

# LEITRIM'S FIRST TD

## James N Dolan (1884-1955) of Manorhamilton

*Dominic Rooney*

JAMES NICHOLAS DOLAN was the third of four children born to John Dolan and his wife Bridget Fitzpatrick. John was a native of Glenfarne, Co Leitrim and as a young man had worked in Enniskillen and Blacklion before setting up his own drapery and grocery business in Manorhamilton. Bridget came from Scotshouse near Clones in Co Monaghan.

John involved himself heavily in the political and administrative life of the town and the surrounding area. During the 1880s and 1890s he was chairman of the Manorhamilton Board of Guardians which administered the Workhouse in the Manorhamilton Poor Law Union. He was also vice-president of the Manorhamilton branch of the Irish National League, the main support base for Parnell's Irish Parliamentary Party. In addition he was a Justice of the Peace for Co Leitrim and chairman of the Leitrim and Sligo Asylum Board.

Tragedy struck the family when James N was only three years old. His mother died shortly after giving birth to a still-born baby. John Dolan remarried some two years later and had two more children by his new wife, Mary Anne. James N probably attended the Boys National School on the Ross Lane and then the intermediate or classical school in the nearby St Clare's Hall. His formal education ended, though, in 1901 when he embarked on an apprenticeship

in his father's drapery shop.

James N was a talented athlete in his youth. His favourite sport was soccer and he was a regular on the Manorhamilton Celtic team during the early years of the 20th century. In 1904 and 1905 he captained the team and was described as 'a conspicuously clever player'. He was also a member of the Manorhamilton Cycling Club and acted as secretary of the Cycling and Athletic sports which were held annually in the Bee Park. He even sold bicycles in his grocery shop in the years preceding the outbreak of the First World War.

### On a path towards nationalism

Tragedy again struck the Dolan family on 28th March 1906 when John Dolan died suddenly from a brain haemorrhage at the age of 54. James N now succeeded his father as manager of the family business. His older brother Charles J had, the previous month, been selected to replace P A McHugh as the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) MP for Leitrim North and was now based at Westminster. Charles soon became frustrated with the slow rate of progress in the London parliament where Irish business was constantly being placed on the long finger. When the Liberal Government proposed a very watered-down type of Home Rule for Ireland, Charles called on the IPP members to



■ James N Dolan on the occasion of his appointment on 18th June 1924 as parliamentary secretary to William T Cosgrave, president of the executive council.

*(Photo courtesy of the National Library of Ireland)*

withdraw from Westminster and establish their own parliament in Dublin to manage Irish affairs and promote native industry. The IPP failed to respond, so Dolan resigned from the party in June 1907 and recontested the election for Sinn Féin which was advocating similar policies to his own.

James N became his brother's chief supporter during the election campaign. He also accepted the chairmanship of the John Mitchell branch of Sinn Féin which was established in Manorhamilton following an address by Arthur Griffith to a packed St Clare's Hall on 1st November 1907. And although Charles Dolan failed in his attempt at re-election in February 1908, James N was by

then recognised as one of the party's leading members among the 15 branches in the constituency.

James N backed his brother's attempts to establish a boot factory in Manorhamilton in the years 1909-1911. He is listed as one of four directors of the Breffni Boot Company which hoped to raise £5,000 through a joint stock company. The venture never really got off the ground, however, despite the fact that Charles spent eighteen months studying the shoe industry in Kansas and St Louis, USA.

From now on James N's personal mission in life was directed more and more towards the goal of Irish nationalism. He became one of the founding members and first treasurer of a branch of the Gaelic League, the Irish language and cultural organisation, which was set up in Manorhamilton on 10th October 1909. He was also treasurer of the branch's committee which ran the Breffney O'Rourke Feis in the Bee Park every year from 1912 to 1915. He emphasised his attachment to the Irish language by filling in the 1911 census form in Irish for himself, his siblings and his resident shop assistants.

