<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>TITLE</strong></th>
<th>West Offaly and the 1916 Rising</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AUTHOR (S)</strong></td>
<td>Padraig Heavin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PUBLICATION DATE</strong></td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ORIGINAL CITATION</strong></td>
<td>Padraig Heavin, ‘West Offaly and the 1916 Rising’ in <em>Offaly Heritage</em>, vol. 9, pp 168–179 (Tullamore, 2016).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TYPE</strong></td>
<td>Article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RIGHTS</strong></td>
<td>© Offaly Historical and Archaeological Society and Padraig Heavin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ITEM DOWNLOADED FROM</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.offalyhistory.com">www.offalyhistory.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
West Offaly and the 1916 Rising

Padraig Heavin

West Offaly in this context is confined to the parishes of Ferbane and Banagher. The population of the parishes in 1916 would have been approximately 5% of the total number living within the county, then known as King's County. With five participants in the Easter Rising, they account for almost half of the men from the county who fought in Dublin. It is also unusual that the parents of four of the men grew up within a mile of High Street Church, near Belmont and would have attended Mass there. The question then arises - was there an old Fenian priest preaching sedition in the area? The answer is almost certainly no. This essay provides an overview of the lives of these five Easter Rising veterans from West Offaly.

Mass in the old Oratory at Clonmacnoise 24 April 1966. Note the extreme high flood on the Shannon (Photo P. Heavin).
Patrick Doyle, Ferbane

Patrick Doyle was born to parents Jane Feeney from Cloghal, Moystown and Patrick Doyle from county Longford, a teacher who taught at Ferbane National School. They married in 1890 and had seven children. One of their sons was John Doyle who wrote the song ‘The Green Fields around Ferbane’, the anthem of West Offaly. Another son, Patrick J. Doyle having completed his primary and secondary education, studied Medicine at University College Dublin and at the Coombe Hospital. His extra-curricular activities included joining the Irish Volunteers. When the Rising came, he served in Marrowbone Lane Distillery under Con Colbert until the surrender on Sunday 30 April 1916. From there he was transferred with other volunteers to Knutsford Prison, Cheshire, where he learned of the execution of Colbert on 8 May. This was said to have impacted him and his fellow prisoners severely. The prisoners were later transferred to Frongoch Internment Camp from where Patrick was released in July 1916. His involvement in the Rising had delayed his qualification as a doctor, but he resumed his studies while a member of the reconstructed ‘B’ Company, 1st Battalion Dublin Brigade.

He returned to Offaly between June and September 1918, and was ‘on the run’ until the heat died down. While there he joined ‘C’ Company (Ferbane) 2nd Battalion South Offaly Brigade, as a result he was unable to sit his final exams; according to UCD archives he was noted ‘absent’ from the final medical examination in the summer of 1918. However, he sat and passed the final medical exams that autumn and qualified as a doctor, just in time for the great flu epidemic of that year which caused many deaths worldwide. It was a dangerous and stressful time for all doctors.

In December 1920 he was appointed District Medical Officer to Shinrone and Moneygall, and married Mary Fitzgerald, Corcullen in the same year. As a doctor, he rendered valuable assistance to many of the men who were injured or became ill during the War of Independence. Retaining his interest in public affairs and the welfare of the country he was a member of Seanad Eireann from 1938 to 1949. He served the people of Shinrone with great dedication until his death on 9 October 1964.  

James Kenny, High Street

The next parent was James Kenny who operated a drapery business beside the church in High Street. Owing to his connections with the trade, his son James was able to obtain employment with Todd Burns Ltd. in Dublin. He joined the Volunteers on 13 November 1913 at Camden Street, Dublin. He was attached to ‘B’ Company 4th Battalion when it was set up and was promoted to Company Lieutenant and took part in the Howth Gun-running. Subsequently, he was appointed Battalion Quartermaster. Kenny was sworn into the Irish Republican Brotherhood by Capt. George Irvine and as a result of this, he began in earnest to obtain arms and explosives for use in the forthcoming Rising.

On Good Friday and Holy Saturday 1916, Kenny used a hackney cab to deliver the arms

1 Application Form for a pension under the Military Services Pension Act 1934 completed by P.J. Doyle in 1937. See also Midland Tribune, 1916 Jubilee Supplement, April 1966.
Members of Offaly No 1 and No 2 Brigades Old IRA and Cumann na mBan, Clonmacnoise 24 April 1966. The names of some of the men who were present are Denis Kearns, Belmont; John McDonnell, Ferbane; Sean Dockery, Ferbane; Joe Kilmartin, Clononey; Modd Egan, Moystown; Mick Moran, Cloghan; Bill McIntyre, Ferbane; Jim Cordial, Gloster; John Joe Flynn, Belmont; Bill Flaherty, Ferbane; Jack Claffey, Clonmacnoise; Paddy Dolan, Noggus, Cloghan and Eddie Daly, Ferbane (Photo P. Heavin).

