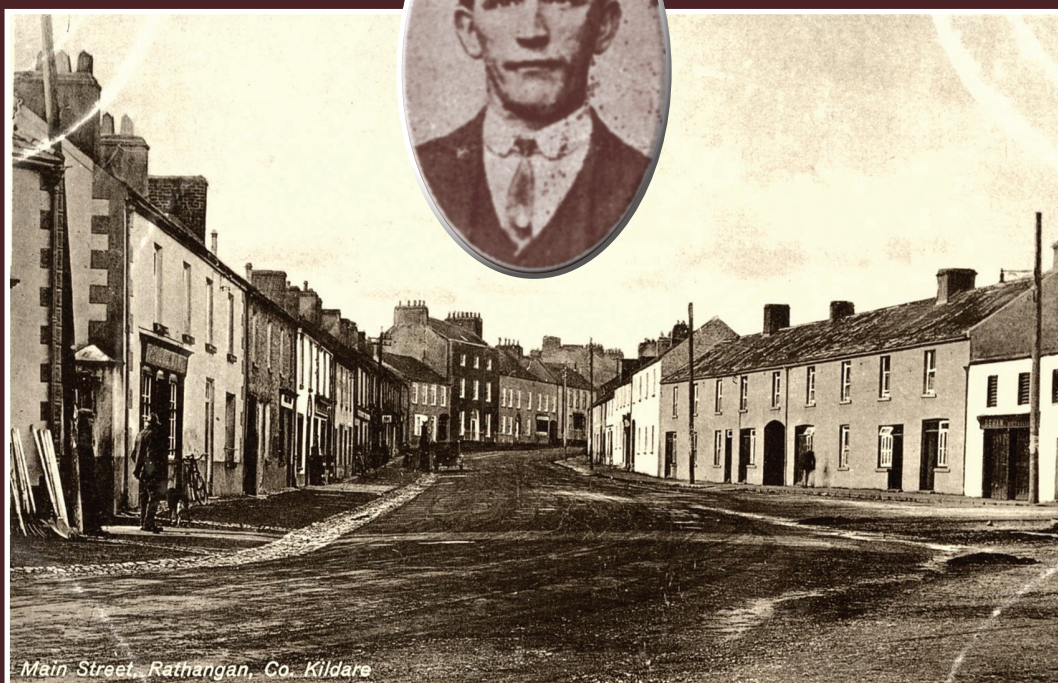


# THOMAS BEHAN



*Main Street, Rathangan, Co. Kildare*

# POEMS

Compiled by Mario Corrigan and James Durney

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COMPILED BY

MARIO CORRIGAN AND JAMES DURNEY

# Acknowledgements

County Kildare Federation of Local History Groups

County Kildare Decade of Commemorations Committee

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to the Kildare Local Studies, Genealogy & Archives Collections.

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## Foreword

I am delighted and honoured to have been asked to provide a Foreword for this publication.

These poems were first drawn to my attention by James Durney of the Local Studies, Genealogy & Archives Department of the Kildare Library & Arts Services. I was immediately struck by the sincerity and intensity of their content and the way in which they captured the spirit of those engaged in the War of Independence at that difficult time in our history.

Mario Corrigan's idea of reprinting the poems as a fitting tribute to the poet, and to those who fought in that conflict, was quickly agreed and, in subsequent discussion, we felt that it might be an interesting notion to have individual poems read and recorded by members of the Federation of Kildare Local History Groups as a suitable memorial. Accordingly, each group was asked to nominate someone to read, and record, one of the poems in the booklet. Many groups rose to the challenge and the poems concerned were duly recorded in Newbridge Library, on Saturday 11 September 2021. These recordings will be held in the Local Studies archives and as an online podcast and will provide, for the future, a tangible legacy of our commemoration at this time.

I would like to thank Kevin Murphy, James Durney, Karel Kiely, and Mario Corrigan, for facilitating this unique initiative and for always finding new and imaginative ways of celebrating Kildare's history.

Thanks to Larry Fullam and to Leo Conway for copies of the Royal Humane Society Cert and the image of Stephen Conway.

I would also like to acknowledge the financial support of the Co. Kildare Decade of Commemorations Committee without which the project would not have been possible.

Brian McCabe,  
Chairman,  
Co. Kildare Federation of Local History Groups

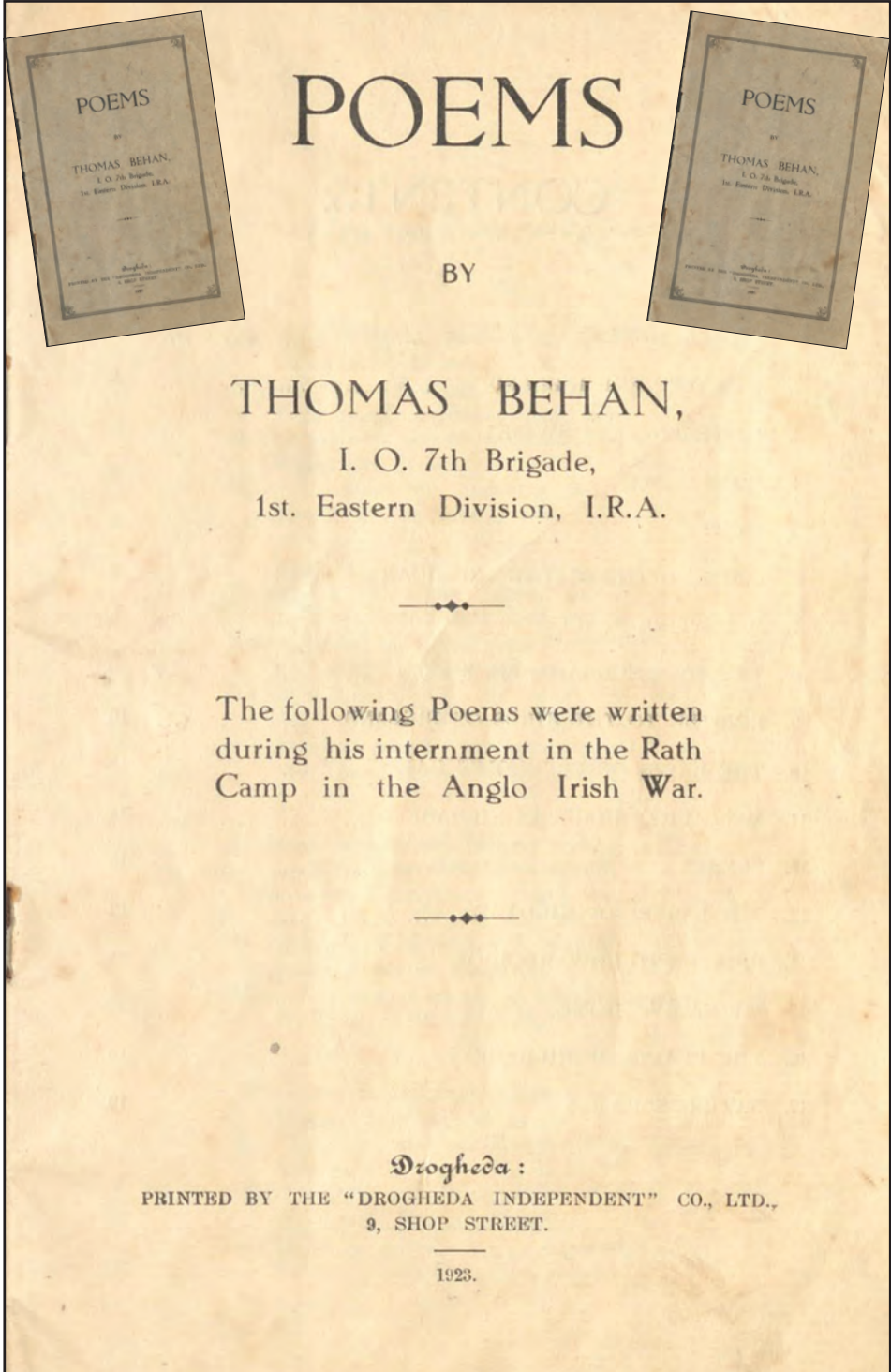
## Introduction

The facsimile of 'Poems' by Thomas Behan reproduced in this book is of an original copy given to me in 2001 by his niece the late Marie Maher, Bridge Street, Rathangan. This rare copy printed in 1923 by the *Drogheda Independent* is now safely stored at the Archives Department of Kildare County Library. Thomas 'Tom' Behan was arrested on the morning of the Anglo-Irish Truce, 11 July 1921, and imprisoned at the Rath Internment Camp, the Curragh, Co. Kildare, until its closure on 8/9 December 1921. During his imprisonment Tom wrote many poems and epistles, seventeen of which were published in a book of poetry a year after his death. Tom's works range from odes of his native place of Rathangan and Kildare to humorous parodies of his time in the Rath Camp.

Tom Behan's religious devotion is clearly embodied in the first two poems 'To the Sacred Heart' and 'A prayer for Ireland' in which he espouses his Catholic faith with Irish nationalism. Some of the people Tom met in his internment inspired him to write elegies, including one to the 'blithe and hoary Fenian' Con Buckley, who he mistakes for his brother, Domhnall ua Buachalla, T.D., North Kildare. Another poem is to 'The true Soggart,' Fr. Patrick Smyth, the internees revered chaplain and one of the most popular men in the Rath Camp. Fellow Rathangan native Ned Broy, an undercover police spy for Michael Collins, and the martyred Lord Mayor of Cork, Terence MacSwiney, also merit an epistle.

On 31 December 1921 the Leinster Leader carried a fitting tribute 'to the work of the ladies of Cumman na mBan on behalf of the prisoners', which may have been written by Tom Behan. No doubt Tom did not forget the sterling work of the 'lasses of Kildare' and wrote two poems in their honour. His 'Epistle to the girls of Ireland,' was written to the air of 'Slievenamon' (Mountain of the women), a comparison which indicates Tom's esteem for the militant women of Ireland. The last poem in the collection is 'Nature's Isle' - in which he speaks so fondly of an 'undaunted Eire, My Godly home, none can compare, We'll guard till death.' Sadly, Tom Behan would not live long enough to enjoy his new-found freedom in 'the little isle' that gave him birth for he was to die at the Curragh, on 13 December 1922, 370 days after his release from the Rath Internment Camp.

James Durney  
16 September 2021



# POEMS

BY

THOMAS BEHAN,  
I. O. 7th Brigade,  
1st. Eastern Division, I.R.A.

The following Poems were written  
during his internment in the Rath  
Camp in the Anglo Irish War.

*Drogheda :*

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1—TO THE SACRED HEART.

---

Oh! Sacred Heart, sweet guide of all  
 Since this dark world began,  
 Sweet sword of nations, weak and small,  
 True guide of mortal man;  
 Not in vain we sought assistance here,  
 When foes of every sort  
 Strove to wreck our homes so dear,  
 Saved by the Sacred Heart!

In days of old, when foemen came  
 To wreck our saintly Isle,  
 And toss the shrine of the All-Divine  
 For sordid earthly spoil;  
 Through good and ill, we loved You still,  
 Our reverence ne'er did part;  
 We knelt in prayer, the joys to share  
 Of Thee, Sweet Sacred Heart!

In later days, when ravage war  
 Laid low our structures grand,  
 When armies' might to wrong the right  
 Ran savage through our land;  
 In miseries' fold, unheard, untold,  
 Our appeals to Holy Art  
 Were heard once more, in blissful shores,  
 By Thee, O Sacred Heart!

