



## PERSONAL MEMOIRS: ELLEN SHANAHAN LENNON

By Ivan Lennon

While “to the manor born” would no doubt be an exaggeration, my paternal grandmother Ellen Lennon, nee Shanahan, was definitely of bourgeois background in the Deise market town where she was born in 1875. Her father was the customs house officer for Dungarvan and the owner of substantial holdings at the “Lookout” facing the harbour. Her lifestyle was maintained with her 1897 marriage to George Crollly Lennon, manager, as was his father James before him, of the Dungarvan Gas Works. Reportedly “of an emotional nature...she worried a lot about the tribulations of royalty”; most particularly the Russian Romanov children who “were always being threatened by anarchists.”

The Lennon home, facing Devonshire Square, was quite commodious including out buildings for livery and turf, plumbing, gas lighting and a live in ‘domestic servant’. Private schools were provided for her school age children, including George who was to lead the Waterford Flying Column during the War of Independence.

The unexpected death of her husband, in June 1914, resulted in reduced financial circumstances necessitating a move to smaller accommodations. Her children were removed from their fee paying school and enrolled at the local National School in nearby Abbeyside.

For her, daily devotions at the nearby parish church were the norm. The parish priest was noted for his “heroic work for the success of the farming population in their stubborn fight for justice.” However, perhaps emboldened by the December 1920 excommunication of the I.R.A. Rebels in nearby Cork, he saw fit to excoriate, from the pulpit, her son who led the physical force Republicans “on the run”.

As noted in Una Troy’s (a.k.a. Elizabeth Connor) DEAD STAR’S LIGHT she

...just got up and out of the chapel...walking down to the door under the amazed stare of the whispering congregation.... Imagine the agony in her heart.

Ironically, it was an uncle on her husband’s side of the family, Dr William Crollly, Archbishop Primate of All Ireland (1835-1849), who had suggested that priests

were unwisely involving themselves in politics at the time of the murder of landowner Major Mahon in County Roscommon.

She observed:

The priests...they think they are the Church. They forget they're only a small part of it – they forget they should be our servants, not our masters...Sure it is a religion that's grand enough even to get over the priesthood it has- and that ought to be enough to believe it's the true one.

Secure in her faith, she continued, until her death in 1924, daily devotions at the nearby Friary Church. As noted in the MUNSTER EXPRESS of 15 November 1924:

During the past week there passed away a widely known figure in the town in the person of the late Mrs. Lennon, Western Terrace. Her death occurred at a Dublin Hospital on Friday and on Saturday the remains were conveyed to Dungarvan by motor hearse followed by a large number of motorcars. Deceased was an active member of the social life of the town and one who will be much missed by a large circle of friends... There was an unusually large cortege.

Per the WATERFORD NEWS of 14 November 1924:

The procession in the night was a very sad one, the children of the deceased being the chief mourners. After last Mass on Sunday the interment took place, when the remains were laid to rest with those of her deceased husband...One of the sons of (the) deceased, Mr. George Lennon, occupied a responsible position during the fighting in the country, and in the struggles that took place he had many hairbreadth escapes....

Her remains were conveyed to the parish church, from which she had, four years earlier, left. Newspaper accounts note her burial 'in the adjoining cemetery'. Unfortunately, in that the Church maintains that "no records were kept", her exact whereabouts, and that of her family, remain unknown.

Her son George, the erstwhile I.R.A. Rebel, continued her tradition of outspokenness when he criticized the "special position" of the Church as embodied in the Free State Constitution of 1937. After directing the Irish Topographical Survey during the "Emergency" (1939-1945) and working with the National Planning Conference, he decamped, for the second and final time, from the Free State on one of the first civilian flights westward in February 1946.