

# Serving King and Country

Armagh Barracks, 1901.

by Mary McVeigh

When Cardinal Michael Logue, after a stay in Rome, received a welcome home gift from the Armagh catholic laity in March 1901 he took the opportunity to air his disapproval of the Oath taken by the new king, Edward VII, at the Coronation in January and his opposition to the enlistment of Irish Catholics in

Armagh barracks, 1901. The Armagh Guardian whilst giving full coverage to the Primate's speech was not reticent about criticising him. This paper was staunchly and vociferously Unionist and its editor Delmage Trimble was to the forefront in organising comforts for the troops abroad. In the editorial His

ish side. Police intelligence reports from County Armagh in 1900 noted that the anti-recruitment campaign was bringing together nationalist groups such as the Irish Republican Brotherhood and the Ancient Order of Hibernians, although the county inspector did not think that the many leaflets in circulation would have 'much effect' on recruitment.<sup>2</sup>

It would seem that he was proven right and not all Catholics heeded either priests or politicians because an examination of the 1901 census returns taken just days after Cardinal Logue's speech, on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1901, reveal that of the 200 or so NCOs and private soldiers in Armagh barracks over 60% of them gave their religion as Roman Catholic.<sup>3</sup> The barracks was home to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the Royal Irish Fusiliers and it was the recruiting depot for Counties Armagh, Monaghan, Cavan and Louth<sup>4</sup> but, according to the census, there were men from as far away as Cork, Carlow, Waterford, Wexford, Galway, Limerick and Mayo. The greatest number, forty-four, came from the home county, Armagh, and Dublin came second with thirty-five giving it as their place of birth. There were fifteen men from Antrim but only two from Monaghan, four from Cavan and three each from Louth and Tyrone. There were four from Longford but none from Fermanagh or Donegal. Fourteen men gave their birthplace as England but some of the names given would suggest that they were mostly from Irish emigrant families. It should be noted that whilst the majority were Catholics not all from the south or west of Ireland were so designated. Dublin in particular had a number of Protestant soldiers.

The second largest religious grouping in the barracks census returns was designated Church of England. Presumably these people were Church of Ireland and it was the enumerator who decided



the British army. In a lengthy address to the Cathedral Committee who had presented him with a pair of carriage horses he expressed his admiration for Queen Victoria and the new king but deplored the Coronation Oath because of its anti-Catholic content. As long as this 'insulting declaration' remained on the Statute Book of England young people should desist from enrolling 'under her flag'. He blamed poor administration for forcing them to leave Ireland. He said that so many of the young, strong and energetic had been driven 'into exile' and all that remained for the army to draw upon were 'the cripples, lame and blind'. Indeed he went on to add that he feared that the recruits they raised at the present would need to be treated in the way that the wounded soldiers at the Battle of Clontarf were by the Irish Chieftan. These unfortunates had to be

Eminece was castigated for his comments. His 'sneering' was as 'uncalled for' as it 'was unmerited'.

"For many years the priests of Ireland have been doing their utmost to prevent Roman Catholics joining the army and some in their addresses from the altar have even censured girls for walking with soldiers. In neither cases have the efforts prevailed – the army has its fascination for many young men and the red coat captures the hearts of the girls", it declared.<sup>1</sup>

The Catholic Church was not the only body to warn against enlistment. The war in South Africa had been going on since 1899 and Nationalist leaders who saw the Boers as fellow victims of oppression from the mighty British Empire formed an Irish-Transvaal Committee to support them and to dissuade young Irishmen from going to fight on the Brit-

to anglicise them. Interestingly it would appear that Presbyterians were less eager to take the king's shilling because there were only 11 of them whereas there were some 70 Church of England and 122 Catholics. Just a single 'Wesleyan' appeared in the barracks census. It would seem that there were only two officers in the barracks then. Major Fitzgerald aged 35, unmarried, Church of England and a young lieutenant of 17 whose name looked to be either Greer or Green, a Presbyterian, who surprisingly, was, born in Australia.

Why did men, especially Catholics who were seemingly ignoring the warnings of both spiritual and political leaders, join the army at this time? Economic security was probably the drawing factor in the majority of cases. David Fitzpatrick has pointed out that Irish recruits, like their British counterparts, were typically unemployed lads in their late teens and the Armagh census returns would support this as the vast majority listed their occupations prior to enlistment as labourers.<sup>5</sup> Economic security was certainly not something on which a labourer could have depended at the onset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Instead, if he had a job at all, he could have expected long hours, hard toil, poor and often hazardous working conditions. The army offered regular pay plus food and lodgings.

Whilst most soldiers had been labourers there were some who had held more skilled jobs in civilian life – tailors, painters, mechanics and an engine driver. The more unusual include a florist from Dublin, William Stevens, a Wexford cycle-maker, Walter O'Brien, and a ship's steward from Scotland whose name was not given.<sup>6</sup> Most of the sergeants had been clerks pre-army and no doubt their previous work experience and education aided their advancement.

Interestingly a number of the young recruits from County Armagh were weavers and the first explanation to spring to mind was that they had joined up because there was a slump in the line trade. They opted for military life rather than face unemployment. However, further research revealed the exact opposite. Indeed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning

of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a dynamic rise in the weaving section of the textile industry due primarily to the importation of cheap yarn and improved marketing of products abroad.<sup>7</sup> It could have been the case that these young weavers were lured away from the tedium of factory life by the promise of adventure and travel with the army.

There were six drummers listed in the census, the youngest was only a boy of 14 years, Joseph Cullen from County Armagh. One man was born in India, Albert Edward McGuigan and four others came from England. Just one drummer was a Catholic, Thomas Boyle, another Armaghian and the oldest at aged 39. Both he and Albert Edward McGuigan were married.