During the years 1908 to 1910 Sean Mac Diarmada was a full-time republican activist travelling the country, ostensibly setting up branches of Sinn Féin, but in reality raising awareness of, and recruiting for, the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Mac Diarmada swore James N into that organisation which stood for complete independence from Britain, in the form of an Irish Republic, through revolutionary methods if necessary.

Once a member, James N went about covertly setting up an IRB circle in the Manorhamilton area.

Dolan was also a founding member of the branch of the Irish National Volunteers which was formed in St Clare's Hall in Manorhamilton on Sunday 24th May 1914. These volunteers had originally been established in Dublin the previous November to put pressure on the British Government to keep its promise of granting Home Rule. The movement split at national level in September 1914, following John Redmond's call on its members to join the British Army and fight the Germans, in the hope of advancing the Home Rule Bill. A minority of the Volunteers around the country, including James N, refused to contemplate fighting for Britain and instead set up their own organisation, calling themselves the Irish Volunteers. A branch of this new group continued to meet, drill, parade and carry out manoeuvres in Manorhamilton over the following eighteen months. The year 1914 was also a significant one in James N.'s personal life, which saw the 30 year old get married. His bride—Loretto (Loretto) O'Reilly, aged 25—had grown up in Ardagh, Co Longford, but was actually born in the USA.

### Interned after the 1916 rising

At the outbreak of the Easter Rebellion, the British Prime Minister, Lord Asquith, appointed General Sir John Maxwell military governor of Ireland and issued him with orders to quell the uprising and pacify the country. Maxwell spent the first two weeks of May 1916 presiding over military trials

which imposed the death sentence on the rebel leaders. He also directed the arrests of some 1,400 rebels and suspects in the capital. Once these operations were complete, Maxwell extended martial law to the whole of Ireland and then organised mobile columns consisting of infantry, cavalry, artillery and an armoured car to travel to towns across the country from where the Royal Irish Constabulary had reported Irish Volunteer activity.

On Saturday 13th May – just 24 hours after Sean MacDiarmada had been executed in Dublin—a large force of British military arrived in Manorhamilton to search the houses of suspects and arrest the leaders. Their first port of call was the home of James N Dolan, which is now the Allied Irish Bank in Main Street. When the search unearthed a number of Volunteer bandoliers, as well as an old sword, Dolan was promptly arrested. Twenty-two other houses in the town and surrounding areas were also searched and six more suspects—brothers James and Thomas O'Loughlin, Thomas Gilgunn and his son Brian, Ben Maguire and John Daly—were arrested. All seven were detained in the local RIC barracks overnight. They were allowed visits from the local clergy and some townsfolk, but were denied a civil trial. On Monday 15th they were marched out to Manorhamilton Railway Station, put on a train and conveyed to Dublin under armed escort. After spending a few days in Richmond Barracks in Inchicore, they were shipped over to Britain in a cattle boat with other detainees from various parts of the country. They were then



■ The Allied Irish Bank, Main Street, Manorhamilton was originally the home and business premises of the Dolan family. James N Dolan sold the building to the Munster & Leinster Bank in October 1923.

(Photo courtesy of Bryan Rooney).

transported to London and spent the next six weeks in Woking Jail.

Soon the British prison system was being swamped by 2,500 Irish internees. So, in June 1916 Frongoch, a former German prisoner-of-war camp in Wales, was reopened to cater for 1,800 Irishmen (including the Manorhamilton seven) who were transferred there from many British jails. Conditions in Frongoch were very difficult for the Irish internees who had still not been convicted of anything. The camp was cramped, rat-infested and damp. The prisoners also suffered from a lack of adequate diet. But unlike some of the earlier prisons where the Irish detainees had been held in solitary confinement for up to twenty- two hours a day, in Frongoch they were allowed to mix freely with one another. Not surprisingly, the camp became a fertile seeding ground for the spreading of the revolutionary gospel and became known as the University of Revolution. Notable internees there included Michael Collins, Terence McSwiney, WT Cosgrave and Sean T O Ceallaigh.

