

Title: An Investigation into the Death and Retrieval of the Body of Seán McIntyre in June 1921

Sources and Investigation Approach:

In June 2021 it was 100 years since the death of Volunteer Seán McIntyre. My great-grandfather, Patrick Sheridan, was also a Volunteer and was involved in the mission in which Seán McIntyre lost his life. I was interested to find out more about this story.

Initially I decided to talk to Drumlane Heritage Committee to find out where to get information. I met with Suzanne Gunn in November 2021 and she told me that the best place to start, is the Military Archives. She also gave me books (The Fight for Irish Freedom, author Michael B. Barry; Selton Hill, author Pádraig Leydon; Ireland: The Autobiography, editor John Bowman) to help me understand what life was like at that time and develop a greater understanding of what happened.



Figure 1. Brendan McCann, son of Volunteer Anthony McCann; Suzanne Gunn, Drumlane Heritage Committee (DHC); Paddy, Ann and Johanna O'Reilly, relatives of Seán McIntyre; Mícheál McCabe DHC; courtesy of DHC June 2021

Next, I conducted a Google search to see what I could find about Seán McIntyre. I found references to the event and the participants in Military Pension documents in the Military Archives of Ireland, and also several newspaper articles about Seán, the mission in which he lost his life, and the retrieval of his body.

Then I made contact with Dr Brendan Scott, Historian-in-Residence with Cavan County Council, to see if he could help with my research. Dr Brendan was very helpful and told me that there is a poster and information in Cavan Library relating to Seán McIntyre. He also told me of some books which referenced the events (The Dead of the Irish Revolution, authors Eunan O'Halpin and Daithí Ó Corráin; County Cavan and the Revolutionary Years 1918-22, editor Dr Brendan Scott).

I have listed all sources in my References section

Essay:

Introduction

In 1921 Seán McIntyre was a 21 year old farmer in Lagan, Belturbet, Co. Cavan. He had been christened John McIntyre, but was nicknamed Seán. His father died in 1903, and his brother James died from meningitis in 1919. After the untimely death of James, Seán tended to the farm and helped James' wife with her son. In 1919, Seán joined the IRA, where he was part of the West Cavan Brigade. They led many successful missions against the RIC and Black and Tans in West Cavan.

What Life was Like at the Time

To understand the gravity of the political situation in Ireland, and the effect it had on everyone alive at the time, you must understand what life was like at the time. People lived in fear of the RIC and British Soldiers in the early 1900's. Even if you weren't actively fighting against the British forces, you were suffering the consequences. If you openly expressed favour towards the British, you were in danger of being immediately shot or boycotted by the IRA. If you expressed feelings towards the Irish, the Black and Tans would be knocking on your door soon enough. I have heard many stories about the torture that was life for innocent people.¹ One story that definitely helped open my eyes to the fear and violence of the 1920's, was a story that Suzanne Gunn of Drumlane Heritage Committee told me.



Figure 2: The Black and Tans in a Crossley Tender

*"The Black and Tans motor cars had a sound off them, which was significant, and was the only regular alarm bell to the people of Milltown that they should take cover. One day when my grand-uncle was very young the Black and Tans rolled into town, shooting bullets this way and that. The young boy watched, not sure what was going on, and stood motionless as a bullet propelled towards him. Only a woman of the neighbourhood grabbed him and pulled him over a wall, he would have been another tally on the scorecard of some RIC officer."*²

The House at Tomkinroad

Tomkinroad House was a derelict landlord house, formerly in possession of David Griffith, approximately 7.5km from Milltown Village. It was in the process of being sold. The IRA feared that it would be taken by the RIC or Black and Tans, and decided to not let that happen. They hung up a sign on a second farm attached to the residence, stating that if anyone ever bought said house, they would suffer consequences.

