



Spike Island Ledger



NATIONAL
HERITAGE
WEEK 2021
14-22 AUG **h**

The Spike Island Ledger was kindly donated to the Local Studies Library in 2001 by Michael Griffin. His uncle, Thomas Griffin, compiled the ledger while interned on Spike Island in 1921. He was an active member of the Ballynoe Company IRA Volunteers and was sent to Spike following his arrest in January 1921. He remained there until the end of 1921. The ledger itself lists the names of IRA Volunteers interned during the months of April and May. It is not known why the ledger was only used during these two months; it is possible other ledgers might have been used but were subsequently lost.

Thomas Griffin acted as the canteen Staff Officer for the internees and in this role was responsible for looking after the internees' money. Some 900 internees were held on the island from February to December 1921, three times the number of prisoners, though not all are listed in the ledger. Some of the internees listed include Dick Barrett, one of six who managed to successfully escape in November 1921. Another is James 'Tough' Barry, who subsequently managed the Cork hurling team to All Ireland success. Unfortunately, not all survived their time on the island. Patrick White from Meelick, Co Clare, was shot by a sentry and died later of his wounds. Daniel Clancy, from Kanturk, was injured because of British Army fire and subsequently died in the Cork Military Hospital in Victoria Barracks.



Thomas Griffin

The money listed in the ledger was either in the internees' possession on entering the camp or was sent by letter from family or friends and in two instances from the O/C (Officer Commanding) in Buttevant and the Cage, (Brigade Cage, Victoria Barracks, Cork). The money was used to buy canteen supplies, shampoo, stamps and to pay for telegrams during their stay in the internment camp. An internee's remaining money would be returned to them on release or when transferred to another internment camp. This exhibition is concerned with the Republican internees on Spike Island as the ledger recorded their names only and did not include prisoners.

The IRA campaign in Munster against the RIC and British Army in the latter half of 1920 and early 1921, resulted in the death of 169 members of the RIC and British Army. This led to the declaration of Martial Law in this area in December 1920, and in Wexford and Kilkenny in January 1921. Despite the high loss of life amongst Crown forces, they still managed to capture several hundred Republican combatants and their supporters. One solution was internment. The Republicans were arrested, charged and brought before a military court and those not found guilty were held as internees.

There were 1,478 by January 1921, swelling to 4,454 by July of that year. Many were held even after the Truce was declared in July, remaining in custody until the signing of the Treaty in December 1921. Existing prisons were used to hold both internees and prisoners in the initial phase of Martial Law. These prisons included civilian prisons, Military Prisons in the Field, internment camps, the Military Detention Barracks Cork and the Brigade Cage in Victoria Barracks.

MARTIAL LAW IN CORK.

PROCLAMATION TO HOUSEHOLDERS.

Names To Be Posted On Doors.

A Central News Cork telegram states the military authorities are publishing a proclamation requiring all householders in the area under Martial Law to have affixed from January 1st to the inner side of their outer doors a list of all inmates with their age, sex, etc.

Hotel and lodging-house keepers will be required to furnish each morning to the nearest police station a similar list, with the added information as to where each guest has come from and their destination.

NEW INTERNMENT CAMP.

Yesterday morning 80 Sinn Fein prisoners in Cork Jail were conveyed in lorries to the Custom House and placed on board a warship, for the new internment camp on Spike Island, Cork harbour. They included nine members of Cork Corporation.

The Prison Board in Dublin were responsible for the civil prisons however, the military authorities had to ensure that prisons in the Martial Law area were not overcrowded and defended appropriately. As the Martial Law area was the area of operations for the British Army's 6th Division, they were responsible for discipline, the day to day running and defence of these camps. The prison on Spike Island served as a Military Prison in the Field and an internment camp. The internees were often held in another facility, Victoria Barracks and Kilworth Army Camp, prior to being transferred to Spike Island internment camp. An order was issued by the 6th Division Headquarters on 15th February 1921 to the Officer Commanding Spike Island instructing him that the prison on the island had been chosen to hold Republican prisoners and internees.