The cases of many internees were considered over the summer

by a committee chaired by Sir John Sankey, and those prisoners considered less dangerous were released. By the end of August 1916 numbers in the camp had decreased by one third or more. James N Dolan may have been discharged in September, since the *Leitrim Observer* of 30th of that month noted that he had just been elected vice-president of the Manorhamilton Town Tenants League. However, other accounts would suggest that his release only coincided with the closure of Frongoch by the British chief medical officer just before Christmas 1916.

### Elected Sinn Féin TD for Leitrim in the 1st Dáil

There had been extensive condemnation of the 1916 Rising by many sections of Irish society in the weeks after the event. However, a change in the public mood and opinion soon began to emerge, due to the prolonged nature of the executions and the extensive number of arrests and internments which followed. As early as June 1916 a significant number of young people in Leitrim were wearing Sinn Féin

badges. The release of the Manorhamilton internees from Frongoch in the autumn or winter of 1916 helped further the cause of Sinn Féin in the county.

The party's policy of abstention from Westminster was now beginning to appear more attractive than the Irish Parliamentary Party's continued campaign for Home Rule. During the first eight months of 1917 Sinn Féin won four bye-elections throughout Ireland at the expense of the IPP. In April James N Dolan and Ben Maguire established Leitrim's first post-Rising Sinn Féin club in Manorhamilton. Dolan was later instrumental in the formation of many other clubs across the county. On 1st November 1917 Arthur Griffith addressed a huge Sinn Féin meeting in Manorhamilton. He reminded his audience of the 'No London Parliament' banner which had been strung across Main Street during the 1908 election, and added that whenever the history of Sinn Féin was being written, the name of Leitrim would invariably be linked to the establishment of the movement.

By the early months of 1918 Sinn Féin was in the process of

setting up an effective political organisation throughout the whole country, with Dolan to the forefront in Leitrim. In April of that year the British government planned to introduce conscription in Ireland. Sinn Féin was the most actively opposed group to such a move. In an attempt to reduce its influence, seventy leading members of the organisation, including Dolan, were arrested in May on a charge of allegedly conspiring with the German government to start an armed insurrection in Ireland. There is no evidence that this so-called 'German plot' had any basis in reality. Nevertheless most of the prisoners were interned without trial in England for the next ten months, with Dolan and Arthur Griffith being held in Gloucester Jail.

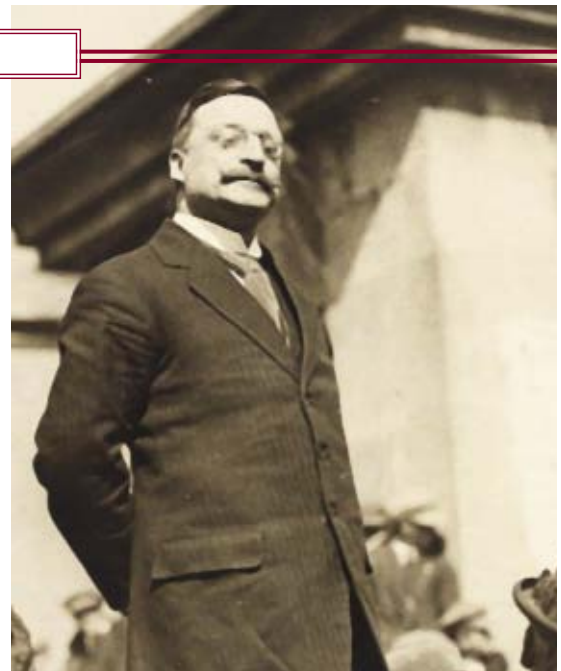
World War I ended on 11th November 1918 and a general election in Britain and Ireland was fixed for 14th December. While still in Gloucester, Dolan was selected by the Sinn Féin executive to be its candidate in the new single-seat Leitrim constituency. The IPP chose Gerald Farrell, a barrister from Co Longford with Leitrim connections, after the sitting Leitrim North and Leitrim South MPs declined to go forward again. When the votes were counted, Dolan received 17,771 to 3,096 for Farrell. This was the greatest percentage majority of any Sinn Féin candidate in Ireland. Sinn Féin also had a clear victory at national level, winning 73 out of 105 seats. The Unionist Party claimed 26 seats and the IPP 6.