When now, at last, the unhappy past  
 Is gone forever and aye,  
 And from out afar the Eastern Star  
 Has sent us freedom's day,  
 We'll still be true, O Lord, to You,  
 Our zeal will ne'er depart;  
 We'll always plead, in joys or need,  
 To Thee, Sweet Sacred Heart!



**2—A PRAYER FOR IRELAND.**

O, Mary, chain of predestination!  
 A fountain of grace and consolation;  
 Sweet solace of all since civilization  
     Began its sorrowed trail.  
 We hail you, in our darkest hour,  
 To plead to Him, O Almighty Power,  
 And ask that He may a blessing shower  
     And cease our age-long wail!

Then, purest-hearted Lady fair,  
 In agony's depths you heard our prayer  
 And guarded all thy blessed care  
     Through tortures' stressful zone.  
 Do thou again, O Spotless Maid,  
 In glory's garb come to our aid  
 And have the woes of Ireland laid  
     Before the Almighty Throne!

In unending murmurs, our Rosary,  
 In distress or woes, goes up to Thee  
 Through Immaculate Heart, O, Mary  
     We plead for graces more.  
 O, hear us now, Thy mercy flow  
 To bid all sorrows forever go  
 And heal, alas! our burdened woe  
     So long in silence bore!

O, comforter of distressed and weak,  
 In unknown bounds your aid we seek;  
 From Mansions above, O, Maiden, speak  
     And say all torture's o'er.  
 Then keep our Faith,  
 That we will always Him obey,  
 And pray through you till destined day  
     Will light a brighter shore!

## 3—TO TERENCE MACSWINEY.

In Erin's cause, thy life began,  
 Your parting words, Thy will be done,  
 O, patriot, O, martyred son,

How gallant and how brave!

You bore the cross of Erin's woe,  
 Unmindful of the mighty foe;  
 You are, alas! true friend laid low,  
 Low in an Irish grave!

Although we mourn our fallen brave,  
 We grudge not sacrifice to save  
 Our land, which thou hast died to save,  
 O, dauntless soldier true!

But from the gloom that shrouds thy bier  
 An omen bright arrayed to cheer,  
 And that's why thou hast suffered here  
 And rose to dare and do.

But now, true friend, your cares are o'er,  
 The Lord shall guard for evermore  
 You on that bright and blissful shore  
 For all eternity.

Where tyrants' mighty torture chains  
 Shall fetter not your limbs in pain,  
 Nor e'en to slur your honoured fame,  
 Brave champion of the free!

Then sleep in peace, your flag arrayed  
 In golden gleams shall be displayed,  
 Our destined hope so long delayed  
 Shall foster by its brave.

And when triumphant clarions ring  
 Of peace and freedom, a message bring,  
 We'll kneel in reverence a hymn to sing  
 O'er our martyred hero's grave!

## 4—MORTAL MAN.

Sometimes between the shadows dark  
 A bright'ning ray, a brilliant spark,  
 Shines o'er the green, the withered grass,  
 To light the shades of man's dark pass.

And then again a vision deep  
 O'ershadows life in stricken grief,  
 Makes loss all heirs to earthly fold,  
 Great kingly crowns or greed of gold.

And then till reached the final goal  
 Where his only goods will be his soul,  
 Where vice and virtue through life's trail  
 Are weighed on one eternal scale.

How short the stay of mortal man  
 Compared with the great oblivion span,  
 That awaits for aye, be it great or small  
 The fate or prize of every wight.



## 5—VANITY.

How vain to prize for earthly spoil,  
 Those rustful doles are all futile ;  
 Or pride to rank a lordly being,  
 Above his race to reign supreme !

Each silly dupe in ignorance dwells  
 Their ambitious craze for pelf excels  
 Beyond the scope of simple man  
 To glean its depths, its cursed plan.

O! vanity, your folds consume  
 The guiltful male of earthly loom,  
 And rewards your prey in endless strife  
 The harvest of his lustful life.

O! guard against this demon vice,  
 Its wrathful course shall pay the price,  
 And time shall gulf its guilty lore  
 Into tortures great for evermore.



## 6—LINES TO THE BLITHE AND HOARY FENIAN.

(Gon Buckley, T.D., North Kildare).

Good morning, Con, how are you?  
 Sure 'tis you that's looking well  
 In spite of all the hardships,  
 On you they never tell;  
 With your corduroy and Hamar boots,  
 Your eyes and face so gay,  
 I think you'r growing young when I look  
 At your lovely locks of grey.

Well, youth, I'm glad to tell you  
 I'll soon be sixty-four,  
 And since the days I was twenty-one  
 I ne'er got such health before;  
 I am proud to wear that felon garb,  
 Thank God He ordained it so;  
 And were He pleased to sound my farewell call  
 In peace to my grave I'd go.

When I look back on the Fenian boys,  
 And know what they went through,  
 And then look out at the dawning day,  
 I envy a youth like you.  
 Ah! 'twas they that lit the fires, that now  
 Burn deep with hopes so high,  
 Though girded by Saxon gun and gold,  
 They rose to dare and do.

Then came along that gallant band  
 Who rose on Easter Day,  
 Sure, fatal was their gallant stand  
 Against a tyrant's might array;  
 But from their hallowed stricken tomb  
 There came their parting song,  
 We give our lives, that you may live  
 To some day right the wrong!

The seed, once sown, took root again  
 And spread through every part,  
 In memory of those hero youth  
 And the cause they held at heart;  
 From every hill and every vale  
 All brave sons of the Gael  
 Swelled the ranks of the I.R.A.  
 To have a nation once again.

## 7—MY NATIVE PLACE.

I long, I long for my sweet home,  
 No place so fair I know  
 As that fair place, my homely vale,  
 Near where the Slatie flows ;  
 Though brighter scenes or attractions fair  
 Be the haunts of other men,  
 This worldly wish will e'er be mine,  
 The village endowed in the glen.

I long to stray o'er the verdant hills  
 That surround my peasant home,  
 Where mirth and laughter in peaceful rills  
 Ever flow to bedeck and illumine  
 From their braes I can look at the tattered shrines  
 Of Ballinowlart and Glenaree,  
 Or view the plains where Dooley marched  
 The Insurgents to victory.

O! Let me stray mid Summer's eve'  
 O'er the gorse and heather bell,  
 To the céilig crowds at each cross-roads,  
 Twixt scenes I love so well :  
 Where hearts entwined with purest mind  
 Are chivalrous, kind, and true :  
 O! village sweet, I oft repeat  
 I embrace no home but you.

All earthly fold to me is loss,  
 Or greed for wealth and fame  
 No crave I ween, that history's page  
 Will add unto its name ;  
 My only wish to wend my lot,  
 To eke still hard may seem  
 By sweated brow an honest end  
 Round the village by the stream.

Thus let me stray o'er Rathangan town,  
 With you and the friends, so dear,  
 That alert their haunts silent bower,  
 Midst scenes of bliss and cheer ;



No stately place or palace grand  
 Will e'er delude my dreams,  
 My only wish, the village home,  
 And cabin by the stream.

## CHORUS.

Where gently flows the silvery Slatie,  
 Where faithful colleens smile ;  
 Where nature in its gusty state  
 Makes Summer all the while.

**8—THE TRUE SOGGART, FR. SMYTH.**

O! dauntless, true and brave,  
 With fearless heart you gave  
 In darkest hours to save—

Our Country.

You feared not cell or sword,  
 Nay, shrouded coffin board  
 To defy a foreign horde—

For Liberty.

As the Soggarts did of old,  
 You rallied 'neath the fold,  
 Your zealous heart so bold—

And True.

Ne'er paused to count the loss,  
 Come triumph or holocaust,  
 To regain the freedom lost

For Roisin Dhu.

O! noble chieftain blest,  
 Your life entwined distress  
 Till omens shroud your breast

For long and drear.

You love with courage grand  
 The Dolors of our land,  
 True Priest, brave soldier man—

You knew not fear.

Then live to reap in truth  
 The harvest of your youth,  
 The bloodful seed took root

To die no more.

O! freedom's cup be thine  
 To o'erflow till end of time,  
 Will start your life sublime

A fairer shore.

**9—EPISTLE TO THE GIRLS OF IRELAND.**  
(Air—Stievenamon).

O! maids, lovely maids, of this sorrowed Isle,  
Your beauty excels everywhere ;  
Your pure, modest face and your angelic grace,  
No maidens on earth can compare.  
Your bold hearts, so true, no fear ever knew,  
For chivalry no rival can stand  
With the spotless colleen of the emerald green,  
The maidens of our dear land.

In battle's array, in the midst of the fray,  
To guide and to cheer on the brave,  
They stood by our side when the battle's ebb-tide  
Was surging its roll for the grave ;  
The drear dungeon cell was illumed by our girls,  
Ah! nature ne'er destined a band  
Like the true Irish youth, a goddess in truth,  
The maidens of our dear land.

O! sing ye the praise of those heroine maids  
Who gallantly defended our cause,  
No nation will die when its fair ones will try  
With their aid to defeat alien laws ;  
When our history is o'er, and our silver-decked shore  
Will entwine a free born land,  
As the ocean in bounds your fame will resound  
The maidens of dear Ireland.



**10—THE DAWN OF FREEDOM'S DAY.**

A glimpse of light o'er the ocean's might  
Is sparkling through the gloom,  
Its storied blast is sweeping fast  
O'er our crested Isle of tomb :  
Then round its birth with armoured girth  
Stand firmly for the fray,  
To guard with life, our hope, our strife,  
For the dawn of freedom's day.  
When times were young, our flag was wrung  
By a foreign, hostile foe  
From its infant age o'er history's page  
Was gored by years of woe ;  
Our sires of old, true, staunch, and bold,  
With unconquered hearts did say,  
Till death we'll try 'neath its fold we'll die  
For the dawn of freedom's day.

Then rally beneath its unsullied sheet,  
 Be courageous, and firmly stand  
 With hearts entwined round its fold enshrined  
 To die or defend our land ;  
 O'er our martyr's graves, the hillsides and vale,  
 In gold letters will be our essay,  
 Until death we were true to our faith and to you,  
 For the dawn of freedom's day.

CHORUS.

Through every care, with sword prepare,  
 As the veterans of the fray,  
 And strike with might in Erin's fight  
 For the dawn of freedom's day.



**11—MY CALICO SHACK IN KILDARE.**

In the year 'twenty-one sure my troubles began,  
 As nature from sleep was awaking ;  
 I woke by a noise of some Houlihan boys,  
 Thought all demons from hell were escaping ;  
 I listened to see what the devil it might be,  
 When a crowd rushed the sides and the rear  
 Shouting General Skinner invites you to dinner  
 To a calico shack in Kildare.

The leader politely told me to dress quietly,  
 To pack up my kit and make haste ;  
 And lest I might bring any brandy or gin,  
 He searched from my boots to my waist.  
 Then off in a hurry, with an escort of lorry,  
 And armoury to bring up the rear ;  
 Through the grand morning dew, o'er the hillside we flew  
 To a calico shack in Kildare.

On arrival, I found my new home was all bound  
 With decorations so varied and strong ;  
 Electric lamps and barbed wire in hedgerows like brier.  
 A sentry en route all day long.  
 The guests all assembled, amongst them was mingled  
 The heroes of Kerry and Clare,  
 From Mayo to Navan, from Longford and Cavan,  
 All to dine on the plains of Kildare.



