
[A Republican Easter So Long Ago](#)

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The General Post Office (GPO) on what is now O'Connell Street in central Dublin has a very special place in Irish history. On Easter Monday 1916 it was one of many sites occupied by Irish nationalist volunteers seeking to overthrow British rule and establish a republic. The building was duly occupied by a small but very important band of rebels from the Headquarters Battalion of the Dublin republican volunteers, it was from here they would control the fight and make their stand. The band included five members of the volunteers military council, in due course they were executed.

The six elegant Greek columns standing in front of the GPO bear witness to the battle fought on this very spot ninety three years ago. Photographs taken immediately after the rising depict a visitation of the mighty British Empire's wrath. The rubble and destruction of O'Connell street were more like the aftermath of an attack on an enemy country's garrison not that of a loyal city within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

The restored facade of the GPO is gracious once more, the first time I saw it I couldn't be quite sure that a building so unassuming held the mark of so much Irish history. The relaxed smiles of the two armed Gardai standing outside confirmed it, they were watching me look the place over, we talked briefly as they pointed to the gouges of bullet holes from 1916 then they seemed to understand my silence as I stared into the past, judging the direction of the bullets flight and the potential nature and location of its target. This was a place of national importance.

Knowledge of the Irish rebellion came to me in dribs and drabs over the years, British TV news, political programs and newspapers catalogued the atrocities perpetrated by terrorists in Northern Ireland and later on in mainland Britain, they were the constant media backdrop to my teen years and youth. During that time the Republic of Ireland appeared to be an innocent haven of peace and it flew under my radar while the troubles were going on in the north. It seems ridiculous now but I hadn't consciously made the connection between what the Irish Nationalist Volunteers had fought for in the Dublin streets in 1916 and the wanton bloodshed of Northern Ireland which simmers to this very day.

In 1916 Britain was at war with Germany on the continent of Europe. Irishmen were fighting in the trenches of Belgium and France side by side with Brummies, Cockneys, Yorkshiremen, Welsh and Scotsmen against the Germans. Now they had chosen to fight the British on the streets of Dublin, it was insurrection, it was treason. It was also the bloody and bitter start of a military campaign that would see the emergence of an independent Irish Republic in 1937.

Mary Kenny as she was then, an Irish lass from the Wexford mountains just outside the

village of Killealy, fought for Britain during the second world war. She had a British passport and was a British citizen. It was just after the declaration of War against Germany when she stepped ashore as a vivacious 22 year old in Liverpool in 1939. She described the thousands of Irishmen heading back the other way for the sanctuary of Ireland's neutrality, wishing to take no part. Yet she spoke of thousands of Irishmen and women coming with her to Britain's aid. It was a confusing and conflicted state of affairs but then Irish history always has been.

I was here to find out something of the why; and by the way, Mary Kenny was my mother.

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