¹ Irish Times 4th January 2020, Diarmaid Ferriter Article – Black and Tans: 'Half-drunk, whole-mad' and one-fifth Irish; and Ireland: The Autobiography, edited by John Bowman

² Conversation with Suzanne Gunn, Drumlane Heritage Committee, November 2021

David Griffith, the owner of the house, had lost interest in owning it several weeks before the sale. He had left a motorcar, and had sold almost all of the furniture, except an old sofa, which was waiting to be auctioned off. The sofa was left outside the house, while the motorcar was left in the shed, also waiting to be sold. The previous year Mr. Griffith had been occupying the house when it was raided for guns by the IRA. He refused to cooperate and was shot in the leg. He claimed money, and was given £5,000 as compensation for his wounded leg.³



Figure 3: Tomkinroad House

The Blowing up of the House at Tomkinroad

So, it was set. The IRA sent 11 volunteers from the West Cavan Brigade⁴ to blow up the house. Seán McIntyre was one of them. They went to the house, and set the explosives. They crept outside and waited anxiously. At any moment, the RIC might become conscious of what was happening and intervene. Seán McIntyre went back in to see why the explosives failed. He crept into the house; the explosives went off, and McIntyre's exit was blocked. Before he could try and remove the barricade from the door, he was crushed in a pile of debris. The Anglo Celt from the 11th June 1921 explains all of the damages. Only small parts of the walls were remaining. One of the walls was discovered 100 yards away. The motorcar was undisturbed, as was the sofa. Two caps, a coat, and a hat were found near the site. The cut stone chimney was remarkably still standing, although it was much of a safety hazard and was an incredible liability.⁵

Military Archives
REGISTRATION OF BIRTHS AND DEATHS IN IRELAND.
26 VICTORIA, Chapter 11, and 43 and 44 Victoria, Chapter 13.

CERTIFIED COPY OF ENTRY IN THE REGISTER BOOK OF DEATHS. (See Endorsement.)

THIS Registered in the District of Belturbet in the Union of Cavan in the County of Cavan

Date and Place of Death (2)	Name and Surname (1)	Sex (4)	Condition (3)	Age last Birthday (6)	Rank, Profession, or Occupation (7)	Certified Cause of Death and Duration of Illness (8)	Signature, Qualification, and Residence of Informant (9)	When Registered (10)	Signature of Registrar (11)
1921 26th June Belturbet Cavan R.D.	John McIntyre	Male	Single	21	Farmer	Heart disease as certified by medical attendant	Thomas Ridley who came to the house of informant on the 26th June 1921 Belturbet Cavan	26th June 1921	Peter Registrar

I hereby Certify that the foregoing is a true Copy of the Entry No. 331 in the Register Book of Deaths of my District.