Eithne Kenny, a grandniece of Kieran Kenny laying the wreath on his grave 24 April 1966. The cameramen in the background are: Michael DeForge, Birr; Buddy Burke, Midland Tribune and Kieran Kenny, Banagher. Also in the background are Michael Heavin, Moystown; Sean Mahon, Cloghan; Patsy Jaffray and Pipe Major Sylvester Shelley, St. Colmcille Pipe Band. Tullamore. The boy with the cap is Tony Fitzpatrick, Shannonbridge (Photo P. Heavin).
to the various outposts; he was ordered by Eamonn Ceannt to get rifles to Ardee Street Distillery, the South Dublin Union, Watkins Brewery and Marrowbone Lane Distillery. It was here that he experienced some of the bitterest fighting of the Rising. When the fighting ended James Kenny decided to escape rather than face a very uncertain future as a captive. With a rifle and revolver he made his way from house to house until he reached 42 Ruben Street, where his sister, Mrs. Dwane lived. While there he hid in the coal cellar and just as well, because the house was raided shortly afterwards, but he was not discovered. Within a couple of days, a happy event, the birth of a child, caused James to move as it was too dangerous for his sister if he remained any longer.

Kenny then contacted Tom Cullen who broke down his rifle and made it into a parcel. As he emerged into the city he headed for Kingsbridge Railway Station. Had he been searched by one of the many patrols operating along the Quays and around the Station, he would have been in serious trouble. His destination was the village of Belmont, which lay almost eighty miles away. He was almost home when he met an RIC Constable cycling towards Belmont. As they passed, Kenny tightened his grip on the parcel under his arm, saluted and kept on walking. Having gone about a hundred yards he decided upon a backward glance. The constable had dismounted from the bicycle and was studying his progress but Kenny kept on walking. Luckily the constable decided to head for Belmont and Kenny reached home safely. His father got a huge surprise when he arrived through the door. A neighbour called almost immediately and warned him to leave the house as a raiding party of RIC were on their way as the constable had recognized him. As soon as he could locate a safe hiding place he hid the rifle; it was the first to come into the locality. He remained ‘on the run’ and participated in all the activities of ‘F’ Company (Belmont) during the War of Independence. He had no choice as his employment with Todd Burns was terminated due of his participation in the Rising.

It was a struggle financially to keep going and in 1923 he went back to Dublin, only to discover that he was totally forgotten. He contacted his old friend, Joe McGrath, now a Government Minister, for assistance. Eventually, in July 1923 he managed to get a position in the National Army with the rank of Sergeant at Islandbridge Barracks, working in the Leather Store as an Inspector. He remained there until 16 November 1923. Kenny continued to live in Inchicore until his health failed, when he returned to High Street and died at the age of sixty-nine on 8 October 1953. James Kenny was buried in the family plot at Clonmacnoise.²

Kieran Kenny, Banagher

Following the example of his brother’s successful business at High Street, Michael Kenny started a drapery shop on Main Street, Banagher under the name ‘The Irish House’. The business prospered and Michael married and had a family of three daughters—Mary Bridget, Rose-Ann and Kathleen, and three sons—James, Joseph and Kieran. To gain experience

in the drapery trade, Kieran obtained employment with Todd Burns Ltd. Dublin. Like his cousin James, he also joined the Volunteers. During the 1916 Rising he served in 'A' Company with Section-Commander Joe Doolan (Killoughey), but were separated just prior to the occupation of the Garrison posts when Doolan was assigned to the South Dublin Union as O.C. First Aid Corps. (Some years earlier Joe had been a member of St. John’s Ambulance Brigade).

Kenny was detailed with his company to Marrowbone Lane Distillery. He was a trusted friend of Eamonn Ceant who sent for him early on Easter Monday. Kenny and Liam O’Flaherty arrived at Ceant’s house at about 6.40 a.m. after attending 6.00 a.m. Mass in Mount Argus. Ceant gave them the mobilization orders which both of them delivered to the prescribed officers and N.C.O.s. Later Ceant went to Liberty Hall and the battalion mobilized at 11.30 a.m. in Emerald Square and arrived at their action stations at about 12.30 p.m. A measure of Kieran Kenny’s capacity as a soldier and leader can be assessed by the fact that he held his rank prior to the Rising and in the ensuing bitter fight he proved himself one of the bravest volunteers.

