

An Extraordinary Wedding

By Eileen McGough

The plan worked perfectly. Kathleen Quinn with her sister, Carmel and Capuchin priest, Rev Father Aloysius Travers had travelled from Dublin to Dundalk on the morning train. Shortly before noon on 24 April 1918 they were escorted into the visitors' room at Dundalk Gaol and were joined by the Republican prisoners whom they had officially requested to see, Diarmuid Lynch of Tracton, County Cork, Michael Brennan of the West Clare Brigade and Frank Henderson of the Dublin Volunteers. The sentry stood discreetly by the door as Carmel Quinn had an animated conversation with Brennan and Henderson to divert the attention of the hapless sentry (who lost his job in Dundalk Gaol because of what happened that day on his watch.) Meanwhile the engaged couple, Lynch and Kathleen (Kit) Quinn were grouped in a hushed exchange with the priest.

Diarmuid Lynch, a member of the Supreme Council of the IRB (Irish Republican Brotherhood) and Kathleen Quinn were married at noon by Fr A. Travers, one of the group of Capuchin priests based at Church Street in Dublin who had ministered to Padraig Pearse, Tomas McDonagh and the other executed rebels before they faced the firing squad in Kilmainham Jail in May of 1916. Before the visit was over Michael Brennan and Frank Henderson witnessed the marriage.

Having been sentenced to death for his part in the Rising of Easter Week, Lynch's sentence was commuted to ten years of penal service, following the personal intervention of the president of the USA, Woodrow Wilson. (Lynch had taken out American citizenship in 1902). When he was freed in the mass release of Republican prisoners from English jails in June 1917, with Michael Collins, Harry Boland, Cathal Brugha and other like-minded Republicans he was immediately engaged in political work to revitalise the IRB in a continued campaign to achieve Irish Independence. Lynch was the most senior IRB officer to survive the Easter Rising.

In his capacity as Food Controller in the Sinn Fein Executive Government, Lynch mounted a campaign of protest at the exportation of corn, bacon and other foodstuffs from Ireland to feed the British troops at war in Europe, while food shortages were acute in Ireland in that winter of 1917- 1918. In February 1918 a band of activists under Lynch 'pignapped' two herds of pigs being driven down the North Circular Road to the North Wall for export. The pigs were butchered and the meat sold to the local Dublin people. The owners of the pigs were recompensed for their losses. Lynch was arrested, tried and imprisoned for gross disorder, theft, defiance of the Government, etc. Diarmuid Lynch was now forty years old and had been a prisoner in no less than eight British prisons.

While serving this latest sentence in Dundalk Gaol, in April 1918 he was informed via the prison grapevine that he was to be deported to the USA. He asked for permission to marry his fiancée, Kathleen Quinn of Newbridge, County Kildare, so that she could apply for a passport to travel to the USA with him as his wife. This was refused so he quietly, with the help of his Republican comrades outside, made the marriage arrangements.

D. McHugh, the Governor of Dundalk Gaol, reacted swiftly when news of the marriage filtered back to him. Lynch was immediately escorted to the Dublin train by two armed G-men (detective constables) on the first leg of his journey to Liverpool for deportation to the USA. By chance his new bride, her sister and Fr Travers were travelling back to Dublin on the same train so they, the G-men and Diarmuid shared the carriage for the journey.

The Republican communication lines between Dundalk and Dublin were super effective and by the time the train drew into Amiens Street Station a huge crowd of Sinn Fein activists, Volunteers and IRB men had gathered. Many were armed. Facing them were armed battalions of soldiers and policemen. Harry Boland whispered to Lynch that an attack was intended to secure his freedom but Lynch advised against it as so many were armed in the crowded and confined space. Almost inevitably a bloodbath would ensue.

Michael Collins and Harry Boland led an armed escort of Volunteers in procession from the train station to the Bridewell, followed by the Black Maria which carried Diarmuid, his new wife, Eamon de Valera and the G-men. De Valera shouted above the din, "Diarmuid, you have set a new style- taking your bride to the Bridewell!" This was the last time these three main players in the National struggle, Lynch, Collins and de Valera, were together.

The huge crowd which followed the Black Maria to the Bridewell was intimidating so Michael Collins was not stopped from entering the police station with Lynch and they had a useful discussion as to the future communication channels between Ireland and the USA (During the Great War all letters were opened and censored.)

