

# MANORHAMILTON'S IRISH VOLUNTEERS 1914

Dominic Rooney

**The Manorhamilton Corps** of the Irish Volunteer Movement originated as a pressure group to ensure Home Rule. But it saw a significant number of its members join the British Army during World War I to fight for the freedom of small nations, while some of the remainder chose a violent military struggle at home to try and win complete independence from Britain.

## Background

The demand for Home Rule in Ireland increased in the 1870s and 1880s. In 1886 the Liberal Prime Minister Gladstone, at the instigation of Parnell, tried to introduce the 1st Home Rule Bill. While popular in most of the country, there was serious political and physical resistance to the idea in Ulster. The Unionist Party was formed, the Orange Order was revived and there were anti Home Rule riots in Belfast. Ulster Protestants were urged to defend themselves and there was serious thought given to armed resistance. However the Home Rule Bill was defeated in Parliament.

In 1893 Gladstone introduced a 2nd Home Rule Bill which passed in the Commons but was defeated in the House of Lords. Once again there were mass demonstrations in Ulster with sporadic outbreaks of violence and threats of armed resistance.

A 3rd Home Rule Bill was brought in

by Asquith in 1912. This time the Unionist demonstrations led by Carson were even more emphatic. Furthermore a Solemn League and Covenant to defeat Home Rule by any means was signed by 400,000 men, some in their own blood, and the Ulster Volunteers were organised on a military basis in 1913.

MacNeill was elected as their Commander and a Provisional Committee was chosen to run the Irish Volunteer movement. Unknown to MacNeill and the majority of the Volunteers however, one third of the members of this Committee belonged to the secret society and physical force body, the Irish Republican Brotherhood. And whereas MacNeill only envisaged the role of the Volunteers as a pressure group to 'defend and protect the rights and liberties of the Irish people' through the winning of Home Rule, the IRB was already planning to exploit the Volunteers and use them to fight in a war of separation from Britain. These differences however did not become apparent publicly until more than two years later.