The dinner once over, I was told by a soldier  
 That I should be chancy and stay,  
 As here every boy did fully enjoy  
 The wonderful pastimes and play.  
 At once I consented that I'd be contented  
 To stay where this scenery fair,  
 Combined with protection, disloyal correction,  
 In a calico shack in Kildare.

Where pleasures and gaff were made by the staff,  
 Of inventions the latest were seen ;  
 The fashions in style, there sold by the mile,  
 Were envied by every colleen.  
 No heart there was chill, all agreed with a will  
 That no Poland on earth can compare  
 With this curtain-roofed tent, free from troubles and rent,  
 My calico shack in Kildare.

Since then I am here inside of the wire,  
 Where the fads and the fashions are grand ;  
 All coats void of reels and brogues without heels,  
 In a hive like a book-maker's stand.  
 Whilst the stars and the moon flash their rays through the  
 gloom,

And Nature's o'ershadowing glare  
 Flashes down through oblivion from their Maker in Heaven,  
 I am still in my shack in Kildare.



### 12.—AN ELEGY.

TO DECEASED BROTHERS :

In Rathangan Churchyard green,  
 Inside that fair and ancient shrine,  
 The truest, dearest friends of mine  
 Two brothers side by side.  
 Are laid in slumbrous realms to rest  
 Smouldering in the silent dust  
 In youthful bloom death shroud their breast  
 And called them to abide.

With zealous prayers around their silent tomb,  
 The Lord we ask to brighten the gloom  
 That filled our hearts when destinies doom  
 Called you to obey.

By guarding your souls in bliss on high,  
 In unity's fold as on earth you lie  
 Where parting pains or wailing sigh  
 Ne'er met your golden way.

Then rest content, our prayers will be  
 In soothing tones on earth for thee,  
 That in heavenly garb for eternity  
     To dwell on that fair shore.  
 Where joys illumine that mansion great  
 And pain unknown to your blissful state,  
 Our hopes are brightened by the faith  
     To meet to part no more.



**13—THE LASSES OF KILDARE.**

We cannot let, unnoticed, pass  
     The work that has been done  
 By every true, good Irish lass,  
     The faithful Cuman na mBan.  
 We proved the friends, the friends indeed,  
     That we had everywhere,  
 But those more true, our friends in need,  
     The lasses of Kildare.

They travelled over hill and vale  
     To plead the captives' cause,  
 They strove with us to break the chains  
     And oust the Saxon laws ;  
 They asked for comforts for the men  
     Deprived of freedom's light,  
 And gone to fill a felon's den,  
     The captives of the fight.

Though compassed here for many a year  
     By the foeman's devilish art,  
 With all those colleens, ever dear,  
     Has held our cause at heart ;  
 Whilst brave men are consigned to fame  
     For honest work they done,  
 We can't forget the part they played,  
     The faithful Cuman na mBan.

Thus let us drink a toast to those,  
     The patriotic band,  
 Who stood in danger ever, by  
     The soldiers of our land.  
 Who, in our fight for Ireland  
     Have always done their share.  
 May God above protect and love  
     The lasses of Kildare.



## 14.—EPISTLE TO EDWARD BROY, Ballinure, Rathangan.

Oh! let me sing a comrade's praise  
 A comrade brave and true.  
 And let me harp on every praise  
 Which lyric strings allow.  
 In Justice name to tell the fame  
 Of one who feared no sword;  
 But heard the plea of Ireland free,  
 And stood to shield her fold.

Your trojan might was in our fight  
 When gloom o'erhung its fate,  
 You illumed our way till freedom's day  
 True friend of this our State.  
 No bolder son a girth ne'er flung  
 To wield an Nation's right,  
 And dry the tears of weary years,  
 To end the slumbrous night.

Ah! soldier true, your heart ne'er knew  
 The guilty haunt of fear,  
 You fearless tread, the gory bed  
 And faced its dangers drear,  
 You met with pride, the Saxon tide  
 That round you surged its might  
 To end the wail and stricken trail  
 To destine Freedom's light.

Ah! few did learn your heart was stern  
 To Erin's cause so grand;  
 No praise you sought whilst you have fought  
 To free your Fatherland.  
 You still were true to Roisin Dhu,  
 And rallied 'neath her bier,  
 To die or save from mocking knaves  
 The Isle you held so dear.

Then let us raise the swelling praise  
 Of this famed simple youth,  
 Bold rebel Broy, the fearless boy,  
 A hero crowned in truth;  
 And all those men who are yet unknown  
 Who answered to the call;  
 What love for Ireland they have shown,  
 A love surpassing all.

## 15.—MY NATIVE PLACE. First Essay.

On the grand old Curragh of Kildare,  
 Where St. Brigid taught and prayed ;  
 Where the Saxon in the days of old,  
 Our forefathers betrayed.  
 The noblest sons of Erin's Isle,  
 The bravest and the best—  
 Are gathered in from o'er the land,  
 In a cause that's true and best.

For loving dear old Ireland,  
 For hating alien laws ;  
 For allegiance to their Sireland,  
 In its just and holy cause ;  
 They are herded here like animals,  
 To live, to starve, and pine—  
 By the champion of Small Nations—  
 Mother England divine.

But in spite of all those tortures,  
 The sufferings and the pain ;  
 The war-clad Saxon could inflict—  
 Eire's sons were still the same.  
 I saw them charge with bayonets,  
 I heard them curse and swear,  
 And the very demons out of hell  
 Could not equal or compare.

But our boys they never murmured,  
 Their hearts were brave and true,  
 To the cause of Holy Ireland,  
 Their dear, dark Roisin Dhu.  
 To talk about those hardships,  
 The world will never know,  
 But were I to live one hundred  
 In my memory they'll ever grow.

The margarine for breakfsat,  
 Our one potato meal ;  
 The leaking tents and bed of straw,  
 Outside the pointed steel ;  
 They watched us through the live-long day,  
 They herded us like sheep,  
 They came into our huts at night  
 To awake us from our sleep.

To try to tell you of those times  
 My work would be in vain,  
 'Twould take the brains of Moore or Burns  
 Our sufferings to explain ;  
 Whilst we all drudge through muck and sludge,  
 They search us day and night,  
 The bayonet is our daily bread,  
 They show us how they can fight.

In our midst they burned the Stars and Stripes,  
 The flag that heard their call,—  
 Their awful plea, their dying kick—  
 When her back was against the wall ;  
 Through all, our boys kept up their hearts,  
 Played their games in the good old style,  
 Though youths turned grey and worn,  
 They met all with a smile.

And still, while true to the dear old land,  
 In the midst of this hunnish horde  
 They ne'er forgot devotion  
 To their Master and their Lord ;  
 From history I learned of the Mass bush  
 Away in the lonely glen,  
 On mountain slopes, in craggy cliffs,  
 When hunted by Cromwell's men.

But the sights I saw in this Rath Camp  
 Will never leave my mind  
 Until I am called by the Lord of all  
 To leave this world behind ;  
 As each morning brings another day,  
 The Church is filled to the door,  
 They kneel outside, one human mass,  
 Though muck it is their floor.

They prayed to their loved Saint Brigid,  
 The patron of the sod,  
 Though yet oppressed by Saxon,  
 They knelt in prayer to God.  
 They appealed to Apostle Patrick  
 To once more take our part,  
 And plead the cause of Ireland  
 In Heaven to the Sacred Heart.



They then remembered their comrades true  
 Who are gone their golden way,  
 And ask them to join McSweeney  
 To crave for freedom's day ;  
 And thus when a bugle would of six  
 And an urchin would shout from his guns :  
 You bloody ragged Irish sod,  
 Get inside your hut !

You'd look across Kildare's fair hills  
 And bid Mother Nature good-night,  
 And know once more within yourself,  
 The Saxon laws that might is right.  
 Then Rosary in hut and tent,  
 A plea to speed the day,  
 When the foreigner will pack his kit  
 That ends another perfect day.

When I look out o'er historic Kildare,  
 I think of our martyrs of old,  
 For just outside is the Gibbet Rath mound  
 Where our forefathers lie stiff and cold.  
 'Twas there in the dark days of Ninety-Eight,  
 On a word from the Saxon Huns,  
 The men of Wicklow and Kildare  
 They met and left down their guns.

Their arms down we know the rest,  
 Bold Brittania true to her name,  
 Massacred each and every one,  
 Another victory to her roll of fame.  
 I then look away to famed Mullaghmast,  
 I think of Tone's lonely grave,  
 How he and Lord Edward and all the rest,  
 Gave their lives that our land might be saved.

I feel proud that their flag is unsullied,  
 That we can on history's page,  
 Hand down to those that are coming  
 A cause that grows strong in its age.  
 I then look around at the scenery,  
 Allen Hill it catches my eye,  
 I can see Donnelly's hollow and the Chair of Kildare,  
 They recall history of days gone by.

## 16—THE PLAINS OF KILDARE.

Give me again, a fair Summer night,  
 Between the fading sunbeams and the scented twilight,  
 O'er the hill-slopes and braes and valleys so fair,  
 Round the meads and the rills of the Plains of Kildare.

Let me walk of the scenes of famed Mullaghmast  
 Where rests the brave heroes of centuries that's past,  
 Or waft to tread o'er the ashes of stone,  
 Or stray by the gibbets that surround my own home.

Your rare rustic shrines will ever to me  
 Be a treasure unknown, a heaven of glee ;  
 They stand through all ages an omen of old  
 To tell of the brave men who sleep 'neath your fold.

The patriot hearts that are sleeping to-day  
 Beneath those fair shades in their mother clay,  
 Loved your fair silken robes, gave their lives it to save,  
 Now illumine your fair plains in smouldering grave.

Oh ! hope of my youth and dream of my years,  
 No sorrows e'er pause to wait sullen tears  
 Where the hearts, fond and true, are frisky and gay,  
 And merrily glide all shades of life's way.

No attractions on earth will e'er lure me away,  
 To my haunts, when a boy, my hopes every stray,  
 Where pleasure streams torret round the scenery rare,  
 Of Nature's own garden, the Plains of Kildare.



