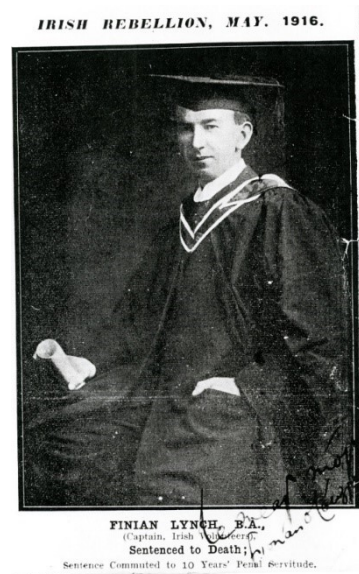


My great-grandfather Fionán Lynch a “determined man”
A teacher, actor, revolutionary, prisoner, elected Sinn Fein
MP, TD, Minister, Barrister, Judge and Patriot – his role during
the revolutionary period in Ireland (1912-1922) by Lasara
Lynch

Fionán Lynch was my great-grandfather. He was an Irish revolutionary who fought in the 1916 rising, the War of Independence and the Civil War. He also served as a TD, sat in the first Dáil and became a Minister in the first Cumann na nGaedheal government.

He was born on the 17th of March 1889 in Waterville, Co. Kerry. His parents were both teachers and lost many of their eleven children to scarlet fever in the early 1900s. Fionán survived. Irish was his first language and he attended Rockwell College and subsequently, Blackrock College for a year of post-secondary school education. He planned to study medicine but his father died suddenly and the family did not have the resources to fund his University education so he went to teach Irish in a school in Swansea, Wales. It was here that he founded a branch of the Gaelic League, where he acted as a mentor to others. In 1909, he returned to Ireland to train as a teacher at St Patrick’s College Drumcondra where he became friends with Gearoid O’Sullivan, Michael Collin’s first cousin. He studied French and translated Moliere’s works into Irish for his thesis.

Gearoid and Fionán stayed in “digs” at his aunt’s, Myra McCarthy, house at 44 Mountjoy Street near the Mater hospital (see photo). Because so many men from Kerry and Cork resided there it was nicknamed the “Munster Hotel.” It would later become Michael Collins digs and one of the most raided houses in Dublin in 1921 and 1922.



Fionán joined the Keating branch (Munster branch) of the Gaelic League in 1912. He was a member of the Branch Committee along with Gearoid O' Sullivan. Fionán, Pearas Beaslai, Con Collins, Dermot O'Hegarty, Gearoid O'Sullivan, Maire Ni Chonaill, Maire Dixon, Treasa Ni Mhuirthile, Brigid Dixon and Caitlin de Bhulbh founded 'na hAisteoirí - a Dramatic Society to produce Irish Plays. Fionán and Gearoid often played the principal male parts and both were elected to the Coisde Gnotha (governing body of the Gaelic League). Fionán's involvement in the revival of Irish culture is probably what led to his, and others, rebellious instincts and later fight for Irish freedom. All the men involved in Na hAisteoirí and both Dixon sisters took part in the Rising of 1916.

In 1913, Fionán attended the Rotunda Rink meeting where the Irish Volunteers was founded. He signed up immediately after the meeting (see image of Fionán in his Irish Volunteer uniform).

They had training drills at 41 Parnell Square and Fionán was assigned to take squads for drilling and recalled well that James Connolly taught them urban guerilla warfare for Dublin who had conflict experience *"he was in a scrap or two in the past"*. Fionán was assigned to the 'F' company 1st Battalion of the volunteers and initially was elected 2nd Lieutenant later became captain of 'F' company when Piaras Beaslai became Vice Commandant.



