive and were restricted to 20th century levels). The dates are significantly different from each other, providing good evidence of at least two separate phases of activity, one in the late 7th or 8th century, and another in the 10th or 11th century. Whilst not expected in light of other finds from the site, these results serve to demonstrate how archaeological sites, and caves especially, preserve signals of human presence throughout the centuries. In this context it is worth noting how these results relate to the archaeologically attested scale of human activity in the Irish landscape. It is possible to compare these results to models of the density of activity across the Sligo-Leitrim region, and indeed across Ireland.³ The butchered large mammal rib (UBA-48127) dates approximately to the acme of archaeologically documented human activity in Ireland around AD 700, although the density model of activity in the Sligo-Leitrim area seems to indicate that the region saw growth continuing into the 9th century (Figure Ap10.1, left). The horse bone (UBA-48126) dates to a prolonged era of declining economic activity and shifts in settlement patterns in Sligo and elsewhere.⁴

Human activity across the landscape was still very high during this declining phase and these two dates add to the corpus of early medieval activity detected in over a third of excavated Irish caves.⁵

Post-medieval dates

The two post-medieval dates from Tormore Cave have significant uncertainty associated with them. While the dates, measured using accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS), are highly accurate with standard deviations of less than 25 years, their calibrated dates have a large span. This is because radiocarbon laboratory measurements must be compared with an age-calibrated model of the radiocarbon content of the earth's atmosphere. Unfortunately, the period post-AD 1500 saw a number of radiocarbon reversals in the atmosphere, which renders measurements of samples from recent centuries difficult to calibrate with precision. The radiocarbon results for the two sheep/goat bones (UBA-48124 and UBA-48125) intersect with the calibration curve several times, from the late 17th century until the early 20th century (Figure Ap10.1, right). It is simply not possible to be any more certain about their age other than that they post-date the late 17th century, and pre-date the age of nuclear weapons testing that enriched the atmosphere with carbon-14 in the 1950s. Essentially, these sheep/goats could have been butchered in the cave any time between 1680 and 1950.

However, using Bayesian statistics, we can investigate whether these results are *consistent* (or, more accurately, not inconsistent) with the historically and archaeologically attested use of the cave in 1922. This can be done by first specifying a 'prior' belief that the bone samples and the 1922 occupation form a distinct phase in time, then calculating the 'posterior' probability distributions of the radiocarbon ages in light of this 'evidence', and an agreement index signalling whether the model (the statistical definition of a distinct phase in time) is consistent with the evidence.⁶ Using OxCal 4.3 to undertake this analysis,

¹ Radiocarbon dates obtained under NMI Licence to Alter 7621 and Licence to Export 7621.

² Reimer *et al.* 2020

³ Hannah and McLaughlin 2019; McLaughlin 2020

⁴ For a full discussion, see Hannah 2021

⁵ Dowd 2015: 174

⁶ Bronk Ramsey 2009

RADIOCARBON DATES

Table Ap10.1 Radiocarbon dates on animal bones from Tormore Cave.

Context and grid	Species and element	Lab code	$\delta^{13}\text{C}$	$\delta^{15}\text{N}$	C:N ratio	Collagen yield %	Radiocarbon age (BP)	Calibrated radiocarbon date (2 σ) cal AD	
Surface find (C.7) Grid 12-13mN	ID.246 Large mammal rib (probably cattle). At least three deep chop marks at 45° to the line of the rib and two lighter chopmarks at 60° to the line of the rib, all of which are along the edge of the rib. Dismemberment related to crude butchery.	UBA-48127	-21.9	6.9	3.15	4.20	1284±23	670-774	1.000
Surface find (C.7) 12-13mN	ID.250 Horse metapodial fragment.	UBA-48126	-23.0	6.8	3.10	7.80	1071±24	895-925 949-1024	0.231 0.769
Surface find (C.7) 10-11mN	ID.187 Medium mammal (probably sheep/goat) long bone shaft fragment. Chopped across shaft.	UBA-48125	-21.5	6.7	3.10	9.70	117±23	1683-1735 1756-1760 1802-1929 1934-1937	0.262 0.005 0.728 0.005
Surface find (C.7) 11-12mS	ID.98 Sheep right astragalus. Multiple cutmarks across midline of dorsal face. Dismemberment. Articulated. Butchered when fleshed.	UBA-48124	-22.1	6.5	3.12	4.70	177±23	1660-1695 1725-1811 1838-1844 1852-1856 1862-1866 1872-1878 1916-1950	0.200 0.566 0.008 0.004 0.006 0.008 0.208