Office, Belturbet Date, 26 March 1925

Registrar of Births and Deaths,
for the District of Belturbet

Military Service Pensions Collection

Figure 4: Certified Copy of the Death Certificate of Seán McIntyre

³ Anglo Celt 11th June 1921 – House Blown Up; Sensation at Tomkinroad

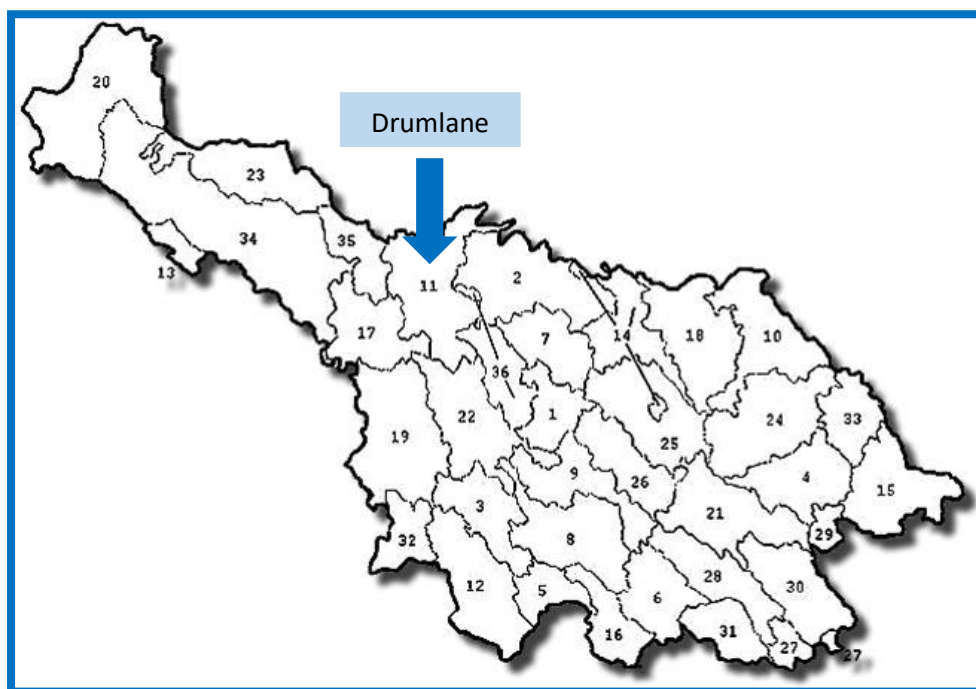
⁴ Military Archives Ireland – Military Service Pensions Collection – West Cavan Brigade

⁵ Anglo Celt 11th June 1921 – House Blown Up; Sensation at Tomkinroad

The Retrieval of the Body of Seán McIntyre

After the body of Seán McIntyre was found, the group of men sadly and anxiously went to their commanding officer and reported the fatality. The site of the bombing was under constant surveillance by the Black and Tans and RIC, so by staying around for too long after the bombing, they would raise suspicion, which might cause the British forces to look around more, and find the body of Seán McIntyre. After a while 13 men, including my great-grandfather Patrick Sheridan, were assigned to retrieve the body.⁶ They used a donkey and cart which was filled with hay and possibly turf to act as their hearse. By laying Seán down, then covering him with a layer of hay, they could disguise it from the RIC's eyes. If they were caught with the body, they would almost certainly be instantly shot, or taken captive. The retrieval mission took 4-6 weeks. It is said that when the party was escorting the body they sent a man behind, and a man in front, both with whistles, and if at any time they encountered British forces or someone suspicious of them, they were to blow on the whistles to warn the cart in the middle. A local carpenter called John Gunn made the coffin to put McIntyre in, because it was too dangerous to go to an undertaker. After the coffin was done and the coast was clear they headed off again and contacted the local priest, Father Thomas Myles. He met them at Drumlane Abbey cemetery in the middle of the night. Seán's family burial place was at St Mary's Church, Staghall, however, Staghall was much too conspicuous and dangerous at the time, so they had to go to Drumlane.⁷ Supposedly, at a point in the journey, the volunteers took hold of a boat and rowed across a lake so that they would have less chance of being seen, however, I did not find any corroborating evidence of this.

