



**My Great Great grandfather - John  
McCarthy**

**Liadhain Ní hÓgáin,  
Bán Leathan,**

**Seú Rang  
Scoil Naomh Bríde,  
Bréan Trá**

**My Family's Involvement with the Irish Volunteers from 1916 and in the War of Independence (Jan 21st 1919 to July 11th 1921) and The Civil War (June 28th 1922 to May 24th 1923).**

My great great grandfather on my mother's side of the family was called John McCarthy. He was born in Ballyhooley, Co. Cork. on 23rd June, 1881. His father James, originally from Clonmel, was a Fenian who came to Ballyhooley to work as a stone mason for the Earl of Listowel on his Convamore estate. On one occasion the steward on the estate ordered him to build up the windows and doors of a cottage from which they intended evicting the tenants. He refused to do this and was dismissed from his job by the steward. He made an appeal to the earl himself and got his job back. On the 1901 Census he is listed as a Master Mason.

John grew up in a nationalist household and my grandmother remembers him telling stories of himself and his older brothers being taken to a big land meeting in Mitchelstown by his father in September 1887. The meeting was addressed by John Dillon M.P. among others. The meeting was attacked by the police and three men, Casey, Lonergan and Shinnick were killed. When the commotion broke out, John was thrown into the horse and trap, along with his brothers, by his father and they headed back to Ballyhooley as fast as they could. This became known as the Mitchelstown Massacre and left a huge Impression on John.

John went on to become a national teacher and started teaching in Ardagh Boy's School, in oscarbery in 1906. He had a deep love of Ireland and the Irish language and wanted to see

his country free of British Rule. One of his most famous pupils was Tommy Barry later to become General of the West Cork Brigade.

John was a member of the I.R.B. and the Irish Volunteers and as a result the family house in Newtown, Rosscarbery was often raided by the Black and Tans (See note at end). My great grandfather, Jack, remembered as a child the house being torn asunder by the Black and Tans. His aunt, Tess, who lived with them got married in June 1918. Her husband, a radio officer, died two months later in August of the Great Flu. She never got over her great loss and kept all her wedding presents in a spare room in the house. On one of their raids the Black and Tans opened the boxes and threw the contents around the place, driving the butt of a gun through a tea-chest of beautiful china. Jack remembered being sick in bed as a child with the measles and the Tans coming in and pulling him out of bed to search under the mattress. He remembered his uncle Michael Keenan, from Glandore who was staying with them at the time, and who was also a member of the I.R.A., being put up against the front door with John McCarthy with the Tans threatening to shoot them both until his mother, Kathleen, who was pregnant at the time, came out and stood in front of both of them and told the Tans they would have to shoot her first. They relented but took Michael Keenan away to Cork Jail where they kept himself and John L. O'Sullivan in a cage inside the main gate to humiliate them in the hope of getting information out of them (John L. who later become a T.D. was also a member of 3rd Cork Brigade of the Old IRA) The old Muskerry Railway ran up beside the jail in those days and Michael and John L. were taken up the line and held there when the train was due. When the train was fairly close they were pulled off. This was done in the hope of getting information about the West Cork Brigade. They were later held in Spike Island and were beaten up many times. A humorous story that Jack remembered and often told his family was his father warning them of not telling the Black and Tans where his gun was hidden and himself piping up 'I will not tell the Tans your gun is hidden in the secret drawer in the hall table',

