

**WHY
MILLSTREET'S
HISTORY
NEEDS
TO
BE
WRITTEN**

Aubane Historical Society

**WHY
MILLSTREET'S
HISTORY
NEEDS
TO
BE
WRITTEN**

Jack Lane

**ISBN 1 903497 31 0
Aubane Historical Society
Aubane, Millstreet, Co. Cork**

November 2006

**TALK IN MILLSTREET TO COMMEMORATE
PADDY MCCARTHY, 5 NOVEMBER 2006.**

I am very glad to be asked to say a few words at this commemoration.

I suppose people might ask why this commemoration at this time? We have had not one like this before so why now?.

I think it is necessary and very welcome because to me it is part of a reaction to current revisionist attitudes to the War of Independence. For decades past it clearly did not seem necessary to have a commemoration like this. The national monument in the Square and the fact that Paddy McCarthy's name is the first on it sufficed. People clearly appreciated the reason he and others fought and died nearly 90 years ago and there was no need for any more specific commemorations down the years.

However, times change and you would need to be blind, deaf and dumb not to realise that there is a new attitude abroad these days about the War of Independence and the 1916 Rising.

If you read the vast majority of history books written these days or most of what is written or said repeatedly in the media every day you will constantly see the legitimacy of that war being questioned, criticised, disparaged and at the very least a general feeling generated that maybe it was not necessary and that we brought it on ourselves for no good reason.

The most outrageous development of this attitude is that the War was a sectarian war against Protestants - Southern Loyalists have been made to disappear from history. This is what we hear constantly from the likes of Eoghan Harris, Ruth Dudley

Edwards, Peter Hart and their myriad supporters in editorial rooms and studios cross the country.

The general idea is to give us a bad conscience about that War and as it led to the formation of the State - a bad conscience about the whole basis of our political society. A bad conscience is a terrible affliction to have, a very debilitating condition to endure and has no positive benefit.

I think it is very important to counter this and events such as these are a means of doing so. And I think you will find that there are many similar events being held elsewhere nowadays throughout the country for the same reason but you will not hear much about them in the media.

This revision of our history is countered simply by putting all the facts on the table.

The basic fact that needs re-emphasising is that Paddy McCarthy was part of the legitimate army of a democratically elected government. That is something that gets obscured these days.

What government here or anywhere else has ever won 75% of the seats in an election as happened in 1918? No clearer mandate or message has ever been given to a government here or elsewhere in modern times. That is the authority on which Paddy McCarthy and others did what they did.

That is the essential fact about the War of Independence. Yet, you will find no history books on that election.

Yet, this overwhelming result for independence was ignored by the government of the day and this after a World War had been fought by that same government for the "*freedom of small nations*" and in which over a quarter of a million Irish men

joined up and 50, 000 had died on the basis of that promise. As well of course as millions elsewhere. They were all cynically betrayed. And instead of the "*freedom for small nations*" we got the "*Black and Tans.*" Paddy McCarthy came down here from Meelin to put a stop to the Tans terrorising the people of this town and the area around here and he died doing so. What he and others did led eventually to political independence for this state.

And what have we done with that independence? Again all possible negative factors are paraded before us regularly by our self-hating revisionists but what are the most obvious and important facts?

Independence has led to continuous democratic government, one of the longest in the world today - soon there will be nearly a century of such continuous development. This is rare - one of the youngest states with one of the longest-standing democracies in the world today. All attempts at totalitarianism have been avoided and just as significant we have also avoided war as a means of avoiding totalitarianism.

We needed no one to aid us in securing and maintaining our independence and democracy. No 'rapid reaction forces' appeared to help us.

And the more independent we have become the better off we have become. And political independence has been the key to this success. Independence has been the how and the why of our economic success. These are the legacies and achievements of Paddy McCarthy and his colleagues.

These are achievements and legacies for all parties and all citizens and why we all should celebrate them and him.

I would like to get back to these accusations about the War of Independence being a squalid affair of Catholics against Protestants. This is the chorus we hear at the moment. And I want to refer to it because of where we are, because the history of this town and this area is a living refutation that sectarian issues ever mattered to people here in modern times in their political conflicts.

It's a great pity that the history of Millstreet has not been written. I have highlighted some sources for this history in a few publications and some people may have thought I was indulging myself by raking up past conflicts unnecessarily. But it is a great history and I have not published the half of it.

Modern history in the area begins with the convulsions of the Land War and for the decades during and after the Land War the Millstreet area was synonymous with extreme political and social conflict. Kevin O'Byrne has researched the period and I am indebted to him for a lot of the information on that period and we hope to publish his researches soon.

The place became renowned nationally and internationally during that war and it was said of Millstreet that it "*.par excellence has established its character for being the seat of lawlessness and blackguardism of every description*" (Cork Constitution, 5/7/1881). It was described on another occasion as having "*...the unenviable reputation of being the most lawless town in Ireland*" (Cork Constitution, 22/8/1881). An MP who lived through the period later described it as having been '*the cockpit of Ireland*' (Cork Accent, 4/4/1910).

The cause of all this was that evictions were the order of the day by the progressive landlords of the time. These evictions led naturally to protests, "outrages", boycotting, moonlighting and demonstrations on almost a daily, and nightly, basis.

This agitation on the land issue included such unheard of and blasphemous activities as the Parish Priest being challenged during his sermon, a demonstration in the Church here during a Good Friday service (15/4/1881). On another occasion the Parish Priest's sermon was stopped and drowned out by a demonstration of mass coughing among the congregation most of whom then walked out (29/8/1881).