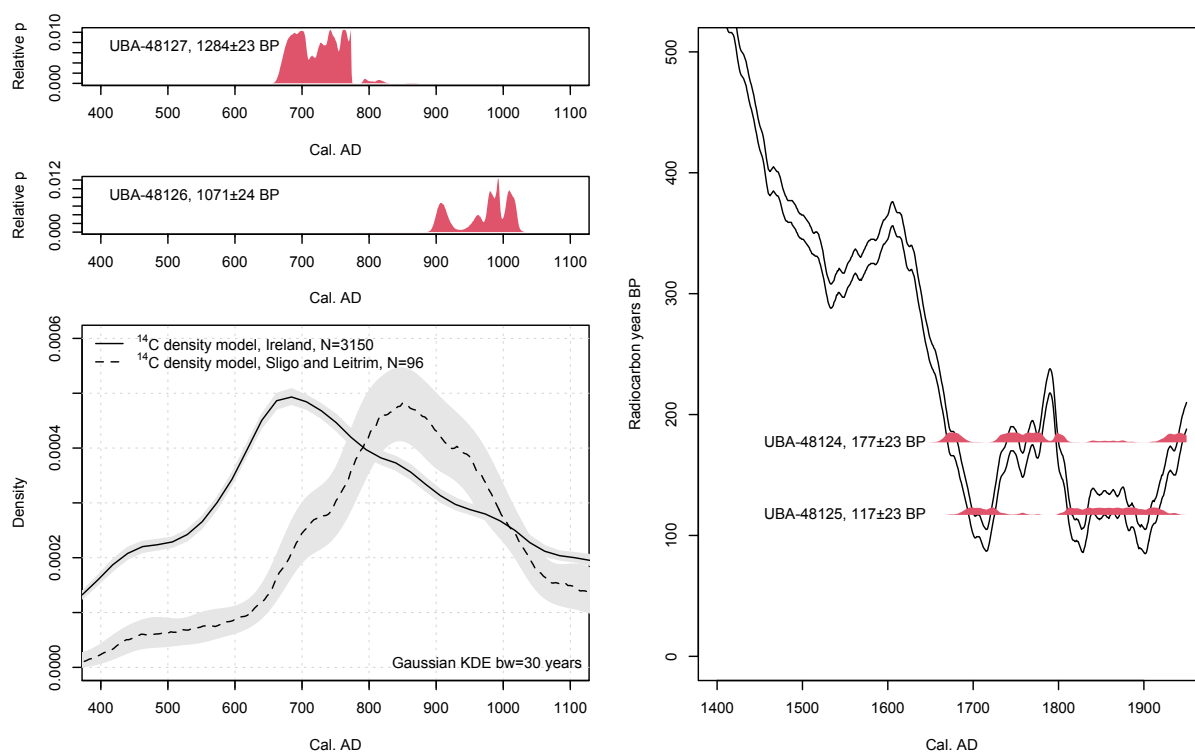


Figure Ap10.1 Calibrated age models for the radiocarbon dates. The two upper left panels show the calibrated ages of the early medieval dates, which can be compared to the overall density of dated archaeological material from Ireland and the Sligo-Leitrim region (lower left panel). The IntCal20 calibration curve, and how its post-medieval age reversals intersect with the post-medieval dates from the cave, is shown on the right panel.

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we find that the two bone samples (UBA-48124 and UBA-48125) are indeed not inconsistent with a phase of occupation including 1922 (agreement indices: $A_{\text{model}}=74.1$, $A_{\text{overall}}=73.3$). The posterior probabilities calculated in this model date the sample UBA-48124 to between 1907 and 1948 (88% probability, $A=66.2$) and UBA-48125 to between 1905 and 1930 (68% probability,

$A=83.2$). It is important to stress that because no sealed stratigraphic link between the samples and the 1922 occupation exists, other than surface activity, these results cannot be read as strong evidence that the bones date from 1922, only that their radiocarbon measurements do not exclude this possibility.