The Sinn Féin TDs then chose to follow through with their plan of abstentionism from Westminster.

As a result they assembled in a revolutionary parliament in the Mansion House in Dublin which they called Dáil Eireann. Unionist and the IPP members refused to recognise the Dáil. Only 27 Sinn Féin deputies were present at the 1st meeting of the Dáil on 21st January 1919, as the majority of them were, like James N Dolan, still in prison or on the run. These prisoners were all released in early March 1919 amid much rejoicing. Welcome home celebrations for Dolan in Leitrim were postponed, however, owing to the death of his half-sister May (Mary Agnes) from pneumonia at the Meath Hospital in Dublin on the day after he arrived back in Ireland. She was only 28.

The Dáil met again on 10th April 1919. The attendance of 52 members, which included Dolan, elected Eamon de Valera, who had escaped from Lincoln Jail two months earlier, president of the Dáil. Arthur Griffith was chosen as vice-president. At this meeting the Dáil called on the Irish people to ostracise the RIC who were the public face of the British presence in Ireland and who upheld the laws of the Crown. It also decided to float a national loan to help the finances of the new state. On 12th September 1919 the Dáil was proclaimed to be an illegal assembly by the British authorities and its meetings were officially banned. From then on it was only able to assemble intermittently and at various locations. A nationwide suppression of Sinn Féin, the Irish Volunteers, Cumann na mBan and the Gaelic League followed.

Very early in the morning of 18th November 1919, Dolan was arrested at his home in



■ Arthur Griffith (1871-1922) addressed large Sinn Féin rallies in Manorhamilton in 1907 and again in 1917. Griffith and James N Dolan were among eleven Sinn Féin TDs interned in Gloucester Jail in 1919. (Photo courtesy of the National Library of Ireland)

Manorhamilton by a strong force of RIC and brought to Dromahair under military guard. Three days later he was charged at Drumshanbo court with unlawful assembly, as well as with advocating support for the Dáil Eireann national loan. Although he refused to recognise the proceedings, he was sentenced to two months in Sligo Jail. A powerful force of police and military, which were drafted into Drumshanbo for the occasion, guarded the court against a large crowd of protesters.

### A moderating influence during the War of Independence

The Irish Volunteers had been left in disarray after the Easter Rising in 1916, with many of their leaders interned in British jails. Steps towards reorganising the corps were taken by Michael Collins, Cathal Brugha and other ex-prisoners in 1917. At their first post-Rising convention in Dublin in October of that year, it was decided that the

Volunteers would organise, arm and drill in public to try and pressurise the British Government to recognise the Irish Republic. However, early in 1919 they began to engage in increasingly violent action against the RIC. These developments led to the start of the War of Independence. There were moves to make the Volunteers who, from now on increasingly became known as the Irish Republican Army, the army of the Dáil. But it was August 1920 before the force took an oath of allegiance to the Irish Republic and its government.

The tactics used by the IRA consisted mainly of guerrilla warfare. At first they concentrated on arms seizures and attacks on individual policemen, but later engaged in more ambitious raids and ambushes. By June 1920 55 RIC members had been killed across Ireland and hundreds of barracks burned down or abandoned. To help bolster the RIC the British government established two new police bodies—the Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries. These forces often carried out reprisals on the civilian population for the attacks perpetrated by the IRA. By the summer of 1921 over 400 policemen, 150 military and about 750 IRA and civilians had lost their lives in the conflict.