These were considered extraordinary occurrences and caused a sensation in the establishment media at the time but they were only the tip of the iceberg and were almost routine to most local people.

It has been remarked that the scene in the film, *'The wind that shakes the barley,'* where people argue with the priest and walk out of the church was a bit incredible - not so if they knew anything about Irish history.

Now in all this there was not a trace of inter-religious hostilities, it was a conflict between Catholics for many obvious reasons — one being that some of the biggest landlords were Catholics such the McCarthy-O'Leary's. Also, the main ideological opponent of the Land League was the local Catholic Parish Priest, Canon Griffin, who was known far and wide for his opposition to it. And he was ably supported by the most prominent local Catholic businessman of the time, Jeremiah Hegarty.

If any religious description could be put on these conflicts it had all the appearances of being anti-Catholic - which of course it was not. Religion simply did not come into it unless people such as Canon Griffin introduced it by political preaching from the altar. And of course the local Bishop, Dr. Moriarty, had earlier made the famous (or infamous) declaration about the Fenians —

i.e. that *"hell was not hot enough nor eternity long enough"* for them.

After the Land War one of its great leaders, William O'Brien, established a very strong base here with his All-for-Ireland-League," a Party who had a distinctive conciliatory policy towards Unionists and Protestants that put him in opposition to the main Redmondite Home Rule party. This policy was known as the 3 Cs, standing for '*Conference, Conciliation and Consent*' and its whole raison d'etre was harmony between Unionists, Protestants and Nationalists based on those concepts. With the able support of Canon Sheehan, O'Brien's party's aim was to prevent a Catholic Ascendancy replacing the Protestant Ascendancy that he had just helped overthrow. His Party defeated all the Redmondites in Cork except a Protestant Home Ruler in East Cork in the 1910 General Elections that O'Brien did not contest. There were protests here in the town when Home Rule was passed as it was seen as a way of copper fastening divisions between Protestants, Unionists and Nationalists.

O'Brien and his Party went on to support Sinn Fein in the 1918 Election seeing it as the only alternative to the totally discredited efforts at Westminster to get any real form of Independence or unity in Ireland. This support by O'Brien and his Party which had huge support in the area is what guaranteed such success around here for Sinn Fein in that Election and later for the military struggle. This is the political heritage of this area and it is a heritage that produced people like Paddy McCarthy and his comrades.

If we took heed of our revisionists we would have to start imagining that Paddy McCarthy was a terrorist of some sort and yet again the basic fact was that he was the very opposite - he, quite literally, died fighting terrorism in this town which was the

explicit policy of the Tans and Auxiliaries orchestrated from the Barrack here. Our revisionists of course always seem to have a great inability to distinguish between cause and effect.

Again, if we followed these revisionists we would also have to start imagining that he came down from Meelin to shoot Protestants in the Barrack. It has been established recently (see History Ireland, Autumn 2004, Vol.12, No. 3) that about 20% of the Tans were Irish and about 60% of these were Catholics so that between them and the RIC, who were mostly Catholics, it is almost certain that there were more Catholics than Protestants in the Barrack at the time. Even if it had entered his head to do so, he would have a very difficult job indeed trying to separate out the Protestants from the Catholics in the circumstances. This is all nonsense of course but this is the kind of demeaning nonsense that is the provenance of current revisionist history.

The fact is that there are a few things that are absolutely certain about Paddy McCarthy and his colleagues - one is that he and they did not have a sectarian bone in their bodies and another is that he died fighting terrorism in this town - the same terrorism that on the previous day, 'Bloody Sunday,' was terrorising the people in Croke Park.

It is very fitting therefore that we pay tribute to him and his comrades and that he and they continue to get the credit they deserve. I want to thank Noel Keating and colleagues for organising this event.

Jack Lane

jacklaneaubane@hotmail.com

5 November 2006

PADDY MCCARTHY
(8/2/1896-22/11/1920)



Paddy McCarthy was born at Rowels, Meelin and was an active member of B Company of the Second Battalion, Cork No. 2 Brigade of the IRA under Sean Moylan.

He was held in Belfast jail on a gun offence in 1918 and later in Strangeways, Manchester, from where he escaped in October 1919. He took part in the capture of Mallow Barracks in September 1920 - the only military barracks to be taken over during the war.

He and the Brigade Flying Column took on the Auxiliaries and Tans in Millstreet on 22 November 1920 to counter their terrorism and vandalism in the town.

Initially he had to be buried secretly and was later reburied in Clonfert graveyard, Newmarket. His funeral cortege was three miles long.

The Commemoration in 2006 was organised by Noel Keating and the local Sinn Fein Cumann.

AUBANE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

- **Notes on the history of Millstreet**, by *Canon Michael Costello and Padraig O'Maidin*
- **A Millstreet Medley**, by *various authors with rediscovered material by Canon Sheehan and Eoghan Ruadh O'Suilleabhain*
- **Millstreet - "the cockpit of Ireland"** (*by various authors*)
- **Evidence to the Parnell Commission**, by *Jeremiah Hegarty, Canon Griffin and Dr. Tanner MP*
- **Aubane versus Oxford: a response to Professor Roy Foster and Bernard O'Donoghue** *by various authors*
- **D D Sheehan: Why he left Cork in 1918.** *A correspondence from The Corkman.*

..... "Millstreet- A "Considerable" Town *by various*
....."authors

- **A Millstreet Miscellany** *by various authors*
- **Sean Moylan: in his own words. His memoir, of the Irish War of Independence**
- **The 'Boys' of the Millstreet Battalion area** *by veterans of the War of Independence*
- **A Millstreet Miscellany (2)** *by various authors*