Appendix 11

Conservation of metal artefacts

Susannah Kelly

Three copper alloy, seven iron and seventeen composite metal objects from Tormore Cave were submitted for conservation in April 2022, three weeks after the conclusion of the archaeological excavations (see column 5 of the Finds Register, Appendix 2). The copper alloy assemblage included a mesh fragment, a coin and a wire handle. The iron objects comprised a buckle fragment, four fragments of a skillet pot and iron sheet fragments. The composite objects consisted of four fragments of a twisted copper alloy wire core covered in textile, in addition to seventeen copper rivets attached to iron sheeting. A further 99 small pieces of sheet iron remained untreated as it was deemed of no advantage to clean these fragments.

Iron artefacts

The iron material was lightly concreted with ferrous oxide corrosion products with lime crusts and inclusions. The iron was actively corroding with surface blisters and lamination taking place. The iron with copper rivets had cuprous crusts emerging through the more voluminous iron corrosion products. Surfaces were obscured. The outer crusts were removed using a scalpel under microscope before closer surface cleaning with 88 micron aluminum oxide medium via air abrasive. All deposits were removed with compressed air prior to desiccation to <15% RH (relative humidity) for 48 hours. They were then heat sealed in microcrystalline wax. The conserved iron artefacts should be stored with silica gel in an airtight container, <15% RH, to protect from reactivation of corrosion.

Copper alloy artefacts

The copper alloy artefacts had hard cuprous oxide and carbonate surface deposits encrusting the surfaces. These were cleaned using a scalpel and glass bristle brush. The mesh was immersed in IMS and cleaned in an ultrasonic tank to soften the deposits in order to allow for mechanical removal. All were degreased in acetone and sealed in *Incralac* in xylene with fumed silica. The copper alloy artefacts should be stored with silica gel in an airtight container, <35% RH, to protect from reactivation of corrosion.

Twisted copper wires in cotton sleeve

Prior to conservation, the exposed copper wires could be seen to be heavily oxidised with hard lime soil adhesion. The outer woven fabric casing of the wires was encased in soil deposits which proved to be more robust than the textile. The outer surfaces were lightly tapped to remove any loosely adhering debris. The four fragments were then soaked in ethanol to attempt to soften the soil deposits, which only proved partially successful. The wires were then cleaned in an ultrasonic tank in deionised water and *Synperonic A7* non-ionic detergent and rinsed thoroughly in changes of deionised water in the ultrasonic bath before dewatering in ethanol and allowed to air dry. The exposed metalwork (coiled white metal and copper wires) was coated in *Incralac*. The wire fragments remain delicate. They should be stored in acid free packaging and handling should be avoided.

Appendix 12

Forensic analyses

John P. Cassella

On-site analysis

Exploratory forensic analysis was conducted in Tormore Cave on 1 April 2022 using forensic alternate light sources (ALS), more commonly used within forensic science laboratories and at crime scenes. These are used for the presumptive identification and location of any fluorescent materials including body fluids such as blood and urine, and trace evidence such as hairs, fibres and gunshot residue etc. The forensic strategy in this environment was to investigate the cave interior for trace evidence and any biological material on the floor and walls in Area 1 and Area 3.

The cave surfaces were illuminated using a 'Foster and Freeman' (Evesham, UK) forensic Crime-Lite; a Ultraviolet (UV) light at a range of 350-380nm; and pure white light sources of 400-700nm. Two white lights were used to produce a 'relief' lighting, thus creating an enhanced view formed by minor variations in any cave surface indentations of markings or scratchings that could be observed in the rock wall and ceiling, that might represent some form of graffiti. A number of lines, shapes and potential patterns were observed and photographed using a Nikon D3600 DSLR camera on standard camera settings.

In respect of any biological fluids or materials, there is uncertainty due to the paucity of forensic literature as to how long such material might leave a physical biological signature. A cave is an ideal environment to test for the presence of body fluids, as caves are subject to minimal impact from rain, wind or large fluctuations in temperature. Tormore Cave presented some potential natural biological interference in the form of possible microbial activity on the wall surfaces identified by fluorescence using the ALS. In Area 3, two threads (22E0030:139 and 22E0030:140), possibly from clothing, were observed whilst using the fluorescent UV light; both threads were recovered and placed separately in clear plastic mini-grip resealable bag. Both threads were approximately 10cm in length, approximately 1-2mm in thickness and composed of smaller fibres of sub-millimetre width (approximately 50-70microns) (Figure Ap12.1).

The UV light was further used to analyse the indented possible graffiti in Area 1 of the cave for the presence of biological material, which would be expected to fluoresce. However, nothing of biological value was identified associated with this possible graffiti.

