

The following exclusive Tribune feature on the Pearsons is partly based on two illustrated lectures Philip McConway gave this year. The first lecture on 15 January at the Offaly Historical and Archaeological Society (OHAS) in Tullamore was entitled 'Spies, Informers, and Militant Loyalists: The Intelligence War in Offaly 1920-21'. The article also contains material taken from a lecture he delivered to Birr Historical Society 'The South Offaly No. 2 Brigade Irish Republican Army, 1920-21' on 15 October. The recent RTÉ Hidden History documentary 'The Killings at Coolacree' referred to him as the author of the 'The IRA in Offaly, 1920-21'. This is inaccurate. This was the subject of an M.Phil thesis which will be published at a later date. In his contribution, which was heavily edited, he was also quoted as saying the Pearson women were present at the execution. This is not his position having reassessed all the available evidence some months ago. On 25 September he notified this position in writing to the director stating it was dubious the Pearson women witnessed the execution.



William Pearson



William Stanley



J.J. Horan arrested and imprisoned in Tullamore Jail. He was later interned in the Rath Camp, Curragh. The Pearsons were widely believed to be responsible for his arrest.



Thomas Burke, GHQ organiser and later O/C Offaly No. 2 Brigade IRA.



John Dillon, a victim of the Pearson's informing activities. He was imprisoned in Tullamore Jail and later transferred to the Rath Internment Camp.



Peter Lyons, Intelligence Officer, 'D' Drumcullen Company. Peripheral involvement in the Pearson executions supplying a rifle to the Active Service Unit (ASU) who acted as the firing squad.



Michael McCormack, O/C, 3rd Southern Division (Offaly, Laois and North Tipperary). He was critical of the No. 2 Brigade's poor sniping abilities.



Michael Cordial wearing a Free State Army uniform where he served with the rank of Lieutenant. He was the IRA 3rd Battalion's (Kilcormac) quartermaster.

The Pearsons Of Coolacree

PART 1

BACKGROUND
THE Pearson family owned an extensive 341 acre farm at Coolacree, over a mile from Cadamstown and four miles from Kinnity. Originally a native of the Ballygeehan townland in Co. Laois, William Pearson bought the land in 1911 for £2,000. He avoided employing local labourers to work the sizable farm. He explained how he saved the expense of hiring workmen as "one man interested in the work would be worth six who were not." A man of delicate health, he left most of the farm work to his sons. He had four sons and three daughters. Richard, the eldest son, managed the farm. The Pearsons were a tight-knit and insular family. This self-exclusion and reluctance to hire local labour may lie in the family's Cooneyite roots.

THE PEARSONS AS COONEYITES

The family were recorded as members of the Church of Ireland in the 1911 census. They may have joined the sect after the census was taken or concealed their Cooneyite membership. The Cooneyites were an aggressively minded, secretive, and millenarian sect. In the death certificate of Susan Pearson her religious affiliation was described as "Christian," a euphemism for Cooneyites. In photographs of the family all the hair of the females was cropped short, a tell-tale sign of the strict adherence to Cooneyism.

The origins of the radical sect can be traced to William Irvine, a Scotsman. Irvine's excitable preaching and uncompromising zeal attracted many young people. Initially the languishing Methodist churches were fiercely denounced by the sect. Irvine railed on all other Christian churches as irrevocably corrupt and decadent. He poured contempt upon all organised forms of Christian worship and proclaimed marriage an empty institution believing the end of the world was nigh. In Co. Fermanagh the sect established a permanent footing and underwent renewed growth when Edward Cooney, a charismatic preacher, joined. By 1904 the sect was commonly referred to as Cooneyites although this was just one of many diverse names which included 'Dippers', 'Two-by-Two's', 'No Name Church', 'Go Preachers' amongst others.

Cooney's fiery zeal was ideally suited to the militant stance of the sect. Preachers of all groups other than their own were considered 'false prophets' and 'hirelings.' Only those who became followers of the 'Jesus Way' were regarded as true children of God and everyone else considered satanic.