John supplemented his income from teaching by growing fruit and vegetables and my great grandfather, Jack, remembered being told by his father that Tommy Barry walked into the garden one day and gave him a bag of ammunition to deliver to Pete Kearney (I.R.A.) in Dunmanway. John used to go to the market in Dunmanway on a Saturday with a load of vegetables with his pony and trap and was able to hide the ammunition in a sack of potatoes. I think this happened on more than one occasion. Jack recalled Rosscarbery as being 'a very hot spot during the troubles mainly because there was a military barrack there and regular British troops and R.I.C. occupied it. The Auxiliaries (see note at end) and the Tans also occupied the courthouse in Newtown, near where he lived. The I.R.A. were also busy there and regularly attacked the British forces. The British were at one stage so afraid to venture out into the countryside that they would tie the Fehily brothers, Jerh and Paddy, who were prisoners at the time, up in front of their truck. They knew this would prevent the I.R.A. from ambushing them for fear of shooting the Fehilys'. He remembered the Black & Tans times of curfew and the fact that people had even to have their names on the carts going to creamery or town and would be prosecuted if they did not obey this. He also remembered the night Rosscarbery R.I.C. Barracks was taken by the West Cork Brigade under General Tom Barry on the 30th March, 1921. He remembered the explosion and the windows rattling and all the children with their mother and aunt huddled together into a back hall where there was

no window. Jack was born in February, 1916 so was a young boy when all these events occurred. They made a lasting impression on him and he imbued a love of history and all things Irish in his own family.

John joined the Irish Volunteers in 1916 and was a founder member of the Rosscarbery Branch. John must have been walking a fine line at this time as early in 1916 Recruitment Meetings were being held after Mass in Rosscarbery with the encouragement of the local P.P. who would have been John's manager. Under the guise of G.A.A. clubs and Gaelic League Branches, the members of the Irish Volunteers organised feiseanna, concerts and other Irish Ireland activities. In this way the Volunteers helped to keep the national spirit alive among the general public. John was also an organiser for the Irish Products League and at a meeting in Rosscarbery the following proposal was passed 'That we the members of the Rosscarbery Products League, pledge ourselves not to buy, encourage or use any galvanised roofing, such roofing being exclusively of foreign manufacture, and by its use here in this country the local slate quarries are severely handicapped or almost completely wiped out of existence.'

A family member visited the Military History Archives in Cathal Brugha Barracks in Dublin late last year and was given access to John McCarthy's file. His records showed that he joined the Irish Volunteers in 1916 and was in the National Army for two years. His records showed that he was a Captain from 8th August 1922 to October, 1922, 2nd Lieutenant from 1st October 1922 to November 22nd 1922 and 1st Lieutenant from 1st November 1922 to demobilisation on 7th March 1924. He was an Intelligence Officer with the Cork No 3 Brigade, Company K, Second Battalion, 1st Southern Division and worked closely providing intelligence to Michael Collins, Tommy Barry and Sean Hales.

As John McCarthy worked in the intelligence section of the Army, he worked closely with Michael Collins and met with him on the day Collins was killed on 22nd August, 1922. He is mentioned by Tim Pat Coogan in his *Biography of Michael Collins* as follows: 'Another account describes a scene in Calnan's pub in Rosscarbery while Collins was away, possibly visiting Mrs. McDonald [up in the village]. A row broke out between Dublin members of the convoy and local troops when the machine gunner of the Slievenamon [Collins' armoured car], John McPeake, took a bottle of whiskey from a shelf in the pub. McPeake himself later admitted that there was some drinking on the trip but firmly denied that it was to excess. The pub affray may have been the reason that six soldiers are said to have been disarmed and locked up, though local legend has it that they were put away by the local Commander, Captain Sean McCarthy, because they were ex-British army personnel who were thought to have been plotting against Collins. When McCarthy told Collins of his suspicions and warned him to be careful, Collins is supposed to have listened to him in silence and then shaken hands saying, 'I'm going to put an end to this bloody war as soon as possible'. An often recalled incident in the family is of John (Sean) McCarthy warning Collins to be careful on his journey and him replying - 'I'll never be killed in my own county Mac'. Unfortunately, he was not right and he was killed later that evening in Béal na mBláth. John and thousands of others were devastated but carried on until when Liam Lynch, the anti-Treaty IRA leader, was killed in action in April 1923, his successor Frank Aiken, at the urging of civilian republicans under Eamon de Valera, called a ceasefire and then in May 1923 ordered their remaining fighters to 'dump arms' and return home – effectively ending the war. No surrender was called however and no formal end to the war was ever negotiated.