Analysis of two threads

The two co-located, but separately identified, threads (assumed to be clothing threads), collected from Area 3, were subjected to qualitative forensic analyses in the laboratory in order to address the following questions. It was considered that such data would assist in determining if these threads could potentially have come from clothing associated with the 1920s occupation of the cave, or indeed a later visitor not associated with occupation.

- What was the macroscopic and microscopic structure of thread 1 (22E0030:139) and thread 2 (22E0030:140)?
- What was the weave, colour, structure and cellular make-up of the threads?
- Were the fibres related to each other in any way?
- Were the threads humanly made (synthetic) fibres, animal fibres (e.g., wool) or natural fibres (e.g., cotton)?
- Did these threads show any evidence of biological (root) or mycelial structures (e.g., fungal)?
- Could the age and origin of these fibres be concluded from the analyses?
- Did the threads exhibit fluorescence outside of the cave environment in a laboratory setting?
- If so, then what made the threads fluorescent? Was it natural properties or the presence of dyes, or changes induced from being in the cave or any other reason?
- What did the analyses and the data obtained from these investigations add to the bigger picture of the 1920s occupation and subsequent visitations to this cave?

Taking a 1cm scissor-cutting from each of the two threads, light microscopy was conducted using a standard 'microscope liquid mounting medium' and

