

# *Decade of Centenaries*

*Shooting Dead of Charles Lynch Breaffa North Miltown Malbay*

*by Corporal Alexander McPherson on the 21st October 1920.*



*Charles Lynch*



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The first British serviceman killed and secretly buried by the IRA in Clare was Private George Robertson. On 21st October 1920 two British soldiers Lance-Corporal Alexander Mc Pherson and Corporal Norman Buchanan had spent the morning drinking in Miltown Malbay in West Clare. Both men were Non Commissioned Officers of the 2nd Battalion Royal Scots (Lothian Regiment) stationed in the area. That evening, on their way back to barracks, they called to the Breffa North district where they began burgling houses on the pretence that they were searching for arms. At 5p.m. that evening they called to the family home of Ned Lynch, Captain of G. Company, 4th Battalion of the I.R.A.'s Mid Clare Brigade. Lynch challenged the pair when they attempted to enter the house.

According to local Eamonn Lynch, "The taller of the two [Mc Pherson] said they were raiding for arms and tried to push past me. ... He carried what I first thought to be a revolver but on closer scrutiny noticed it was a glass one painted black which I knew had been looted sometime previously from Blake's pub in Miltown. I hit him a heavy punch in the right arm which caused him to drop the 'shot of malt' as the toy gun was known to us locally and it broke in pieces on the doorstep. Just as this happened one of the neighbours arrived accusing the soldiers of having stolen £10 from him whereupon the bigger soldier tried to break away. I tripped him and we searched him thoroughly recovering other articles he had looted but not the money. The second soldier [Buchanan] was less truculent, was also searched but offered no resistance and after receiving directions from my brother made off for the military post."

A short time later Mc Pherson returned with a force of British soldiers, R.I.C and Black and Tans. Mc Pherson shot dead Charles Lynch (seventy year old, father of Ned Lynch). The soldiers then turned to shoot Charles's son John and a neighbour, with R.I.C. Constable named Cooney intervened saving their lives. Before the British soldiers left they set fire to the Lynch family home, when leaving the area the soldiers shot and wounded John Grady, a local farm labourer, assaulted members of the Lorrie family (several of whom had previously served in the British army) and burned ricks of hay belonging to the Talty, Boland and Moroney families.

After McPherson shooting Charles Lynch, locals became enraged as he was an unarmed man. The situation become very volatile and in an attempt to defuse the anger the Black and Tans decided that McPherson, should leave the area. Therefore he and another nineteen year old named Robertson left Miltown under the cover of darkness and walked in the direction of Ennis. Two hours later they reached Connolly and to avoid the village, in which it was known to have some IRA men, they took the "new line" a small road parallel

to the village. It was here that they were met by local volunteers who arrested them holding them up on the road with the tap of a wooden barrel disguised as a hand gun. The tans were in uniform which was strange and they immediately declared that they were deserting. They were tied together and marched about a mile west of Connolly to Healys House, a deserted house used to house cattle where the two men were interrogated.

Ned Lynch the son of the dead man, was sent for to identify if either of the prisoners was the one who shot his father. For this process, two local youths were dressed up in the Black and Tan uniform and taken before Ned Lynch. He shook his head on both occasions and Lynch immediately recognised him. An officer of the volunteers insisted that McPherson should have a fair trial by a Sinn Féin court. Therefore both men were taken to Kinturk School, tried and found guilty and were to be executed if their command officer agreed.



*Kinturk school*

The volunteers then marched the two Tans southwards over rough country side of bog and scrub and arrived at Lisroe. This was now late into the second night and they all took refuge in Eustaces house in Furror. During the night McPherson the bolder of the two, asked to go to relive himself. Sonny Hehir was dispatched with him and McPherson had his hands tied behind his back. Somehow in the darkness McPherson

managed to escape and ran in a northerly direction towards the sea and Miltown. By dawn he had reached Dunsalleigh, he sheltered here for the day and walked the remaining three miles to Miltown after night fall.



*Mick Eustaces House and Mick himself (courtesy of Eustace Family Posts Nov. 2013)*

The next morning three Lorries of Tans and an open car with McPherson perched up front arrived in Lisroe and began a house to house search. While McPherson was under captivity he noticed the design of a musical instrument known as the Jews harp on the chairs. Eustaces house was only the second house to be searched and it was immediately identified by McPherson from the design on the chairs. The Tans set the house on fire and threw in the horse and cart and a ladder. The Tans were frustrated by their failure to find Private Robertson, so they killed livestock on nearby farms and assaulted a number of local men. (Paddy 'Con' McMahon) The only trace the British found of Robertson except for his bloodstained uniform cap.

Realising what would happen the volunteers along with Robertson had fled before dawn, as the Eustace family had been warned of the advance of the British raiders and they were not at home when the troops arrived in Furror. Mick Eustace was arrested by British forced two days later when he returned to examine the remains of his family home and he was interned in Limerick prison until 24 December 1921 before being released without charge.

Meanwhile, Robertson had been moved to the Connolly area and was being moved from house to house by night. The volunteers were stretched and he had to be killed. Details of the method of execution

remained a secret however it was widely known that stoning was tried but it is believed as fact that his end finally came as a result of a blow from a bogdale hatchet delivered by a local volunteer. Robertsons remains have never been found, it is believed Robinsons body was buried in the bog on Connolly which was owned by Colonel Frederick St. Ledger Tottenham, a local Unionist landlord. Tottenhams bog was chosen as the site for Robertsons burial since it was felt that his lands were unlikely to be searched by the British forces.

The Tans continued to search and they set up a base near Connolly Church to which every man they could find was brought before McPherson for identification. Many were terrified, they had a revolver placed in their mouths or were blindfolded and put standing against a wall but none was identified.

As a result of the reprisal a feeling of animosity against the volunteers arose among the local people. Many felt that they had behaved cruelly rather than efficiently. The local priest denounced them saying that they would carry the mark of their actions for the rest of their lives.

As recently as 1961 the Irish Press carried an item from a woman in London. She was enquiring of anyone in the Connolly area of County Clare could give any information on the whereabouts on a grave holding the body of her son. People were mystified by this but it emerged that the woman was the mother of Robertson and if she could prove that her son had been killed by the IRA. She would have been entitled to a pension from the British Government. Sadly no one came forward with any information.

## References

- (1) Eamonn Lynch, Bureau of Military History Witness Statement
- (2) Burning of Eustace's House in Furroor in Kilmaley Parish Magazine (Clare 1989), p. 64.
- (3) Paddy Con Mc Mahon Ernie O' Malley Notebooks, UCD Archives P17b/130 pp 30-42
- (4) <https://www.theirishstory.com/2013/02/07/missing-in-action-british-servicemen-secretly-buried-in-clare-during-the-war-of-independence/#.Xx8o9Z5KjIU>
- (5) <https://www.historyireland.com/20th-century-contemporary-history/missing-in-action/>
- (6) <https://www.cairogang.com/soldiers-killed/robertson/robertson.html>
- (7) <http://www.roneustice.com/EFP/PDF/EFP1113Final2.pdf>

*Booklet was compiled by Connolly Community Development CLG*