In the later days of the war John was told he was a marked man. He was arrested but escaped and delayed his return to school for a time. In correspondence in his file there is a letter from him stating 'It is very doubtful if it would be quite safe for me to return to Rosscarbery just at present, as owing to the nature of my work as Battalion Intelligence Officer, I have strong reason to suspect that I am not looked upon by the Irregulars [see note] in a very lovable light'. In a letter of reply from Command Headquarters in Cork it is stated 'the officer in question has certainly done valuable Intelligence work in the Bandon area during the past twelve months. It is suggested that it would not be all advisable for him to take up the duties of School Teacher at Rosscarbery at present'. For services rendered he is the holder of the Military Medal.

John did return to teach as Principal of Ardagh Boy's School in Rosscarbery in due course where he taught for many happy years until his retirement in 1946. John was made a Peace Commissioner and was always available to help people filling forms and all that went that role. He was a great friend of Sean Hales (see note) and spent a few years after the war organising the erection of a monument to honour Sean Hales in Bandon. The monument was finally erected on January 19th 1930 after almost five years of meetings and fund raising. In a lengthy report of the *Southern Star* of January 25th 1930 it stated 'All connected with the memorial deserve the greatest thanks for their efforts in carrying through to a successful issue, but a special word of praise is due the worthy hon. sec. John J. McCarthy, N.T. P.C. Rosscarbery for his untiring efforts in connection with it. It was a labour of love to all and that their efforts have been crowned with success is the best thanks that could be bestowed'

When John McCarthy died on 13th July, 1961, his coffin was draped in the tricolour and borne to the cemetery by Old Comrades, former pupils, members of the G.A.A. and the I.N.T.O. According to Jack, when the coffin left the family home in Newtown, Tommy Barry was there to put the tricolour on it. Even though Tom Barry and John McCarthy took opposite sides in the civil war they remained close friends up to his death.

I will conclude with An Appreciation of the late John McCarthy, N.T. Rosscarbery by an old pupil which appeared in newspapers after his death.

' John McCarthy, our old Master has gone to his eternal reward, May God be good to his noble soul, for with his passing a landmark has vanished from our lives. But though he has gone, his influence upon us will long remain as a monument to a life well and truly spent in the service of God and of his country.

We who were privileged to be his pupils, down through the years, will always remember with great gratitude the great energy and zeal with which he prepared us for the Battle of Life, and the magnificent religious instruction he imparted to us, will remain like a star on our horizon, to guide us to the end.

A noted scholar and teacher, he made sure we had a thorough grasp of the essentials, and also introduced us to science, drama, music and song, and like the grand old band of patriotic schoolmasters to which he belonged, he instilled into his pupils a love of Ireland, its language, laws and customs which was afterwards evident in the number of his old pupils who shed lustre on their teacher by the service they rendered to Church and Country.

When memory takes us down the golden years to the happy days we spent in the Ardagh Boy's School we will always recall that dynamic personality who was our master (we can

scarcely remember him miss a day from school), his booming voice and perfect command; his great sense of humour and his wonderful gift as a storyteller; his love of games and our schoolboy teams; and in bygone days, his epic after-school rides [on his bicycle] to Cork and back to represent the Carbery Rangers at the County Board.

Possessed of sterling qualities of mind and heart, he was always ready to do a good turn for anyone in need; and the aged, the widow, the applicant for a grant; indeed anyone in trouble turned naturally to the Master to plead their cause, and he never failed them.

Unswerving in his loyalty to the ideal of a free and independent Ireland, he saw his country rise from bondage to almost complete independence and the flag he loved and served, we proudly, though sadly, laid on his coffin as we bore him to his last resting place in the Abbey, side by side with his comrades of old. And now that the curtain has fallen for the last time, on a life of service and usefulness to God and to his fellow-man, we pray that the Great Teacher may grant to his servant, our old master, John McCarthy, the reward of eternal life.

Ar dheis De go raibh a anam. '  
An Old Pupil.

