

The Royal Irish Constabulary

CHAPTER

17

The Irish Constabulary was established under the Constabulary Act of 1822. From its establishment until its disbandment in 1922, some 85,000 men passed through the ranks. A force was gradually established in each barony in the country with the Chief Constables and Inspectors General under the control of the civil administration in Dublin Castle.

The majority of members were farmers or labourers prior to enlisting and most were Roman Catholic. During the earlier half of the 19th century, they faced unrest from many quarters. Organizations such as the Ribbonmen, Young Irelanders and Fenians were agitating at varying times. It was as a reward for their valour in putting down the Fenian Rising that Queen Victoria granted the force the 'Royal' title. Henceforth they were termed 'The Royal Irish Constabulary' or RIC.

Among their duties in the 1830s was the forcible seizure of tithes on behalf of the Established Church. In the 1850s they had to take on a range of civil and local government duties. They were responsible for collecting a wide range of statistical information including the population censuses, agricultural statistics, the annual returns of emigration, reports of evictions as well as annual crime reports. The most interesting facet of their work was their

| The Parish of Clontuskert - *Glimpses into its Past*

dedication to writing reports. These reports can be examined in the Registry of Deeds in Dublin and the detail of their reports on the deterioration of the potato crop in this area during the Famine, is fascinating to read. All of the reports are written in beautiful handwriting, with perfect grammar and spelling.

In 1852 there were 1594 barracks in the country, with 92 of these in Co. Galway. It was said that no place in Ireland was more than walking distance from a constabulary barracks. The cleanliness of the barracks and the general tidiness of the gardens and surrounds were evident throughout the country. The barracks were usually rented houses and there were four to five members in each barrack. In Clontuskert there were barracks at one time or another in Drum and Ballymanagh, and a 'holding centre' existed in Glenloughaun .

The Land War 1879-1892 was a very busy and troubled time for them. They had to protect bailiffs executing warrants and

enforcing evictions. This was an unpleasant duty, greatly disliked by the members of the force, most of whom were themselves from a rural background. They were accused of continually harassing the Land League leaders and this attracted widespread animosity.

However, the most difficult and most dangerous time for these men was during the War of Independence. Systematic attacks were



Joe Flattery,
Ballymanagh

The Royal Irish Constabulary

carried out on the RIC as they were perceived to be instruments of British Rule. A boycott of the police was enforced by the IRA and RIC members were threatened and assassinated in increasing numbers. Members eligible for pension retired in large numbers.

Many members had joined the British Army during the 1914-1918 war. John Brock of Garryduff was one such member. He joined the Irish Guards and fought in the war, later returning to resume service in the RIC until its disbandment in 1922. John's two brothers, William and Michael were also members of the RIC, while two of their uncles, both born in Garryduff, were also members of the force.

Patrick Byrnes, uncle of Billy Byrnes of Gorteencahill, also joined the force in 1913. At the outbreak of World War 1, he joined the Irish Guards and fought in Northern France. He was awarded a Military Medal for his gallantry in the Arras Campaign, one of the scenes of the Allied victories. He returned to the RIC and served in Co. Meath until the force was disbanded. He joined the RUC on its formation and spent his entire service in Derry. Patrick's brother Richard also joined the force in 1907 and served until its disbandment. Their father Malachy was also an RIC member.

In 1921, after the Truce, the RIC continued policing, but due to a split in the Sinn Féin ranks there were many attacks against them. They were disbanded in 1922 but could not return to their homes for fear of reprisals from some IRA elements. One option open to them was to join the Palestine Police force which was recruiting in Britain at that time.

Joe Flattery of Barnaboy was an RIC member. Joe's father Daniel Flattery joined the RIC in 1882 and served in both counties Mayo and Galway until he retired in 1913. Daniel's brother Charles, uncle of Joe, was also an RIC member, serving in Mayo and Donegal until he retired from the force in 1888. Joe himself

The Parish of Clontuskert - *Glimpses into its Past*

joined the Palestine Police Force after the disbandment of the RIC. Later he was posted to Hong Kong where he held a senior position in the police force. During World War 11 when the Japanese occupied that country, Joe became a prisoner of war and was interned until the surrender of the Japanese forces.

Peter Flaherty of Ardranny was also a member of the force up to 1914. He declined to join the British Forces and emigrated to America. He is reputed to be one of the RIC members assigned to guard King Edward VI when he visited this country.

Gus Curley,
Chapelpark

Gus Curley of Chapel Park joined the RIC in 1919 and served in Portroe in Nenagh. After the disbandment of the force in 1922, he went to London. He returned in 1924 but sadly, died suddenly while fishing from the bank of the Suck at the young age of twenty-five. Many others from the parish may have been RIC members, but information on those who enlisted is very difficult to find. Some names mentioned locally as having enlisted were Martin Colohan of Chapelpark, Peter Curley of Ballagh, Thomas McKeigue of Loughturk, Jack Curley of Ballymanagh and Patrick Poland of Lismanny



The RIC in the North was replaced by the Royal Ulster Constabulary in 1922 and many RIC members joined their ranks. A total of five district

inspectors and about 170 members of other ranks of the RIC joined the new Civic Guards, later to be called the 'Garda Síochána' during the early years of the force.