PROTESTANT OPPOSITION TO COONEYISM

Protestants emerged as the most robust opponents of the sect. In the preface to Reverend Simon Carter Armstrong's pamphlet 'The Cooneyites or Dippers published in 1910 the sect was castigated for its 'pernicious teaching.' Armstrong warned anyone who gave 'help or countenance to them' as 'false to his Christian profession, and a traitor to his Church.' Some Protestants resented the presence of the sect in their local community whom they regarded as troublesome outsiders. A fiercely critical letter by 'A Loyal Subject' appeared in the King's County Chronicle (19 April, 1900) protesting against a meeting of the sect in a wooden hall erected at Bourne, midway between Roscrea and Templemore: 'These obstinate and self-opinionated saints...The whole thing has so far proved only

disgusting hypocrisy and profanity, and a moral nuisance in the neighbourhood.' In an article in the Impartial Reporter (13 July, 1917), the sect was described as "a movement which most sane people would regard as mischievous."

COONEYITES PROVOKE HOSTILE REACTION

Such was the intense anger the sect incited, whole communities often turned against them. On occasion Edward Cooney received police protection because of the fury he fermented amongst the general public. In Newtownards the townspeople threatened to expel Cooneyites as they were similarly 'hunted out' of Ballynahinch. At Strangford Lough the Cooneyites were 'almost driven into the sea.' In Swords windows were smashed at a house where the sect met requiring police intervention. In England the sect stirred up a hostile reaction. A crowd of 3,000 men and women drove Cooneyite 'Go Preachers' out of the quaint market town at Sudbury in West Suffolk. Overseers of the neighbouring parishes issued a signed statement warning the country people against the 'Tramp Preachers,' while a number of ministers of various denominations also signed a similar caution. At Debenham the quiet countryside was reported to be in 'uproar' over the activities of the sect.

THE PEARSON'S RELIGIOUS BIGOTRY

Although the young Pearson boys once hailed for the local national school team the family later developed a disdain for their Republican neighbours. In an arms raid in the area the IRA forcibly seized two guns from the Pearsons who refused to hand them over. From 1918 onwards houses of farmers and others known to possess shotguns were targeted by Irish Volunteers. Arms were collected from those who were friendly to Republicans and commandeered from Loyalists. Patrick O'Riordan, Vice Commandant of the 4th Battalion (Birr), recalled that 'generally speaking, the owners of the guns, Catholic and Protestant alike, gave them up to us voluntarily when we called, and in very few cases had the guns to be seized by threat or force.'

By 1920 the Pearson's ties with the local community underwent an inexorable decline accentuated by an acrimonious dispute of the family's origin. In what smacked of religious intolerance the family blocked Catholics from accessing a traditional local Mass path. Cooneyites deplored religious meetings held in a 'church building' as 'the false way.' The eldest brothers often galloped on horseback through groups of Sunday Mass goers to force them off the roads. The family was immersed in a deluge of sweeping sectarianism which was embedded in Cooneyism. Not to be outdone the sisters tried to block access to the Mass path by linking arms together to form a human barrier. The Pearson sisters were known to be as belligerent as their men folk. Women, on all sides, were regarded as more extreme than men. During the period of WW1 the wives of British Army soldiers, the so-called 'separation women,' often violently opposed the Irish Volunteers. With RIC connivance, the separation women along with a number of young boys orchestrated the attack on the Sinn Féin rooms in Tullamore on 20 March 1916. The following year the 'Separationist faction' organised a hostile demonstration and engaged in stone throwing when Eamon de Valera visited Tullamore attracting a crowd of



The ruins of the Pearson family farm at Coolacree, over a mile from Cadamstown and four miles from Kinnity.

10,000 people. At an anti-conscription meeting in Tullamore bricks and other missile were thrown injuring a number of Volunteers. The RIC complained how the IRA's war in Offaly 'would have waned before this [May 1921], if the influence of the women had not kept it alive.' Ernie O'Malley, a leading IRA Commander, observed: 'The girls and women glorified the fighting...The women were more bitter than the men.'