Soon after, Fionán was recruited by Seán Mac Diarmada, who he knew well, to join the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB). Mac Diarmada administered the IRB oath to Fionán. Fionán was attached to 'The 'Circle,' made up of many Keating Branch members. Bulmer Hobson was "Centre" of the Circle. The Battalion Council was established in 1915 and consisted of Battalion Leaders, including company captains. Fionán commanded half of the First Battalion during an important rehearsal in January 1916 over the battleground area (Church Street and King Street near the Four Courts) occupied by the First Battalion

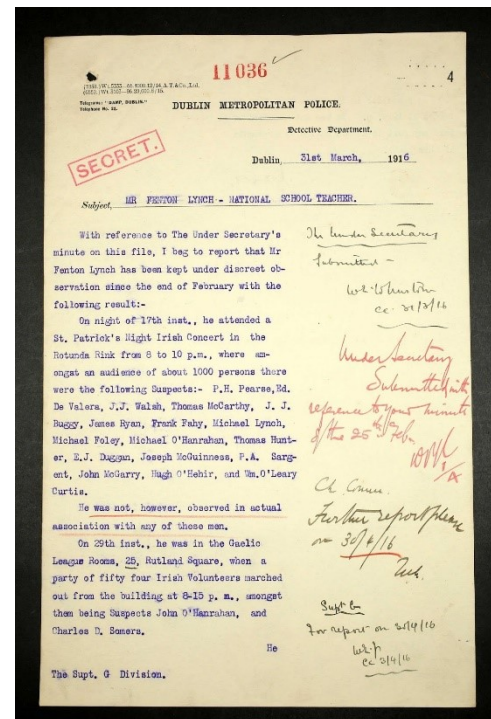
during Easter Week 1916. Fionán has been appointed as a teacher to St Michans school on Church Street and his knowledge of the area assisted greatly during the Rising.

The Dublin Metropolitan police followed Fionán from 1914 to 1916 as they frequently monitored Irish Volunteers and IRB members and issued regular bureaucratic reports often misspelling his name (e.g., Fenton Lynch – see figure).

In early 1916, the Commissioners of National Education and the manager of St Michan's school, where Fionán taught, informed Fionán that if he did not sever his connections with the Irish Volunteers his "salary would be withdrawn". Fionán reported to Sean McDermott who referred him to Tom McDonagh and was advised to "lie low for the time being." At the next

meeting of F company Fionán reported to his men that he had to resign but that when there would be "anything doing" he would be back to lead them. He and two other teachers, Thomas Ashe and Diarmuid O'Connell, formally severed their connections with the Irish Volunteers up until Easter Week in 1916. While he could not train with the Volunteers, he organised a squad for the various civil servants who could not be openly associated with the Volunteers. Family members of those involved in the Rising were not always bystanders. For example, Fionán's youngest sister Brigid was involved in Cumman na mBan and acted as a courier during the Rising using her motorbike travelling from barricade to barricade. She always swore that all she was doing was "bringing cigarettes from one Company to the other". At the time of the Rising, Fionán, Diarmuid O' Hegarty, Gearoid O' Sullivan and Seán Mac Diarmada were all living at 44 Mountjoy street belonging to Fionán's aunt, Myra M. McCarthy. The weapons for the First Battalion were even stored in the roof of Myra McCarthy's bathroom unknown to Ms. McCarthy.

While Fionán was not directly involved with the volunteers in early 1916, he was aware of the plans for the Rising. He scouted out the area that the 'F' company would occupy during the Rising and made all necessary preparations before Holy Thursday 1916. Then, on Holy Thursday night, Fionán said "I reminded the men of what I had told them a few months before when leaving them – that when there would be anything doing, I would be back to lead them. I them said Well, I am back, and I will ever remember with pride



the cheers with which that announcement was greeted.” He re-established himself as Captain of ‘F’ company. In his own words he described the week before the Rising:

During the last few three or four days before the Rising the excitement was at fever-height, and rumours were rife as to a general round-up by the British. And so on. Somewhere about that time, or perhaps earlier in Holy Week, most of the leaders changed their addresses in order to stay in houses where there were a number of armed volunteers any attempt at arrest. Sean Mac Diarmada (see photo) came to 44 Mountjoy St. with us; in addition to Gearoid O’Sullivan and myself there were also staying in 44 at that time Mort O’Connell, Clerk of the Dail, Fionán (Floss) O’Doherty and Con Keating, all members of my company. Keating was a wireless operator, and he was drowned when the car in which he was travelling to Caherciveen went into the Laune at Ballykissane Quay on Easter Saturday 1916.