The War of Independence really only began in Leitrim during the Spring of 1920. At first it took the form of burnings of rural barracks, but with the arrival of the Black and Tans in Carrick, Manorhamilton, Ballinamore, Mohill and Drumshanbo it assumed a more violent character. Sixteen people altogether—5 members of the

Crown Forces, 7 IRA and 4 civilians—lost their lives in Leitrim, with most of the casualties occurring in the south of the county. Some Dáil members were known to be unhappy with the bloodshed occasioned by the War of Independence. Although anti-RIC and an organiser of a local police boycott in August 1920, James N Dolan was one of those strongly opposed to the killings and the methods of warfare adopted by the IRA. It is believed that the relative peace in North Leitrim during this traumatic period was due to his restraining influence.

Dolan, however, did involve himself very actively in the setting up of the Dáil/Sinn Féin Courts, which many believed were a much greater threat to British authority in Ireland than outright armed resistance. They showed the effectiveness of civil disobedience as a weapon to be used against the British and were one of the most significant steps towards Irish independence. From July 1920 onwards Dolan presided over Dáil courts in Manorhamilton and in other parts of the county. He was also to the fore in another Dáil initiative in September 1920. Following anti-Catholic pogroms in Belfast when thousands of Catholic workers were forced from their jobs and many Catholic houses were looted and burned, the Dáil imposed a boycott in the South of Ireland of all goods manufactured in Belfast. Dolan initiated this boycott in Manorhamilton and set up an effective committee to implement it.