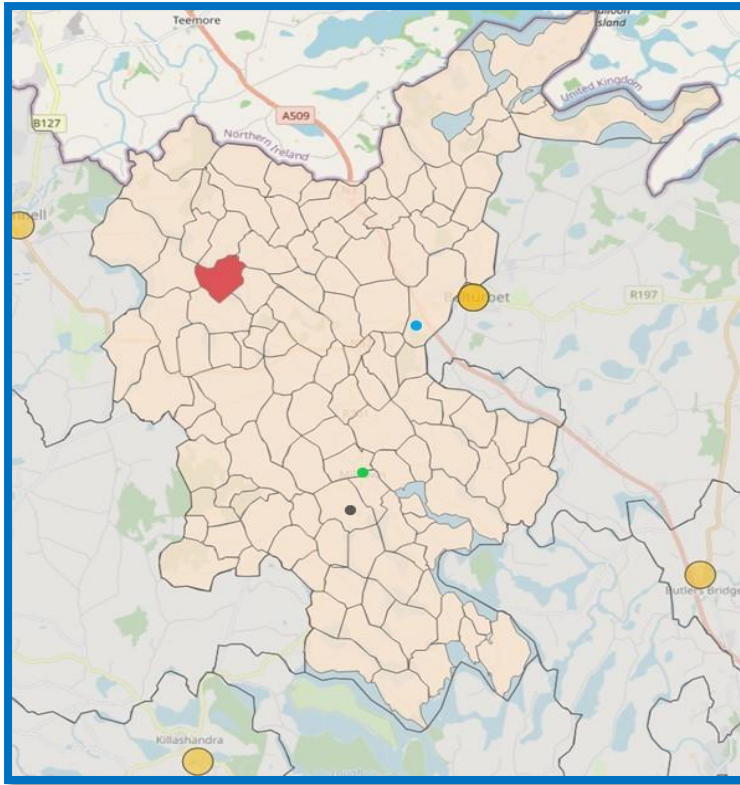
Map of Parishes in Co. Cavan



⁶ Military Archives Ireland – Military Service Pensions Collection – West Cavan Brigade

⁷ Anglo Celt 3rd June 2021 – Remembering Seán McIntyre 100 years on

Map of Drumlane Parish, Co. Cavan



	Tomkinroad
	St Mary's Church, Staghall
	Milltown Village
	Drumlane Abbey and Cemetery

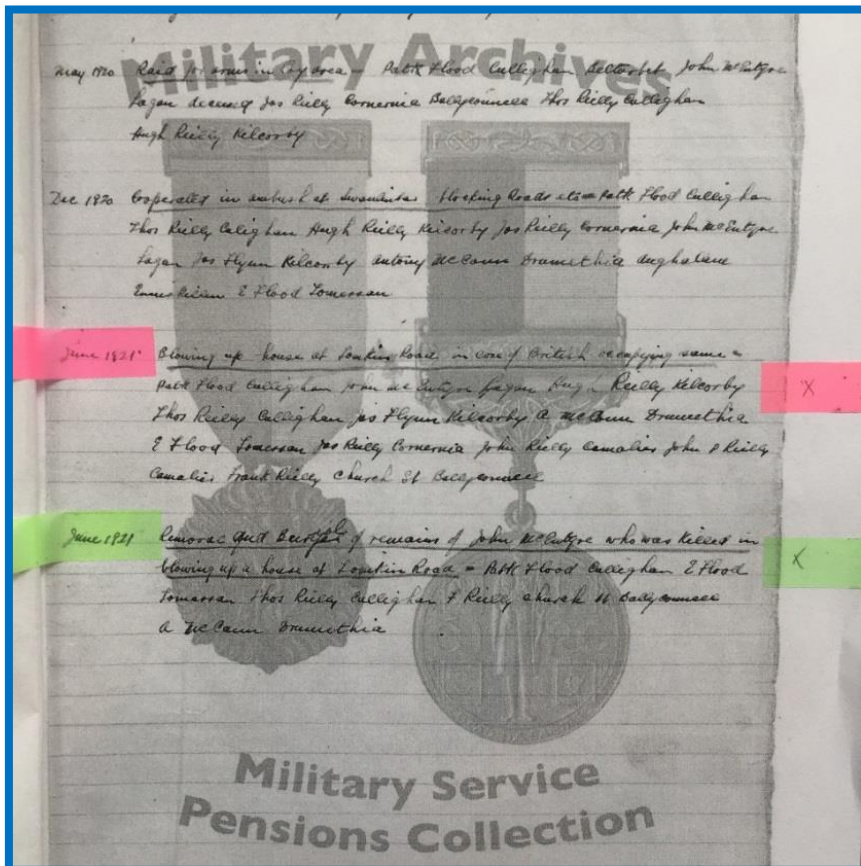


Figure 5: Military Archives Ireland Military Service Pensions Collection

Particulars of operations in which Belturbet Company took part under arms.