ARREST OF LOCAL REPUBLICANS

The Pearson's bitterness towards their community heightened following a heated argument between Richard and John Dillon, a local Republican. The family was almost certainly to blame when John Dillon and another Republican JJ Horan, were later arrested. The Pearsons were said to have gloated over the arrests by erecting white flags on their farm in a triumphant display of loyalist supremacy and mocked the IRA for having 'surrendered.' The Pearsons openly courted Crown force support and their actions were vigorously aggressive and provocative. Michael Cordial, Quartermaster, 3rd Battalion (Kilcormac), South Offaly No. 2 Brigade IRA stated: 'They were - particularly - so, the male members of the family, father and three sons - violently opposed to the National Movement and they looked with contempt on local Volunteers or IRA men.' As with numerous informers and opponents of the IRA in Offaly the family was warned several times to refrain from antagonising Republicans. Richard threatened to burn down the house of a Volunteer who warned him.

REPUBLICAN STRATEGY HARDENS TOWARDS LOYALIST COLLABORATORS

Since March 1921 Dáil Éireann accepted formal responsibility for the actions of the IRA. According to the RIC and the British Army the majority of people sympathised and supported the IRA in Offaly by the time of the execution of the Pearson brothers. In June 1921 the RIC in Offaly complained of 'losing the support of the large section in every community, who like to be on the winning side.' The Offaly IRA was in the ascent and experiencing widespread support. The popular legitimacy of Republicans was reflected in their substantial democratic mandate both at a local and national level as well as the success of the arbitration courts. In a fatal misjudgement the Pearsons banked on British victory and Republican defeat.

By June 1921 the burning of loyalist collaborators' homes, spear-

headed by the Cork IRA, was standard IRA policy. However, no person was regarded as an 'Enemy of Ireland, whether they may be described locally as Unionist, Orangeman, etc. except that they are actively anti-Irish in their outlook and in their actions.' The Pearsons were aggressive in their outlook and, above all, in their actions. Republicans pointed out how, until a very late stage in the war, there was no retaliation by the IRA when the houses and property of Republicans were destroyed by the Crown forces. This strategy of restraint was counter productive as the Crown forces continued their reprisals with gusto while giving a free hand to loyalist collaborators.

On 22 June 1921, eight days before the execution of the Pearsons, an IRA General Order on counter-reprisals with the sanction of Dáil Éireann was circulated. The order was deemed necessary to prevent destruction by the Crown forces of Republican houses and property. The order outlined how it was 'desirable' that 'the most active enemies of Ireland' should be ordered out of the country or have their lands confiscated. Republicans highlighted how the policy of moderation failed:

The restraint and moderation...under well nigh intolerable provocation, to retaliate with methods employed by the enemy had no effect upon the conscience or policy of the British government and a deplorable small effect upon their few active supporters in Ireland, who appeared to suppose that under the shelter of the terrorist British forces they could continue to commit high treason with impunity and at the same time contemplate the flaming homesteads of their patriotic fellow countrymen with cold indifference or active approval.

ATTEMPTED KILLING OF IRA VOLUNTEERS

From their intimate relationship with the Crown forces the Pearsons developed a false sense of security. The Pearson brothers became more emboldened and militant in challenging the IRA. In June 1921 Volunteers from the local Kinnity 'C' Company, 3rd Battalion were ordered to fell a tree to block the road at Coolacree. The planned road-block, a routine military operation for Volunteers, was in place for an anticipated attack on Crown forces in Birr. Shortly after midnight the three eldest Pearson brothers, Richard, 24, Sidney, 20, Abraham, 19 fired with shotguns on the Volunteers cutting down a tree. Two Volunteers were wounded, one of whom received a serious stomach injury.

Constantly pushing the boundaries with the local IRA, the Pearsons finally crossed the Rubicon. The local IRA's unwillingness to confront the threat posed by the Pearsons almost led to the killing of two of their comrades. The danger was left to the senior IRA leadership of the No. 2 Brigade to defuse. The IRA's kid gloves were now off. With the attempted killing of Volunteers the eldest Pearson brothers collectively signed their death warrant. Retaliation was now of imperative military necessity to safeguard local Republicans.