## Notes

### **Black and Tans**

The Black and Tans were mostly former British soldiers brought into Ireland by the government in London after 1918 to assist the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) in their work. In 1919, the British government advertised for men who were willing to face 'a rough and dangerous task'. Many former British army soldiers had come back from Western Europe and found it difficult to settle. For many the sole attraction was not political or national pride – it was simply money. The men got paid ten shillings a day. They got three months training before being sent to Ireland. The first unit arrived in Ireland in March 1920.

Once in Ireland it quickly became apparent that there were not enough uniforms for all those who had joined up. Therefore they wore a mixture of uniforms – some military, some RIC. This mixture gave them the appearance of being in khaki and dark police uniform. As a result, these men got the nickname 'Black and Tans', and it stuck.

### **The Auxiliaries**



The Auxiliary Division of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) were known as the Auxiliaries. They were a paramilitary unit of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) during the Irish War of Independence. It was set up in July 1920 and made up of former British Army officers, most of whom came from Great Britain. Its role was to conduct counter-insurgency operations against the Irish Republican Army (IRA). The Auxiliaries became infamous for their attacks on civilians and civilian property in revenge for IRA actions, the most well-known example of which was the burning of Cork city in December 1920.

## The Irregulars

The anti-Treatyites, were sometimes referred to by Free State Forces (pro-Treaty) as Irregulars

## Sean Hales

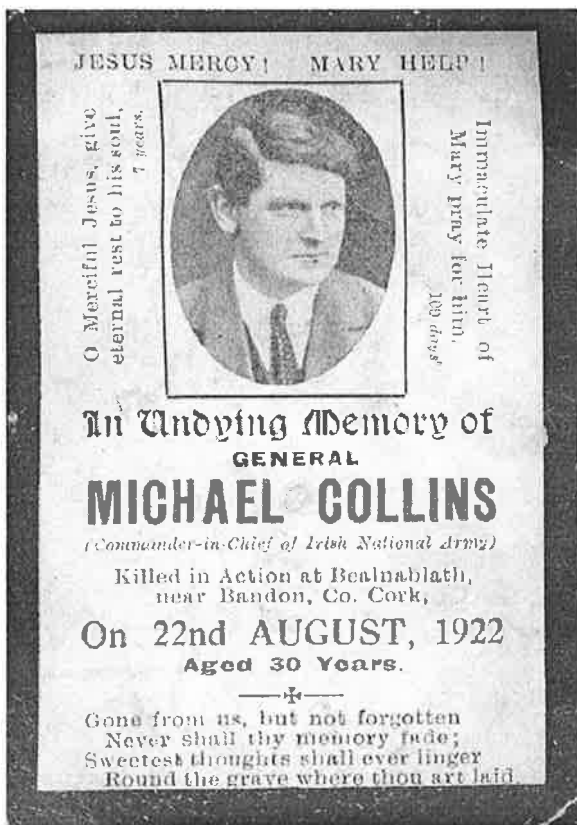
Sean Hales was a great friend of my great great grandfather. He was also involved in the Irish Republican Army during the War of Independence. Sean Hales was elected to Dáil Éireann in both 1921 and 1922. Shortly after he was elected the Civil War broke out and on 7 December 1922 Sean Hales was killed by anti-treaty IRA men as he left the Dáil.

<p style="text-align: center;">Α ΠΑΘΗ ΗΜΕΡΕ, ΣΥΡΟ ΑΗΡ.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">  </p> <p style="text-align: center;"> <i>In the Most Holy Name of Jesus,</i>  <small>PRAY FOR THE REPOSE OF THE SOUL OF</small>  <b>General Sean Hales, T.D.,</b>  <b>KNOCKNACURRA,</b>          Who was Shot in Dublin, on the          7th DECEMBER, 1922,          AGED 39 YEARS.          ΟΥΑΝΝΑΕΤ ΟΕ ΛΕ Ν-Α ΑΝΑΜ.       </p> <p> <small>⊕</small> SWEET JESUS, for the sake of Thy bitter Passion, and the sorrows of Thy Immaculate Mother, have mercy on the soul of Thy servant, <b>SEAN</b>, and let the light of Thy countenance shine upon him.       </p>	<p style="text-align: center;">"At least one Holy Communion from you, dear friend."</p> <p style="text-align: center;">  </p> <p style="text-align: center;">         Dead he is not His soul hath but taken wings          And fled to vale of visions where it dwells          For evermore amid undying things          Still an echo from his memory swells          And through the darkest hours of grief's          black night          Strikes our hearts with agonized delight          As from the palace floors of Heaven          His spirit stoops o'er the starry balustrade          To look with love on our land so laven          With the blood of patriot friend and comrade.       </p> <p style="text-align: center;">—•—</p> <p>         Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul.          Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, assist me now and in my last agony.          Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, may I breathe forth my soul in peace with you. Amen.—  <i>300 days' Indulgence.</i> </p>
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## Michael Collins



