

Papers of Margaret and Father Tom Burke

P30



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INTRODUCTION

The papers of the Burke family of Castlegar, County Galway, were deposited in UCD Archives by Colonel Dan Bryan in September 1975. The collection principally comprises correspondence, reports and newspaper cuttings, and originates from the war of independence and, primarily, the civil war period. All the correspondence (except items 10-11, 14) was written or received by members of the Burke family—Father Tom Burke, Margaret Burke and Catherine (Burke) O'Donovan. Although generally relating to the eight years between 1916 and 1924, the collection is not very complete and was probably assembled by Catherine Burke O'Donovan who is the principal recipient of the letters.

The early correspondence and reports (1-11) relate to the organisation of the Irish Volunteer movement in the Galway area. Father Tom Burke was its chaplain. The Irish Volunteers, a splinter group of a larger Volunteer movement founded in 1913 (the main body was the National Volunteers), had taken part in the 1916 Rising and had grown in strength in the years immediately following the Rising. The Irish Volunteers were the unofficial army of Sinn Féin, which developed as a political party during this period. In August 1919, the title of the Volunteers was changed to Irish Republican Army, the members of which took an oath to the Republic and to Dáil Éireann. Among the letters received by Burke are two from Michael Collins (7-8).

The later correspondence dates mainly from 1923 to 1924 and consists of letters written by Margaret Burke and Thomas Derrig during their respective periods of imprisonment by the Irish Free State government. Following the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December 1921, a split developed in both the Sinn Féin party and the I.R.A. The civil war followed during which many of those who opposed the Treaty were imprisoned by the Free State government and subsequently went on hunger strike in protest.

Margaret Burke was a member of Cumann na mBan, the woman's division of the Volunteers, and played an active role in the war of independence. Like the majority of Cumann na mBan members, she opposed the Treaty and was imprisoned by the Free State government. She does not appear to have taken part in any hunger strikes. All her letters (15-22) are written from Kilmainham jail and North Dublin Union internment camp during the spring and summer of 1923 and have relatively few references to national events of the period. Although she refers frequently to letters, received, these are not included in the collection.

Tomas Derrig (1897-1956), Westport, County Mayo, was a member of the Irish Volunteers since their inception and organised a Volunteer corps at University College Galway. He was arrested by the British authorities in 1918 and given a twelve month jail sentence in Belfast, where he went on hunger strike. In 1919 he became commander of the I.R.A. West Mayo brigade. He was arrested and released in 1921 and was elected a T.D. in the same year. He opposed the Treaty and became adjutant-general of the western division of the anti-Treaty I.R.A. After playing a major part in the civil war, he was arrested by the Free State government in April 1923. In an abortive attempt to escape he was shot in one eye which he lost. While in jail he went on hunger strike but eventually abandoned it.

He was later to be a founder member of the Fianna Fáil party in 1926 and held ministerial posts (Education, Posts and Telegraphs, Lands) under various Fianna Fáil governments. All his letters in the collection are personal ones, written from jail in 1923 and 1924 to Catherine Burke O'Donovan, they refer to prison conditions and the national events of the times, but are not illustrative of his whole career.

The newspapers in the collection are all, with one exception (37), anti-Treaty publications and deal mainly with prisoners' hunger strikes.

Because of the variety of sources all relating to the same general issues, the collection has been arranged mainly according to document type.