What was life like then for the wives and families of soldiers who lived within the confines of the barracks, in married quarters? If there has been any research on the topic it is a well kept secret! Hopefully it will engage someone with an interest in women's history because to date male historians who have devoted many tomes to general military histories and histories of specific regiments have largely ignored the wives of soldiers who were often forced to leave behind families, friends and sometimes their own homelands to be with their men.

There were 34 wives, 27 of them with children, and 1 mother-in-law in the Armagh barracks when the census was taken. Only 10 of these women were from County Armagh. The rest were from other parts of Ireland and abroad so presumably a considerable proportion met their husbands when they were stationed in the women's hometowns. An obvious example was Louisa Connolly from Aldershot, a town with a long military association. Henry Harris recorded in his history of the Royal Irish Fusiliers that the Second Battalion stationed there since 1886 was able to maintain its numbers thanks to recruits from the Armagh depot.<sup>8</sup> Margaret Steele was born in India so there is a good likelihood that she came from a military family and this was how she met her husband George, a sergeant.

Even most of those who were from

other parts of Ireland were far from home – Cork, Mullingar, Westmeath, Roscommon and Limerick were some of the places noted. Thus it is likely that loneliness and homesickness were not uncommon among them considering that travel over a hundred years ago was not as accessible as it is today. One woman certainly far from home was Sophia Augustina, the French wife of Colour Sergeant Patrick Woods who was from County Tyrone.

It would appear that some of the families had been on the move more than once over the years. For instance, Bridget Daly who was from Boyle, County Roscommon, had two children born in India, one at Peshawar and other a year later at Murcat. After a gap of seven years she had another in Armagh followed by a fourth two years later. Mary Burns had children born in Cork, Kilkenny, England and Armagh. A number would seem to have returned home for their first confinement, possibly for family support. One of these Ellen Wallace from Westmeath had her first baby in her hometown and others in Kilkenny, Cork and Armagh. The largest family was that of Sergeant-Major Alfred and Sarah Jane Schofield who had eight children, all born in Armagh.

Most of the married men with families in married quarters were Non-commissioned officers but the majority of women either left the relevant space blank or stated on the census forms that they had no occupation. Several classified themselves as housekeepers and one put down she was a 'soldier's wife'. Just three gave occupations, independent of being a wife. Lizzie Burke, a mother of three from Monaghan was a schoolteacher, Mary Ann Lynch from Armagh was a weaver and Bridget Maginn described herself as a 'patent turner'.

Two families had servants. Elizabeth Holmes, Armagh, had a domestic servant and Sarah Evans, a 91-year-old widow from England who was the mother-in-law of J.S. Evans. Unfortunately it was not possible to ascertain the ranks of the males.

Four of the wives had husbands who were out of Ireland during the census tak-

ing. Two of these men were in England and the other two were in South Africa, presumably on active service. Although the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion did not serve in South Africa it did send men to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions there. One of the women whose husband was in South Africa was Annie McFettridge; a Presbyterian from County Antrim who had two young children and the other was 22-year-old Lizzie Devlin from Cork who was childless. Hopefully she was able to make friends with a fellow Cork woman, Julia Borne, whose husband was in England.

This study came about by accident, so to speak. When I was looking through the 1901 census to get an overall picture of the religious and economic composition of Armagh at the at the outset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century I was surprised to discover that the majority of soldiers and their families in the barracks were Catholics. I was aware certainly that substantial numbers of Irish Catholics served on the side of the British in both World Wars but I assumed that the Armagh depot, because of its geographical location, drew its recruits mainly from the Protestant community. I decided to look closely at the census returns to see what information they would show up and then, if possible to delve a little further. This is just the beginning of my research, I hope. When I was writing this I was mindful of my own

military heritage. My grandfather served with the Royal Irish Fusiliers in both India and China and during that time his sister was jailed for her activities with the Cumann Na mBan.

<sup>1</sup> *Armagh Guardian*, 22 March, 1901

<sup>2</sup> Terence Denman, 'The red livery of shame': the campaign against army recruitment in Ireland, 1899-1914, *Irish Historical Studies*, xxix, no.114 (Nov.1994)

<sup>3</sup> The 1901 census returns for County Armagh are held on microfilm in the Irish and Local Studies Library, 39c Abbey Street.

<sup>4</sup> Marcus Cunliffe, *The Royal Irish Fusiliers 1793-1950*, (Oxford, 1952), p.231

<sup>5</sup> David Fitzpatrick, 'Militarism in Ireland, 1900-1922' in *A military history of Ireland* ed. by Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffery (Cambridge, 1996) p.381

<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately two pages of the military returns gave only initials rather than full names although they provided all other required information, religion, former occupation, place of birth and ability to read and write.

<sup>7</sup> Philip Ollerenshaw, 'Industry, 1820-1914', in *An Economic History of Ulster, 1820-1940*, ed. Liam Kennedy and Philip Ollerenshaw, (Manchester, 1985), p.83

<sup>8</sup> Henry Harris, *The Royal Irish Fusiliers (The 87<sup>th</sup> and 89<sup>th</sup> Regiments of Foot)*, (London, 1972), p.72

No.	Name	Rank	Company	Religion	Remarks
8	610 William Hunter				
9	611 John Finnelly	Lower Sgt			
10	612 William Hagan	do			
11	613 James Hagan	do			
12	614 J. O. Hagan	Private			
13	715 James Hagan	do			
14	716 J. Hagan	do			
15	717 James Hagan	do			
16	718 John Campbell	do			
17	719 John Campbell	do			
18	720 John Campbell	do			