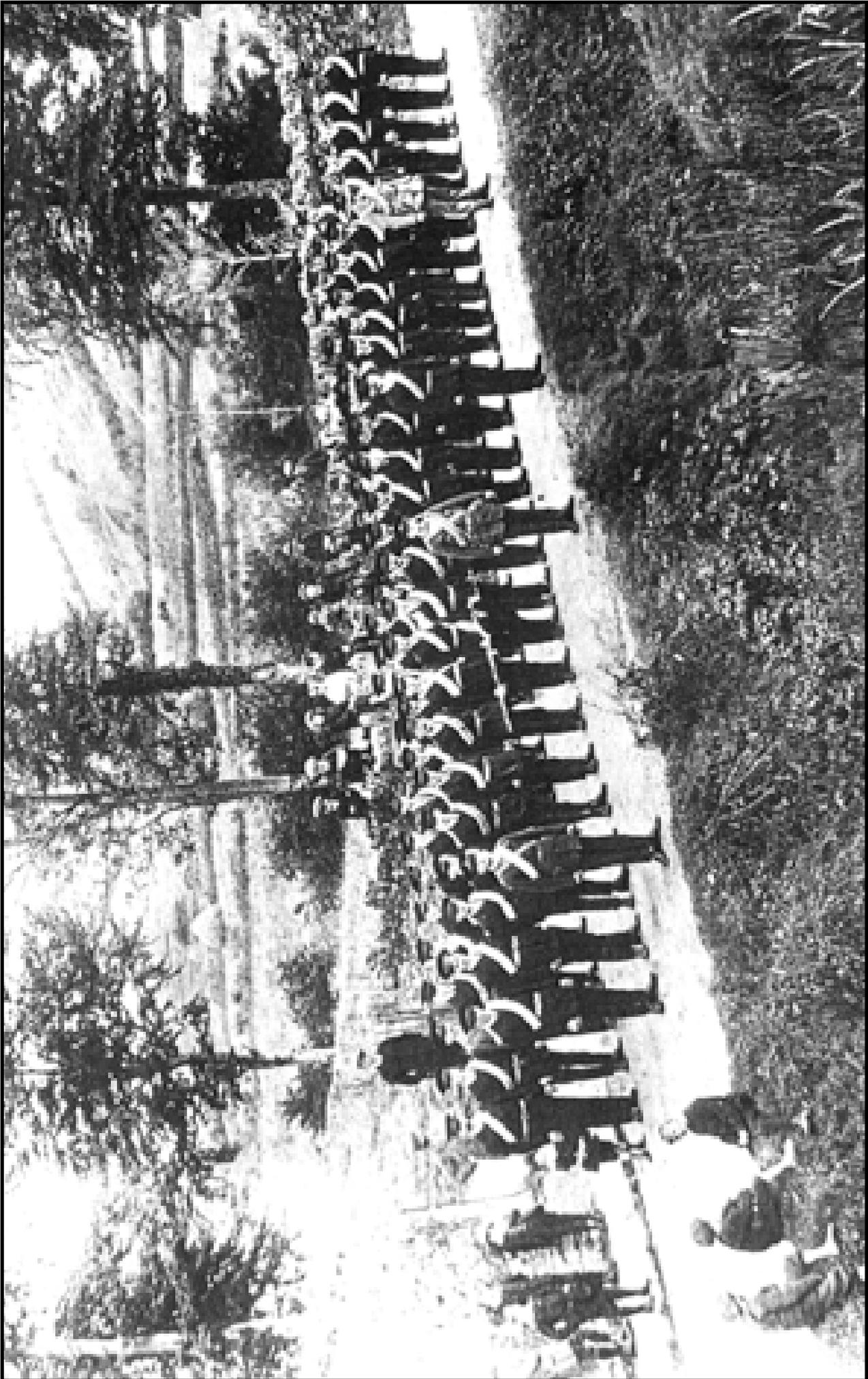
## Volunteers in Manorhamilton

On Sunday 24th May 1914 at a large and enthusiastic meeting in St Clare's Hall a corps of the Irish National Volunteers was formed in Manorhamilton. Thomas McGovern, Chairman of Manorhamilton District Council presided. James Lynott proposed the setting up of the corps

and this was seconded by J D Rooney. Fr Kelly, the local curate, then spoke about the background of the Volunteer movement nationally, while the guest speaker, a Mr James McGurrin, outlined the need for nationalist Ireland to have as strong and powerful a pressure group to achieve Home Rule as that of Carson's Ulster Volunteers, who opposed it. The proposal was put to the meeting and was enthusiastically adopted.

Following the meeting the whole assembly was led in procession around the town by the Manorhamilton Brass and Reed Band and the Drumlease Fife and Drum Band, before returning again to St Clare's Hall where the following officers and committee were appointed: President Thomas McGovern; Secretaries J P McGuinness and P Wilson; Treasurers James Lynott and P Munday. Committee members: J Mcniff, B M Rooney, Joseph Gallagher, James McSharry, J D Rooney and P McGloin. The corps was then formed and 250 men joined up.

Further meetings were held on a regular basis and on 9 June the first route march was organised to Cloonlougher. We are told that the turn-out of Volunteers who 'presented a very smart appearance' was a large and imposing one. The following Sunday 14 June the full corps under their instructor, Mr. William Clarke, lined up outside St Clare's Hall and marched behind the Brass and Reed



Manorhamilton Corp of the Irish Volunteers, standing to attention outside St Clare's Hall, October 1914.  
Officers in front: James Lynott & J P McGuinness (section commanders), William Clare (company commander & drill instructor), & M M Rooney (section commander).

Band down the Main Street and out the Sligo Road to Shanvaus where a large crowd had gathered to see them. Returning via Lurganboy and Milltown this 'fine body of disciplined men marching in perfect order' impressed everyone. The drill instruction every evening in St Clare's Hall was obviously paying dividends!

By July 1914 the movement was going strong in Manorhamilton and more recruits were joining daily. (Incidentally other branches of the Volunteers had also been formed at this stage in Mullies, Glencar, Glenfarne and Dromahair). The instructor, William Clarke, had now been appointed Company Commander, and James Lynott, J P McGuinness, B M Rooney and P Munday chosen as the four section commanders.

The Volunteers turned out in full strength for their first church parade and the first parade of Volunteers in the history of the town—on Sunday 19 July. After Mass a collection was taken up to provide arms and equipment for the corps. The lack of arms was a major problem not just for the corps in Manorhamilton but also for the Irish Volunteers throughout the country. The Ulster Volunteers had taken the initiative and tilted the balance of power in their favour by landing their cargo of guns and ammunition on the north eastern coast three months earlier. So the Irish Volunteers decided that to be seen as a credible and effective force they too must organise a similar supply of weapons. This was achieved to a limited extent when on 26 July—just one week after the Manorhamilton parade and collection—the *Asgard* daringly sailed into Howth Harbour and the Volunteers



Sergeant William J Clarke, 2nd Battalion Connaught Rangers, killed in action in France.

unloaded her and marched away with a rather small supply of rifles and ammunition.

### The Volunteers Split

The growth of the Irish Volunteers which by July 1914 numbered about 180,000 had been a source of concern to John Redmond, the leader of the Home Rule Party, since the early summer. He felt that as he was approaching the very climax of the Home Rule campaign, he needed to be in charge of this private army and powerful pressure group. Eventually the commander of the Volunteers Eoin MacNeill agreed to his request in the interests of maintaining unity in the organisation.

