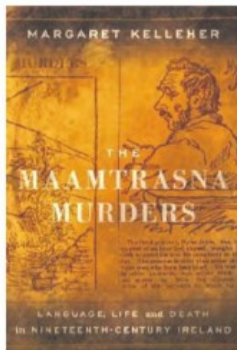


Massacre in Mayo and the fatal error that followed it...



Book Review
By Michael Halpenny

The Maamtrasna Murders
By Margaret Kelleher
Published by UCD Press



ON THE night of 17th August 1882 a group of seven armed men dressed in white báinín vests entered a thatched cottage in Maamtrasna on the Galway- Mayo border. When they left, five members of the Joyce family were dead or dying.

The discovery of the bodies led to a manhunt. Two days later 10 local men were identified by neighbours as members of the raiding party, some of them relations of the deceased.

There was enormous pressure on the authorities to secure convictions, not least because only three months previously the state had been rocked to the core by the assassination in the Phoenix Park in Dublin of the Chief Secretary for Ireland Lord Frederick Cavendish and his Under-secretary Thomas Burke. Above all the country was at war over land and in a period of unparalleled land agitation – the Land War.

Two years before in 1880, the Irish National Land League organised their historic campaign of isolation against the land agent of Lord Erne, Captain Boycott at nearby Lough Mask, just 12 miles from Maamtrasna.

In 1882 alone there had been the killings of land bailiffs in Castleisland, county Kerry and at Lough Mask itself. And it was rumoured that the motive for the attack on the Joyce family on the night of 17th August was because a member of their family was believed to have acted as an informer in the investigation into the killing of the Lough Mask bailiff, Joseph Huddy and his grandson John.

This new book by Margaret Kelleher pivots not so much on the political context of the murders but rather illuminates the language and cultural issues that surrounded the subsequent trials and the guilty verdicts that became a cause célèbre for Irish Nationalists at the time. In the 1880s Ireland

was not only going through an extended period of agitation over land but was adjusting to the mass emigration and social upheavals wrought by the Famine. One major feature of that period of enforced transition post-Famine was the language shift from Irish to English.

Nevertheless at the time of the Maamtrasna murders while some of the 10 accused spoke or understood English, some were monoglot Irish – speaking Gaelic only. The accused around whom much of the book centres, Maolra Seoighe (in English, Myles Joyce) was one of the latter, speaking only Irish.

Because of fears of jury tampering, the trial of the 10 accused, which would normally have been held at the Galway assizes, was transferred to the Special Commission Court at Green Street in

Joyce was handicapped from the start by a language he did not understand and judged by a jury not of his peers and who were doubtlessly contaminated by evidence heard in the previous trial of his co-accused

Dublin, a venue which had seen many historic trials and was to be reconstituted in more modern times as the Special Criminal Court.

There, when his time came 40-year-old Joyce took his place on the witness table in the centre of the court (as was the fashion then) to be arraigned for the murder of the five members of the Joyce family.

However, it was a trial he could not participate in nor understand as it was conducted wholly in English. He did have an interpreter, but it was a police interpreter who was a member of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC), the very force that had arrested him and the other nine co-accused.

He was handicapped from the start by a language he did not understand and judged by a jury not of his peers and who were doubtlessly contaminated by ev-



Michael D Higgins: Presidential pardon

idence heard in the previous trial of his co-accused.

The verdict of guilty was almost a forgone conclusion and had miscarriage written all over it, so much so that even the conservative *Daily Express* of London reflected widespread disquiet over the outcome of the trial.

The condemned man's final address to the court echoes down the years. He said he was "as clear of it (the charge) as the child not yet born" and that whether he was "hanged or crucified" he was as clear of the crime as can be.

This book relates in marvellous and scholarly detail one of the infamous miscarriages of justice on this island and also records its rectification 136 years later when earlier this year, President Michael D Higgins issued a posthumous Presidential pardon to Seoighe.

OBITUARY Tom O'Dwyer

An articulate and able defender of workers' rights

TOM O'Dwyer served for 28 years as an industrial official before his retirement in 2009. His career began in Wynn's Hotel and the Burlington Hotel, where he was also to become a trade union activist and shop steward.

Tom was subsequently on the No. 4 Branch Committee (Hotels and Catering) for many years. Appointed as an industrial official in 1981, Tom represented members in the Hotels and Catering Branch as well as – for a brief time – members in the Services Branch.

A highly-skilled and articulate official, Tom took great pride in representing members, and his efforts served those workers well.

American TV legal drama of the same name. Tom was an excellent colleague to all, often mentoring young officials and shop stewards.

He willingly shared with them his lifelong love and experience of



Principled: Tom O'Dwyer

Tom was an excellent colleague to all, often mentoring young officials and shop stewards

the trade union movement. He was also always willing to learn from others.

Tom was compassionate, astute, principled and kind but didn't suffer fools gladly! Nor was Tom all work and no play – he loved to have fun and he loved to socialise, travel and to dance.

No gathering was complete without his rendition of My Way. An avid reader and a strong advocate of lifelong education, much of his learning was self-taught.

Above all he believed in dignity and respect for all, and on securing good terms and conditions for all workers. Tom spent a very significant portion of his life promoting the causes of workers, regularly holding Saturday morning clinics at his home in Ballyfermot where he would advise, write letters, and offer to advocate for people who required assistance.

The trade union movement will be the poorer for his passing. We salute our comrade and we extend our sincere condolences to his Tom will be sadly missed by his brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews and a large circle of friends. May he rest in peace.

He excelled in championing the rights of all workers but especially those working in the hotels and catering industry.

Tom was highly experienced in appearing before the Employment Appeals Tribunal and especially liked the opportunity to cross-examine witnesses in any fora.

He loved defending workers and their rights. Such was his enthusiasm and persistence that he earned the nickname 'Petrocelli', after a character in the 1970s