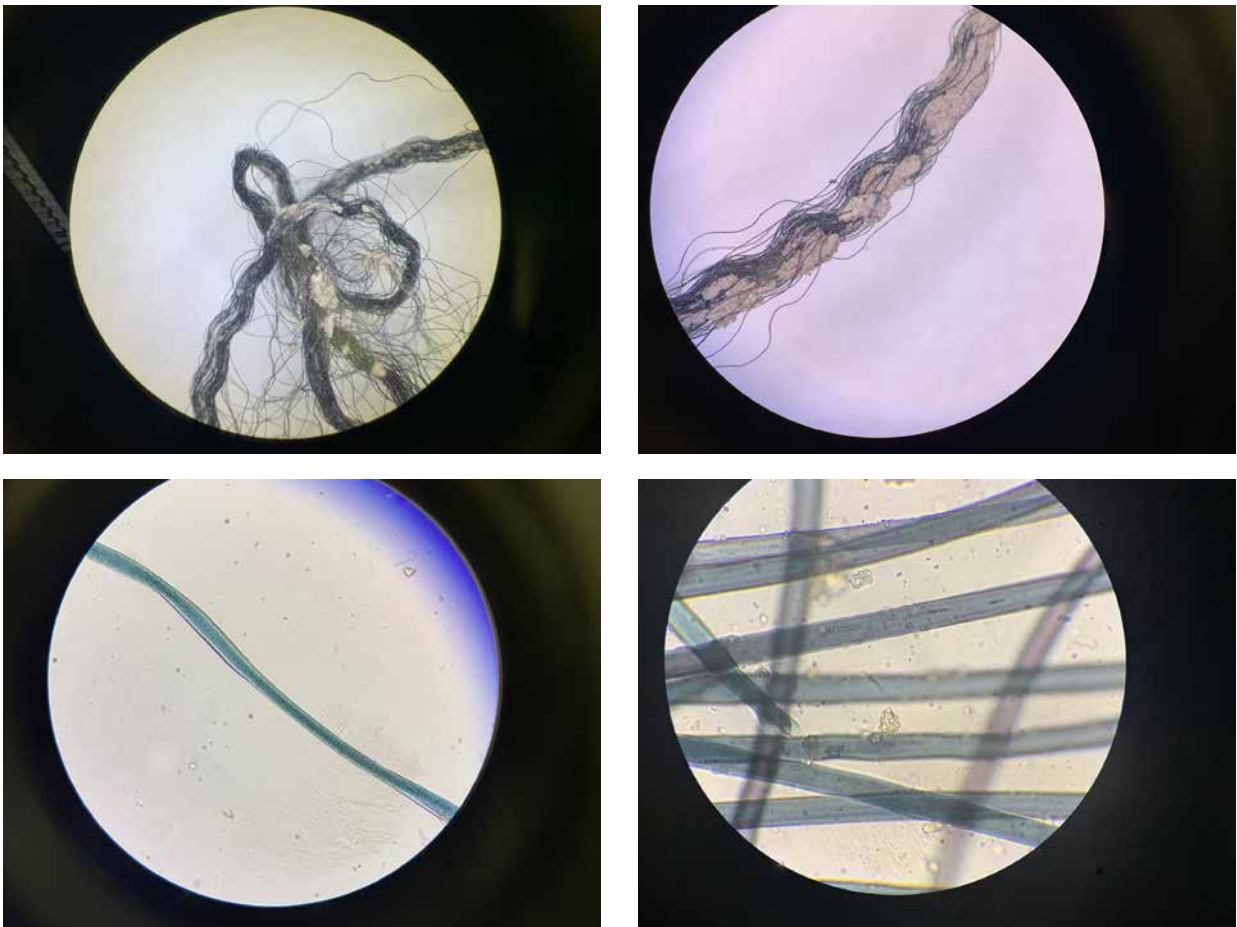


Figure Ap12.1 Top, L to R: Thread (22E0030:139) x30 magnification and x40 magnification showing precipitate formation. Bottom, L to R: Thread (22E0030:139) x400 magnification and Thread (22E0030:140) x400 magnification (John P. Cassella).

glass coverslip. Images were taken of the two threads at low (x40), medium (x100) and higher power (x400) magnification (Figure Ap12.1).

Light microscopy images were taken using standard illumination (underlit white lighting), on a dissecting microscope and on a standard stereo light microscope and also with an ad-hoc set-up of holding a CopperTree Forensics 'Forensic Investigation Torch' (FIT) underneath and at the side of the microscope sample stage. The FIT operated at 4 watts and a wavelength of 437-458nm with a peak at 450nm. Under white light, both of the threads appeared to be composed of approximately 50 smaller fibrils of sub-millimetre width (approximately 50-70microns). Both samples exhibited a mineral precipitation throughout the entire length of the threads. Microscopically this precipitation did not appear to penetrate into the thread fibres, but rather it sat upon the surface of the individual fibres, with the fibres potentially acting as nucleation sites allowing the precipitate to form and grow. Both

threads and subsequently fibres were examined at higher magnification under the microscope with white light, and both threads and fibres presented a visual colour approximating to the Pantone 15-5711 TCX (Dusty Jade Green). Whilst in the cave, the UV light (350-380nm) showed the threads did not exhibit any fluorescence but that smaller fibres in proximity to these threads appeared to show a bluish fluorescence. In the laboratory, it was demonstrated whilst holding the CopperTree FIT blue light (437-458nm) to the unopened clear plastic mini-grip resealable bag that held the thread, that there were two other smaller fibre types associated with the thread. The other two fibres may have been associated contamination from the cave or indeed deposited with the thread and in some manner linked with it. One of these fibre types fluoresced whilst the other fibre type appeared white/grey and did not fluoresce.

In an attempt to identify the composition of the threads (e.g., humanly made synthetic fibres, animal

fibres (e.g., wool) or natural fibres, such as cotton) a Bruker ALPHA II portable Fourier Transform Infra-Red spectrophotometer (FTIR) was employed. The threads were separately placed onto the FTIR stage and IR spectra were obtained between 3800 and 400 wavenumbers. The IR spectra for both of the threads had correlations of their main IR peaks in the regions 1800-400 wavenumbers, suggesting they were compositionally similar. The precipitate composition, and therefore identity, was not confirmed unequivocally. It was highly likely to be a calcium-based compound such as calcium carbonate or calcium sulphate; using the threads as nucleation and growth matrices was akin to a stalactite growth down along the lengths of the threads. On the balance of probability, the investigation here demonstrated that the two threads are similar and probably composed of polyester, which became commercially available in

1941 and for public consumption in the early 1950s. The fluorescent fibre composition remains unknown, as does the composition of the white/grey fibre.

In conclusion to this work, it is clear that where human interaction is suspected, a multidisciplinary approach to an archaeological investigation can benefit from forensic analysis at the scene and in the laboratory. Identifying any human presence through evidence left behind by utilising simple scientific techniques, processes and procedures, as is done within a forensic investigation looking for trace evidence of perpetrators at a crime scene, can be valuable. The markings on the cave wall and ceiling were enhanced using the relief lighting techniques often used in a forensic role, but the interpretation of these marking is a more complex process yet to be considered.