The first internees, eighty-four in total, were transferred to the island on 19th February. Another sixty-one arrived later that month. The internees were initially held in the north east casements. They were moved to 'A' and 'B' Blocks on 1st April. A further number were transferred from Cork Male Goal during the month of April.



'B' Block

'A' Block

IMAGE COURTESY OF SPIKE ISLAND MUSEUM



'A' Block

On arrival on the island each internee was assigned accommodation in one of the blocks, with each room in the block referred to as a 'hut'. Each hut elected their own hut leaders and each block leader was then elected from the hut leaders. The internees and prisoners also elected staff officers to manage their respective camps, one of whom was appointed canteen officer, namely Thomas Griffin who compiled the ledger in question. Internes were up at 7.30 a.m. The next hour and a half were concerned with stowing beds, erecting tables, washing, eating breakfast and cleaning.

The first check was held at 9 a.m., followed by another one at 2 p.m. and a final one at 4.30 p.m. The men were ordered to their huts at 8 p.m. by the IRA commanding officer. While the men were affected by the loss of freedom, a more pressing concern at times was the boredom. The staff officers sought to alleviate this with events and activities. These included hurling and football games, concerts, Irish language classes and the making of silver jewellery from coins smuggled into the camp in cakes and bread.



Silver broches hand
crafted by internees

Religion also played a part in the internees' lives. A priest from the local diocese was appointed prison chaplain and officiated at daily masses for the internees while the prisoners were only allowed attend mass on Sundays and holy days. The British Army did not record the religious persuasion of the internees though it was recorded for the prisoners. These records indicate that all prisoners were Roman Catholic, suggesting that a similar situation existed amongst the internees.

As was the case in most Irish households of the time, the men were invariably the sole provider for themselves or in the case of those married, for their families. This put a very great strain on their wives and dependents as not only was the only wage or salary no longer coming in to support the family, the family was now tasked with trying to send money, clothing, cigarettes and food to the internees and prisoners. The ledger indicates that amounts varied from internee to internee, some arriving or being sent a few shillings, others in receipt of several pounds.

Credit Register

ARMY IY R

DIET ACCOUNT,

BARRACK

DETENTION ROOMS

Date	Day of Week	Scale 1, No.	Flour	Suet	Bread	Oatmeal	Potatoes	Salt	Scale 2, No.	Bread	Cheese	Flour	Meat	Legs of Mutton	Shin of Beef	Mutton	Pork	Oatmeal	Peas, Split	Potatoes	Salt	TOTAL	Vegetables	Vinegar	Pepper	Indian Meal	Bread and Water		
			lbs. oz.	lbs. oz.	lbs. oz.	lbs. oz.	lbs. oz.	lbs. oz.	lbs. oz.	lbs. oz.	lbs. oz.	lbs. oz.	lbs. oz.	lbs. oz.	lbs. oz.	lbs. oz.	lbs. oz.	lbs. oz.	lbs. oz.	pints oz.	lbs. oz.	lbs. oz.	lbs. oz.						
Mansfield	Edmund																												
Mahony	Patrick		11	6									200									2	11	6			1	11	
Meads	John		10	0																								2	0

28/4/21
29/4/21
30/4/21
1/5/21
2/5/21
3/5/21

Patrick White

The shooting dead of Patrick White on Spike Island in 1921 is significant as it is the only case of someone shot dead while playing hurling during the War of Independence. Unlike the Tipperary footballer Michael Hogan, killed in similar circumstances at Croke Park in 1920 on “Bloody Sunday”, White did not earn legendary status as his death did not take place in public view.

