



Gaeltacht Policing | Galway Division

When An Garda Síochána were first formed in 1922, approximately 10% of the population spoke Irish as their everyday language, mostly in regions on or near the western seaboard. Since this time, concerted efforts were made by subsequent Governments to revive the Irish language. Various Garda Commissioners over the years were also to the forefront in this regard.

In 1923, 500 places were reserved for Irish-speaking recruits to the Force. Extensive recruiting campaigns in Gaeltacht areas met with little success for various reasons. From the late 1920s to the mid-30s preferential treatment was given to Irish-speaking recruits. Basic instruction in conversational Irish was also provided to all recruits in training to improve the situation.

Given his background, Commissioner O'Duffy was adamant that the newly-formed force should be in the vanguard as regards the revival of the Irish language and was instrumental in setting up Conradh Gaelach an Gharda, a society to promote both the Irish language and the culture as a whole in the force. Garda periodicals *Iris an Gharda* and later *Guth an Gharda* regularly carried articles in the Irish language, actively encouraging the men (as most of the force were at the time) to study the language.

Even in stations where the members were capable of conversing in Irish, official correspondence continued to be carried out in English. The lack of amenities and remoteness of many of the Gaeltacht Stations was an obstacle to both the policing of these areas and the promotion of the language. A Government Commission in as early as 1926 recommended that members who could carry out their duties in Irish should receive extra pay. The Government disagreed.

Gardaí in some stations continued to make their own arrangements to improve in the language. In certain Stations the Sergeant provided lessons, others employed teachers whom they paid for themselves. Some studied on their own or joined the local Gaelic Leagues. Competency in Irish later became a prerequisite for promotion.

Despite the efforts involved, progress was slow for a number of reasons, one being the fear of being posted to remote Gaeltacht stations. One member writing to the *Garda Review* at the time described his station as



Members of Carraroe Station Party with Kate Sullivan (sitting) and her daughter Julia Sullivan (Joyce). Courtesy of Julia O'Donnell.
Comhaltai ó Bhuíon Stáisiún na Ceathrún Rua i dteannta Kate Sullivan (ina sui) agus a hiníon Julia Sullivan (Joyce). Le caoinchead Julia O'Donnell.



In the Heart of the Gaeltacht, December 1934. Lettermore station party, with Sergt. Morris Roe. Courtesy of An Garda Síochána.
I gcroílár na Gaeltachta, Mí na Nollag, 1934. Buíon stáisiún Leitir Móir, i dteannta an Sáirsint Morris Roe. Le caoinchead an Gharda Síochána.

follows: “the áras [station] is 4 miles from the nearest church, 8 miles from the nearest railway station, 20 miles from the nearest Doctor, 19 miles from the nearest District Court, 33 miles from the nearest District HQ and 36 miles from the nearest Divisional HQ. 99% of the people speak no English at all and there is no field for hurling or football.”

Other initiatives in the early years to improve the situation included a Linguaphone gramophone with Irish records being provided to all stations. Sadly, further efforts to officially

promote the language involved a degree of compulsion from the authorities, leading to resentment on behalf of the members who had their duties to attend to.

In 1934, the Galway West Division was designated an all-Irish Division, with only men capable to speak the language stationed there. In 1937, Irish was made compulsory for entry to the Garda Síochána. In December 1935, then Commissioner Eamon Broy ordered members in all Irish-speaking Districts to provide their evidence to the courts exclusively in Irish. This led to controversy among certain members of the Judiciary and had to be relaxed later.

This reluctance in regard to using the Irish language persisted in the force and in 1934, Broy persuaded the Government to pay an additional 7.5% to members based in Gaeltacht areas.

Overall, the efforts to promote the language in the early years failed and a Government Minister at the time stated that “there was no sense in making the Force bilingual when the rest of the country was not”.

Since the foundation of the Force, Gardaí have been assigned to the following Gaeltacht Stations in the Galway West Division: Úarán Mór, Leacht Seoirse, An Ceathrú Rua, Cill Ronáin, Indreabhán, Maigh Cuilinn, Leitir Mór, Ros Muc, An Spidéal, Carna, An Mám and Sraith Salach.

The first Gardaí posted to An Ceathrú Rua in 1923 were Sergeant Thomas Burke, 4915, Garda J. Keane, 4336, Garda M. Patten, 4576, Garda D. Twomey, 4562 and Garda E. Mahoney, 4495.

In 2021, An Garda Síochána commissioned a special Fáinne Gaeilge (gold, silver and cupla focal) developed by Conradh na Gaeilge to further the efforts to increase the use of the Irish language. The goal of the initiative is to encourage all personnel to use whatever Irish they have and to provide an effective way for members of the public to identify Irish-speaking personnel.

Our focus is on strengthening our Irish language services through recruitment, training and promotion of the language in order to provide a policing service that supports communities and staff who wish to engage through the medium of Irish.

(Commissioner J.A. Harris, An Garda Síochána, Irish Language Strategy, 2022 – 2025.)