Michael Collins, great friend of my great great grandfather John McCarthy and a hero to all his family. Jack died on the 22nd August, 2003. A great Michael Collins man all his life it was a coincidence that he died on his anniversary. He would have liked that!



## Photographs:



John McCarthy - extreme right, back row. We do not know the names of the others.



Military Service Medal.





John McCarthy in centre front row. This may be a picture of the Volunteers as the uniforms do not seem to be consistent. Don't know any of the others.



John McCarthy 3rd right in front with his golden cocker at his feet. Once again we do not know where this was taken or who the others are.

Return of Officers, Warrant Officers, N.C.O.s and Men serving at *Company Post 1st Division* *London* Command at Midnight 12th-13th November, 1922

Rank	Regt.	Comp.	Name	Age	Place of Birth	Place of Residence	Religion	Marital Status	Service and Address of Next of Kin
Platoon	1st	1st	Widley James	20	Northampton	London	R.C.	Widely	Mr Harry Widely 100 St. George's London E.C.4
Platoon	1st	1st	McIntyre James	21	London	London	R.C.	Widely	Mr James McIntyre 100 St. George's London E.C.4
Platoon	1st	1st	McCarthy John	21	London	London	R.C.	Widely	Mr James McCarthy 100 St. George's London E.C.4
Platoon	1st	1st	McCarthy James	20	London	London	R.C.	Widely	Mr James McCarthy 100 St. George's London E.C.4
Platoon	1st	1st	McCarthy James	20	London	London	R.C.	Widely	Mr James McCarthy 100 St. George's London E.C.4
Platoon	1st	1st	McCarthy James	20	London	London	R.C.	Widely	Mr James McCarthy 100 St. George's London E.C.4
Platoon	1st	1st	McCarthy James	20	London	London	R.C.	Widely	Mr James McCarthy 100 St. George's London E.C.4
Platoon	1st	1st	McCarthy James	20	London	London	R.C.	Widely	Mr James McCarthy 100 St. George's London E.C.4
Platoon	1st	1st	McCarthy James	20	London	London	R.C.	Widely	Mr James McCarthy 100 St. George's London E.C.4
Platoon	1st	1st	McCarthy James	20	London	London	R.C.	Widely	Mr James McCarthy 100 St. George's London E.C.4

Verify that the above particulars have been verified by personal interview with each soldier present.

James McCarthy, Lieutenant  
OFFICER COMMANDING

Military Archives  
2012/32

Army Census 1922



John McCarthy with his family outside Ardagh Boys' School. Jack on the extreme right.



Tom Barry with James McCarthy, (son of John and brother of Jack) unveiling a plaque to O'Donovan Rossa in Rosscarbery.



This is a picture of John McCarthy and his wife Kathleen in later years taken outside the door where once she bravely stood in front of her husband and brother when the Tans threatened to shoot them.



I got all this information from my grandmother who is pictured above, left, with her grandfather and her sister.

My grandmother was lucky to have a Memoir written by her father telling her all of the above history and I am lucky and proud to hear all about it now.

She told me that she adored her grandfather; he took her to her first circus, bought her a big book of fairy tales which he used to read aloud to her, dressed up as Santa Claus and made everything fun for her and all his other grandchildren.