The No. 2 Brigade's Response On 26 June 1921 the attack was reported to Thomas 'Squint' Burke, the No. 2 Brigade O/C. At a 3rd Battalion meeting in Kilcormac Burke decided to execute the three eldest Pearson brothers and burn down their house. The No. 2 Brigade underwent an unprecedented ruthless direction when Burke became the new O/C in May 1921. Burke was a one time medical student attached to the Dublin IRA. He served as a GHQ appointed organiser in south Offaly on a weekly wage of £5.10 where he led a flying column. Ernie O'Malley was one of earliest GHQ organisers sent to Offaly for a short duration in 1918. In early 1921 two organisers were sent to south Offaly by GHQ. Both were unsuccessful and recalled by the IRA Chief of Staff. Undeterred, GHQ then sent Burke, one of their best men, in what was a determined effort to intensify the war in Offaly.

Burke replaced Sean Mahon as Brigade O/C who was arrested in early May 1921 during a major round up by the Crown forces. Burke was pivotal in reviving the fortunes of the much criticised Brigade. An ability to guarantee a more merciless and clinical approach was why GHQ elevated Burke to be the new Brigade O/C. From Portlanna, Co. Galway, Burke had none of the parochial baggage which may have curtailed the actions of his predecessor who was criticised for his poor leadership ability and incompetence. The young medical student's ascension signalled a new departure more to the taste of GHQ than the diffident local IRA.

Shortly after Burke assumed command a No. 2 Brigade Active Service Unit (ASU) numbering five Volunteers ambushed and fatally wounded two RIC constables at Kinnity on 17 May 1921. Six days later the O/C of this ASU shot a spy near Mountbolus. The following month Burke ordered the execution of two informers, both of whom were ex-soldiers. The local IRA was accountable to GHQ for any execution. In cases of 'communication with the Enemy,' GHQ required that all sentences were to be ratified by the Brigade O/C. Reports of executions were sent to the Adjutant General in GHQ. Suspicion alone was not enough to warrant an execution. Richard Mulcahy, IRA Chief of Staff, stipulated where there were any doubts surrounding the guilt of an informer GHQ was to be contacted. Mulcahy warned the O/C Tipperary, No. 2 Brigade: 'You must be very careful that where there is any doubt the correctness of any evidence alleged against spies the matter is referred to GHQ, before any action is taken against them.' Seamus O'Meara, O/C Westmeath Brigade IRA, saved several people who were suspected of spying from being shot as there was 'no actual proof, only suspicion.' The procedure adopted towards suspected informers was to send them a warning letter. Unlike in Offaly such warnings seemed to have the 'desired effect.'

In June 1921 Burke complained to GHQ over the executions of two informers, one in Cloghan and another near Belmont, that 'Warnings in such cases [sic] useless.' In relation to several other people strongly suspected of informing in the area Burke declared it was 'practically impossible to get proof of their guilt.' An informer ordered out of an area later joined the Black and Tans and subsequently 'convicted several men arrested in the district on various charges.' Tipperary IRA leader Dan Breen stressed: 'Our only mistake may have been that we set at liberty many whom we had ample evidence; they received the benefit of the slightest doubt.'

Militant loyalism not informing sealed the Pearson's fate. In a report sent to GHQ Burke recorded the reasons why he ordered the execution of the two Pearson brothers and the burning of their home:

The men who fired were recognised by the men present to be three brothers named Pearson. These Pearson were sons of a Protestant [sic] farmer in the district. They had always displayed open hostility towards the IRA and have been active in promoting the Ulster Volunteer movement in their district in which there are a number of 'Planters.'