On Easter Saturday morning, Fionán was awoken by Sean Connolly, killed Easter Monday during the Dublin Castle attack, banging at the door with the news Roger Casement’s arrest in Kerry. Mac Diarmada and Fionán hailed a taxi and visited Padraig Pearse in Rathfarnham and brought him to Liberty Hall for conferences all day. On Easter Sunday Fionán and Gearóid O’Sullivan attended early mass on Berkeley Road and afterwards read in the newspaper MacNeill's order reversing the order to start the rising. Fionán brought back the newspaper to Seán Mac Diarmada containing MacNeill’s cancellation of the “manoeuvre” for that day.

“It was the first and only time that I saw Sean really angry and upset. I think, myself, that he and the others who insisted on carrying on with the Rising, had taken MacNeill more into their confidence there would have been no such proclamation from MacNeill.”

Meetings between the seven signatories of the proclamation took place all day long under the guard of the ‘F’ company at the Keatings branch of the Gaelic League. Fionán had “a most unpleasant duty imposed on me at the time was to place a guard over my own IRB Centre, Bulmer Hobson, who was detained by order of the Supreme Council for some days prior to the Rising. My instructions were that he was to be released when the Rising had started. As far as I know, the only reason for Hobson’s arrest was that he

agreed with MacNeill that a Rising was impossible without German aid and, therefore, when the "Aud" failed to land any substantial share of arms he was opposed to the Rising going ahead at all at that time." The Battalions were informed that the Rising would take place on Easter Monday instead.



During the Rising, Fionán was based at the Four Courts area. On Easter Monday morning, the First Battalion mobilised in Blackhall Place and took up their allocated positions. Fionán was stationed in North King Street. The fighting was quiet until Wednesday 26th April when the fighting became very

intense. 'F' Company experienced very intense fighting on Church Street and North King Street up until Saturday when they fell back to the Four Courts when an armored car (a Whippet) was brought to bear against the Volunteers. The fighting on North King Street was supposedly the worst fighting that occurred in the whole of Dublin. Indeed, a number of civilians were murdered in their



houses by the British army (South Staffords). General Sir John Maxwell stated "The allegations of brutality seem almost exclusively concerned with the fighting in North King St. with one exception of the place at Ballsbridge, where the Sherwood Foresters were ambushed, this was by far the worst fighting that occurred in the whole of Dublin. At first the troops, coming from one end of the street, were repulsed, and it was only when we made an attack from both ends that we succeeded, after twenty-four hours fighting, in capturing the street. The casualties were very heavy during this fighting..."

Fionán's last fighting was on Saturday 29th April, near May Lane, where Seán Hurley was mortally wounded beside him. Fionán arranged for the nearby Capuchin priests to administer the last rites to Sean. They withdrew over the rooftops and arrived in the Four Courts where a battalion council was held planning to continue fighting and attack the South Staffords regiment on Church Street. However, the surrender order then arrived from Pádraig Pearse and the Four Courts 1st Battalion surrendered.



After the surrender, Fionán, along with many of his comrades, were arrested. Incredibly, Fionán's first cousin Floss O'Doherty and Mort O'Connell fell asleep in a quiet corner of the Four Courts (see image) overnight and when they awoke the following day, they found the Rising was over and all

their comrades has been arrested. They changed their Volunteers uniform for lay clothes and were able to sneak out past some British soldiers and went home avoiding arrest and imprisonment.

Fionán and the others were marched to the Rotunda Rink, then on to Richmond Barracks (see mugshot from Richmond Barracks dated May 5th, 1916) and from there to Kilmainham Jail. During this march, they were jeered at and had things thrown at them by the crowd. *"On Sunday we were marched from Rotunda rink right through the city through Inchicore to the Richmond Barracks. From the lane ways the women, were up shouting at the military to BAYNONET them. The crowd were extremely hostile."*