## 17—NATURE'S ISLE.

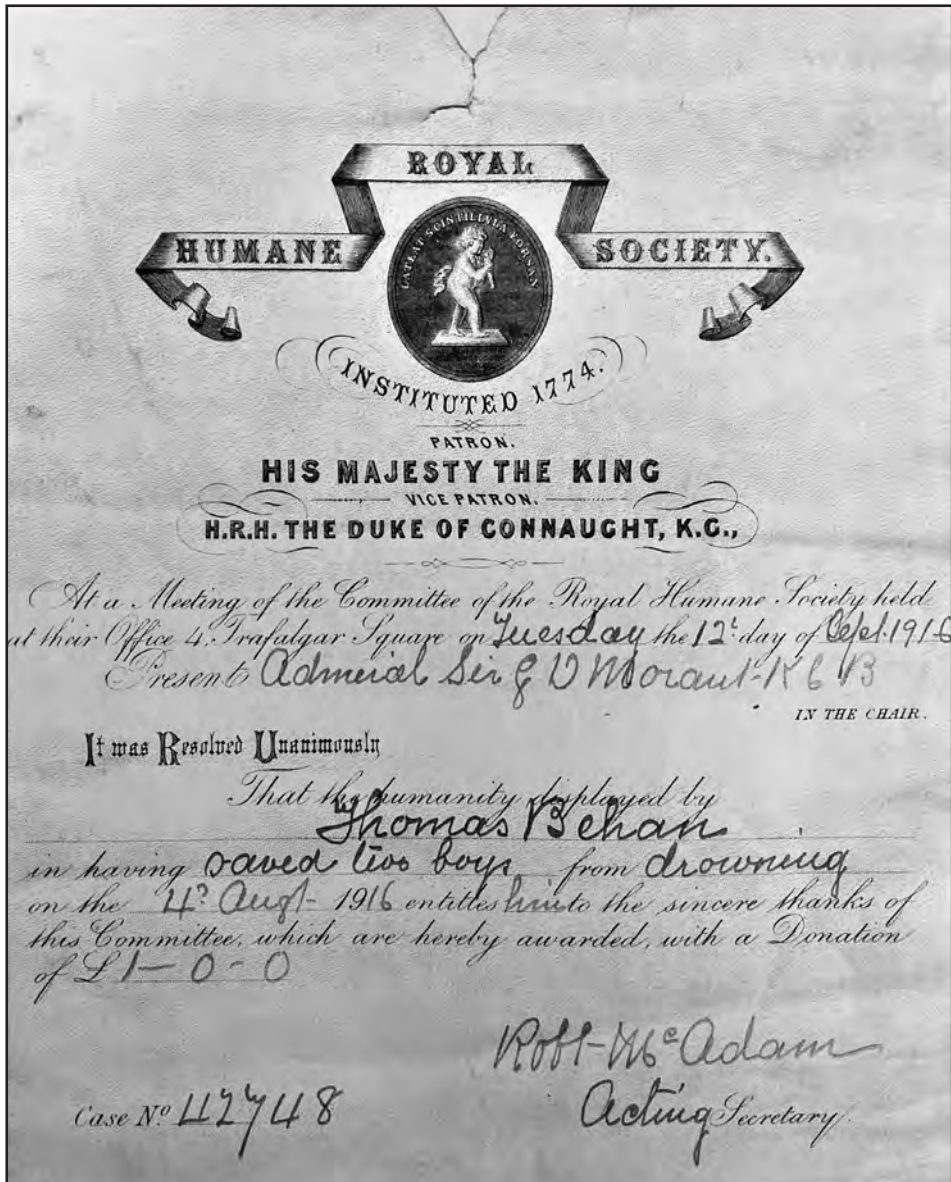
Give me a land on all this earth  
 Like the little Isle that gave me birth,  
     No sons as brave, no hearts as true,  
     At every age to dare and do ;  
 Nowhere the smile on every face,  
 Illumes the heart to leave its trace,  
     But ever still in joys aglow  
     Where pleasures loving brooklets flow.

Ah! nature in its blended state  
 Designed our land a nation great,  
     Arrayed our hills in sombre grand,  
     Entwined our glens with silken band ;  
 And gave us hearts to guard with care  
 Such ardent plains and shrines so fair,  
     To rout the fierce assailing foe,  
     Where pleasures loving brooklets flow.

The little songster daily sings  
 Sweet lays to make the valleys ring,  
     Each bower reflects the realms above,  
     Its scented shades a haven of love.  
 O! Nature's Pearl, undaunted Eire,  
 My Godly home, none can compare,  
     We'll guard till death, come joys or woe,  
     Where pleasures loving brooklets flow.

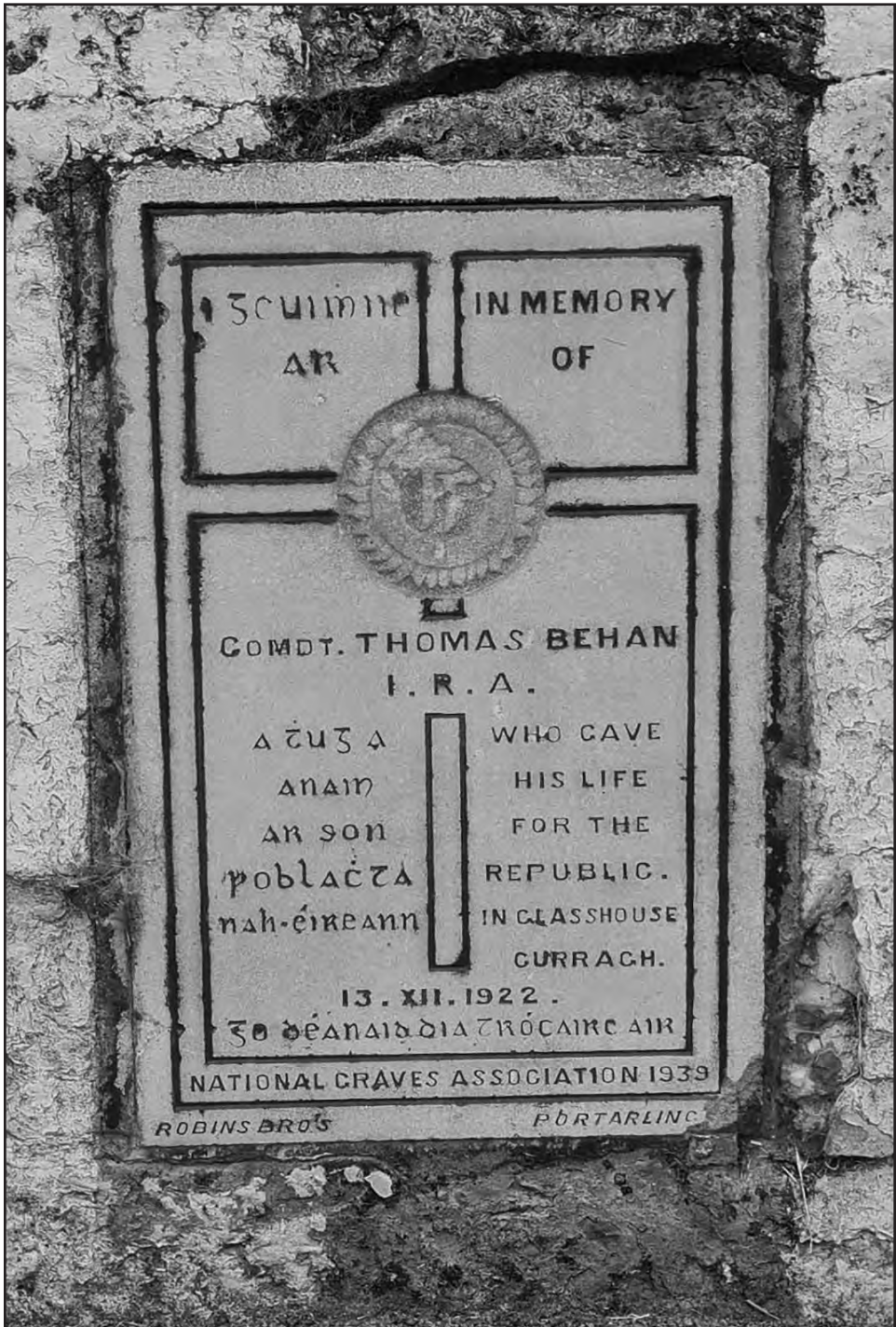
1872	58	Thomas	M	Patrangon	Lali Behan Lee	Labourer	Went to sea	Went first day	H. J. May
		Patrangon		Patrangon	Lee		Present at Birth	Patrangon	Register.

The General Registry Office, Birth Registration of Thomas Behan, 1890, Rathangan.



Copy of Certificate from Royal Humane Society, 1916.  
Courtesy of Leo Conway.





*Plaque erected in 1939 on Rathangan Bridge by the National Graves Association.*

“All I ask of you is, that wherever you may be you will remember me at Holy Communion, and at the foot of the Altar.”

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be loved everywhere.—100 days, once a day.



My Sweetest Jesus, be not my Judge, but my Saviour.—50 days each time.

**In Sad and Ever Loving Memory**

OF

**THOMAS BEHAN,**

**I.O., 1st. EASTERN DIVISION,**

**KILDARE BRIGADE, I.R.A.,**

**Late of Rathangan,**

**Murdered at The Curragh, 13th Dec., 1922.**

**Aged 31 Years. R.I.P.**

But oh! it was for Ireland's love,  
And Ireland's faith he died;  
And to his soul in Heav'n above  
We raise our heads with pride.

The voice is now silent, the heart is now cold;  
The smile and the welcome that met us of old.  
We miss him and mourn him in sorrow unseen,  
And dwell on the memories of days that have been.

*Memoriam Card, Thomas Behan.*

*Courtesy James Durney and Kildare Local Studies Dept.*



Hare Park Internment Camp.  
 Courtesy Kildare Local Studies Dept.

399	1922	Thomas Behan	nee Rochahr	32 years	Lab <sup>4</sup> Contractor	Shock to heart due to sudden wound to left side of chest	Information received from Mr. F. Keegan, Carragh, Curragh side of Kildare, 10/12/23	Theresa Margaret February 1923	1923	Registrar.
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The General Registry Office, Death Registration of Thomas Behan, 1923.



The Glass House, Military Prison, Curragh Camp.  
 Courtesy Mario Corrigan 2018.



First Page. Superintendent Registrar's District of Cadumey 05920869

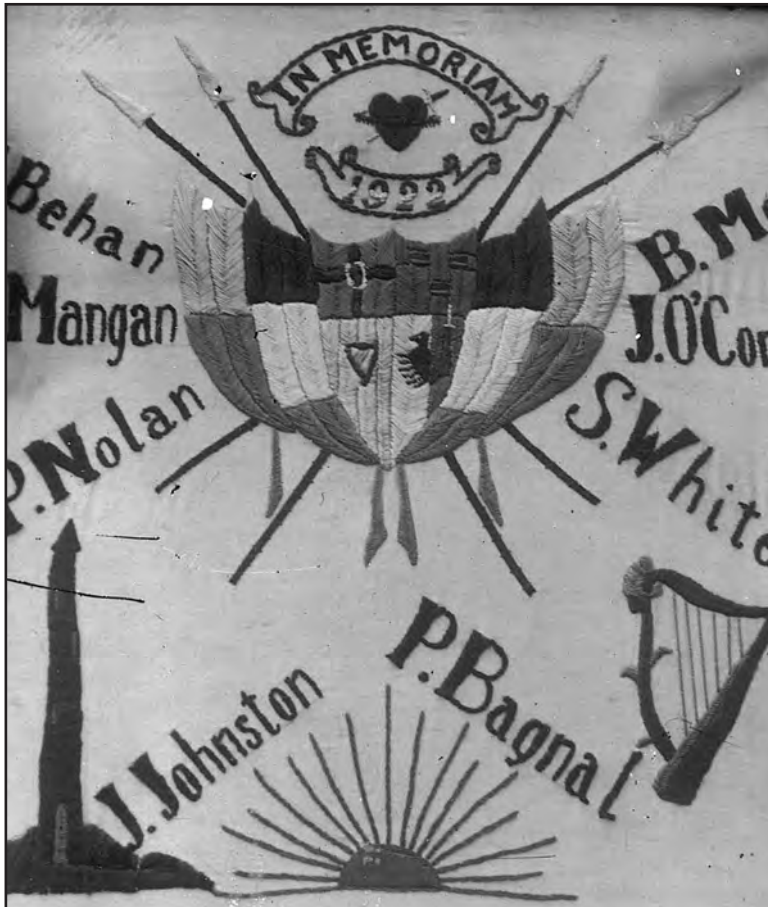
1889 Marriage solemnized at the Roman Catholic Chapel of Mathrangau in the Registrar's District of Mathrangau in the Union of Cadumey in the County of King's

No. (1)	When Married (2)	Name and Surname (3)	Age (4)	Rank or Profession (5)	Residence at the Time of Marriage (6)	Father's Name and Surname (7)	Rank or Profession of Father (8)
	Monday 4 <sup>th</sup> Nov. 1889	Patrick Behan	Full	Smith	Labourer	Mathrangau Co. Wick to Madare	Thomas Behan Labourer
		Julia Lee	Full	Spinster	"	Mathrangau Co. Wick to Madare	Alire Christy Lee - Dead Labourer

Married in the Roman Catholic Chapel of Mathrangau according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church by me,

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Pat Behan and Julia Lee in the Presence of us, Simon Mc West, Michael Kenny and Eliza Coulah

The General Registry Office, Marriage Registration of Patrick Behan and Julia Lee, 1889.