Collins joined Diarmuid and Kit again on the train to Kingstown(Dun Laoghaire) the next morning for further planning, accompanied of course by the G-men! Kit travelled to Liverpool with Diarmuid hoping that she might be allowed on board the deportation ship with him, but she was roughly bundled back to Dublin under G-man escort on the following day.

Evidently the priests of the parish of St Patrick's in Dundalk were peeved that a Catholic priest from outside of their parish had conducted a marriage ceremony on their patch and Denis Lynch(Diarmuid's brother) had a tough job to get a wedding certificate for Kit so that she could apply for a passport in her new name, Mrs Diarmuid Lynch. Eventually Archbishop Michael Logue of the Armagh Diocese issued the necessary document and in June 1918 Kit was re united with her new husband in New York. Diarmuid wrote to thank Denis for his assistance. He apologised for the delay in writing and added roguishly; "I wanted Kit here before I could get myself to write and finally when I had her- Well!"

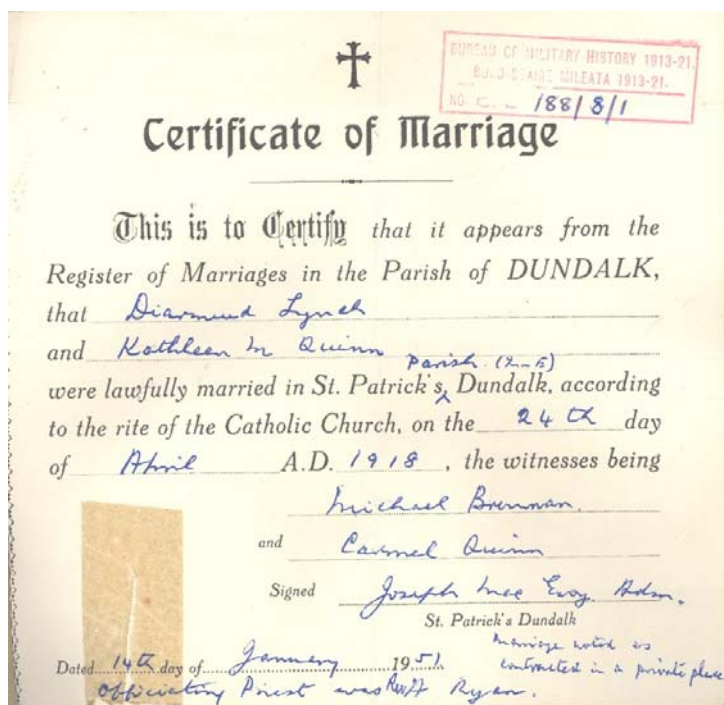
Kit was equally exuberant, 'What an age it seems since the morning of 1 June and how wonderful life has become since then!'

No trace of that original marriage certificate has been found. When Diarmuid Lynch died in 1950 his widow applied to the parish of St Patrick's, Dundalk, for a copy of her marriage certificate, necessary for probate. It seems that the bold deed still rankled, the copy certificate provided in 1951 reads; '*It appears from the Register that ... were lawfully married' etc*; a handwritten postscript states; *marriage noted as contracted in a private place.*

The romance of a prison marriage at the exact time and on the exact date of the 1916 Easter Rising induced more than one writer to weave it into their writings. Roddy Doyle used it in his novel, *A Star Called Henry* (2005);

'He wanted to get married in Dundalk Gaol, so his fiancée could have a Yankee passport and get herself deported with him. But the men in charge were having none of it. They'd already seen one jail wedding, Plunkett's in 1916 turned into a Republican legend. But Lynch got married anyway The fiancée smuggled a priest in- under her coat, in her handbag? I never knew- and a couple of witnesses as well, and herself and himself were hitched in Lynch's cell.' (page 194)

Eileen McGough- Author, *Diarmuid Lynch a Forgotten Irish Patriot* (2013) Mercier Press.



Marriage certificate provided in 1951 by St Patrick's parish in Dundalk.



Dundal Gaol today; it is now converted into a state-of-the-art culture centre and is the headquarters of Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann for the North-East of Ireland



Diarmuid and Kit Lynch in New York, summer 1918.