



On 3rd June 1916 the Kilkenny People reported the evidence given by County Inspector Power RIC before the Royal Commission on the Rebellion in Ireland. The reference in the headline to Burning Bush on Mount Leinster is to part of County Inspector Power's report which the editor of the Kilkenny People, Mr. E.T. Keane seems to have found less than wholly believable.

The Kilkenny People account is a slightly edited version. Here is the official report:

ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE REBELLION IN IRELAND. Section 1905

EVIDENCE GIVEN ON 27 May, 1916.

County Inspector P. C. Power, Kilkenny, was examined.

Chairman- How long have you been in the service?—since 1882.

How long in Kilkenny?—Six years.

How often are you moved as a rule?—I have been moved a good deal; Kilkenny is my third county. Will you give the Commission as far as you can the actions of the Sinn Fein movement in your county, leading up to the 24th April, 1916, and tell us at the same time if anything took place in Kilkenny and what did take place? '—I prepared a short statement which, with your permission, I shall read. It is as follows:—

The first appearance of the Sinn Fein movement was noticed in Kilkenny about 1912. It was started, it was thought at the time, merely to encourage Irish industries, etc., and did not seem to get much support. Its membership at that time consisted of about a dozen persons who always held rather extreme views. On the 5th March, 1914, Sir Roger Casement, accompanied by Thomas MacDonagh, who has since been executed, held a meeting in Kilkenny City, for the purpose of forming a branch of the Irish National Volunteers. At that meeting about 500 persons attended. Sir Roger Casement advised them to drill and become proficient in the use of firearms which he said would be supplied to them. A Branch was formed and a number of members enrolled, drilling and training was actively carried on from that time, and a large sum of money was collected in the city towards this organisation. Then, when Mr. Redmond and his party got partial control of the Volunteers in June, 1914, a split occurred, and at a drill parade which was held in Kilkenny the Sinn Feiners severed their connection with the Irish National Volunteers, and the Treasurer, Mr. Deloughery, forwarded without any authority whatever about £90 to Mr. John MacNeill in Dublin. A branch of the Irish Volunteers, what they call Sinn Feiners, was then established, but they showed no great activity until the arrival in the city of an organiser named J. J. O'Connell in April, 1915. From that time forward, the movement showed much activity and began to spread to country districts, where it obtained a number of sympathisers. This activity received impetus from the attitude of Mr. Redmond towards

recruiting, advocating that Irishmen should join the Army, and also from the fear of conscription which possessed many people down there. Then, I also noticed that the Irish Volunteers increased and the National Volunteers became more or less dormant. That might be due to the number of National Volunteers who enlisted and also to the lack of drill instructors—old soldiers—who had to rejoin colours, and through fear on their part too of conscription. The Irish Volunteers were well organised and stimulated by paid organisers (I presume they were paid by that organisation, because as far as I know they had no other means of support, and as they stayed at a fairly decent hotel in the town, I assumed they were getting money for the work). One of these men called Edward O'Kelly described himself as a lieutenant in the volunteers. John McDermott, who has since been executed, and a man named William Mellows—I understand he returned and was rather prominent in the rising in Galway. He is still being looked for—all addressed meetings in the district. At that time a good deal of seditious literature and leaflets and newspapers were in circulation. Chairman: Would you give us the names of the papers?—They were The Spark ; The Irish Volunteer; Nationality ; Honesty ; The Gael ; Irish Worker ; Sinn Fein ; The Hibernian A. O. H.

All Dublin papers?—Yes, they were as far as I know.

What were some of the other activities of the movement?—Instructions were imparted in modern military tactics, drill, etc., and I have one of these drill books (it was left behind by Lieutenant O'Kelly in a gladstone bag after his departure from Kilkenny). It is a very up-to-date treatise on drilling, &c. (Book handed in.) It is a standard work and deals with military tactics, route marches, &c. Frequent route marches, drill exercises were conducted by these volunteers. The first occasion of an armed parade of the Irish Volunteers was on the 23rd November, 1915, on the occasion of the anniversary of the Manchester martyrs.

Where did they get their rifles from?—That really I am unable to say. They were modern rifles, some magazine rifles and Le Enfield rifles. Some of them were very up-to-date—303 Lee Enfield. Service pattern?—Well, no, not the very latest. I think it is the type before the latest. The Irish National Volunteers also took part in the Manchester Martyrs Demonstration, but marched separately from the Irish Volunteers. The Irish Volunteers at that time carried about ten modern rifles, but from our information we believe they had many automatic pistols. The rifles carried by the National Volunteers were old Italian rifles of an antiquated type. John MacDermott, who has since been executed, attended on this occasion and delivered an address behind closed doors in the Gaelic League Rooms to the Irish Volunteers. I think the reason why he spoke in the Gaelic League Rooms was because there was not sufficient accommodation in the Sinn Fein Hall. There was more room in this hall, but anyhow he gave his address behind closed doors, but I could not tell you what he said. In March, 1916, Lieutenant O'Kelly, the man to whom I have already referred, delivered a very seditious speech on the occasion of an Irish volunteer parade at John's Well, near Kilkenny. He made a very seditious speech and I reported it in the usual way.

Was any action taken on it?—No action, as far as I know. One of my sergeants was present and took a longhand note. I sent the report of the speech. In February and March, 1916, the Irish Volunteers appeared publicly under arms, and about 15 of them carried rifles and fixed bayonets when marching through Kilkenny City. They appeared on two or three occasions, no more. In connection with the outbreak I want to say that there was no actual outbreak in Kilkenny City, but during Easter Week we noticed a good deal of activity and restlessness amongst the Irish Volunteer men We noticed them going about in groups. On Easter Monday they moved about in groups through the City and attended the railway station in small bodies, apparently seeking for information from Dublin.