Commemorative banner.  
Courtesy James Durney and Kildare Local Studies Dept.

## December 1922

# The Story of the Rathbride Column

*James Durney*

During the Civil War an anti-Treaty I.R.A. unit operated in the Kildare-Curragh area and was known by the Free State authorities, as the 'Rathbride column.' It was led by Commandant Bryan Moore, Rathbride, a veteran I.R.A. officer, and consisted of Tom Behan and Joseph Kelly, Rathangan; Pat Moore (brother of Bryan), and Patrick Nolan, Rathbride; Stephen and Jimmy White, Joseph 'Jackie' Johnston, Patrick Mangan, Patrick Bagnall, all from Kildare town; and James O'Connor, Bansha, Co. Tipperary. Three of the men – Mangan, Nolan and O'Connor – were railway workers.

The Rathbride column operated against the railway line, goods trains and National Army in the vicinity of Kildare. In October the group had sent a runaway engine down the main Kildare line. A railway bridge near Kildare was blown up and an engine and some wagons, from which the driver and fireman had been forcibly removed, was sent crashing into it. On 11 December 1922 two engines were taken from a shed at Kildare and sent down the line towards Cherryville. One engine ran out of steam and did no harm, while the other overturned and blocked the line for some time. A third engine was also taken out at Kildare and driven into the turn-table pit at the station; in addition, a wagon of coal was also run into the pit. The column was also responsible for an ambush on National troops at the Curragh Siding on November 23 when a large party of troops were returning to Dublin after escorting prisoners to the Curragh Internment Camp. On their return journey the troops were fired on at the Curragh Siding and two were wounded. In the confusion a policeman was accidentally shot by a National soldier.

In October a proclamation by the Provisional Government announced that anyone who fought, was found under arms, or committed an act of war against the government would face the death penalty. On 13 December 1922 National army troops raided a farmhouse at Mooresbridge on the edge of the Curragh plains and "found the proprietress in possession of a fully loaded Webley revolver." In the subsequent search of the property, one of the soldiers banged his rifle butt against a floor and heard a hollow sound. They found an entrance to a 'dug-out' and threatened to throw grenades in unless the occupants surrendered. Annie Moore's son, John O'Reilly, claims the 'dug-out' was in fact an unfinished tunnel, which was to lead out to the nearby railway line.

Ten men and one woman, Annie Moore, were arrested and the 'dug-out' yielded ten rifles, 200 rounds of ammunition, four bombs, two grenades, and food supplies. The soldiers assaulted several of the detainees – Annie Moore was allegedly struck by a rifle butt, as also was Tom Behan. Annie Moore later claimed Tom Behan was killed by a blow of a rifle butt on the head at the scene, while the official version is that he was, 'shot while trying to escape,' from the Curragh camp. Behan was a veteran IRA man and at the time of his death was Brigade Intelligence Officer, 1st Eastern Division.

The Free State authorities claimed that "One of the party of men arrested when trying to make his escape from the hut in which he was detained at the Curragh, ignoring the warning of the sentry to desist, was fired on and fatally wounded."

Sometime between the 13 and 18 December seven of the men arrested were tried before a military court and found guilty of being in possession of arms without authority and sentenced to death. The sentence was duly carried out on the morning of 19 December.

The following official report was issued from Army Headquarters, GHQ, on that evening: "Stephen White, Abbey Street, Kildare, labourer; Joseph Johnson, Station Road, Kildare, railway worker; Patrick Mangan, Fair Green, Kildare, railway worker; Patrick Nolan, Rathbride, Kildare, railway worker; Brian Moore, Rathbride, Kildare, labourer; James O'Connor, Bansha, Tipperary, railway worker; Patrick Bagnel, Fair Green, Kildare, labourer who with others, were arrested at Rathbride, Co. Kildare, on the 13th inst., were charged before a Military Committee with being in possession, without proper authority, of – 10 rifles, 200 rounds of ammunition therefor, 4 bomb detonators, 1 exploder.

"They were found guilty and sentenced to death. The sentence was duly executed this morning, 19th inst., at 8.30 a.m."

Bagnall (19), White and Johnston (18) were still in their teens.

Father Donnelly, chaplain to the troops, administered to the seven volunteers before their executions. They were shot one by one and were buried in the yard adjacent to the Glasshouse.

The last letters from the seven men were printed in the Republican paper *Eire*. /The Irish/ /Nation/.

James O'Connor of Bansha wrote to his mother: "I am going to Eternal Glory tomorrow morning with six other true-hearted Irishmen." Patrick Mangan wrote to his mother: "I am to be shot in the morning. I fought for Ireland and am sorry I could not do more... I have made my peace with God and was never so happy as tonight."



The men were executed and buried within the grounds of the Military prison on the Curragh, 'The Glass House.' Their bodies were exhumed in 1924, waked in Kildare Courthouse and re-buried in Grey Abbey, graveyard in Kildare Town. James O'Connor's body was returned to Tipperary. In 1935 a marble Celtic Cross was unveiled to the men on the Market Square in Kildare Town, the oration given by Fr. Michael O'Flanagan.

Thomas Behan was not executed. His body was returned to his family and buried in Rathangan, graveyard.

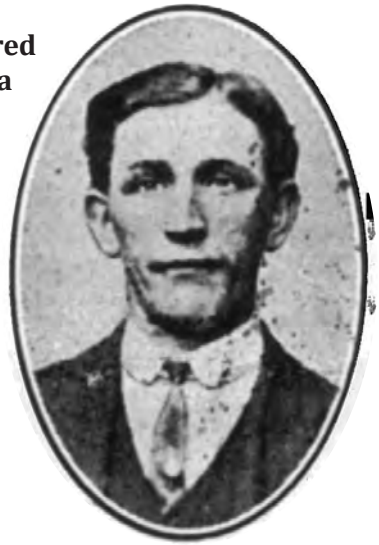


*Postcard of Rathangan.  
Courtesy of Kildare Local Studies Dept.*

# Thomas Behan, Rathangan

*Mario Corrigan*

**Tom Behan was a soldier. Born and bred in Rathangan he was self-employed as a Road Contractor, but was swept along by nationalist politics prior to 1916. As a prominent member of the local Volunteers, he was arrested in the wake of the Easter Rising and was interned in Wakefield Jail in England. He fought during the War of Independence and was interned again just as the country found peace. When the Civil War broke out, he joined the anti-Treaty forces. He was captured and killed on the 13 December 1922.**



## **FAMILY**

Thomas Behan was born on 20 July 1890 to Patrick Behan, a labourer, and Julia Lee, both of Rathangan. Named after his grandfather, he was the eldest of 11 children, composed of 6 sons and 5 daughters: Thomas (1890), Christopher (30 March 1892), Patrick (9 November 1893), Margaret (18 May 1895), John (26 May 1897), Joseph (3 March 1899), Mary (20 December 1900), Bridget (21 November 1905), Harriet (27 January 1903), Michael (24 March 1908), Julia (7 May 1910).

Tom Behan was Rathangan born and bred. In 1901 and 1911 his family lived at Main Street, in a 2nd class house with 3 rooms and 13 people. The family later moved to Bridge Street.

His parents, Patrick, and Julia were married by Fr. Simon McWey on 4 November 1890 in the R.C. Chapel in Rathangan, and both were described simply as labourers. His father was identified as a Bird Catcher in the 1911 Census while his mother was described as a seamstress in 1901. At the time of the wedding, Patrick's father, Thomas Behan, was still alive, but Julia's father Christopher Lee was dead. The witnesses were Michael Kenny (who married Mary Lee on 16 May 1876) and Eliza Conlan.

Julia Lee was born on 26 March 1867 and baptised the next day, to Christopher Lee (Ragman) and Mary Lynch of Rathangan so she was 23 years old when she had Tom. Her husband, Patrick, was baptised on 7

November 1858, to parents Thomas Behan and Harriet Lalor of Rathangan. Thomas married Harriet on 15 May 1854 at Rathangan; witnesses were Pat Lalor and Martha Conlan. Their first child was born on 1 July 1855. Harriet Behan, wife of a labourer, died at Rathangan on 5 December 1888. In 1900, a road contractor named Thomas Behan, was involved in a case involving the cutting of hedges, but it is unclear if this could have been Thomas Behan's grandfather.<sup>1</sup> Thomas Behan senior, a labourer, died at Rathangan Demesne, on 16 February 1915.

The following year, 1916, two of Tom's brothers died of tuberculosis. Christopher died 11 March 1916; John died 28 July 1916. In the midst of all this, Thomas Behan was arrested and interned on the Curragh and later deported to England, ending up in Wakefield prison until July 1916.

Thomas Behan was self-employed taking road contracts from Edenderry No. 2 R.D.C. & from Kildare R.D.C. for several roads in the area worth between £200 and £250 per annum. He was assisted in the work by his father and brothers. It was estimated that Thomas contributed £60 to the household and his brother and father who he sub-employed contributed about £25 each, so the family income relied on Thomas. He was active with the I.R.A. during the War of Independence and by June 1921 he had declined to proceed with his contract for drainage in the district.<sup>2</sup>

Captured, Behan was interned on the day the Truce came into effect on the 11 July. Prisoner 349, Thomas Behan, of Rathangan had a 'date of departure' recorded as 8 December 1921.<sup>3</sup> Thomas went Anti-Treaty during the Civil War being arrested and killed on 13 December 1922.

On Monday 27 November 1922, a meeting of Kildare Co. Council made mention of correspondence from the ITGWU and an allegation by Thomas Behan, that payments due for road contracts had been deferred because of a complaint made to the Council by the ITGWU Rathangan, respecting the employment of additional workers on road contracts.<sup>4</sup> It suggests Behan had returned to his contracts after his release for a time at least and was still working or at least overseeing contracts prior to the September meeting of the Council at least. Julia had declared he was unable to work after his release in December 1921 owing to ill-health contracted while in jail.<sup>5</sup>

His mother applied for a Military Pension and the claim had to be investigated. According to the Social Welfare Officer in Edenderry in 1960 (comments in brackets relate to 1960) the family at the time of his death in 1922 consisted of the following:

Father Patrick Behan 63 Road Contractor; Mother Julia 62, Household duties; Sister Margaret, 24, Waitress, was married (widow); Sister, Mary, 22, Waitress, was married (widow); Sister Harriet, 19 at home, (working in



Dublin); Sister Bridget, 14 school (married); Sister Julia, 12 school; Brother Patrick, 26, in jail (dead); Brother Joseph, 23 at home (married); Brother Michael, 13, school.<sup>6</sup>

Bridget, Julia and Michael were later deemed to be dependent on Thomas as the main earner for the home as their father Patrick worked for Thomas. Julia had to leave school when Thomas died. Their father was ill and remained so until his death in 1928. Their mother Julia had no private income and no wage-earning employment, but her application was somewhat successful, and she received £112 10s gratuity (one off payment) under the 1932 Act. The family were considered to be only partially dependent on Thomas Behan's income, so no pension was recommended. Later, Julia claimed that when she received the gratuity her husband was ill (he was dead by this time) and the money disappeared on medical requirements and other necessary household expenses. The money was quickly spent, presumably on debts owed from her husband's illness and death. Julia also erected a fine stone to the memory of her beloved son Thomas, who died for Ireland.

