**Killing of Protestants in 1922 truce not sectarian, study argues**

**No justification for deaths of 13 men in Dunmanway and Ballygroman, author contends**



View of Sing Sing, a vault at Kilquane Cemetery, Knockraha, Co Cork, used by the IRA for holding prisoners during the War of Independence. Photograph: Gerard Murphy

[Barry Roche](http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/barry-roche-7.1837426)

[Thu, Jan 23, 2014, 20:46](http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/killing-of-protestants-in-1922-truce-not-sectarian-study-argues-1.1666033)

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A controversial thesis that the killing of some 13 Protestants by members of the IRA in West [Cork](http://www.irishtimes.com/search/search-7.1213540?tag_location=Cork&article=true) in April 1922 during the truce was sectarian has been challenged by a new study of the killings.

History teacher [Barry Keane](http://www.irishtimes.com/search/search-7.1213540?tag_person=Barry%20Keane&article=true) has spent the past four years working on Massacre in West Cork - The [Dunmanway](http://www.irishtimes.com/search/search-7.1213540?tag_location=Dunmanway&article=true) and [Ballygroman](http://www.irishtimes.com/search/search-7.1213540?tag_location=Ballygroman&article=true) Killings in which he examined the killing of some 10 Protestant men in the Bandon Valley and three others in Ballygroman in Mid-Cork.

The killings featured prominently in Dr Peter Hart’s book The IRA and Its Enemies - Violence and Community in Cork 1916-1923 when he concluded in a chapter entitled Taking it out on the Protestants that the primary motive behind the killings was sectarian.

Mr Keane’s interest in the issue stemmed from his BA Thesis at the Geography Dept in UCC, where he examined the decline in the number of Protestants in Co Cork following Independence, and his knowledge of that issue was very much at odds with Dr Hart’s thesis.

“I knew that Peter Hart’s interpretation of that data was wrong from my own research - there was a 43 per cent drop in the Protestant population of County Cork between 1911 and 1926, but some 73 per cent of that drop is directly linked to the withdrawal of the British military in 1922.

“The British army left, their families left, the coastguard, senior members of the RIC, Post Office officials left - in Kilworth Army Camp for example, you would had between 1,000 and 2,000 British soldiers and virtually all of them Anglicans or Methodists or Presbyterians, and all of them left.

“After Independence, business people in Fermoy for example wrote to WT Cosgrave saying they were broke because of the departure of the [British Army](http://www.irishtimes.com/search/search-7.1213540?tag_organisation=British%20Army&article=true) from the barracks in the town; the last county to rebel against the British - for economic reasons - should have been Cork.”

Armed with his knowledge of the decline of Protestants in Co Cork, [Mr Keane](http://www.irishtimes.com/search/search-7.1213540?tag_person=Mr%20Keane&article=true) began looking specifically at the Ballygroman and Dunmanway killings when 13 Protestants ranging in age from 16 to 82 years were killed between April 26th and April 29th, 1922.

He concluded that while Dr Hart was substantially accurate in terms of the individual events surrounding all of the killings, he believes Dr Hart was incorrect to ascribe a sectarian motive to the killings and instead believe they were revenge killings for the death of a local IRA man.

Cmdt Michael O’Neill was shot dead by Capt [Herbert Woods](http://www.irishtimes.com/search/search-7.1213540?tag_person=Herbert%20Woods&article=true) when he entered the home of Capt Woods’s relations, Thomas and [Samuel Hornibrook](http://www.irishtimes.com/search/search-7.1213540?tag_person=Samuel%20Hornibrook&article=true) at Ballygroman on April 26th, 1922 and all three Protestant men were later kidnapped by members of the IRA and killed.

Drawing on statements given by IRA veterans to the Bureau of Military History as well as local oral histories, Mr Keane concludes the Ballygroman and Dunmanway killings were best summed up by the testimony of IRA man and later GAA President, Michael O’Donoghue.

“All were Protestants. This gave the slaughter a sectarian appearance. Religious animosity had nothing whatsoever to do with it. These people were done to death as a savage, wholesale, murderous reprisal for the murder of Mick O’Neill,” said Mr O’Donoghue.