RIC AND IRA UNANIMITY ON MOTIVE FOR EXECUTION

In the monthly report for June 1921, sent to GHQ, Joseph Reddin, Adjutant No. 2 Brigade, wrote: 'Two hostile Unionists executed for levying War on members of this Coy [Kinnity] when operating on road blockade a week previous. Also the house and its contents were destroyed.' At the Military Court of Inquiry in lieu of an inquest the RIC Queen's County Inspector maintained the motive for the execution was that Richard and Abraham Pearson saw two men, 'Sinn Feiners,' felling a tree on their land adjoining the road and told the men to clear off. When they refused the Pearsons fetched two guns, fired at and wounded two men. Both the RIC and IRA were firm and unequivocal over the motive for the execution. There was no ambiguity.

THE EXECUTION OF RICHARD AND ABRAHAM PEARSON

Up to thirty IRA Volunteers were involved in the operation to execute the Pearson brothers and burn down their house. The Volunteers were mostly drawn from the 3rd Battalion comprising four companies: 'A' Killagey, 'B' Kilcormac, 'C' Kinnity and 'D' Drumcullen. The main ASU numbered about ten men, armed with rifles, who acted as the firing squad. On 30 June 1921, at 4 p.m.

a number of Volunteers surrounded the Pearson's house. Other Volunteers went to where Richard and Abraham were working in a hay field about thirty yards away. The IRA ordered the two brothers to put up their hands and go up to the house. They were taken to a yard at the back of the house, told of the execution order, and then shot by the firing squad.

The ASU botched the execution and did not carry out a coup de grace by finishing the two brothers off with head shots. The Offaly IRA had limited experience in shootings and their training was minimal. They were not battle hardened veterans. Almost two weeks previously, the 2nd Battalion (Cloghan) IRA bungled the shooting of an informer. Three Volunteers armed with two rifles and a shotgun were lying in wait to kill the chief clerk at Perry's mills in Belmont. The Volunteer armed with the shotgun was overly uptight and fired prematurely when the target was over sixty yards away. This lapse in military discipline enabled the fortunate man, an ex-soldier, to escape with his life.

The Offaly IRA preferred to specialise in low risk sabotage. Their activities were praised by An tOglach, the IRA journal. The Offaly IRA blamed the flat countryside and the perceived poor terrain for their lack of success in ambushes. This was more of an excuse than a valid reason. There was a chronic lack of decisive leadership which had a debilitating affect on operations.

The No. 2 Brigade's military deficiencies were noted by Michael McCormack, O/C 3rd Southern Division. In a correspondence with GHQ, McCormack observed: 'Their sniping is poor, as you will doubtless have noticed & consequently the enemy have adapted an attitude of contempt for the Brigade in general.' McCormack expressed disappointment how IRA training camps could not be more elaborate due to the absence of 'good officer material.' The inadequate educational background of many of the IRA officers hampered aspects of the training regime. Volunteers who attended a training camp during the Truce were reported to be 'very slack in any military knowledge.'

At 6.55 p.m., while leaving the dispensary in Kinnity, Dr Frederick W. Woods was told the two Pearson brothers had been shot. Dr Woods immediately proceeded to Coolacree on a bicycle. On arrival at 7.30 p.m. he saw Richard Pearson lying on a mattress in a field at the back of the house. By this stage Richard lost a considerable amount of blood. Had medical assistance arrived sooner the lives of the two brothers may have been saved. Richard received superficial wounds to the left shoulder, a deep wound in the right groin and right buttock. There were also wounds to the left lower leg of a superficial nature and about six wounds to the back. Dr Woods dressed the wounds antiseptically. After attending to Abraham, Dr Woods returned to Kinnity at about 8.45 p.m. At 10.45 p.m. the RIC came to the doctor's house.

He again left for Coolacree. By the time the doctor arrived Richard was already dead. The cause of death was shock and haemorrhage. On examining the body again Dr Woods found a dangerous wound he had not previously discovered. Abraham was removed to Crinkle Barracks in Birr. He had extensive wounds to the left cheek, left shoulder, left thigh and the lower left leg. He was also wounded in the abdomen and the lower part of the spinal column was fractured. At 6 a.m. the next morning Abraham died from 'shock due to gunshot wounds.' The remains were interred at the family place at Ballacolla in Co. Laois.