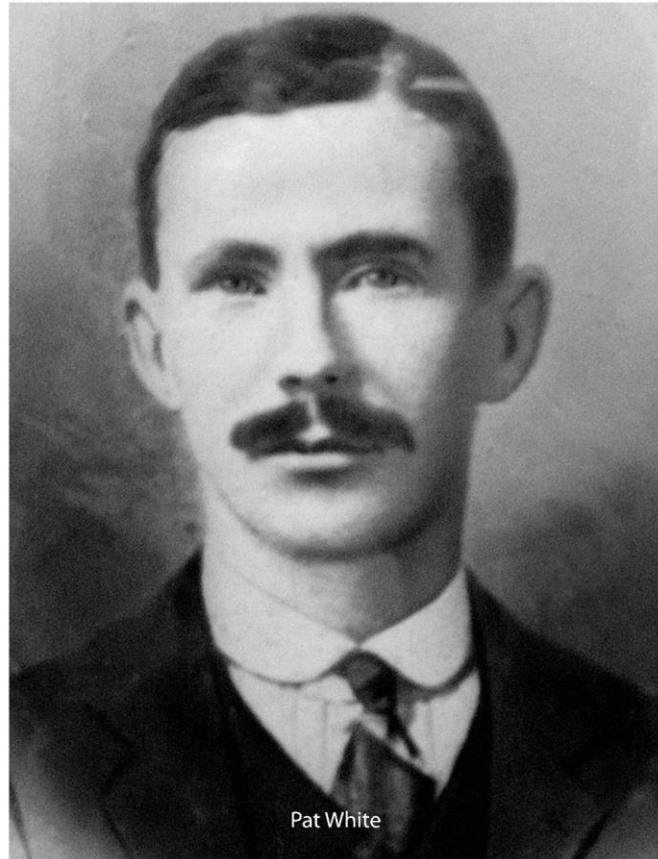
White came to be on Spike island after participating in a Republican engagement at Cratloe, County Clare on 13th January 1921 which resulted in two police fatalities. He was initially held in several other detention centres. He and his comrade Thomas Ringrose were used as human shields, handcuffed to the back of military lorries in order to deter ambush attacks, with soldiers under orders to shoot the “mascots” should that be required.

White's career as an activist had started back in 1914 when he joined the Irish Volunteers. A carpenter, who grew up on his family farm, he was among a group that had gathered in East Clare at the start of Easter week 1916 awaiting instructions for a rising which never materialised, their brief having been to liaise with the German gun running ship "The Aud". After 1917 he rose in the ranks of the East Clare Brigade of the IRA during the War of Independence, eventually becoming captain of the Meelick Company.

Clare, along with parts of Limerick and Tipperary which it bordered, was one of the major theatres of engagement during the independence struggle, with White's company in the forefront of those engagements. Their militancy sometimes caused them to act without GHQ clearance and an unauthorised raid on a Limerick city post office in 1918 drew a reprimand. In the "War in Clare 1911 -1921", a senior participant Michael Brennan, who would go on to become Irish Army Chief of Staff, described a string of incidents throughout Clare and the Mid-west in which the Meelick Company were specially singled out.

White's life came to a tragic end on 1st June, 1921. Internees could play hurling in a designated recreational area but were prohibited from moving beyond the barbed wire fence that sealed off the area from the rest of the camp. During a game in which he was participating, the ball went beyond the wire and when he went to retrieve it, he was shot instantly though according to his comrades the same sentry, Private Whitehead, had given him permission to proceed. Thomas Ringrose, who held the dying man in his arms, recalled that the only words his comrade spoke were "What will my poor people do?".

Though a commandant recommended disciplinary action against Whitehead for crass stupidity, he was overruled by General Neville McCready (a senior British Army Officer in Ireland at the time) and no charges were brought. The Civil War and its aftermath caused the incident to fade into obscurity but it was recalled in 1957 when a bronze plaque, designed by the eminent Cork sculptor and artist, Marshall C. Hutson, was unveiled by the Minister for Agriculture Senator Sean Moylan, who had himself been a prisoner on Spike Island.



Pat White

Patrick White

Image courtesy of Spike Island Museum

Dick Barrett

Born in Hollyhil, Ahiohill near Ballineen, the young Dick Barrett was greatly stirred by the events of Easter Week in Dublin. During the following year, as public opinion became increasingly sympathetic towards the republican cause, he was one of many who switched from passive support to active involvement. By the end of 1917, Barrett had risen in the ranks of the local Republican movement. He was prominent at numerous local engagements, resulting in promotion to the planning stage of operations, (no doubt influenced by the good impression he made on GHQ staff).