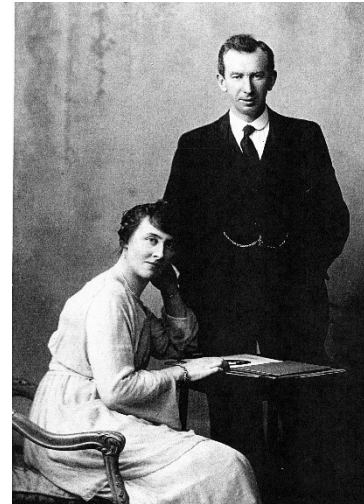
He awaited trial in Kilmainham, while listening to the executions of his comrades, including Ned Daly and Seán Heuston, and his good friends, Seán Mac Diarmada and Tom Clarke. Fionán was tried and sentenced to death. However, after the execution of the first 16 rebels, his sentence was commuted to ten years' penal servitude. He was transferred to Mountjoy Prison. The Dublin Metropolitan Police and British army had a habit of misspelling Fionán's name – above his prison cell his name was listed as "Fenian Lynch." A passing prison guard noted this and laughed saying "Fenian by name Fenian by nature." From there Fionán was shipped to Portland Prison, Isle of Wight England. He was later transferred to Lewes prison but in June 1917, he was granted amnesty and was released.

He returned home to Kerry, and was greeted by hundreds of people and speeches, including one given by Pádraig Pearse's mother. Local folklore described the fields around the Lynch family home in Kilmackerin Co Kerry as being mobbed by the crowd. Fionán spent the next while giving many speeches about the benefits of the republic (see photo). However, these speeches were considered seditious by the British and Fionán was arrested repeatedly.



One of his most noteworthy speeches was in Ardfert, Kerry in August 1917, on the anniversary of the execution of Roger Casement.

He wore his Volunteer uniform and made the speech with Thomas Ashe and Austin Stack. After the speech, he got a lift back to Tralee in the horse and cart owned by a Volunteer called Tom Slattery who had been imprisoned at Frongach, Wales when he tried to save Casement from arrest in 1916. Also in the cart was Tom's daughter Brigid who later married Fionán (see photo of Brigid Slattery and Fionan Lynch on their wedding day). Therefore, Tom Slattery is my great-great grandfather and Brigid is my great grandmother!



Fionán returned to Dublin and was re-arrested after a short while. He was sent to Mountjoy Prison where he, and others, began a hunger strike seeking rights as political prisoners rather than simple criminals. The prisoners were unable to walk and had to be forcibly carried to the force-feeding room. After one of Fionán's force-feedings he saw Thomas Ashe being brought out of his cell. Fionán called out

“Stick it Tom boy” and Ashe called back “I’ll stick it Fin.” This was the last time Fionán spoke to his friend as Ashe’s feeding tube was inserted incorrectly, and the food was fed to his lungs. He died at the neighboring Mater Hospital later the same day (see image of Ashe on his deathbed in the Mater Hospital). After Ashe’s death the other prisoners got

full privileges of political prisoners. At Ashe's inquest the barrister for the Empire described Fionán as "determined man". Fionán was then transferred to Dundalk Jail, but was released soon after, in November 1917.

Fionán began organising the Volunteers in Donegal and Waterford but was once again arrested in May 1918. In December 1918, although still in jail, Fionán was elected as a Sinn Féin member for Kerry. It was his friend, Michael Collins that signed the nomination on behalf of Fionán. The Sinn Féin members met in Dublin in January 1919 and constituted the first Dáil Eireann. Fionán missed the first meeting as he was still imprisoned in Belfast. Fionán was released in August 1919 and helped some other prisoners escape from Manchester prison a couple of weeks later.



Fionán was a member of the delegation that went to London to negotiate the Anglo- Irish Treaty (see photo of the Treaty party –



Fionán front row, on the right). He supported the Treaty like most IRB members and viewed it as the most practical solution. He spoke forcibly at the Treaty debate at Earlsfort Terrace supporting Collins and arguing that the Treaty compromise would provide the country control of education of the population and this would allow the State to guide subsequent generations and ensure full independence in time.