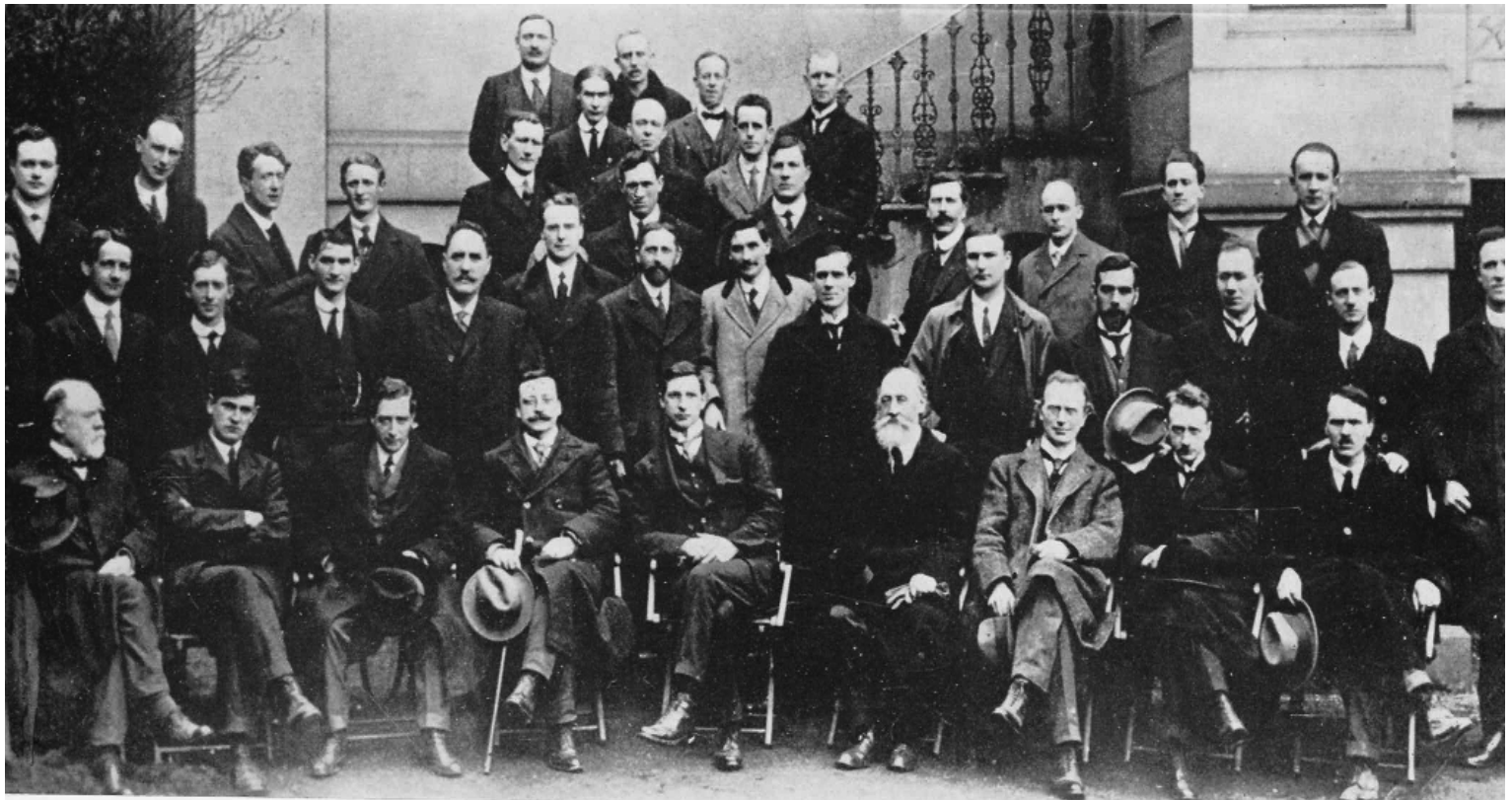
### A supporter of the Treaty

The War of Independence came to

an end on 11th July 1921 following the announcement of a truce between Sinn Féin leaders and the British government. However, it took several more months of negotiations before the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed on 6th December. This established the Irish Free State as a self-governing dominion within the British Commonwealth. On 7th January 1922 the Dáil ratified the treaty—although just by a small majority of 64 votes to 57. James N Dolan voted for the Treaty saying that ‘it would be the foundation stone of peace and friendship between the two countries’. He didn’t look upon the settlement as final and everlasting, believing that all countries are evolving and that the treaty was only a step forward in this country’s development.

There was general rejoicing at the signing of the Treaty, particularly as the event was followed by the release of Republican prisoners from British jails and the gradual withdrawal of British troops and RIC from the Free State. The treaty, however, split the IRA, the majority of whom were anti-treaty and became known as the Irregulars.

The first general election after the treaty was held on 16th June 1922. Sinn Féin had by then divided into pro-treaty and anti-treaty factions. The pro-treaty side, led by Michael Collins, won a majority of seats and the election may be viewed as a referendum on the treaty. In the Leitrim-Roscommon North constituency James N Dolan was one of two pro-treaty Leitrim TDs. The anti-treaty side then boycotted the



assembly. Two weeks later the civil war broke out when Government troops attacked the Four Courts, which the anti-treaty IRA had been occupying since April 1922. Towards the end of the summer the anti-treaty IRA began to wage guerrilla warfare against the Free State. Their most notable victim was Michael Collins, head of the provisional government and commander-in-chief of the Free State army. The civil war, which lasted nine months, accounted for about 1,750 deaths in total, although Leitrim had only ten fatalities. The IRA in the county largely supported the treaty. However there were still many instances of violent raids by the Irregulars on Free State barracks, banks and post offices for arms, ammunition and money.

### Dolan's subsequent political career

On 6th January 1923, while the civil war was still ongoing, James N

Dolan welcomed back to Ireland Private Charlie Kerrigan from Glencar, one of the Connacht Rangers who had mutinied in India in June 1920, after hearing about the way their fellow countrymen were being treated at home during the War of Independence. Kerrigan spent over two years in Maidstone Prison in Kent, before being finally pardoned and released. Dolan treated him to breakfast in Dublin and gave him £1 before he set off for Glencar. In the general election later that year Dolan headed the poll in the new five-seater Leitrim-Sligo constituency. The Pro-Treaty TDs had by then formed themselves into the Cumann na nGaedheal Party under the leadership of WT Cosgrave.