Mr Keane believes all 13 were shot in revenge for the killing of Michael O’Neill and because they were perceived to have been hostile to the nationalist cause by elements in the IRA in the Bandon area who were in strict need of control at the time.

He notes that senior West Cork IRA men such as [Tom Hales](http://www.irishtimes.com/search/search-7.1213540?tag_person=Tom%20Hales&article=true) and [Tom Barry](http://www.irishtimes.com/search/search-7.1213540?tag_person=Tom%20Barry&article=true) were in Dublin trying to avert the Civil War and he contrasts the Bandon situation with Skibbereen and Bantry, where strong IRA commanders like [Con Connolly](http://www.irishtimes.com/search/search-7.1213540?tag_person=Con%20Connolly&article=true) and Gibbs Ross kept control.

And he notes: “By no stretch of the imagination can it be suggested that these murders were justified. After all, even if these men had been hostile during the War of Independence, their side had lost; they were the defeated ‘enemy’ if they were the enemy at all.”

**Irish Independent**

**War of Independence Protestant killings were 'not ethnic cleansing'**

* [Email](http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/war-of-independence-protestant-killings-were-not-ethnic-cleansing-29942509.html)

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A mass card for IRA leader Michael O’Neill

**Ralph Riegel** – 23 January 2014

**THE notorious killing of 17 Protestants in west Cork during a War of Independence truce was not a deliberate act of ethnic cleansing, a new book claims.**

Author Barry [Keane](http://searchtopics.independent.ie/topic/Keane%2C_Inc.) says that documents now indicate the bulk of the killings were in retaliation for the killing of the IRA's Commandant Michael O'Neill outside Dunmanway in April 1922.

'Massacre in West Cork' claims that some IRA units were so infuriated they struck out at individuals they suspected of being pro-British.

In the four days after O'Neill's killing, 10 civilians were shot dead in Dunmanway, Ballineen, Clonakilty, Murragh and Bandon – all Protestant males aged from 16 to 82.

Despite claims that the killings had a major impact on west Cork 's ethnic profile, with the local Protestant population dropping by almost 30pc between 1911 and 1926, recent research has shown that the majority of these were British military and that most native Protestants remained.

"The online publication of the Bureau of Military History (BMH) files provides startling new evidence about the murders," Mr Keane said.

He cites statements from Michael O'Donoghue, who worked closely with O'Neill in Bandon, and who later became GAA president. In one of the statements he names Herbert Woods as the man who fired the fatal shot.

"Several prominent loyalists – all active members of the anti-[Sinn Fein](http://searchtopics.independent.ie/topic/Sinn_Fein) Society in west Cork and blacklisted as such in IRA intelligence records in Bandon, Clonakilty, Ballineen and Dunmanway were seized at night by armed men, taken out and killed (in retaliation)," the IRA man said.

Dear Editor

Author Barry Keane is reported (Irish Times, 23 January 2014 ‘Killing of Protestants in 1922 truce not sectarian, study argues’) saying of the murder of thirteen Protestants in and around Dunmanway in April 1922 “he believes Dr Hart was incorrect to ascribe a sectarian motive to the killings and instead believe they were revenge killings for the death of a local IRA man”. This is in the context of a lengthy dispute over whether Peter Hart ever or properly described these attacks as ‘ethnic cleansing’.

I think it is now accepted that nothing like the ethnic cleansing that occurred recently in the former Yugoslavia matches the 1920s in Ireland, whether in Belfast or Cork, but what remains firmly resisted by Keane in his new book ‘Massacre in West Cork’ as well as Republican writers generally is that the murders were sectarian. Relying on the statement by former GAA President Michael O’Donoghue, Keane avers that the killings were retaliatory after an IRA man Michael O’Neill was shot dead during a night-time raid on a Protestant house and that “Dr Hart was incorrect to ascribe a sectarian motive to the killings”. Retaliation may well have been the trigger motive especially as your paper on 17 January reported Col. Michael Costello’s statement that the deceased’s brother Daniel took part in “the murder of several Protestants in West Cork.” But retaliation in the form of murdering ten entirely uninvolved Protestants not to mention executing the three men in the house being raided is a step change from vengeance which is of course often in the background to sectarianism.