Appendix 13

Weather conditions in September 1922

James Bonsall

Thousands of daily weather readings¹ and rainfall data² provide an insight into the weather conditions experienced in Sligo in 1922. Daily weather diary entries and observations of temperature (°Fahrenheit), rainfall and sunshine hours in the archives were converted into their modern equivalents (e.g., temperature in °Celsius) and are presented below (Figures Ap13.1 and Ap13.2). Wind speed (recorded on the Beaufort scale and converted to ms^{-1}) and wind direction records were used to account for wind chill factor when wind speed was greater than 3 ms^{-1} and temperature was lower than 10°C .³ Wind chill represents how cold it feels to the human body, as opposed to the measured temperature. The perceived decrease in temperature is caused by the flow of air across human skin and can severely impact health.⁴ The Markree Castle method of calculating rainfall in 1922 (a method which differs over time and at different locations), was observed daily at 9.00am and measured in inches, from rainfall collected in a 5 inch diameter gauge, located 1 foot off the ground, at a height of 122 feet above sea level.

The maximum temperatures indicated a relatively warm period between 18 September and 31 October 1922, up to 8.3°C to 19.4°C , with temperatures falling through the second half of October. The measured minimum temperatures for the same period range between -5°C to 12.2°C , again with colder temperatures

in the second half of October. Occasional cold snaps lasting 24 to 48 hours occurred in late September and early October. There was a significant cold period from 6-13 October 1922, where temperatures fell from 10°C to -1.7°C on 9 October, before rising slowly again to 10°C on 13 October. During that period, there was also a significant amount of rainfall. After that date, the temperatures generally decreased substantially throughout the second half of October. The wind chill factor played an important role on 21 days between 18 September and 31 October 1922, consistently decreasing the minimum temperature throughout the second half of October. Observations of -1.41°C to 9°C occurred between 14 and 26 October, with significant drops in minimum temperature down to -10.4°C and -4.8°C between 28 and 31 October.

Rainfall was particularly heavy during the second half of September and the first week of October. The 25 September was recorded in the weather diary as 'Overcast, showery with strong SE winds' which reached 12ms^{-1} (43.2 kph) in both the 9am and 9pm observations that day. The hours of sunshine experienced were reasonably consistent with the modern average. In October 1922, 75.6 hours of sunshine were recorded, while the modern 30 year average (1981-2010) at the Met Éireann station in Claremorris, County Mayo, is 74 hours.⁵

¹ Ryan *et al.* 2021

² Additional unpublished rainfall data were kindly provided by Ciara Ryan (Climate Services, Research and Applications Division, Met Éireann). The observations were recorded by J.R. Armstrong in September and October 1922 at the Markree Castle Weather Station, located 19.2km south-southwest of Tormore Cave.

³ Białek and Miszewska 2022

⁴ Białek and Miszewska 2022

⁵ Walsh 2012

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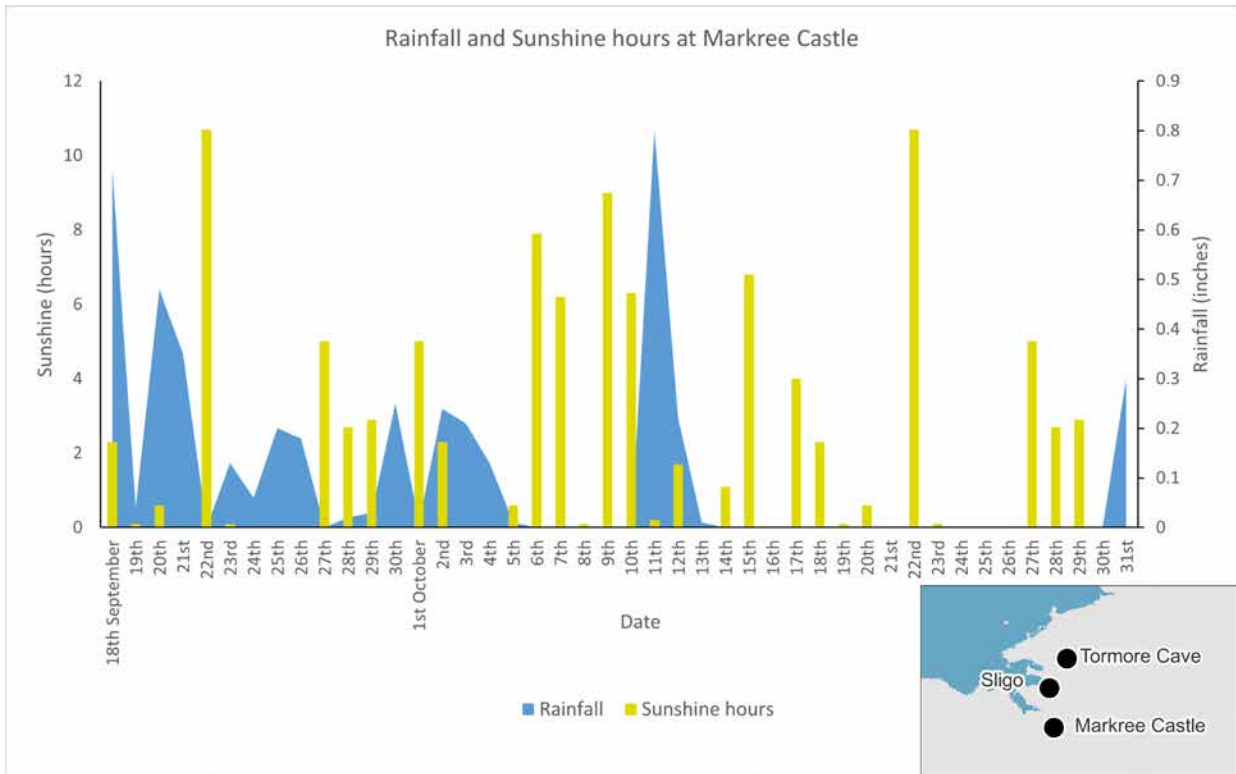