"June 1921 Blowing up house at Tomkin Road in case of British occupying same."

Followed by list of participants.

"June 1921 Removal and Burial of remains of John McIntyre who was killed in blowing up a house at Tomkin Road."

Followed by list of participants.

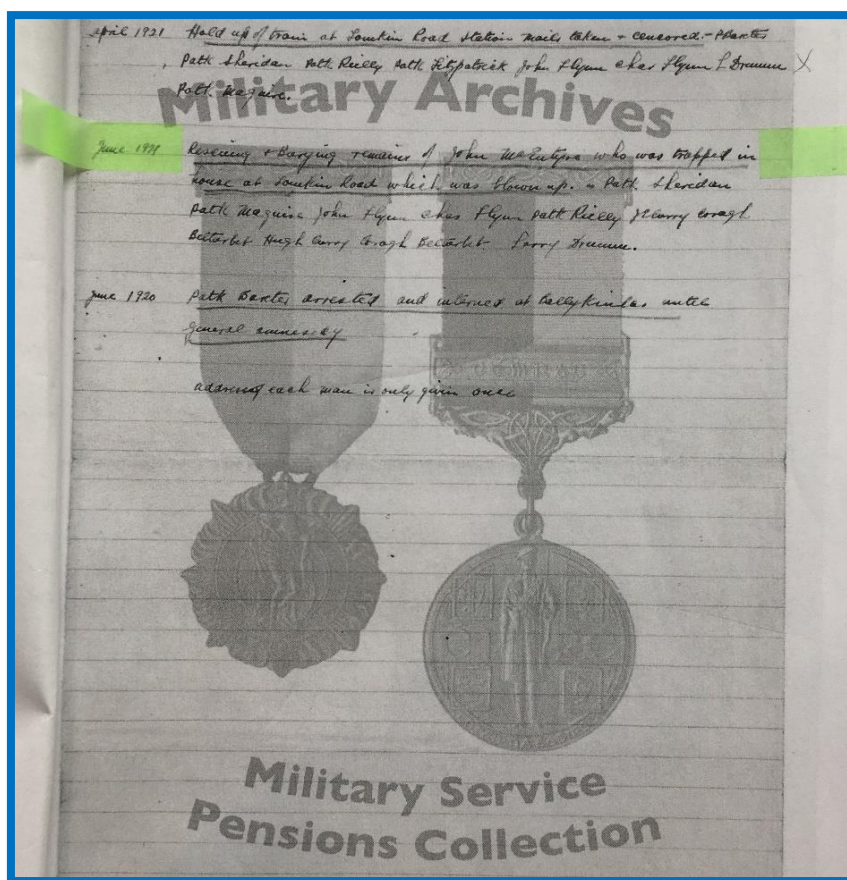


Figure 6: Military Archives Ireland Military Service Pensions Collection

Activities of Milltown Company

"June 1921 Rescuing and burying remains of John McIntyre who was trapped in house at Tomkin Road which was blown up."

Followed by list of participants

The Aftermath of the Incident

After the death of Seán McIntyre, his brother's wife was now left with only her son. She was struggling to pay for the house, the farm and the food. McIntyre's remaining brother left for America, after learning that the family was now known by the British; and McIntyre's two sisters had contracted Tuberculosis. After being told by a doctor that the hot climate of Australia would help them, they left for Oceania, but died soon after arriving.⁸

In the 1930s Mary, James McIntyre's wife, filled out a pension application form for Seán McIntyre, but was refused.⁹ Mary had to sell the house and farm, and ended up living the rest of her life in poverty with her son, Hugh.¹⁰

⁸ Anglo Celt 3rd June 2021 – Remembering Seán McIntyre 100 years on

⁹ Military Archives Ireland – Military Service Pensions Collection – Rejected Pension Application re Mary McIntyre