Marie Altzinger
December 1981

**I. Irish Volunteers and Irish Republican Army:
Galway Brigade, 1918-20**

i. Reports

- | | | |
|----------|-------------------|--|
| 1 | 21; 26 April 1918 | Brief notes signed by F. Clancy, company adjutant, concerning drill formation of the Bushy Park, County Galway company of Volunteers for Sunday 21 April and Friday 26 April 1918.
1p |
| 2 | 27 April 1918 | Irish Volunteers affiliation fee receipt signed by Michael Collins, Volunteer Adjutant-General and Director of Organisation, for receipt of 10 shillings from Captain Glynn, Glenamaddy Company, County Galway. 1 item |
| 3 | 9 May 1918 | Manuscript Irish Volunteer report signed by Joe Connor, Company G, 2 nd Battalion (Galway Brigade.) Includes a breakdown of functions to be carried out by company members (scouts, cyclists, and engineering), number of barracks and patrols in the area, types of available ammunition and transport, and a general description of the geography of the area. 2pp |
| 4 | 11 May 1918 | Manuscript report of activities carried out by the Athenry half battalion from 30 April to 11 May 1918. Includes references to despatches issued, mobilisation times for Marinvea, Shepanagh, Menlough, Newcastle, Athenry, Kilconneran and Kiltulla companies and numbers of men in each company. Reported activities include the holding of map-reading, scouting and engineering classes. 2pp |
| 5 | [1918] | Circular Irish Volunteer questionnaire filled in for the New Inn Company of the Athenry battalion. Includes a list of members and their functions (scouts, cyclists, map-readers); types of classes being held (engineering and signalling); details of army guards and patrols, available money and transport resources; and a geographical description of the local area. 2pp |

- 6** May 1920 Rough pencil minutes of meetings held [by a division of the brigade] on 8 and 23 May 1920. Headings include finance, arrangement of public meeting and canvassing. Item was also used for calculations and is signed Michael McHugh and Pat Fallon. 3pp

ii. Letters and Notes

- 7** 20 June 1918 Manuscript covering note from Michael Collins to Fr. (Thomas) Burke, (chaplain to the brigade) originally accompanying 24 'receipts' [for membership fees?] and a list of Volunteer companies [in the Galway area?] 'as promised'. 1p
- 8** 15 August 1918 Manuscript note from Michael Collins to Fr. Burke informing him of a (Volunteer) executive meeting to be held at 46 Parnell Square, Dublin on 24 August (1918). 1p
- 9** [1918] Manuscript note, marked 'destroy this' from Liam Ó Maoiliosa to Fr. Burke thanking him for his help. References made to letters which they had discussed, to 'the Limerick boys' [Limerick Volunteer Brigade?], and to the possibility of forging a letter to 'Mrs H ... to put them off the scent.' 1p
- 10** 6 May 1918 Manuscript note from 'Seamus', Mount Bellew, County Galway to 'Stephen' informing him of the postponement of a meeting at Mount Bellew. Includes annotation by 'Jack B' saying that he will be present at the next meeting. 2pp
- 11** 14 May 1918 Manuscript note from Michael Collins to 'Seamus' referring to the former's decision to direct (Volunteer) work in Ballinasloe, County Galway, from Athlone, County Westmeath. 1p

5 manuscript letters written from North Dublin Union Internment Camp to her sister, Kit (Mrs Catherine O'Donovan); thanking her for letters and parcels received. Discusses the manner of her arrest (19), prison conditions, her fellow prisoners, a fancy-dress competition held in the prison, won by Éamon de Valera (21), prison rules governing letter-writing, her health and the impossibility of seeing a specialist while in prison, and family affairs. Gives an account of the 'case' and release of Mrs (Nora) Connolly O'Brien (daughter of James Connolly, signatory of 1916 Proclamation) from the prison.

18	31 May 1923	1p
19	18 July 1923	2pp
20	25 July 1923	1p
21	30 July 1923	1p
22	8 August 1923	1p

iii. Letters from Thomas Derrig to Catherine O'Donovan

23	7 August 1923	Written from Mountjoy Jail thanking her for her recent letter. Refers to Mrs. O'Donovan's pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick and to his own (awaited) glass eye. Says that he 'got your cipher long ago.'	1p
24	27 November 1923	Written from Kilmainham Jail acknowledging her recent letter and parcel. Discusses his (recently ended) hunger-strike- 'I must say that I enjoyed the Hunger Strike'- and describes Kilmainham as 'a regular paradise' in comparison with Mountjoy prison. Discusses the prisoners' dislike of Richard Mulcahy and Kevin O'Higgins, the fact that the 'anti Free Staters' have been beaten outside the prison, and his plans for the future after he is released. Refers to having met Una (Garvey-Colivet).	3pp
25	13 December 1923	Written from Kilmainham prison acknowledging receipt of her letter and parcel. Discusses his recent stomach upset, Michael Kilroy's release from prison following his abandonment of the hunger strike and the type of priests in the prison. Asks for news of Peg (Margaret Burke).	1p