Figure Ap13.1 Temperatures in Sligo in late September and October 1922 (James Bonsall).

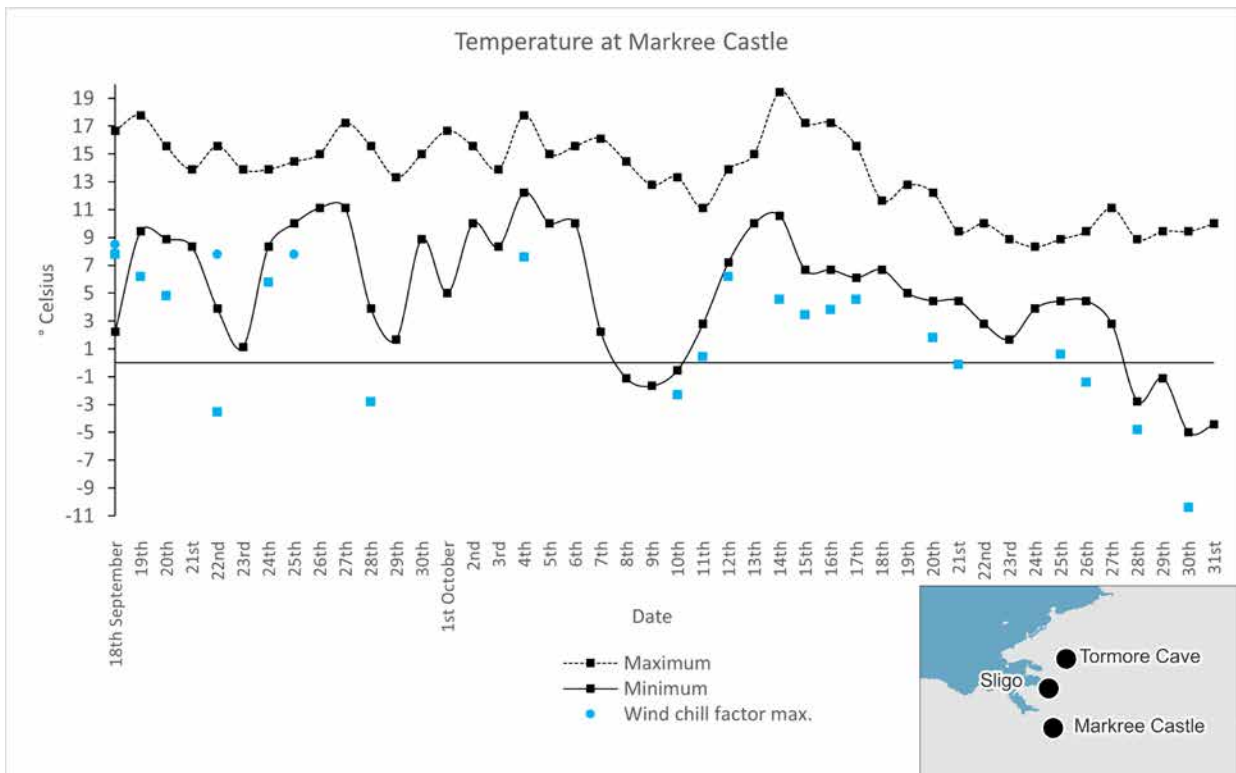


Figure Ap13.2 Rainfall and sunshine hours in Sligo in late September and October 1922 (James Bonsall).