The Pearson episode was tragic. However, the manner of their deaths was no less traumatic than many members of the Crown forces and IRA who died during this time. On 21 September 1920 RIC Sergeant Denis McGuire, 44, was shot through the right eye by an IRA sniper at Ferbane. He died

of his wounds in the County Infirmary eight days later leaving a widow and six children. Liam Dignam, 23, O/C 1st Battalion (Clara), No. 2 Brigade was wounded by the Black and Tans in Clara on 25 October 1920. Dignam, who was unarmed, was shot in the back, above the right kidney, leaving a large wound while trying to escape with his companions into a house. He fell at a door step writhing in agony. Removed to the County Infirmary he succumbed to his wounds on 21 March 1921.

Peter Lyons, IRA Intelligence Officer: 'They [IRA] did what they should do.'

The day before the execution Sidney, the third target, left with his father to attend a wedding festival in Tipperary from where they proceeded to Mountmellick. The IRA, using hay sprinkled with petrol, set fire to the Pearson home and out houses which were completely destroyed. Ricks of hay and straw were also burned. A group of Volunteers transferring the arms used in the execution back to Kinnity were surrounded by Crown forces but managed to escape. IRA Volunteer Peter Lyons had a peripheral involvement in the execution. He, along with another Volunteer, collected a rifle at Cloghan which was transferred to other Volunteers who in turn gave it to the IRA firing squad. Lyons blocked the road to prevent any surprise Crown force patrol interfering with the execution. A party of Volunteers were in position in Kinnity to harass any attempt by the Crown forces to carry out a reprisal. Over sixty years after the event Lyons remained unrepentant: 'People look back now and say didn't the IRA do this, and didn't the IRA do that, but they did what they should do. I mean to say those two went out and fired on them where they were fighting for their country.'

PROPAGANDA FALL OUT

The Pearson's mother, sisters, and two cousins claimed to have witnessed the execution. It is dubious if any of the Pearson women were permitted to view the execution. In the words of Ethel Pearson, a sister of the executed brothers: 'My mother who was in a fainting condition was carried by my two brothers into a little wood we call the Grove and we all went with her by the order of the raiders.' This was confirmed by Michael Cordial: 'The house was surrounded and all women folk were removed from the scene.' Ethel falsely swore how some of the IRA firing squad used shotguns. As she did not witness the execution this was mere speculation which was disproved by the medical evidence. Dr Woods gave evidence into how the wounds were caused by revolver or rifle bullets.

The execution offered an ideal opportunity to exploit the perceived bloodthirstiness of Republicans. A Dublin Castle propaganda article was produced which alleged the IRA looted the house while rehasing an allegation by Ethel Pearson about 'filthy muddy water' apparently given to her mother when 'plenty of clean water was obtainable.' It is unknown if the article, dated 9 July 1921, was ever published as it seems the intervention of the Truce consigned the horror story to cold storage.

The article was twisted for maximum emotional outrage to detumescence Republicans. It included macabre details of the IRA entertaining themselves by playing 'ragtime music' on a piano and violins while the execution was carried out. This propaganda strategy was known within Dublin Castle parlance as 'verisimilitude,' whereby stories would have the appearance of truth. The lies in the propaganda document were partly based on the deception of Susan Matilda and Ethel Pearson. Significantly, some elements of truth surfaced. In a telling slip the women were reported to have been 'placed on a little hill just outside the back of the house.' This was the grove, further underlining how the Pearson women were not in a position to witness the execution.

PART TWO NEXT WEEK



Motive for the Execution: The road where members of 'C' Company, Kinnity, were engaged in a road block operation by felling a tree. The three eldest Pearson brothers attempted to kill Volunteers by firing with shotguns. Two Volunteers were wounded, one of whom received a serious stomach injury. Both the RIC and IRA were firm and unequivocal on the motive for the execution.