Ireland was still however moving closer and closer to civil war with two opposing armed or partially armed movements, the Ulster Volunteers in the north and the Irish Volunteers throughout the rest of the country. The Home Rule Bill which would bring the conflict to a head was due to be passed in September. Suddenly however, in early August, the 1st World War intervened. Redmond in the hope of progressing the Home Rule Bill pledged Ireland's support for the war and urged the British Government to leave the defence of

Ireland to Volunteers from north and south. The Home Rule Bill received royal assent on 18 September 1914, and went on the statute book but with two provisos—one that it shouldn't come into operation until after the War, and secondly that the Ulster situation would then be reconsidered.

Redmond had originally intended that the Volunteers should not be called upon to serve outside of Ireland. However on 20 September, two days after the Home Rule Act was passed, Redmond called on members of the Irish Volunteers—as Carson had done to the Ulster Volunteers—to join the British Army and fight the Germans on the battlefields of Europe. The vast majority—170,000—of the Irish Volunteers sided with Redmond and called themselves the National Volunteers. About 27,000 of them actually took his advice and enlisted in the army. However MacNeill and 10,000 of the more extreme nationalists refused to follow Redmond's call, and they set up a separate organisation which kept the original name of Irish Volunteers.

### Manorhamilton Corp Re-organised

The tensions caused by the split in the Volunteer movement were felt right throughout the country. In Manorhamilton the corps was re-organised at a meeting on Tuesday 10 November 1914. The local Home Rule Party, MP, Francis E. Meehan took the chair while the following officers and committee were being elected: *President:* B M Rooney. *Vice-president:* John McKenna; *Secretaries:* J.P.McGuinness and P. Wilson; *Treasurers:* James Lynott & P Munday; *Committee:* John Keany, P McGloin,

J Gallagher, J Whyte, John McNiff, P Henry, J D Rooney & P Meehan.

The newly formed committee differed very little from the one elected when the corps was first established in the town six months previously. This would seem to indicate that the majority of Volunteers in Manorhamilton like the rest of the country followed the Redmondite line.

Francis Meehan, MP, then addressed the meeting and underlined that fact that the Volunteers were now under the control of John Redmond. He went on to say that he didn't believe that Irishmen would ever be conscripted into the British Army. However 30,000 of them had already voluntarily joined the Allies to fight against 'the tyranny of the Kaiser and his German hordes', and this included 65 men from the town of Manorhamilton and district around it. Meehan then congratulated the local corps on their splendid turn-out at a great meeting of Volunteers in Dromahair a few Sundays previously. Regarding weapons, Meehan said that the Central Executive of the National Volunteers were not prepared at that time to supply rifles, and had suggested that the local corps get spears which would be just as useful for training as rifles. However he hoped that shortly every volunteer in the country would be armed with a rifle and capable of using it.

Finally he urged the Volunteers to 'leave politics alone, to keep on drilling and training, to be united above all, standing shoulder to shoulder and man to man, being true to themselves and to each other and loyal to Ireland'.

The meeting broke up after a call to remember the local men who had already gone to fight the Germans, and who were wished a speedy return. Drill parades were arranged for two days a week—Tuesdays & Fridays.

### The Aftermath

At first the War was popular in Ireland. About 80,000 Irishmen had enlisted in the British Army by August 1915. As we have seen the National Volunteers contributed a sizeable number of men. The following list of Manorhamilton men serving at the Front in April 1915 amounts to 115 men, most of whom had been members of the local corps of the Volunteers the previous year: Capt Lewis Algeo RIR, Lieut Norman Algeo, Dr Sam Armstrong, Capt RAMC, W Armstrong, F Boylan, J Boylan, J Boylan, D Bracken, J Bracken, H Bradley, P Campbell, C Carroll, C Carroll (prisoner of war in Germany), M Cassidy, J Clancy, O Clancy, P Clancy, T Clancy, Sgt-Major Terence Clancy RHA, P Clarke, W Clarke, Sgt William Clarke, (former instructor and company commander of the Manorhamilton Corps—killed in action), Lieut Corscadden, J Costello, Brian Coyle (killed in action), John Coyle, Michael Coyle (wounded), M Coyle jun, P Coyle, P Coyle, J Crooks, P Cullen, M Darcy, J Dillon, M Dolan, J Faherty, J Feehily, P Feehily (killed in action), G Ferguson, W Ferguson, J Foley, F Fowley, J Gaffney(wounded), P Gaffney, W Gaffney, P Gallen J Gardiner, Pat Hannon, T Hannon, J Harte, S Johnston, J Keany, Jimmy Keany, John Keany, Johnny Keany, L Keany, T Keany, P Kellegher, J Kerigan, F Lee, J Loftus, D Loughlin, T Loughlin, D McCauley, P McDer-mott, J McDonald, J McEnroy, M