Appendix 14

Project outputs and public outreach

Television

28 April 2022: More than 200 artefacts found in Irish Civil War hideout, viewed 11.06.2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FsfTK_Vkl_g>. RTÉ News.

Radio interviews

29 April 2022: Ocean FM.
30 April 2022: Midwest Radio.

Radio documentary

7 August 2022: *The County Measure* by Vincent Woods, RTÉ Radio 1.

Public lectures

16 June 2022: *A Civil War hideout: Archaeological investigations at Tormore Cave, Co. Sligo*. National Civil War Conference, University College Cork, County Cork.

18 September 2022: *Tormore Cave: A Civil War hideout of the North Sligo IRA*. Sinn Féin Noble Six Memorial Weekend, Grange, County Sligo.

22 September 2022: *Tormore Cave: A Civil War time capsule*. Decade of Centenaries: Exploring the Civil War in Sligo, Hawk's Well Theatre, County Sligo. Talk 1 for Leaving Certificate students; Talk 2 for the general public.

23 September 2022: *Sligo's Civil War hideout: Archaeological excavations at Tormore Cave*. Feis Shligigh Noble Six Commemorative event, Sligo town, County Sligo.

5 October 2022: *Tormore Cave: Sligo's Civil War hideout (1922)*. Ó Dubhda Clan Gathering, Enniscrone, County Sligo.

28 October 2022: *Tormore Cave: A Civil War Time Capsule*. SUICRO (Speleological Union of Ireland and Irish Cave Rescue Organisation) Conference, Ballyvaughan, County Clare.

23 November 2022: *Tormore Cave: Sligo's Civil War hideout (1922)*. Nazareth House nursing home, Sligo town, County Sligo.

5 February 2023: *Excavating a Civil War hideout: Tormore Cave, Co. Sligo*. Irish Post-Medieval Archaeology Group, Birr, County Offaly.

20 September 2023: *The Archaeology of Sligo's Noble Six*. Online lecture, Sligo Community Archaeology Project.

25 November 2023: *Cogadh na gCarad, Óglaigh na hÉireann agus Uaimh i Sligeach Thuaidh*. Éigse Chluainín 2023, Manorhamilton, County Leitrim.

Online lectures

Fourth Dimension Prospection Ltd., 2022, *A Civil War hideout: Archaeological investigations at Tormore Cave, Co. Sligo*, viewed 11.06.2023, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITOnhEpasJQ&t=3s>>.

Sligo County Library, 2022, *Exploring the Civil War in Sligo*, viewed 11.06.2023, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQqy2tTjsfQ&t=6203s>>.

Newspapers (print)

Western People, 28 April 2022
Leitrim Observer, 30 April 2022
The Sligo Champion, 4 May 2022
Sligo Weekender, 5 May 2022

Online media

Breaking News; *Carlow Nationalist*; *Echo*; *Irish Independent*; *Kildare Nationalist*; *Midwest Radio*; *Roscommon Herald*; *RTÉ*; *Silicon Republic*; *Waterford News and Star*.

Publications

Anon. 2022. History is now archaeology. *Descent* 286, 13.

Dowd, M. 2022b. 2022:122, *Tormore Cave, Sligo*, Database of Irish excavation reports, viewed 11.06.2023, <www.excavations.ie/report/2022/Sligo/0031607d/>.

Dowd, M., Mulraney, R. and Bonsall, J. 2022b. Civil War cave hideout excavated – the Tormore Cave Project. *Underground* 102, 11-13.

Online platforms

The excavations at Tormore Cave reached an estimated 300,000 people within two weeks via social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook – Media Impact Value (MIV) statistics courtesy of Aidan Haughey, ATU.

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Bonsall, J. 2022. Excavation of a Civil War IRA hideout, viewed 18.11.2023, <<https://drjamesbonsall.com/2022/04/28/excavation-of-a-civil-war-ira-hideout/>>.

Mulraney, R. 2022. Excavation of a Civil War hideout cave in Sligo, viewed 13.11.2023, <<https://cavesofireland.com/2022/04/28/the-excavation-of-a-civil-war-hide-out-cave-in-sligo/>>.