The scene of the execution. Richard and Abraham Pearson were lined up against the inside wall to the left of the main archway. The execution was botched with the IRA firing squad failing to administer a coup de grace.

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The Pearsons Of Coolacree

PART 2

The Pearsons' Counter-Insurgency

By Philip McConway

William Stanley: The Luggacurran Militant Loyalist Militant loyalism was unusual in southern Ireland and practically non-existent in Co. Offaly. By July 1920 the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) was again reorganising in the northern province and was later absorbed into the special constabulary. In Co. Monaghan, where sectarian tensions existed with the formative UVF in earlier days, militant loyalists fought the IRA. In correspondence with GHQ Thomas Burke singled out the Pearsons as the ring-leaders in organising an Ulster Volunteer type movement in their area. This claim should not be dismissed as there is documentary and circumstantial evidence to support it.

The family harboured a militant loyalist fugitive, William Stanley, a distant cousin. He was ordered out of Luggacurran in Co. Laois by the IRA after becoming embroiled in a plot with the Auxiliaries to arrest an IRA Volunteer. Armed with a pistol Stanley was a member of an informal militant loyalist group. The Auxiliaries were English recruited ex-British Army officers who fought in WW1. Many struggled to find employment on their return home. They were elite mercenaries sent to Ireland to the boost the morale shattered RIC weakened through resignations and IRA assassination. Paid £1 a day they struck fear into the civilian population by their indiscriminate terror campaign. They burned, looted, shot at civilians and gained such an unsavoury record their commander F.P. Crozier resigned in disgust at their conduct.

By harbouring a militant loyalist with ties to the Auxiliaries the Pearsons presumably approved of Stanley's counter insurgency role. Under the alias Jimmy Bradley, Stanley passed himself off as a workman for the Pearson brothers. From local memories he was a familiar face because of his regular attendance at local social gatherings and dances. He attracted suspicion from locals over his constant probing and queries into the activities of Republicans. Stanley came from a virulent loyalist background and his father was a member of the Orange Order. According to the historian Leigh-Ann Coffey, Stanley's father, Henry, was a reputed spy for the Black and Tans. The Stanleys had a malevolent reputation as planters or 'land grabbers' in Luggacurran. Michael Sheehy of the Laois IRA recalled the planters as 'members of the Orange Branch.' Sheehy told Ernie O'Malley how the planters had loyalist regalia in their houses. The IRA raided their houses which netted a small arms supply of a few rifles, some revolvers and shot guns. The Stanley family saw themselves as unabashed neo-colonialists, upholders of the empire, hardened by a defiant planter psyche which sought no truck with the treacherous natives. Stanley was steeped in the same narrow-minded sectarian animosity which the Pearsons displayed towards

their neighbours. On the day of the execution at Coolacree Stanley jumped a ditch and fled the scene. He was fired on by the IRA and later captured at Mountbolus. As he was never under sentence of death the IRA released him.

William Pearson: A Self-Confessed Collaborator

By a stroke of luck Sidney Pearson avoided execution. William Pearson, 56, and Sidney, attended a wedding festival near Roscrea. Leading IRA Commander Ernie O'Malley revealed the existence of militant loyalist activity in North Tipperary. Now some owners of the homes [Cloughjordan and Modreeny area] were known as Orangemen, who kept the ceremonies of that Order, including the Orange Walk. They also became members of the Ulster Volunteer Force, though they had not been as active as their friends in the neighbouring Roscrea battalion area, who had an intelligence service of their own and who lay out to surprise wanted Volunteers until their zeal had been suitably discouraged.

In the Dunmanway-Ballinacree-Murrageh area in Co. Cork an underground espionage organisation known as 'The Loyalist Action Group' resisted the IRA. Attached to the 'County Anti-Sinn Féin Society', 'Unionist Anti-Partition League' and to 'The Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland' this group was suspected of killing two Republican brothers in their beds near Enniskeane in February 1921.

