**DUNMANWAY**

[Jeffrey Dudgeon letter as sent on 3 April 2018 to editor@historyireland.com published July 2018]

Dear Editor,

In his letter in the March/April edition of History Ireland, Barry Keane expresses concern that the issue of the sectarian nature of the 1922 Dunmanway Massacre has resurfaced. He again says, “It’s time to give it a rest”, especially as he reckons it was indeed sectarian but the motives of the killers are unclear and will remain unproven. It is therefore a pointless debate.

Mr Keane states Peter Hart claimed that “there was no evidence against the victims”, yet avers there is such in British and Irish archives. His thorough researches have indicated links between the 13 victims and the ‘authorities’, for want of a better word. He quotes reports, rumours and gossip about each of the dead Protestants. The nastiest aspect is that some of the dead were related to other targets i.e. ‘any Prod would do’. In some form or other, they were identified as enemy agents, informants, hostile elements, or their deaths were simply collateral damage.

I think he would prefer that historians concentrated on the main aspects of the War of Independence in Cork and the less problematic, but Dunmanway was too great a crime to be a mere “stain” on the reputation of the IRA. It may have been exceptional but in a war where Protestants understandably feared they would suffer drastically, it was sadly inevitable, probably more so in the post-truce chaos of 1922. The result reported by the Cork correspondent of *The Irish Times* was that for many refugees, “So hurried was their flight that many had neither a handbag nor an overcoat.”

Like Bloody Sunday, Dunmanway was remarkable for the number of dead and the loss of control by the military. You could argue that Bloody Sunday in Derry was not a planned act of mass killings and I would tend to that view but the consequences were entirely as if it were. In Cork, the perception amongst southern Protestants after Dunmanway was the same - this was the future and it was sectarian. You are often better not to take time to consider the nature of the violence and whether it is ethnic cleansing or a spasm of local rage. You choose flight and think about it afterwards.

Keane insisted previously there is no evidence of “systematic ethnic cleaning similar to that which happened to Catholics in the north.” This attempt to see the north as qualitatively and quantitatively different won’t work. Both outbreaks were generated by similar fears and hopes. The 500+ dead in the north from 1920 to 1923 (including 90 police officers) were from both communities, the larger unquestionably bringing about more of them but the violence was far from one-sided.

The fact remains that in 1922 there were hardly any southern Irish Protestants and next to no Ulster Protestants who would not have been informants or ‘enemy agents’ in some form or other, if only by virtue of thought crime, and thus candidates for such patriotic and, by too many, excusable executions without trial.

Yours sincerely

Jeffrey Dudgeon

**Bandon Valley killings**

Sir,—A ‘bemused’ Barry Keane (*HI* 26.2, March/April ’18, letters) rejects a sectarian interpretation to the contested Bandon Valley killings of late April 1922. We would like to point readers to our 2014 article, ‘“Something in the Nature of a Massacre”: The Bandon Valley Killings Revisited (É*ire-Ireland*: Fall/Winter 2014, pp.7-59, assisted by James Donnelly Jr), where we explain why a sectarian interpretation is called for. We based our judgement on an extensive range of sources, old and new, including almost all the material cited by Keane in his letter. While it is true that the individual IRA killers have not been identified, their victims have, thus enabling the analysis to proceed on the basis of outcomes. All thirteen Bandon Valley fatalities were Protestant, which leaves little room for doubt about the sectarian nature of the attacks. This compares to the War of Independence when the majority of suspected spies killed by the IRA in County Cork were Catholic (70%). If this was simply a matter of killing suspected spies, why was there not a single Catholic among the fatalities?

Beyond those killed, we also looked at those targeted (or who claimed to have been targeted) unsuccessfully by IRA gunmen in the Bandon Valley during the nights in question. Taken together we identified a total of 24 West Cork residents. Of those 24, 22 were Protestants (92%). The IRA gunmen largely visited **loyalist** households perceived to be hostile to republicans. But we note that the gunmen shot dead at least three men who do not appear to have been republican suspects but were killed in lieu of or in addition to their intended target. This kind of ‘collateral damage’ (as Keane describes it), is virtually unique among the scores of Cork IRA civilian assassinations that occurred during the 1920-23 period. Rather than a clinical purge of informers, it suggests the gunmen carried out a reprisal specifically against hostile Protestant **loyalist** households in the area, following the death of a senior IRA commander in an **encounter** with Protestant **loyalists** in nearby Ballygroman. Since Peter Hart’s exploration of the Bandon Valley killings in his 1998 book, *The IRA and Its Enemies*, a more nuanced interpretation has emerged in three respects: the quite exceptional and highly localised nature of the episode; the extent of the opposition to the killings by public officials, including anti-Treaty republicans; and the identities of the visited households as ‘suspect’ to local republicans (rightly or wrongly), without the occupants being considered sufficiently so as to **justify** their execution in the War of Independence.

The scale of the killings was unprecedented in County Cork. The IRA perpetrators did not accuse the Bandon Valley victims of espionage at the time, or publically take responsibility for the killings. Evidence strongly suggests they were not sanctioned by the IRA brigade leadership. Cork No. 3 brigade commander, Tom Hales, quickly issued a public statement standing down his units and promising to protect ‘all citizens in this area, regardless of creed or class’. Republican officials denounced the killings, including Erskine Childers who wrote in the anti-Treaty newspaper *Poblacht na h-Eireann*, ‘Sectarian crime is the foulest crime, and it is regarded as such in the tradition of our people, for it violates not only every Christian principle but the very basis of nationality as well’. Moreover, the anti-Treaty political and military leadership, both national and local, recognised the sectarian nature of these attacks. The major flaw in Barry Keane’s assessment of the Bandon Valley killings is that it fails to do likewise.—Yours etc,

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