At the time of the pension application in 1933, the family circumstances were somewhat precarious. Patrick had been employed but was described as an invalid. Joseph, it seems, was working as an impermanent canal labourer and Bridget was a Home Assistance Officer though when she signed the form (March 1933) it appears she had herself down as a Housekeeper. Two other sisters had married and moved away and were working in the 'Irish Press' offices

By 1938 it appears that Joseph and Michael were in An Garda Síochána and were married. Margaret and Mary were married (both were widowed by 1960). Harriet and young Julia were described as clerks in Dublin and Bridget was still a Home Assistance Officer and caring for her mother Julia who was suffering (at least in 1939) from angina pectoris. The house in Bridge Street was rented and the rent and rates were paid for by Bridget (1938).

Margaret married Thomas Meaney, Garda, 11 April 1928 in Rathmines. Thomas possibly died in Kells, Co. Meath, 2 May 1954 (Retired Civic Guard)

Mary married Louis Vincent O'Neill, Motor Engineer, from Co. Donegal, on 14 September 1927, in Naas. A Louis O'Neill, married motor fitter, died aged 43 at Claremorris, Co. Mayo, 17 Sept 1943.

Brigid married Edward Maher, Insurance agent, The Crescent, Newbridge, Co. Kildare, on 2 July 1941, in the Pro-Cathedral, Dublin and had a shop where she employed young Julia.

The remaining siblings and his parents outlived Thomas Behan. His

father Patrick died 12 (13 on gravestone) October 1928 while Julia Behan, Shopkeeper, Widow, died 18 September 1946.

His brother, Patrick, described above as an invalid, died of tuberculosis, aged 39, on 17 September 1933. His sister Brigid was present at his death at Bridge St., Rathangan. The *Kildare Observer* described him thus:

“He was a very good, decent, obliging and kind-hearted young fellow, most popular everywhere, and his death is deeply regretted.”<sup>7</sup>

There were six priests at his funeral and the chief mourners were: Mother; brothers Michael and Joseph; Mrs Meaney Kells, Mrs. O’Neill Dublin, Brigid, Hattie and Daisy Behan – all sisters; Christopher, Patrick and Joseph Kenny and Christopher Lee – uncles. Mrs Fitzgerald, Friarstown and Mrs Maria Kelly Mullantine (aunts); Peter Behan Coolelan and many other cousins.

Messages of sympathy received included Domhnall Ua Buachalla, An Seanascáil and amongst those in attendance were General Manager of the Irish Press, Robert Brennan, and Kildare Co. Board G.A.A. reps. Mr. T. Clarke, Mr. Joyce Conlan and Mr. Michael Buckley.

Patrick had worked as Home Assistance and Relieving Officer with Kildare County Board of Health from around 1924, resigning his post about a month prior to his death in 1933.<sup>8</sup> His salary was £75 p.a. in 1928.<sup>9</sup>

Patrick was a noted athlete and footballer. According to one newspaper obituary he had been a promising high jumper and had won Leinster Championships at Croke Park in 1919 with 5ft 10.5ins. when Larry Stanley was a competitor. Patrick’s highest ever jump was 6ft and he had won many valuable trophies. Apparently, he broke both ankles and never recovered. He was also described as one of the best and most vigorous footballers until he broke his collarbone.

In July 1932 Patrick Behan was lucky to have a case of assault by him on another individual dismissed by the Justice. He was Relieving Officer in Rathangan at the time, but it was felt there was significant provocation to allow the summons to be dismissed.<sup>10</sup>

Patrick and Michael were members of the Rathangan Fianna Fail Cumann. Michael, the youngest, played football for Co. Kildare on a number of occasions between 1930-1934.<sup>11</sup> On the death of Patrick Behan, a motion of sympathy was passed by St Patrick’s Fife and Drum Band on the resolution of Stephen Conway. Michael Behan was a member of the Band.<sup>12</sup>

When Patrick resigned his post on account of his ill-health Brigid, his sister, was dispensing his duties until the vacancy was advertised. The *Kildare Observer* described her as a “very capable, hardworking young girl

who is very popular in her native town.”<sup>13</sup> The same newspaper reported on her appointment on 23 September 1933.<sup>14</sup> She was described as the Home Help Officer in September 1934 when the Board of Health allowed her 2s 6d. for an office.<sup>15</sup> Brigid was also appointed Registrar of the New Cemetery in late 1933 or January 1934.<sup>16</sup>

An article on 30 December 1933 by ‘The Rambler’ in the *Kildare Observer* described Thomas Behan eleven years after his death as a ‘brave and intensely loyal soldier,’ who had ‘rendered outstanding services in the fight for freedom.’ And who was ‘still mourned as that of a man who loved his country above all things.’<sup>17</sup> But there was more to his memory than his service.

## HERO

The Supplement to the *Kildare Observer* of 19 August 1916, described ‘Gallant rescues from Drowning at Rathangan.’

‘On Friday of last week while three boys named Thomas Behan, Stephen Conway and Michael Kelly, all of Rathangan, were bathing in the canal near the town Conway and Kelly got into difficulties. Behan, who was some distance from them, hearing cries of distress, went promptly to their assistance and was just in time to see Conway rise to the surface for the last time. Behan got hold of him and pushed him ashore. By this time Kelly had apparently gone down for the last time when Behan dived and brought him to the surface. The boy Kelly was in an exhausted condition but recovered shortly afterwards. Behan by his presence of mind and bravery was thus enabled to save the lives of these two boys. Every credit is due to him, and it is hoped that the Royal Humane Society will acknowledge his plucky act.’<sup>18</sup>

The *Kildare Observer*, 11 November 1916, carried a report of the local Petty Sessions but before the meeting the Chairman, Simon J. Malone, reported he had a ‘very pleasant’ duty to perform. He had to present the Royal Humane Society’s certificate to Thomas Behan, Rathangan for what was described as ‘Mr. Behan’s first act of bravery after his release from Frongoch (was actually Wakefield).’ Behan had risked his life for the sake of two young swimmers in the canal the previous summer and ‘deserved great credit for his brave and plucky action.’ He presented Behan with the certificate and a cheque for £1 and said ‘Mr. Behan should be proud of his act of great gallantry.’

‘Mr. Behan suitably returned thanks and said he also desired to thank Mr. J. J. Murphy, J. P., for having recommended him for it.’



Young Stephen Conway was a friend and boarder with the Hannon family on Main Street, Rathangan in the 1911 Census. According to his own Military Pension application he was born in 1902 and died 5 September 1984; his wife Nora died 12 January 1986.<sup>19</sup>

Curiously, in later life, Stephen also worked from 1934-1942, as a road worker for Kildare Co. Council, before a stint in the Briquette factory in 1942 and then with Murphy Bros Malsters.

Stephen Conway, Chapel Square, Rathangan, joined Rathangan Company late in 1919 and was at the Allen Ambush in March. He claimed to have fired his shot gun at the Black and Tans on the Kildare Road in May 1921, and then got away through Black Bog. With him were Jack Kennedy, Paddy Lusk and Tom Behan (I/C). Conway received training as a signaller and was in the training camps at Ballymacoll, Dowdingstown and Clonbrin. One referee on his application, Patrick Kenny recalled he was in Signals for 7th Brigade.<sup>20</sup>



Unlike Behan, Conway was Pro-Treaty. While no service record existed, an old attestation card, for 4 April 1922, corroborated Conway's claim that he joined the National Army on 1 April 1922 at Celbridge and was discharged on 14 August 1922. He was in Celbridge Barracks when it was attacked (24 April 1922) and was in Drogheda for the storming of Millmount Barracks (4 July 1922). After his discharge he claimed he guarded the town of Rathangan and prevented the R.I.C. Barracks from being burned; guarded the Hibernian Bank and arrested irregular suspects, some of whom were prominent.

Leo Conway recalled a story handed down, where Behan and Stephen Conway were facing each other in Drogheda, but now on opposite sides. Apparently, Conway as a national soldier was on the hunt for Irregulars and saw Behan in a Public House with a few others but did not fire on him or try to arrest him. They knew each other and Tom Behan had saved his life some six years previously.

## **VOLUNTEER/REPUBLICAN**

According to Tom Harris there was a branch of the Gaelic League in Rathangan sometime after 1911 and Volunteers active by 1915.<sup>21</sup> There was also the Rathangan Brass Band and a branch of the United Irish League. It is likely that the Volunteers were established in June 1914 in Rathangan.

There was a mass meeting, estimated at 5,000 people, at the Gibbet Rath on the Curragh on Sunday, 7 June 1914, which was attended by nationalists from Rathangan amongst others.<sup>22</sup> The O’Rahilly outlined the motives of the organisation and called on nationalists to join the movement and set up companies in every town in County Kildare. On Sunday 28 June The O’Rahilly spoke at a meeting organised to mark the inauguration of a Volunteer corps in Rathangan, urging those who joined the Volunteers to remain steadfast and strong for a ‘Volunteer could only be disarmed when he is dead.’<sup>23</sup> This was the birth of the Irish Volunteers in Rathangan. On 19 July some 200 Volunteers from Rathangan led by T. J. Murphy in uniform and Dr. Sullivan accompanied the Irish National Foresters and the Rathangan Brass and Reed Band to Edenderry for a parade.<sup>24</sup>

The Irish National Foresters was a ‘friendly’ or benevolent society which had developed as a breakaway group from the Ancient Order of Hibernians. It promoted Irish nationalism and called for *“government for Ireland by the Irish people in accordance with Irish ideas and Irish aspirations”*. Thomas Behan was initiated into the Irish National Foresters on Sunday 31 January 1915. In February 1915, P. Behan was elected Junior Beadle and Christopher Kenny, Secretary.<sup>25</sup>

By November 1915 Thomas Harris described a small group of Volunteers at Rathangan he hoped could be counted upon by the time of a Rising.

Michael Smyth, who later became a Senator, was in charge of the Athgarvan Volunteers and recalled Tom Behan as a member of Rathangan Volunteers when he visited with them previous to the Rising. *“On my visit to Rathangan I was in touch with Christy Kenny, Tom Behan and others and was informed that the majority of the National Volunteer Company there were in favour of the Irish Volunteers and would turn out if there was a Rising. This Company had a good supply of arms and ammunition and were well trained.”*<sup>26</sup>

Harris, Ted O’Kelly and Tom Byrne visited Naas, Prosperous and Rathangan on Easter Sunday, 1916. *“We called at Kenny’s, Rathangan, that evening. Kit Kenny was there. He is now dead. We had tea there. We did all this on bicycles. In Rathangan there were 16 Lee Enfield rifles in the possession of T.J. Murphy of Rathangan who had bought them for Rathangan National Volunteers. I think the Volunteers had lapsed there and O’Kelly asked Kenny to get control of these rifles and take them with him to Bodenstown for 12 O’clock. Kenny agreed and gave us the impression that we would have him and, the rifles and some men. We started back then to Newbridge from Rathangan and we arrived in the Prince of Wales Hotel (now the Central Hotel) where we had tea, Byrne arrived; he had been out in Athgarvan where he had met them all. He thought they would all co-operate, we remained talking and went to bed in the hotel.”*<sup>27</sup>

Tom ‘The Boer’ Byrne also remembered the visit to “*several of the volunteer Companies, notably Rathangan which had a fairly strong Company and quite a few rifles. A man called Kenny was in charge there. Outside this there was little in the way of armament in the county.*”<sup>28</sup>

With the outbreak of the Great War there was a split in the Volunteer movement nationally, the majority remaining loyal to John Redmond and calling themselves the Irish National Volunteers. The remainder, the Irish Volunteers, were separatists who did not want to fight for the King in the war. But the movement in Kildare was depleted and the numbers small by the time of Easter Week. The countermanding order of Eoin MacNeill further confused the situation and apart from a resolute group which marched from Maynooth to the G.P.O. many mobilised locally awaiting further instruction but did not engage in the Rising.