He had earned his stripes through involvement with a fighting cell known as the Crosspound Company, during which time he stayed at his teaching job so as not to come under the suspicion of authorities. After the capture of his friend Tom Hales in July 1920, he was made quartermaster of the Cork No.3 Brigade and had a hand in many of the attacks in the area right up to the Crossbarry ambush on 19th March, 1921. Three days later he was arrested at his classroom in Gurranes and was subsequently interned at Spike Island.

A brief incarceration at the Bere Island camp interrupted his two terms at Spike but this did not lessen his influence in the latter camp. He was soon appointed one of the staff officers for the internees and helped plan several escape attempts, including the spectacular escape of Sean MacSwiney, brother of Terence, and two others in April 1921. He also planned his own escape which was realised on the night of 10 /11 November when he and six others famously exited the “Irish Alcatraz” by boat. He was soon appointed to the staff of 1st Southern Division and later to the GHQ staff.

After the signing of the Anglo-Irish treaty at the end of 1921, he took the opposing side in the ensuing Civil War. Whilst planning the rescue of two Republicans detained in England after the assassination of Sir Henry Wilson, he was drawn to the Four Courts in June, where his comrades were under siege. He was among those arrested after the successful siege and was incarcerated in Mountjoy Prison. After several failed escape attempts he was among four executed without trial on 8th December as a reprisal for the assassination of the West Cork TD Sean Hales, who ironically was a close friend of his.



Dick Barrett

While the significance of Spike Island as a detention centre during the War of Independence is by no means overlooked, much of its story needs further telling. Between its sudden arrival on the scene and equally sudden departure, an eventful narrative unfolded of heroic endurance and some spectacular feats, which gives the place an importance on a par with Alcatraz and other famous detention centres.

The escalating violence after 1919 was particularly acute in Munster, where martial law was proclaimed, and the increasing pressure on the existing prisons resulted in overcrowding creating the need for alternatives. It was against this background that Spike Island internment camp and other ones such as that on Bere Island were established.

Most of those detained hailed from Munster and South Leinster in an all-male set up. The number held was around 900 on opening day 19th February, 1921. A typical prisoner had a spell in more than one section of the prison due to constant arrivals and departures. There was a notable influx of Republican prisoners from Bere Island at the start of April. Accommodation varied from casemates and other caged structures to wooden huts.

Escape plans were never far from the minds of the inmates and the first of two famous breakouts occurred on 29th April. One of those chosen to be freed was Sean MacSwiney, brother of the famous Terence who as Lord Mayor of Cork had died on hunger strike the year before. MacSwiney had been picked amidst rumours that his execution was imminent. The other two on the list were Con Twomey and Tom Malone, aka Sean Forde, whose alias concealed from the British authorities the fact that they were holding a senior IRA leader.

A boat was used as the means of the escape and upon its arrival the fleeing trio swiftly made their escape after Malone had attacked a sentry, who subsequently died from his injuries. After the prisoners had gone on board, the boat headed for Ringaskiddy and upon reaching the mainland the three IRA men made their getaway while the rescuers headed for safe houses in Cork city.

Reaction to the successful April escape was swift and the tightening of all procedures created handicaps for any similar future escape. Unfortunately, the fortress was made of limestone, which is impossible to tunnel through except for one vulnerable part of the complex known as the sally port, so the next plan centred on that.

The escape that eventually took place on the night of November 10-11 was facilitated for the lucky seven by fellow prisoners who helped to cover up the disused passage that was being utilised with blankets and other items. That passage, two walls and a moat, were among the hurdles negotiated before the men arrived by boat on the east shore of Cobh where local knowledge ensured their safety

The authorities at Spike Island responded with sanctions for the remaining prisoners and internees, who were kept outdoors for a day and a half while their property was ransacked. The end was now nigh for the camp and on 18th November the prisoners were transferred en masse by train to Portlaoise Prison.

INTERNEES' MASCOT



(Topical).
Two Spike Island internees taking home their mascot cat "Spike," which went through the hunger strike.

SPIKE ISLAND INTERNEES RELEASED.



(Hizpatrick, Dublin).
Some of the Spike Island internees who arrived in Dublin on Saturday. They are seen on the steps of Harcourt Street Railway Station, where they entrained for Wexford. They gave three cheers for the Irish Free State.