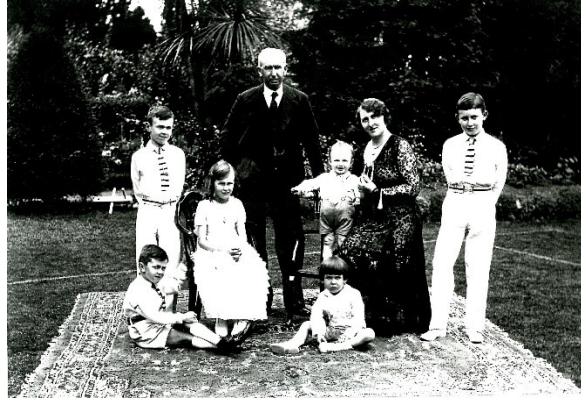
After the signing of the Anglo-Irish treaty on 6th December 1921, he was appointed as minister of education in the new government. There was great conflict between fellow Irishmen who had fought together during the Rising and subsequent War of Independence. Roughly half were pro-treaty, who believed that the Treaty could be used as a stepping-stone to further independence, and the other half were anti-treaty. This conflict led to a brutal civil war lasting from 1922-1923. Fionán fought with the Irish Free State Army during the civil war and was Lieutenant General in charge of Co. Kerry (see photo – Fionán second from the right). Much of the Kerry population was anti-treaty, so it was quite dangerous for Fionán when he travelled to his constituency in Kerry. Fionán was shot on one occasion, but a metal cigarette case saved his life. When lying in the bottom of a ditch and being shot at by his previous comrade-in-arms and friend Austin Stack, his aide made the dry comment “it seems that your constituents are not happy with you General.”

In August 1922, Fionán and Michael Collins were both travelling to their home counties. They travelled together by car as far as Limerick, where they parted company. Fionán headed to Kerry and Michael Collins headed to Beal na mBláth where he was then ambushed and assassinated on August 22. At the end of 1922 following the execution of the Four Courts IRA members, a threat was published by the anti-treaty IRA group, stating that all pro-treaty TD's, which included Fionán, were targets for assassination.



At the end of the civil war, the Cumann na nGaedheal government worked to create a working State. Fionán was firstly appointed Minister for Fisheries and then Minister for Lands and Fisheries for ten years (see photo – Fionán is on the far right).

He continued to be threatened with assassination and Fionán and his family were provided with an armed guard up until 1932 (see photo from 1931 of Fionán, Brigid and the family). Fionan carried small arms around with him. One of the first memories of my grandfather Thomas Lynch was being taken to school in an armoured car!



In 1932, the Cumann na nGaedheal government was defeated by Fianna Fáil and Fionan was out of the government although he continued as a TD until 1944. In 1937, Fionán suffered a severe heart attack, though he was still re-elected in the 1938 election. Remarkably Fianna Fail decided not to contest his Dail seat in the 1938 election as he was recovering from his heart attack. He clearly was held in high regard by both sides of the political divide. Following the election, he was elected by Dáil Eireann as leas cheann comhairle. He resigned due to health issues in 1939. In 1944, he was appointed as a Circuit Court judge for Donegal and Sligo by Eamon De Valera (see photo). It was unheard of that a Fine Gael politician would be appointed by a Fianna Fail Taoiseach to the courts but he was held in high regard by both sides. He previously worked as a barrister for a brief period of time.



In early 1966 the BBC recorded all surviving members of the Irish Volunteers who took part in the Rising including Fionán. We have a copy of this incredible recording where you hear someone who actually lived through all these amazing events that defined our nation describe them firsthand. A few months after this recording was made, in June 1966, Fionán died aged 77. Although he was offered a state funeral and burial in Glasnevin cemetery, his family thought he would not have wanted a big funeral and he was buried in Deansgrange cemetery.

Bibliography

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1. BBC recording of Fionán Lynch 1966.
2. Statement by Witness Bureau of Military History, document witness 192, Judge Fionán Lynch Minore Orwell Park, Rathgar, Dublin. Captain, 1st Battn. Irish Volunteers 1916, Gaelic activities, Dublin prior to 1916 Rising.
 - These two sources are both witness sources. I was able to cross-check any information I found from one sources with the other source to ensure that it was factually correct.

Secondary sources

3. Kerry 1916. Histories and Legacies of the Easter Rising. A Centenary Record, edited by Bridget McAuliffe, Mary McAuliffe, and Owen O'Shea.
 - This biographical, secondary source was incredibly helpful in providing facts about Fionán's involvement in the revolutionary period. It also provided an interesting view of looking back on the time of all these incredibly significant events.
4. My great-uncle and son of Fionán, Dermot Lynch.
 - Talking to Dermot Lynch was an interesting insight to everything he learnt about Fionán as his father. He knew all the stories that Fionán would have told him and while these stories may not have been completely accurate, I was able to cross-check them with my other sources.