Within days of the 1916 Rising breaking out, prominent republicans were arrested in Co. Kildare and lodged in ‘The Glass House’ prison and then Hare Park Camp on the Curragh.

Michael O’Kelly, editor of the *Leinster Leader* newspaper remembered being joined by ‘*Christy, Paddy, Jack and Joseph Kenny and Tom Behan, Rathangan*’ – these men had mobilised for the Rising which did not happen in Kildare. Just over a week or so later they were marched under guard across the Curragh to Kildare Town railway Station and brought to Kingsbridge and then to Richmond Barracks. Eventually they were deported to Wakefield Prison and after a couple of months men from aas and other parts of Kildare were released to travel back to Ireland.<sup>29</sup>

Thomas Behan and his cousins the Kennys from Main St., Rathangan, were interned on the Curragh and later deported, on 13 May 1916, to Wakefield Jail, in England. He was released from there probably in July and, soon after his return to Rathangan, he saved the lives of two of his friends on 4 August when they got into difficulties swimming in the canal at Rathangan. Thomas worked as a road contractor for Kildare Co. Council and Edenderry RDC in the interim years.

With the general Amnesty and Conscription Crisis, Volunteer units once again spread across Co. Kildare and Behan became active in the Rathangan Company.

Thomas Behan, Rathangan, William Byrne and John Nolan of Rathangan Demesne and Christopher Behan of Bonaghmore, Rathangan were charged with playing handball in the public street on 27 April 1918 and in so doing disrupting the passage of people in the town.<sup>30</sup> This public disorder took place in the middle of the conscription crisis in Kildare.



The title page of his *Poems*, published posthumously described Thomas Behan as I.O. 7th Brigade, 1st Eastern Division, I.R.A.<sup>31</sup> His family's pension applications provide the best information about his military career, although all witness statements and family pension applications must be viewed carefully both in terms of natural family bias and also because of the length of time that elapsed before these statements and applications were made.

Thomas, Joseph and Patrick it seems were all members of the Rathangan Company pre-Truce. Patrick, like Thomas, had mobilised for the Rising in 1916 and was active during the War of Independence, taking the Anti-Treaty side during the Civil War and he was identified as a staunch republican in the *Kildare Observer* in September 1933.<sup>32</sup> Thomas and Joseph had taken part in the Allen Ambush on 20 March 1921.<sup>33</sup> One of these siblings was interned at the time of Thomas Behan's death and was described as being in jail in 1922 in the pension application.<sup>34</sup>

As part of the Irish Volunteers Thomas Behan was a member of the Rathangan Company. During the War of Independence he served as 1st Lieutenant of D Company, 4th Battalion, Offaly I Brigade, 3rd Southern Division.<sup>35</sup> The 4th Battalion was completely reorganised between the two critical dates of 11 July 1921 and 11 July 1922 and all were relocated. Apparently the Battalion was informed of a prospected change around May 1921 but the change did not come until after 11 July. Bracknagh and



Rathangan Old IRA Parade 1948, Main St. Rathangan.  
Courtesy of Kildare Local Studies Dept.

<b>Names</b>	<b>Addresses</b>	<b>Date Interned</b>
1. James Behan	Rathangan	
2. John Broughan	Rathangan	
3. Stephen Conway	Rathangan	
4. Christopher Reilly	Rathangan	
5. Thomas Foran	Rathangan	4th July, 1921
6. Luke Flaherty	Rathangan	4th July, 1921
7. Patrick Byrne	Newtown, Rathangan	
8. Michael Joseph Byrne	Newtown, Rathangan	
9. John Kennedy	Meeting House, Rathangan	
10. Stephen Kennedy	Tullylost, Rathangan	
11. John Kennedy	Tullylost, Rathangan	
12. James Jacob	Glanaree, Rathangan	
13. Thomas Cross	Glanaree, Rathangan	
14. Andrew Cross	Glanaree, Rathangan	
15. William Dempsey	Glanaree, Rathangan	
16. Michael Dunne	Rathangan	
17. John Kenney	Rathangan	
18. Patrick Kenney	Rathangan	
19. Joseph Kenney	Rathangan	11th July, 1921
20. William Hannon	Rathangan	
21. James Reilly	Rathangan	
22. Thomas Behan	Rathangan	11th July, 1921
23. Thomas Conlon	Rathangan	
24. Patrick Gorry	England	
25. Christopher Behan	Rathangan	
26. John Maher	Rathangan	
27. Thomas Martin	Rathangan	
28. William Moore	Rathangan	
29. Luke Darcy	Rathangan	
30. John O'Neill	Rathangan	
31. Patrick Martin	Ellistown	
32. James Martin	Rathangan	
33. Joseph Behan	Rathangan	

*Returns furnished for 11 July 1921.*<sup>36</sup>

Rathangan companies became part of 7th Brigade, 1st Eastern Division. Unit strength on 11 July, 1921 when the Truce came into effect was 203 all ranks, and the companies of the 4th Battalion were located as follows: Edenderry, Bracknaghgh, Castlejordan, Rathangan, and Cushina. In the returns there were 33 men in D Company. From July 1921 to July 1922 Company Captain was J. Kenny and Lieutenant was M. Dunne. By July 1922 Rathangan company was no longer part of the Battalion.

In his witness statement, Michael Smyth, claimed he organised a Company in Rathangan in December 1920, as there was some trouble there with Offaly.<sup>37</sup> Joseph Behan, Thomas's brother, stated Thomas was sworn into the I.R.A. in November 1920 by Michael Fitzgerald who was then Captain of Allen Company 5th Battalion 7th Brigade 1st East Div.<sup>38</sup> but the Brigade would not have been operational then. He does suggest however that Thomas joined the Allen Company and from there (as Smyth also suggests) a new Company was formed in Rathangan with Michael Dunne as Captain and Thomas as Lieutenant. Joseph had also hinted at trouble in Rathangan. It would seem the original Rathangan Volunteers company ceased to exist around March 1920 (Joseph says 1919 but the barrack was vacated in 1920) when the local Volunteers had refused to burn the vacated R. I. C. Barracks.

James Moran, Battalion Vice O/C testified that Thomas Behan was a member of Rathangan Company from 1919. Michael Joseph Dunne his Company Captain said Behan was a member of Rathangan Company from 20 November 1919 to the Truce and served as 1st Lieutenant. Patrick J. Byrne, Newtown, Rathangan, 2nd Lieutenant of D Company, corroborated this evidence and declared he was with him at two engagements: Hill of Allen Ambush, 20 March 1921 and the ambush of Constable Adams on the first Sunday in May 1921. According to his own testimony, Byrne took over as 1st Lieutenant after Behan's arrest.<sup>39</sup>

By the time of the Truce on 11 July 1921, D Company was well organised as part of Offaly I Brigade with Michael J. Dunne as Company Captain, but this was to change. According to James Dunne, Greenhills, Kill, on 11 July 1921, six battalions formed the 7th Brigade, 1st Eastern Division: total strength, 1,600 men. 5th Battalion was comprised of Rathangan and Bracknagh: M. Ryan, Officer Commanding or O/C; Jack Kenny, Vice-O/C.<sup>40</sup>

Following the split, Tom Harris had been elected O/C of the Brigade on the Republican side. On the evening of the outbreak of the Civil War, Harris, had been arrested in Naas and P. Brennan, Vice-O/C Brigade, was in command. Jim Dune went to Prosperous to meet with Brennan, and a new Brigade Staff was formed: P. Brennan O/C; J. Dunne, Vice O/C; with M. Ryan, O/C 5th Battalion.



Thomas Behan had served as 1st Lieutenant, in D Company during the War of Independence under Michael Ryan and now served as 1st Lieutenant, A Company, 5th Battalion, 7th Brigade, 1st Eastern Division under Michael Dunne and Michael Ryan. He became Intelligence Officer or I/O with the 7th Brigade and was latterly attached to the 6th Battalion (Kildare Town, Maddenstown, Suncroft, Curragh etc.) and operated as part of an Active Service Unit (ASU) centred on Rathbride.

In the 1938 update to the pension application his mother Julia claimed he had been 1st Lieutenant in A Company until April 1922 when he was appointed Column Leader and Brigade Intelligence Officer the rank he held at the time of his death.<sup>41</sup> The Officer Commanding the Brigade, Patrick Brennan of Kilcullen, described Behan as Battalion Intelligence Officer from June 1922 to 14 September 1922 when he operated in various areas in North Kildare, describing him as ‘... a most dependable & genuine type of soldier.’ Thomas Harris also described him as Brigade Intelligence Officer and Leader of a Flying Column.<sup>42</sup> Thomas Richard McEvoy was Brigade Engineer at the time of Behan’s capture and death and he described how the Brigade I/O was murdered.<sup>43</sup>

Jim Dunne, Kill was Acting O/C of the Brigade while Thomas Harris was interned. Harris and some 111 other republicans escaped from Newbridge Barracks on 15 and 16 October 1922. Harris resumed position as Brigade O/C. A plan was hatched in November to raid Baldonnel Aerodrome in November. It was to include the ASU and members of the Kildare/Meath Brigades and Dublin Brigade all under the command of Patrick Mullaney, but the operation was called off on three different occasions. Shortly afterwards on 1 December, most of Mullaney’s men were captured at the Battle of Pike’s Bridge, near Leixlip, a couple of whom were deserters from the National Army. They were later executed (January 1923), including Kildare men, Leo Dowling from Suncroft and Anthony O’Reilly from Celbridge.<sup>44</sup>

Dunne recalled how “A section of the 6th Battalion Column returned to Kill with me, where I supplied them with rifles as I had bought twenty rifles from a soldier stationed at Naas Barracks. This section of about seven men, under Comdt. Brian Moore, returned to Kildare, where they had a dug-out near the Curragh. In December 1922, I had a visit from Tom Behan, who was our Brigade I/O and stationed with the 6th Battalion Column. Behan informed me that the column in the dug-out were in danger of capture and that he had informed Tom Harris of the situation. Harris would give him no directions as to what action he should take. I informed Behan that, as Harris was Brigade O/C, I could not give him any instructions but that in my opinion he should put the matter before M. Price, Div. O/C. He wrote to Price immediately and I sent it through Miss F. O’Connor. Behan returned to the dug-out and some

days later the dug-out was surrounded and the men captured. Behan was shot in his cell at the Curragh, and Brian Moore and his five [sic] comrades were executed on the Curragh about a week afterwards.”<sup>45</sup>

## DEATH

One of the greatest mysteries revolves around the death of Thomas Behan. Free State troops discovered the dug-out at Moore’s Bridge on the Curragh on 13 December 1922. The unit was captured after a search of the property. There are two stories as to what happened next. One version refers to the mistreatment of Thomas Behan who was hit in the shoulder by the butt of a gun and his shoulder shattered. When he could not climb on board the truck he was hit again in the temple and died on the spot.<sup>46</sup> The other ‘official’ story is that Thomas Behan was captured along with his comrades and transported to the Curragh where they were interned. Behan was shot trying to escape through a window in the hut or his cell. There is no doubt that Behan was killed by a gunshot wound. There was an Inquest the next day, 14 December 1922, and the coroner for South Kildare M. F. Kenna gave evidence to the wound and cause of death. Military authorities may be mistrusted but coroners deal in facts. Thomas Behan died as a result of ‘Shock and Haemorrhage due to Gun Shot Wound to left side of Skull.’<sup>47</sup> This was verified by E P McCarron, Registrar General, 11 April 1933 as part of the pension application process.

