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<b>AUTHOR (S)</b>	Breda Condrón
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# Joseph Wrafter

*Breda Condrón*

Joseph Wrafter was born in 1882 and lived in Ballyduff, Tullamore. His parents were Patrick and Catherine Wrafter (nee Walsh). He had four brothers: Alec, Jim, Pat and John (all stonemasons like their father) and three sisters who emigrated to America. His brother Alec in 1939 sculpted the monument of remembrance at the court house, Tullamore 'as a lasting memory of the Irish Republican Army of the Offaly area who suffered death for the sake of Ireland'. Joseph was a member of the Irish Volunteers and on Monday 20 March 1916 he was attending a meeting in the Sinn Féin rooms in Columcille Street. There he subsequently played a large part in this event which became known as the 'Tullamore Incident'. Others attending were Peadar Bracken, who fired the first shots of the Rising, Seamus and Frank Brennan, Thomas Byrne, John Delaney, James Clarke, Joseph Morris, Henry McNally, Thomas Duggan, Thomas Hogan, Joseph Graham, John Spain, John Martin and Edward Downes. There were also Cumann na mBan members present – Misses Mary Jane, Maggie and Lettie McBride, Misses Mary, Ann and Brigie Mooney, Mrs J. Mooney and Mrs. M. Bolger, Misses Bridgie Neary and Kate Neary.

The ladies were counting a collection made at the previous Sunday's GAA hurling game in which the hurlers of county Laois won. The collection was to be used for the erection of a Wolfe Tone memorial in the town. As it was late in the evening, Joseph and Peadar Bracken decided to escort the ladies home. On their return to the Sinn Féin rooms, they were insulted and attacked by the hostile pro-British crowd who had gathered after seeing their sons, and husbands leave at the railway station to return to England and re-join the army. Present also were the RIC on their usual patrol of the streets but they paid no attention



Joseph Wrafter with his wife, Brigid (nee Cooke).



Sr. Oliver Wrafter (Ita) of Killina Presentation Convent, Joseph Wrafter's youngest daughter. She was born in 1923, two years before the death of her mother.

to the disturbance of the mob; to Peadar and Joseph the RIC actually appeared to be encouraging the mob.

The windows of the Sinn Féin building were being stoned and the mob attacked the front entrance of the building. Joseph and Peadar pushed through the mob and succeeded in entering the building. From just inside the front door Peadar drew his revolver and fired a warning shot over the heads of the crowd. Joseph, who had no gun, succeeded in closing the street door after Peadar fired another warning shot. The further altercation occurred when the volunteers were ordered to give up their arms, they refused and in the ensuing skirmish shots were fired and a police sergeant was shot. This is widely acknowledged to be the first shots of the Easter Rising. Joseph and his comrades were court-martialled and imprisoned.

Joseph Wrafter married Brigid Cooke from Tullamore and they had three children - Eileen, Kevin and Ita. Brigid died in 1925, while Joseph died eleven years later in 1936. Both are buried in Mount Jerome Cemetery, Dublin. In 1935 having lived in America, Joe's son, Kevin, returned home ill to Ireland. Brought straight from the airport to hospital he died there the following day. Sr. Oliver Wrafter of Killina Presentation Convent who is now ninety-three years young is Joe Wrafter's youngest daughter, Ita. She was born in 1923, two years before the death of her mother.