¹⁰ The Dead of the Irish Revolution, p.463 – Eunan O'Halpin and Dáithí O'Corrain

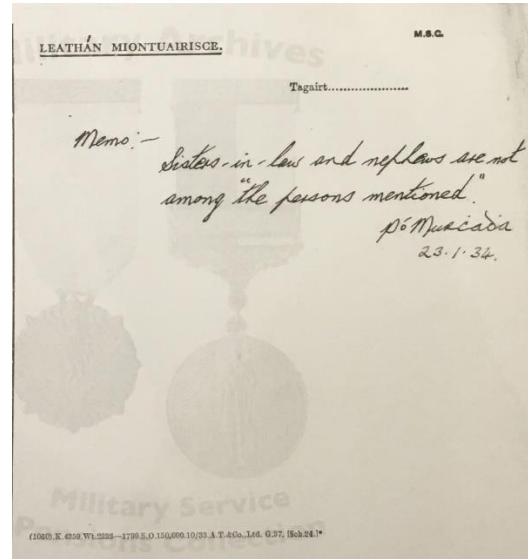
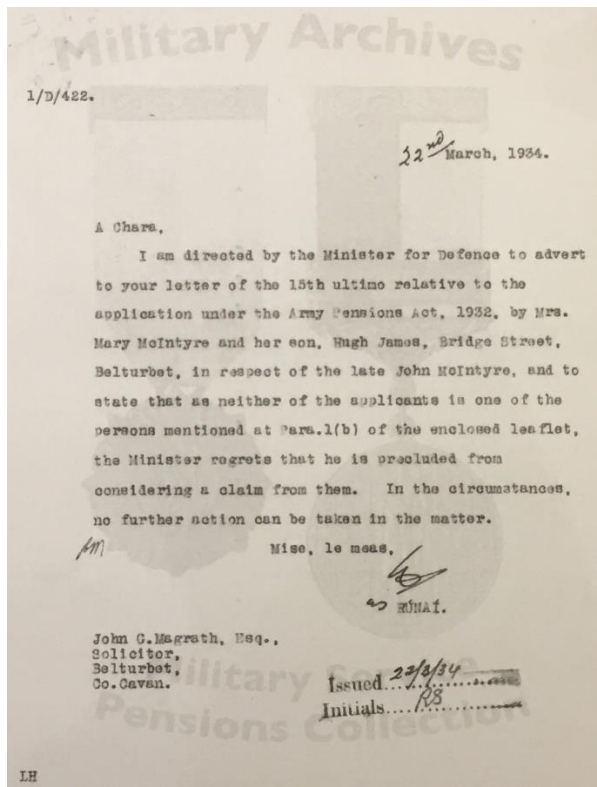


Figure 7: Letter refusing the Pension Application on behalf of Mary McIntyre and her son, Hugh James

The Memorial Service

On the 11th June 1950, there was a memorial service for Seán McIntyre. It was to begin at Lannigan's Cross, near Milltown, then there would be a procession leading to McIntyre's burial place at Drumlane Abbey where they would unveil the new headstone that had been placed over his grave.¹¹ The headstone is still there today, and is an interesting sight to see for anyone walking in the grounds of Drumlane Abbey. It is written in Irish on the front, and English on the back. It displays his name, and other usual information, as well as having an Irish flag made out of green, white, and orange pebbles. Although his proper burial place would have been Staghall, he was thankfully never moved and has had his grave undisturbed since the memorial service. Dr Brendan Scott told me that there was a poster made advertising this event in 1950 and it is housed in Johnston Central Library, Cavan.



Figure 8: Poster advertising Memorial in 1950

¹¹ Poster advertising the unveiling of a Memorial over the Grave of Volunteer Seán McIntyre, 11th June 1950



Figure 9: Seán McIntyre's Grave



Figure 10: Me, at Seán McIntyre's Grave, January 2022

Mo Mhachnaimh

I became aware of two living relatives of people involved with the mission, and they are Paddy O'Reilly, and Brendan McCann. Paddy O'Reilly is a relative of Seán McIntyre himself, and Brendan McCann's father is Anthony McCann¹², who was part of both the bombing mission and the retrieval of the body.