Keane is saying it was (a) not ethnic cleansing (b) not sectarian (c) not IRA policy and (d) a little local retaliation for the 'murder' of one man that had minimal consequence on the Protestant population who for some reason were well-satisfied with its limited nature.

Comment on Indo story:

The 'anti-Sinn Fein Society in West Cork' was as much of a fiction as the so-called list of informers used to pick out Protestant targets. Much trumpeted by certain historians, it is not in the Bureau of Military History, as claimed, if it ever existed. The massacre - on a par with Bloody Sunday - if not ethnic cleansing then has to have been sectarian or was it pure co-incidence that every one of those murdered was a Protestant?

Only asking.

But why is the accusation of sectarianism so strenuously resisted by O’Donoghue, the IPR and most Irish nationalist writers in relation to these and other events? It would be remarkable if an ethnic or national war like that in Ireland over the last century did not involve a high degree of sectarianism. Rebel or paramilitary forces would hardly be an exception to the pattern.

The only reason, I believe, is that Republicanism grew out of, maintains and certainly trades effectively – especially internationally – on a policy and reputation of bringing Irish people of all persuasions together. This could be possible with Irish Protestants, rarely of Unionists and certainly never of the pro-British population and Loyalists – the majority in the north. The problem always was that only a very few could afford to be simply Protestants and those who could showed a remarkable propensity to convert to Roman Catholicism, for whatever reason, or had a minority radical and Anglophobic outlook like F.J. Bigger, Bulmer Hobson, Casement and Douglas Hyde.

This successful piece of disingenuity or sometimes self-deception is at its most resonant with Wolfe Tone’s statement of aims, worth quoting at length, “'To subvert the tyranny of our execrable government, to break the connection with England, the never failing source of all our political evils, and to assert the independence of my country - these were my objects. To unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissentions, and to substitute the common name of Irishman, in the place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic, and Dissenter - these were my means.”

Not only did he fail then but his words now have only the opposite effect, and have done since partition. If the Ulster Protestants are not part of the Irish nation, Republicanism for them has to be sectarian and is in fact Hibernianism, recognisable or not.

Michael O’Donoghue, having a twin brother James in the RIC exemplified the split line amongst Irish Catholics, one more evident today with Home Rule sentiment surfacing as Republican hegemony slides away.

He wrote in his witness statement of that twin: “His training completed, he was posted to Aughnacloy, Co. Tyrone, where he served until the R.I.C. were disbanded in 1922. I wrote back to mother and told her to warn her R.I.C. son never to write to me or never to mention that he had a brother in Cork at U.C.C. Furthermore, I wanted to hear no mention of him whatsoever in any of her letters, and I never referred to him at all. I was a bit alarmed about my own extraordinary position. Here was I now in Cork, an active member of the Irish Volunteers (now the I.R.A.), while my twin brother was in the R.I.C. Force in Ulster, and my father, an ex-sergeant, R.I.C.”

He then related the fate of that brother in the summer of 1922 after he left the RIC, “The local I.R.A. police had promptly arrested him and ordered him to leave Cappoquin within 24 hours under threat of death. He had gone back straight to Gormanston R.I.C. H.Q., where he was retained in the R.I.C. for a few months longer. My parents were irate with the local I.R.A. for this bit of tyranny, and I, too, shared their resentment, somewhat. It certainly was galling for me, an I.R.A. fighter in North and South, to dash home to see my parents and family and to find that my brother, a demobbed R.I.C. man, returned home, had been driven away as a dangerous criminal at the point of the gun by the local Republican police”.

An anti-Treatyite, O’Donoghue was no unseeing triumphalist, observing, “It was just one of the many acts of bullying end brutal tyranny indulged in at that time by petty local Republican "warriors" to show their arrogant authority and self-importance. These acts resulted in the name of I.R.A. police becoming obnoxious in many districts. In many places, the local Battalion Commandant claimed supreme authority in his area and ruled like a feudal baron.”

Once at war, there is little can be done to curb excesses at command level let alone at the periphery. This witness gave honourable examples of how he tried while always defending his comrades but it is not the last word on the matter of Dunmanway.

Jeffrey Dudgeon (unpublished)