Sir Mackenzie Chalmers: Which they did not get?—We were all cut off from communication. We also noticed that there was a considerable amount of activity among their cyclists going out into the country districts and returning again, and also one of their number had a motor. Motors belonging to leaders of the Irish Volunteers were actively engaged going to the country.

Chairman: You never found out what they were doing—I mean out in the country?—I was not quite sure.

Did you know on this occasion?—I had my own suspicions about them. As the situation was rather threatening and I did not know what would happen I took immediate steps to concentrate a force of armed police in Kilkenny. I stripped all the stations in the peaceful districts of men and by Tuesday and Wednesday morning I had a force of about 75 men at my disposal. It was also necessary to hurry a force to protect the Barrow Bridge, which is a very important and a very vital line of communication with Rosslare Port, and we were able to hold it. They did not attack it, and we kept possession of it till it was handed over to the military. Some bridges farther down were tampered with and we thought it highly probable that this bridge would also be attacked, but we had sufficient police to protect it, and then when the military came along we handed it over to them. Excitement at this time was running very high and a great number of respectable people made several applications for protection. I gave all possible protection. I observed myself on the morning of the 27th April about 2 a.m. a searchlight signalling which came apparently from Mount Leinster which practically overlooks Enniscorthy. It was not an ordinary flashlight signalling, but more like a search light on a small scale. The signalling was repeated from a northerly direction towards Dublin, and this would about coincide with the time of the rising at Enniscorthy, and would show that the country was being roused. On the 5th May we made a raid on the local Sinn Fein Hall at Kilkenny, and searched it very thoroughly. I may say that during the week of the rebellion all the Irish Volunteers and Sinn Feiners were holding conclaves there every night in this hall. I had them all watched, and noted them as they were going in. They always had a man on the door, and the door was closed. When we searched the hall on the 5th May we found in it a number of pikes and old bayonets, an air rifle, 200 round miniature rifle cartridges, and a large quantity of empty cartridges, a large quantity of Sinn Fein literature, and a map of Kilkenny; it looked like a military map dividing the city into sections as if for a strategic object.

Mr. Justice Shearman: What is the size of Kilkenny city?—The population would be between 11,000 and 12,000. Amongst the things we found in the hall was a large scroll which was hung across the wall, and had the words written on it, "A felon's cap is the noblest crown an Irish head can wear." When De Loughrey surrendered, and after his arrest a modern Lee Enfield 3.03 rifle and a dangerous pattern of an automatic pistol was surrendered from his house and another similar rifle was found by the police hidden in a chapel yard. Shot cartridges and a gun were found in a stream. In the houses of people who were arrested some arms were found, shot guns, bandoliers, water bottles, and other articles of military equipment We have had no general surrender of arms at all, and from our information we believe there is no doubt whatever about it that a considerable amount of arms and ammunition, &c., were taken out of the city and concealed somewhere.

Mr. Justice Shearman: In the list we have got here it is stated that the arms in Kilkenny up to the 31st March were four rifles, four shot guns and 15 pistols. Are these what have been given up?—No, that is the distribution of arms reported to the police. We got them—this return—from the Chief of the Constabulary. Did you keep a record of the number of arms that were reported before the outbreak?—Yes] I submitted it. This list has been supplied to us—three Lee Enfields and another

rifle, 15 shot guns and 11 pistols, that was before the end of March?—We saw them actually carry the number stated.

You think there might be more than that?—Yes, I think so. Certainly, we saw more than that.

How many did you see? This was compiled from the records of the Royal Irish Constabulary and it looks as if the returns were sent up?—I reported on the matter.

That makes 15, with the rifles and shot guns together there would be 19?—I am sure the return is correct.

Chairman: Was there any recruiting done in your district for the Army?—A great deal. Kilkenny did extremely well.

Then there is no doubt that this is a loyal part of the country and that the Sinn Feiners are only a small body?—I think so.

Did the number of Sinn Feiners increase with the fear of conscription or military service?—It did.

Do you attribute that to the men being shirkers or to their having a conscientious objection?—I should say shirkers.

Mr. Justice Shearman: How many Sinn Feiners do you think were in your county before the outbreak? Of active ones I should say about 200 or 300.

Chairman: Do you know what is the total population of the county?—I am not quite sure at the moment.

Were there secret societies in Kilkenny?—No, not that we were aware of.

Sir Mackenzie Chalmers: Can you say if Lieutenant Kelly of whom you spoke has been a soldier?—I really do not know what he was, I heard he was a medical student, but I don't know.

Do you know who gave these volunteers commissions, by whom were they given? Do you know did they nominate themselves or were they nominated by other people?—I think it was done by other people, but I could not say who they were.

Were there any of the more well to-do people of your district besides the one or two you have mentioned and the owner of the motor car?—Well, yes, there was a man named Stallard, a greengrocer, and he and De Loughrey were in partnership in a cinema theatre. There was also Alderman Nolan, who was a member of the Corporation. He was connected with the movement, and a couple of farmers. There was also a man named Gibbons, as well as another district councillor. Were there farmers sons in the movement?—I don't think so ; as far as I know the movement in our district was made up principally of labourers, shop boys, clerks and others of that description.