The story of being shot while trying to escape is often mis-read as a cover up for a sort of shoot-to-kill policy on the behalf of the authorities. His mother Julia had no doubt that her son was murdered, and others likewise elicited the rhetoric of the time.<sup>48</sup> It may prove impossible to be sure what happened but certainly Behan was shot on the night of his capture, while the others were arrested, to be executed days later. The Army Pensions Board simply referred to the death of the deceased of a G.S.W. received while a prisoner at Curragh Camp on 13 December 1922.

When Julia first wrote to them in January and May 1933 she referred to the loss of her eldest son the late Thomas Behan of Rathangan, Kildare, ‘... *who was murdered by Free State troops on December 13th 1922 ....*’ when he was captured in a dug out at Moore’s Bridge, the Curragh.’ As an adjunct to the letter in May, she said,

‘P S

*The Seven men who were executed on the Curragh, December 19th 1922, were with my son when he was captured but they were kept for a week after his death. He was in charge of these 7 men and was wanted for a long time, so*

*that he was killed when captured. At his inquest the Free State Authorities at the time, said that he was shot while trying to escape which was entirely false. Then he is not entirely counted as executed.*<sup>49</sup>

Patrick Brennan, O/C 6th Batt Carlow Brigade 1919 to 1921 and later 7th Brigade O/C 1922 admitted that while he could rely on his personal knowledge of Thomas Behan as a soldier and an officer, his understanding of the circumstances of his death were based on press reports. He believed he had been shot while escaping from prison, but either way would have been executed with the others on the 19 December if his wounds had not been fatal. On 27 September 1922, the Dáil passed emergency legislation which allowed for the execution of those captured bearing arms against the State.<sup>50</sup>

However, the way Brennan saw it

‘... I hardly could conceive of the decease [sic] doing a Dishonourable act, my interpretation of his trying to escape would be quite within his rights as a soldier of the army.’<sup>51</sup> According to Brennan it would have been his duty or even his nature to try and escape so it is not merely fantasy to think it a story drummed up by the authorities to cover something more sinister. Paddy Mullaney who led the Leixlip Flying Column had escaped from the Curragh in August to re-join the fight.<sup>52</sup> The fact that Thomas Behan was shot while a prisoner at the Curragh, shot while in custody, was a blight on the military’s record but no matter how distasteful it may seem, it was part of their duty as military prison guards.

Michael Dunne, 5th Battalion O/Chad been imprisoned in August 1922, and also heard of Behan’s arrest and death, second-hand. In a note in 1956, he described how, ‘He was imprisoned at the Detention Barracks Curragh Camp and was shot in his Cell I believe by a Sentry. It was alleged he tried to get out through the window.’ In 1933 he referred to Behan being shot trying to escape on the morning of his arrest and while he had no personal knowledge from the information available to him those were the facts.<sup>53</sup>

When Julia had to write again in June 1938 with regard to her application she wrote, ‘... in Respect of my son the late Thomas Behan who was Killed in Action or Rather was Shot by Free State Forces at the Curragh on 13th December 1922.’<sup>54</sup> By this time she described his cause of death as being shot. Thomas Harris also relied on official reports for information on Thomas Behan’s death. He described in his own pension application how he had escaped from Newbridge Barracks in October 1922. After that he was involved in the proposed attack on Baldonnel, which did not come off.

“The area had become impossible. I saw that. Most of those men were taken a few days afterwards and executed, and I was nominally a Brigade O.C. there at the time. I wrote out a report of what I thought the position was



– that it was hopeless, and that I would resign my rank as Brigade O/C and would carry on in the ordinary way!<sup>55</sup>

Whatever happened, the mystery and willingness to believe in some sinister motive has now become part of the narrative of the arrest and death of Thomas Behan. He most certainly died of Gun Shot Wounds (G.S.W.) received, probably on the Curragh. The story of his mistreatment during his arrest should not be ignored as it is suggested that ten men were arrested and maybe two were not executed, Pat Moore and Jimmy White, brothers of two of the men. Executing two brothers would have been a step too far!<sup>56</sup>

At any rate, Annie Moore who was arrested and interned in Kilmainhain Gaol, Dublin, survived, and presumably her father John and mother Mary, who both died later were present but not arrested. So, the story of Behan being manhandled into the truck or beaten by Free State soldiers at Rathbride must be given some credence. Annie Moore later claimed he was killed by a blow of a rifle butt, but she would have then been removed separately to the men and would not have been with the men later when they were brought to the camp. She may have seen him struck but she may not have seen him killed.

His desire to escape once captured if an opportunity presented itself to him must also be seen as plausible. This does not absolve the military authorities from blame but rather testifies to the strength of his character. However, we are left to think that if he was badly beaten or had a cracked shoulder what condition would he have been in. And it is the reliance on the story of his mistreatment that has created a conspiracy that sometimes is used to justify his death or murder and even the murder of his comrades in the haste to ‘cover-up’ the details of his death.

The decision of the government at that time to execute republicans in an attempt to end hostilities or take revenge makes it almost impossible not to create multiple scenarios designed to justify particular viewpoints. The remaining prisoners were later executed in the Glass House prison and escape from those tiny cells would have been extremely difficult. In newspaper reports Behan’s attempted escape was supposedly from a hut which is more credible. The men sentenced to execution were allowed write letters to family and loved ones and the address they gave on their letters was the Curragh Prison or Hare Park. According to their death certificates they were executed in the ‘Military Prison’ on the Curragh which we assume to be the Glass House, but they had been housed in Hare Park which was made up of wooden huts!<sup>57</sup>

Thomas Behan of Bridge Street, Rathangan never had the opportunity to write a letter home. Because he was not executed his body was returned for

burial to the family and he was buried in Rathangan Old Cemetery. His name was remembered in Rathangan, and in 1939 a plaque was unveiled by the National Graves Association at Rathangan Bridge. Sadly, his name does not appear with those of his comrades on the monuments at Grey Abbey or on the Market Square in Kildare Town.

## **POEMS**

A small volume of poetry was published by the *Drogheda Independent* in 1923 following his death. The nature and extent of the 17 poems suggests they were not all written while he was a prisoner in the Rath Camp in 1921 or even that they may have been modified or improved upon his release. The title page claims they were written while he was a prisoner during the Anglo-Irish War, and indeed poems like 'The Calico Shack,' and 'The Lassies of Kildare,' could be imagined to be performed during the prison dramatic evenings. The poem 'In My Native Place' specifically also refers to the Rath Camp as if he is there while you read it. His re-use of the same imagery, words and terms suggest they were 'muddled together' over a particular period. Some are undoubtedly nationalistic in nature while other are personal glimpses into a life that was cut short. None more personal maybe than the sad elegy to his deceased brothers who had died in 1916.<sup>58</sup>

## **MEDAL**

His family made a successful application for a Service Medal (1917-1921). A medal was issued on 7 September 1944. The application was submitted posthumously by his sister Julia Behan and brother Joseph Behan. It was noted that Thomas had been executed in 1922.

## **AWARD**

Initial gratuity for the death of Thomas was paid in 1933; a small yearly allowance was granted in 1938 and an annual gratuity was awarded to Thomas's sister Julia from July 1959.

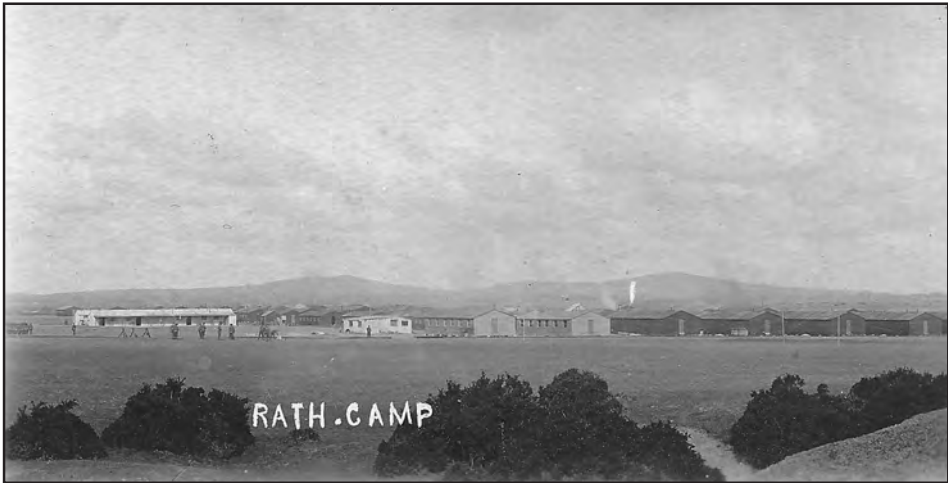
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- 31 Behan, Thomas, *Poems* (Drogheda, 1923).
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- 36 Notes on the typescript document on the Military Archives website show that Thomas Conlon and James Martin were noted to have applied for Service Medals. (Both applications were successful. It is known that Thomas Behan was awarded a medal later. Stephen Conway made an unsuccessful posthumous application on behalf of James Reilly).
- 37 Witness Statement of Mr Michael Smyth, op. cit. <https://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/bureau-of-military-history-1913-1921/reels/bmh/BMH.WS1531.pdf>
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*Rath Internment Camp.  
Courtesy Kildare Local Studies Dept.*

*But the sights that I saw in this Rath Camp  
Will never leave my mind  
Until I am called by the Lord of all  
to leave this world behind*

– Thomas Behan



*Coffins of the Seven Executed Men, Kildare Courthouse, 1924.  
Courtesy of Kildare Local Studies Dept.*

"The entire party were arrested, the somalo having been transferred to Mountjoy. Several reports had been received recently from districts about the camp that robberies were being committed."

A later official report of that day announced that Thos. Behan, one of the captured men, who attempted to escape from the hut in which he was a prisoner at the Curragh, had been fired on and fatally wounded on his refusing to assist.



*Moore's Cottage at Rathbride.  
Courtesy of Stephen Sullivan and Mario Corrigan.*

**An Elegy, To Deceased Brothers  
In Rathangan Churchyard green  
Inside that fair and ancient shrine'  
The truest, fairest, friends of mine  
Two brothers side by side.  
Thomas Behan**



*“Tom Behan who rendered outstanding services in the fight for freedom, and who was a brave and intensely loyal Soldier of Ireland, was shot dead on the Curragh in 1922, and his death, still mourned as that of a man who loved his country above all things, evoked universal sorrow and regret.”*

The Rambler,  
Rathangan Past and Present, *Kildare Observer*, 30 Dec. 1933.