I think it is important that we recognise the hardship and trouble that the people involved in the retrieval of the body of Seán McIntyre went through just to take a single man home. I think it shows the strength of faith in the Irish people at the time, whatever their religion, and they carried it throughout their whole lives. Seán McIntyre's remains were hauled through ditches and hedgerows, for weeks, only to be buried in the wrong place at the wrong time, yet it was still a success, because he had a religious burial, showing what he was like and what he believed in.

After writing and researching about the events of this time, I definitely appreciate what our ancestors did for us to have the lives we have today. They fought bravely and risked so much for Ireland to have a bright and independent future.

I learned a lot about the events of 1921 while doing this project, and I really enjoyed working on it. I found that while reading up on other events around this time, my views have definitely

¹² Military Archives Ireland – Military Service Pensions Collection – West Cavan Brigade

changed. I used to think that in every event or battle between the British and Irish forces, one side was good, and one was bad. But I have really changed in how I think about it. I noticed in a few stories where one side made a first move which could be considered unprovoked or bad, but the other would then strike back even worse, entering both sides into a grey area, in which neither is right and neither is wrong. I have realised the truth in the words of Desmond Tutu: "If you want peace, you don't talk to your friends; you talk to your enemies."



Figure 11: My Great Grandparents, Patrick and Bridget Sheridan, in the 1930s



Figure 12: Me, with Patrick Sheridan's War of Independence Medal in January 2022

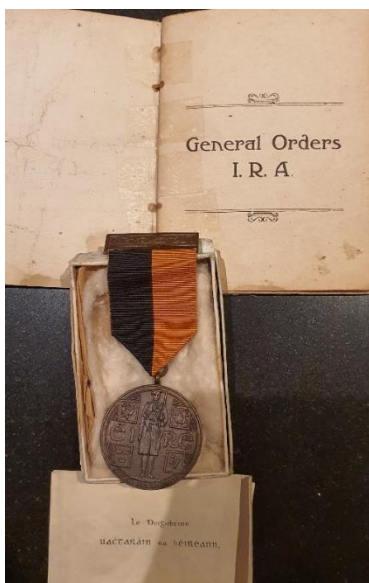


Figure 13: Patrick Sheridan's, War of Independence Medal and IRA General Orders Book. The General Orders Book contains the rules for the Volunteers, for example:

No. 3 "No Volunteer shall under any circumstances make a statement to any policeman or other English Official as to his whereabouts or actions at any particular time, or as to the whereabouts or actions of any other person."

No. 7 "It is very necessary that any Volunteer wounded on Volunteer work should receive immediate attention, and receive it at the hands of a doctor of such discretion as well as national feeling that he shall not endanger the patient by indiscretion, and shall assist in shielding him if necessary."

Acknowledgements:

This essay is all my own work however, I would like to thank the following people for helping me along the way:

- Drumlane Heritage Committee, for keeping the memory of Seán McIntyre alive, and inspiring me to do this project;
- Suzanne Gunn, for taking the time to talk to me, as well as giving me books to read and telling me about the Military Archives;
- Dr Brendan Scott, for always being willing to help and giving me great information;
- My teachers, Mr Conefrey and Ms Dolan, for their encouragement and editing skills;
- My brother Donnchadh, for showing me how to reference and helping with maps;
- My parents, for their guidance and encouragement; and helping with formatting pictures.

Finally, I would like to thank all the Irish Volunteers who sacrificed so much.

Fiachna

Drumlane Abbey, Milltown, Co. Cavan



Drumlane Abbey, January 2022.

Seán McIntyre's Grave is at the bottom left of the picture, inside the wall.

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