The Dolans now decided to leave Manorhamilton and move permanently to Dublin. Lorrie and their two children had already spent some time there during her husband's internment. Their business

■ Members of the 1st Dáil photographed on 10th April 1919.

*Front Row: Laurence Ginnell, Michael Collins, Cathal Brugha, Arthur Griffith, Eamon de Valera, Count Plunkett, Eoin McNeill, W T Cosgrave and Ernest Blythe.*

*Second Row: James N Dolan is standing directly behind Arthur Griffith.*

*(Photo courtesy of the National Library of Ireland)*

in Manorhamilton had suffered during the War of Independence and James N was becoming more and more involved in politics. He was now joint national secretary of his party. The premises, including the six-bedroomed family home were put on the market and bought in October 1923 by the Munster and Leinster Bank.

In October 1924 Dolan was appointed parliamentary secretary to William T Cosgrave, with special responsibility as government chief whip. The position was the most senior of the parliamentary secretaries and was the only one which entitled the holder to attend cabinet

meetings, albeit without a vote. The general election in June 1927 was a disastrous one for Cumann na nGaedheal which won only 47 out of 153 seats. However, it was able to retain power because the recently formed Fianna Fáil party refused to take up its 44 seats due to its objection to the Oath of Allegiance to the Crown. In this administration Dolan was appointed Leas Ceann Comhairle. In a snap general election, called by Cosgrave, later in the same year Cumann na nGaedheal recovered most of the ground lost in June, winning 62 seats. James N Dolan once again became a parliamentary secretary—this time to the Minister of Industry and Commerce, Patrick McGilligan.

Cumann na nGaedheal was defeated by Fianna Fáil in the 1932 election. It won only 57 seats to Fianna Fáil's 72. Dolan was one of those who lost his seat. Another general election was held the following year. Dolan won back his seat, even though Fianna Fáil was returned with an improved



■ James N Dolan's headstone in Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin. His wife Loretto and one son Dermot are also buried in the family plot.

*(Photo courtesy of Glasnevin Trust)*

party. Nevertheless he stood as an independent but was not elected, and subsequently retired altogether from politics.

James N Dolan died at his residence, 28 Palmerston Gardens, Dublin, on 13th July 1955. He was 71. He was buried in Glasnevin Cemetery following Requiem Mass in the Church of the Three Patrons, Rathgar. Chief mourners were his wife Lorrie, his sons Kevin, Dermot, Eamonn and James, his daughters Patricia and Dympna and his brothers Charles J and Fr Matt. Dolan's obituary in the Sligo Champion concluded with the following lines: 'He was an elegant speaker and his words bore the stamp of sincerity. He was the soul of honour, a sincere friend and a lover of his country'.

*I would like to thank Padraig McGarty for his assistance with this article.*

majority in the country generally. The modern Fine Gael Party was formed later in 1933 after Cumann na nGaedheal merged with the National Centre Party and the National Guard (Blueshirts). After failing to get a Fine Gael nomination at a convention in Drumshanbo in 1937 Dolan fell out with the

SNIPPET

**MOHILL PEOPLE ON SHOOTING BRAKE IN GLEBE STREET MOHILL c.1965**

*Photo submitted by Peter Gordon, courtesy of Aiden Kelleher*

THE CARRIAGE was borrowed from Marcus Clements of Lough Rynn Castle and the horse was supplied by Brian Mulvey. Dick Lawrence organised the outfits and we entered for the Style and Appearance competition at Mohill Show.

In the front holding the reins is Mrs Beatty Crowe, Broom Street. On her left is Dick Lawrence. On Beatty's right is Brian Mulvey—next row back is Mrs Eileen O'Sullivan and beside her Aubrey Bradshaw. Next row back on the left is John Bradshaw and on John's left is Anna Crowe Dugdale and on Anna's left is Mrs Walter Petrie. At back left is Peter Gordon and Bobby Clancy.

*This photo may bring back memories for a lot of Mohill people.*