- 26** 29 February 1924 Written from Curragh Military Hospital, County Kildare, where he is awaiting his glass eye. Sends greetings to mutual acquaintances and talks of his debt to the Heneghan family.
2pp
- Letter and brief note in Irish written from Hare Park Internment Camp, County Kildare, acknowledging receipt of letters and parcels. Discusses prison-rules governing letter writing, literature, and the fact that he is still awaiting his glass eye (27).
- 27** 20 March 1924 1p
- 28** 22 March 1924 1p

iv. Other letters received by Catherine O'Donovan

- 29** Friday [November 1923] From Una [Garvey-Colivet] to 'Kait' [Catherine O'Donovan]. Discusses her arrest by the Free State Government, the prisoner's hunger-strike, her meeting with Thomas Derrig (*see* P30/24) in Kilmainham prison, her fellow prisoners and her release.
3pp

III. Other letters and Permits, 1916-43

- 30** 16 January 1917 Manuscript letter from 'H.F.' St. Boniface's Banning, California, U.S.A. to 'Miss' [Margaret?] Burke. Describes the 'wilderness' in which he is living- 'a veritable desert'- the climate; Indian settlements in the area and his loneliness. Praises Miss Burke's style of letter writing and asks how she was able to avoid 'the censor's paint brush.'
4pp
- 31** 9 June 1916 Manuscript permit signed by P.L. Killacky, High Constable, District Inspector's Office, County Galway, allowing Fr. Thomas Burke to travel 'by train to Dublin and thence to England'. Gives a brief physical description of Fr. Burke. 1 item

Note from T. Maguire, Commandant General, 2 Western Division, I.R.A. during the War of Independence to Fr Tom Burke, enclosing a handwritten letter of commendation of Fr Burke's war record [33]. 'An efficient intelligence officer' who took 'many personal risks' and was always 'with the boys in time of grave danger'.

- 32** August 1939 1p
- 33** August 1939 1p
- 34** 24 September 1943 Manuscript letter from Sarah Mellows, 87 Ceannt Fort, Mount Brown, Dublin, to Fr. Burke, asking him for the loan of 'a couple of pounds.' Says that she had 'a total breakdown' in July, (1943) and that some of the 'old Fianna' are paying her rent. 4pp

IV. Newspapers, 1922-c.1954

i. Relating to Sinn Féin hunger strike and Irish Civil War, 1922-3

- 35** Copy of *The Republic of Ireland* (anti-Treaty publication) edited by Liam Mellows. Articles include a questioning of the Provisional Government's functions, a copy of a proclamation issued by the government, an appeal for money 'to uphold the republican fund' and a copy of Éamon de Valera's speech from the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis of October 1921. 4pp
- 36** 14 February 1922 Copy of *The Republic of Ireland*. Articles include 'a reply to Michael Collins by Robert Barton', 'Irish America stands by the Republic', 'Terence McSwiney's warning in 1914', and a report of a recent Cumann na mBan convention. 8pp
- 37** 9 December 1922 Pages from the *Irish Independent*. Includes articles on and a report of the executions of Rory O'Connor, Liam Mellows, Joseph McKelvey and Richard Barrett by the Free State Government. 4pp