McGee, Lieut Jas McGivern RIF, M McGoldrick, J McGourty, P McGourty, J McGowan, J McGowan, J McGuigan, T McKinny, F McMara, J McMor-row, J J McMorrow, J J McMorrow, Jim McMorrow, W McMorrow, J McSharry, W McSharry, J McTernan, Tom Maguire, J Meehan, L Meehan, T Meehan, M Muldoon, J Murphy, B O'Hara, Sgt Joseph O'Rorke RAMC, J Parkes, H Rooney, J Rooney, H Ross, W Ross, J Rourke, Lieut Warren Rutherford, P Rynn (wounded), G Siberry (Bohey), R Siberry, T Siberry, W Smith, J Sommers, P Spear, P Stephenson, M Thompson, J Thornton (wounded), P Thornton, B Trotter, H Walsh, Corporal Thomas Walsh & P Ward.

This was actually the largest percentage of men to join the army from any town of the size and population of Manorhamilton throughout Ireland or the United Kingdom.

Enthusiasm for the war cooled however, as the year 1915 dragged on and as reports of the slaughter in the trenches reached men back home.

John Redmond was by then losing his grip on Nationalist Ireland. The war turned into carnage, as Home Rule receded into an uncertain future and as the Ulster Unionists were widely felt to have outmanoeuvred Home Rulers at Westminster. Although Redmond was able to persuade the British not to include Ireland when they introduced conscription in Britain in 1915, his power to influence events was lessened. The National Volunteers who saw themselves as defenders of Home Rule began gradually to go into decline. Having lost many of

their best men to the war effort, their activities became less frequent and well attended.

Meanwhile Eoin MacNeil's Irish Volunteers—or 'Sinn Fein Volunteers' as they were popularly called—who had rejected Redmond's call to enlist in the British Army, continued to drill and parade, though small in number. After splitting from Redmond they were reorganised along more military lines. And although MacNeil was still Chief of Staff, the movement had begun to be more and more infiltrated by members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

I have found it difficult to get details on how the breakaway Volunteers fared in Manorhamilton, but the North Leitrim man Sean MacDiarmada was one of the two key IRB men who masterminded the effective take-over of MacNeil's organisation.

MacDiarmada and Tom Clarke (whose father was also from Leitrim) were convinced from the beginning of the war that the opportunity for a rebellion, using the Irish Volunteers, must not be allowed to pass. And so towards the end of 1915 MacDiarmada and Clarke, who at this stage had been joined by three of the Volunteer leaders, Ceannt, Pearse and Plunkett, secretly drew up plans for the 1916 Rising.

*I would like to acknowledge the help of Frank Lynott in researching material for this article. I also wish to thank Jackie McGoldrick for his fine photo of Manorhamilton's Irish Volunteers standing to attention outside St Clare's Hall.*

## MEMORIES

*Gerard Maguire, New York*

*When sun goes down and moon appears  
Amid her starry glow  
The mind is apt to wander  
To things of long ago  
My memories are sunlit days  
Or blessed by gentle rain  
It's there I see those simple things I'll never see again.*

*I see the nimble thatcher  
Light sweat upon his brow  
His rushes and his scollops  
No longer needed now  
His gentle presence now has passed  
Like last September's rain  
I miss him and those simple things  
I'll never see again.*

*Oh how I miss the fireside  
With every cheek aglow  
When tales were told of fairies  
And things of long ago  
With leprechauns in every bush  
Along each leafy lane  
The beauty of those simple things  
I'll never see again.*

*I still can see those families  
Of six or eight or ten  
Saving hay in meadows green  
By mountainside and glen  
The women rake as children laugh  
And gather every grain  
How precious were those simple things  
I'll never see again.*

*The tiny school-house on the hill  
That's silent now and bare  
Where first I put my chalk to slate  
And mouthed childish prayer  
The master's stick was quick and mean  
And yet despite the pain  
I sometimes miss those simple things  
I'll never see again.*

*I loved the country butter  
I loved the homemade bread  
The building of the pike of hay  
The prayers beside my bed  
For good or ill we've lost some things  
We'll nevermore regain  
That's why I love those simple things  
I'll never see again.*

*When sun goes down and moon appears  
Amid her starry glow  
The mind is apt to wander to things of long ago  
And teardrops fall in memory  
Of things once thought mundane  
May God be with those simple things  
I'll never see again.*