He celebrated, if that is the correct description, his twenty-ninth birthday during the bitter fighting at Marrowbone Lane and the South Dublin Union area. The volunteers there were under severe attack for most of the week, yet even after seven days fighting against tremendous odds and when garrisons all around the city had surrendered, this gallant little
band still wanted to go on fighting to the last round. The arrival of Ceannt with Sir Francis Vane (British officer in charge in the area) eventually persuaded the men of the futility of continuing the struggle and they marched out proudly to join the South Dublin Union Garrison on the way to captivity.

After the surrender he was moved from Richmond Barracks to Knutsford Prison on 3 May 1916. On the cattle boat with him were five of his Offaly friends – James Carroll, (Shannon Harbour), Joe Doolan, (Killoughey), Patrick Doyle, (Ferbane), Paddy McDonnell, (Belmont) and Seamus Kelly (Mucklagh).

For a firsthand account of conditions in Knutsford and Frongoch, there is none more vivid than what is written in Kenny’s pension application file. He had to sleep on a damp floor with his boots for a pillow with no ventilation, no water to drink and the small allowance of food he got, was kicked in under his door. Usually accompanied by the words ‘take that you Bloody Irish Pig; it is too good for you’. In a letter home Kenny further outlined this treatment:

17th May 1916.

Kieran Kenny,
Irish Prisoner,
Knutsford.

Dear Mary,

I am here for the last fourteen days, saw Jim Carroll he looks alright, but we are not allowed to speak, makes it a bit lonesome. Please let my father know at once. I am sure he is very anxious and vexed with me. If you could let the Boss know he might hold on the job.

As a direct result of imprisonment, Kenny contracted tuberculosis and although valiant efforts were made by his doctors, his health declined after his return to Banagher. He was on the ‘wanted’ list and spent much of his time on the run living now and then with friends in West Offaly and North Tipperary. Despite the health problems, he remained active in ‘B’ Company, (Banagher) Offaly No 2 Brigade during the War of Independence until his untimely death on 28 October 1922. He was buried in Clonmacnoise.3

Paddy McDonnell, High Street

With four sons living on the substantial McDonnell farm close to High Street Church it was obvious that all of them could not inherit the land. After attending Rockwell College in county Tipperary, Paddy moved to Dublin in 1908. There he worked at a large Drapery business owned by Pim Brothers on Georges Street. McDonnell was an accomplished footballer and won a Dublin Senior Championship with Kickhams in 1912. He joined the

Irish Volunteers at the Rotunda in November 1913 and was active in ‘G’ Company, No 2 Dublin Brigade, under Captain Peter Galligan.

Thomas McDonagh was O.C. of this Brigade and instructed ‘G’ Company to erect barricades in Fumbally Lane on Easter Monday as this allowed the Volunteers to keep a nearby barracks under fire. McDonnell was in charge of the men at the barricade. During the night they were instructed to enter Jacobs Factory where they fought until the surrender. They laid down their arms in Peter Street and were then marched to Richmond Barracks. On 3 May McDonnell and his comrades were marched to the Quays and put on a cattle boat with no idea where they were going. He soon met other Offaly men and realised that whatever they had to face, they would do it together. McDonnell was imprisoned in Frongoch until the end of September or early October 1916. Summing up the experience, McDonnell recalled:

I had lost my job, I had lost everything. I had to go home, down to Belmont, in Offaly— that was the hardest part. I had to suffer the humiliation of everyone down there, including my own family.

In April 1917 the arrival of Jimmy Kelly, a native of Geashill who had also graduated from Frongoch, to work at D.E. Williams Ltd. in Belmont, gave impetus to McDonnell again.
Together they started to recruit local men into the Volunteers. The mood of the country was changing and they helped to organise volunteer companies in Belmont, Cloghan, Ferganee and Shannonbridge. These companies were part of the Athlone Brigade. The RIC kept a close watch on the activities of McDonnell and Kelly. One morning Kelly was called into the office at Williams’ and given five minutes to cease organising or his job was gone. He choose the latter course. It was the second time that he had been fired by D.E. Williams Ltd. for his political actions.