- 38** 10 November 1923 Pages from *Eire-The Irish Nation*, official paper of the Irish Republican Party. Includes lists of prisoners on hunger-strike in Kilmainham, Mountjoy, North Dublin Union, Tintown and the Curragh prisons, a letter from Frank Aiken T.D. to the hunger-strikers and a photograph of Erskine Childers, commemorating the first anniversary of his execution. 4pp
- 6 copies of the Sinn Féin *Daily Sheet* giving news of the hunger strikers in Mountjoy, Kilmainham, North Dublin Union, Dundalk, Tintown, the Curragh, Newbridge, and Tralee prisons. Includes discussion of the national press's coverage of the hunger strike (39), the Irish labour movement's support for the strike (41), reports of plebiscite results from Counties Mayo, Galway, Longford, Kerry and parts of Dublin in favour of the unconditional release of the strikers (43-4) and lists of those strikers considered to be in a particularly weak condition, including Ernie O'Malley T.D. Michael Kilroy T.D. and Thomas Derrig. One issue [P30/40] also contain a short biography of Derrig.
- 39** 8 November 1923 1p
- 40** 9 November 1923 1p
- 41** 10 November 1923 2pp
- 42** 12 November 1923 2pp
- 43** 14 November 1923 2pp
- 44** 23 November 1923 2pp

ii. Commemorative Cuttings

- 45** [c. 1949-51] Short article reporting the unveiling, by Gerard Boland T.D., of a stone Celtic cross in Castlegar in memory of Commandants Thomas Duggan and Louis D'Arcy, Captains Joseph Donnellan and Jack Lohan, and Father Thomas Burke and F.J. Feeney for their services to Ireland during the War of Independence. Among those reported present at the ceremony were Fr. Burke's sisters Margaret, Catherine and Mary. 1 item

- 46** [c. 1952-4] Obituary notice, in Irish, of Peig de Burca (Margaret Burke) including an account of her activities as a member of Cumann na mBan during the War of Independence and Civil War.
1 item

V. Booklets, photographs, poetry and medals, c. 1913-post 1937

i. Booklets and photographs

- 47** [1916] Booklet published by Wilson Hartnell and Company, Dublin entitled *Dublin and the Sinn Féin Rising* (April 1916). Contains photographs of the leaders of the rising, street scenes of Dublin 'before and after' an 'insurrection map' of Dublin, a copy of a manifesto issued by those in the General Post Office during the rising, biographies of those executed and an article entitled 'The Alpha and Omega of a short-lived Republic.'
32pp
- 48** post 1913 Monochrome postcard copy of a full length studio portrait of an Irish Volunteer in uniform, taken by T. Colum. 'O Cuire' annotated across bottom right-hand corner of original.
9x14cm
- 49** post March 1921 Memorial card of Commandant Louis D'Arcy, I.R.A. member, Clydagh, Headford, County Galway, who was killed at Merlin Park, Galway on 24 May 1921.
1 item
- 50** pre 8 December 1922 Monochrome postcard copy of head and shoulders studio portrait of Liam Mellows, by Keogh Brothers, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin.
8x13cm
- 51** [c. 1920] Monochrome photograph depicting a gathering in a wood with some men lying on the ground [I.R.A. training exercise?]. Very faded.
8x11cm

- 52 [c. 1920] Monochrome photograph of a gathering in a town square [political meeting?]. One man in army uniform.
6.5x11cm

ii. Poetry

- 53 post 1916 Carbon copy of poem 'Lux Perpetum Luceat Eis' by Monsignor Pádraig de Brún [about the 1916 Rising and/or War of Independence]. Refers to 'the pulse of resurgent spring.' [5th verse refers to Casement?].
1p
- 54 post October 1920 Printed illuminated poem 'Shed we no tear for you Terence McSwiney' by Brian O'Higgins written in memory of and addressed to Terence McSwiney (Lord Mayor of Cork, died on hunger strike 24 October 1920). Monochrome head and shoulders photograph of McSwiney attached.
1 item

iii. Medals and discs

- 55 [c. 1920] Metal [prison?] identification disc stamped P.J. Donovan.
1 item
3.5cm diameter
- 56 post 1937 Bronze Conradh na Saoire (War of Independence) medal, depicting an Irish soldier and the emblems of the 4 provinces, presented 'with the compliments of the President of Ireland' [to Margaret Burke?].
1 item
4cm diameter