



The National Army Barracks in Headford, 1923.



Kevin O'Higgins, who signed the execution orders.

naghdown).

The fact that these men took no part in the Headford attack did not save them. It was suggested that the reason they were chosen for execution was because some of them were from the Headford area.

The prisoners were held in Galway until the evening before the executions; they were then transferred to Tuam. They were executed outside the old Tuam Workhouse on Wednesday morning 11 April 1923.

The prisoners were taken out in two batches of three; with their hands secured they were blindfolded and made to stand against one of the walls. They were then shot.

People in the town heard the volleys that morning and as news spread of the executions an air of gloom descended over the entire area and surrounding districts. People everywhere felt the greatest sympathy for the families and relatives of the executed men.

It was stated that the condemned men, 'went to their doom firmly and with brave hearts'.

Two priests were with them throughout the whole terrible ordeal attending to their spiritual needs. The men had attended Mass that morning; in fact two of them served as altar assistants during the ceremony. The bodies of the executed men were buried temporarily in the grounds of the workhouse; some sources mention a garden nearby.

The following very poignant letter was written by Francis Cunnane to his mother, before he was removed from Galway Jail and taken to his place of execution:

(In the Reception Ward, Galway Gaol, 1923)

Dear Mother,  
You are aware perhaps by now that I am one of the destined by God, to swell the roll of that martyred band who died for Ireland. I am going to my grave dying as I lived, believing that I did the best for my country and that the sacrifice will atone for anything left undone

be me; that I have conscientiously done everything for the better interest of my country, according to my lights. I have no dread, therefore it is with composure I accept my sentence, bearing no hatred against any living soul. To all my friends too numerous to mention, give them my best and sincerest love. For their many kindnesses during and after my intercourse with them, I am more than grateful and trust that God will in some way repay them as I intended to doing. But now that I am leaving them for a happier exchange, I am debarred from fulfilling my desire in this world of sorrows.

Well Mother, I know my death will shock you and all at home, but my dying wish is that no grief or sorrow be unnecessarily displayed by any of you for the end must come sometime and is as unwelcome now as at any future date. And perhaps when I am no better prepared than now. I hope God will accept my sacrifice for any faults I may have committed during my life on earth - my death is a glorious one, and I am unworthy of it. There may be some who think our line of action a hopeless and foolish one, but the voices of Pearse and Plunkett and those who died for the same cause in 1916 inspired me to follow in their footsteps and I am confident the vindication of the sacred cause will come in some generation or another. Cheer up, Mother dear, I shall meet you in Heaven in the near future, though I hope your life on earth shall be long and happy so much so that you will be recompensed in some small measure for your past and present worries.

Give all my neighbours and companions of my childhood my dying wish for their future welfare, and to my loyal comrades a fond farewell. And let no act of vengeance mar the cause for which I die. Let that sanctified flag be borne aloft unstained by the son of Cain, so that the world will see we are not waging war of Bolshevism of which the IRA are accused. I am sending you a few souvenirs including a pair of beads I got from Cissie during the

Black and Tan regime. In them find consolation and do not worry. Now I must conclude finally and eternally in this side of the grave so I send You Father, Cissie, Tessie, Bertie, Gerald, Willie, John, Tommie, Martin, Charles, Joe and Vincent my blessings and good wishes.

May God bless all of you and may we all meet in Heaven, is the sincere wish of your dutiful and loving son - Frank (Cunnane).

What was evident from the moving letters of executed men across the country was their deep religious faith, patriotism, love of country and a belief in the cause for which they were dying.

Ernie O'Malley later wrote: 'Pearse kindled in them a fire which was never extinguished until they lay dead on the hillsides or buried in quick-lime against a barrack wall'.

The executed men subsequently became known as the 'Tuam Martyrs'.

When the Free State forces vacated the workhouse towards the end of 1923 they had the bodies exhumed and brought them to their new headquarters in Athlone.

It seems that all calls for the bodies to be released to the families were ignored. However, on 28 October 1924 the Free State Government finally released the bodies.

The funeral of coffins and some twenty motor vehicles arrived in Tuam at 11.30pm. The heavy downpours of rain didn't prevent crowds from turning out to pay their respects. A Guard of Honour of the IRA took up positions.

The coffins were draped in the tricolour and bore breastplates provided by the relatives recording the names, date of death and age of deceased; all in Irish. Streamers with mourning crosses decorated in Republican colours spanned the streets and soldiers and Civic Guards saluted the coffins; the Civil War was truly over, but at a terrible cost and bitter legacy.

## GAA club honours centenary of man in whose honour it has been named

BY DAVE O'CONNELL

A FULL day of events, on and off the pitch, will take place this Easter Bank Holiday Monday as Oughterard GAA Club marks the centenary of the execution of the man in whose honour they are named.

Séamus Ó Máille was born at Bridge Street, Oughterard, on October 6 1897, and he was executed at the Workhouse in Tuam on April 11 1923.

He is buried in the Republican Plot in Kilcummin Cemetery, and the local GAA Club is officially known as Cumann Péile Séamus Ó Máille in his honour.

This Bank Holiday Monday - just before the centenary of his death - the club have a day's activities planned, including the launch of a book, written by historian Michael Hurley and Sean O'Malley, a nephew of Seamus himself.

Members of the O'Malley family will also unveil a commemorative plaque at the club's Corribdale grounds; they will also be presented with one-off Oughterard jerseys,

specially produced to mark this historic centenary.

Galway Football Chairman Micheál Geraghty will be among the special guests in attendance, and there will be a number of exhibition games on the evening, which begins at 5pm.

"It promises to be an eventful day and it is an opportunity for the community to come together and pay homage to Séamus O' Máille," said a club spokesperson.

James O'Malley - or Séamus Ó Máille - was one of a six young men in the Galway Jail to face trial before Free State Officers on April 10 1923.

The six - Francis Cunnane, Kilcoona, Headford; Michael Monaghan, Clooneen, Headford; John Newell, Wineforth, Headford; John Maguire, Cross, Cong; Martin Moylan, Farmerstown, Annaghdown, and James O'Malley - were sentenced to die before a firing squad.

James O'Malley - or Séamus Ó Máille - was buried in the Republican Plot in Kilcummin Cemetery, his final resting place on October 29 1924.