McDonnell took over as Captain and held that position until he was arrested and charged with unlawful assembly at Belmont. The military had made a surprise raid and found four men together, in contravention of the law which earned McDonnell a stay in Mountjoy Prison from 4 January until 28 March 1919. The Volunteers were re-organised at this time and ‘F’ Company (Belmont) with its new Captain Brian Temple, were part of the Offaly No 2 Brigade. After his release McDonnell was active once again and helped plan the Belmont Ambush on 4 October 1920. This was an outstanding achievement; eighteen men of ‘F’ Company with only one rifle (the one brought from Dublin by James Kenny) and seventeen shotguns took on the Shropshire Regiment, forcing the patrol to surrender and hand over nine rifles and nine hundred round of ammunition and other equipment. The following morning an Army lorry arrived into the McDonnell farmyard and Paddy and his brothers Jim and Mike were taken to Hunston Barracks but were released when they were not identified as participants in the ambush.
In 1923 McDonnell played for Belmont when they won the Offaly Junior Football Championship for the first time. Shortly afterwards Paddy returned to Dublin where he ran a very successful business until he retired. On 7 February 1949, while attending a funeral at Clonmacnoise, a large cross toppled over and killed him. It was a most unfortunate accident, he was only fifty-four years old.4

**James Carroll, Shannon Harbour**

In 1877 a Patrick Carroll was the registered owner of approximately twenty-eight acres of land at ClonONEYbeg or present day Shannon Harbour. The Register also shows that a John Carroll and a Thomas Carroll owned small plots in the same area. By 1895 all of the Carroll lands were registered in the ownership of Patrick Temple who in the Census of 1901 is described as a farmer and publican. At this time it is not known from which household James Carroll was descended. The Carroll family from Shannon Harbour have a very substantial headstone in Killourney Cemetery near Cloghan but again there is nothing to link James to a particular family. Many of the families who live in ClonONEYbeg to this day attend Mass in High Street Church and in all probability the Carrolls did also. While

---

the village of Shannon Harbour is in the parish of Banagher, the winter flood often closed the road to Banagher.

Nonetheless, what is known is that James Carroll moved to Dublin to find work and became involved in the Gaelic League, the language revival movement and as a result he became a fluent Irish speaker. Carroll also took a keen interest in the GAA. This nationalist outlook lead him to join ‘B’ Company 4th Battalion Dublin Brigade of the Irish Volunteers and he served under Eamonn Ceannt in the South Dublin Union where some of the bitterest fighting took place during Easter Week. After the surrender, he was interned in Knutsford Prison and Frongoch. Subsequently, on his release he took an active part in the War of Independence.

He later worked as an engine driver on the railways. On 28 November 1935 he applied for a pension under the Pensions Act 1934 and that application found its way slowly along the well worn path of such matters. His health began to fail in 1937 and he was admitted to Mercer’s Hospital where he died on 3 January 1938 with his brother John at his bedside—he was fifty-nine years old. A few days later he was laid to rest in Mount Jerome Cemetery with full military honours. The pension application eventually bore fruit when a cheque for £65. 3s. 4d. arrived to his brother in Athlone on 20 March 1939.5

5 ‘James Carroll application for a Military Pension’ (Military Archives, W34E4240); Midland Tribune, 1916 Jubilee Supplement, Apr. 1966. Other information taken from the offices of the Land Registry, Dublin and the 1901 Census.
When the 1966 Commemorations for West Offaly were held at Clonmacnoise none of the five men from the area was still alive. Thankfully James Kelly, Eamon Bulfin and Joe Doolan were hale and hearty, their stories are told elsewhere. A committee drawn up from Clubs within Offaly GAA County Board were the organisers of the event on 24 April 1966. Three of the men are buried within the National Monument, James Kenny, Kieran Kenny and Paddy McDonnell. Members of Offaly No 1 and Offaly No 2 Brigades of the Old IRA assembled, possibly for the last time, as all the other events in the county were over. One brave lady from Cumann na mBan also stood in line. Wreaths purchased by the Belmont GAA Club were laid on the Kenny and McDonnell graves by Eithne and James Kenny, direct relations.

After Mass in the old Oratory, the men formed into two lines and marched, not as sprightly as in the past, to the main entrance gate. They were lead by members of St. Colmcille’s Pipe Band, Tullamore under the baton of Sylvester Shelley. The local units of the FCA then rendered military honours as the Tricolour was raised and the Veterans stood to attention. A Commemorative Plaque with the names of the three men had been erected on the wall close to the entrance, a place of honour and respect. The Plaque was then unveiled by Mr. Alf Murray, from Armagh, President of the GAA. He addressed the Veterans and the crowd, estimated at three thousand, and acknowledged all who had taken part in the fight for freedom and their contribution to a free Ireland. He referred to the part members of the Association had played during those turbulent years. He thanked the people who had organised the event and the people attending, for the pride in their own place.