The Pearsons may have been involved in a much wider conspiracy with contacts among like minded loyalists in North Tipperary. Some of the details related by O'Malley resemble the Pearsons activities. Locals insisted the Pearsons ran a counter insurgency campaign with British Army personnel working undercover as labourers on their farm from where they raided local houses at night disguised with blacked faces. In a similar case, a British Army intelligence officer operated from the house of Captain Sawyer Waller, a large land owner in Moystown. William Pearson was proud of his reputation as a staunch loyalist and 'upholder of the Crown.' He later admitted how he 'assisted the Crown forces on every occasion, and I helped those who were prosecuted around me at all times.' There is no evidence his neighbours were 'prosecuted.' This was one of several lies Pearson told to obtain financial compensation. Robert E. Weir, a close friend of the Pearsons, recorded: '...it was solely due to his loyalty that he lost his house and children.' Michael Cordial recalled how 'Heavy explosions were heard while the house [Coolacree] was burning which indicated that a large amount of ammunition was stored there.' The RIC mentioned a rumour that two guns fell out of the roof.

The Pearsons as Informers

The Pearson's were emmeshed in a Crown force intelligence network where they passed on information concerning the identities and residences of local Republicans. In several

pension applications of former Volunteers the name Pearson was synonymous with spies. John Guilfoyle (Kinnitty Company), John Quegan (Drumcullen Company), Frank Doyle (Kinnitty Company), as well as two unnamed Volunteers listed the Pearson as spies. In Cadamstown Joseph Carroll, John McRedmond and Tom Donnelly were arrested soon after the execution and imprisoned in Tullamore Jail. They were later transferred to the Rath internment Camp in the Curragh, Co. Kildare. Susan Matilda Pearson and her sister claimed to have recognised some of the Volunteers who participated in the execution having seen them before in Kinnitty.

Charlie Chidley, a British Army serviceman who drove staff officers to Coolacree, deserted and joined the IRA providing damning details about the Pearson's counter insurgency campaign. Chidley continued his IRA activities during the Civil War. When arrested and wounded, the Free State Army exploited the propaganda coup of 'An Englishman named Chidley, who served with England's Army against the IRA, and again served against it in the ranks of the Irregulars.'

Peter Lyons, the chief Intelligence Officer for Drumcullen, 'D' company, 3rd Battalion observed how the Pearsons were 'very friendly with the soldiers who used to pull up and ramble there.' From August 1920 onwards

passing on information to the Crown forces in May 1921. In collusion with another man who later fled the country, the farmer was blamed for the arrests of Republicans who were 'barbarously ill-used by the military and dragged into lorries and taken away.' The farmer was spared execution possibly because of his social connections and previous friendship with Republicans.

Some historians argue the prosperous farming counties of Kildare, Carlow and Wicklow contributed to the low intensity of violence in these counties. After lucrative profiteering during WW1 many conservative minded large farmers were convinced there were still economic benefits to retain the political status quo. William Pearson was determined to capitalize on any financial gains he could accrue during WW1 by tilling as much land as possible. This was somewhat contradictory to the Cooneyite faith which apparently despised materialism. Members of the sect were encouraged to sell all they owned to go preaching.

The Pearsons fitted into the large farming class who had a record of opposition towards Republicans. There was a notable difference. The Pearsons sought to enforce this hostility through militant action.

Offaly IRA's Distaste for Bloodshed

Their status as large farmers, religious bigotry, and an unflinching militant loyalism were the primary factors why

informers by the No. 2 Brigade were guilty. Cathal Brugha, the Minister for Defence, later supported the execution of the Mountbolus spy with the comment: 'I could not disapprove of the action taken in this case.' Brugha was conscientious in his fair prosecution of spies and convincing proof was demanded in each case. In relation to the informers shot at Cloughan and Belmont it was admitted in the House of Commons how both men were on 'very friendly terms with the troops stationed in the vicinity of their homes.'

Burke had an impeccable record in the targeting of spies and informers. In contrast, the North Offaly No. 1 Brigade shot a suspected informer near Killeigh who was generally believed to be innocent. Some years afterwards the real informer was killed in a threshing accident. This individual was thought to be in league with a high ranking Volunteer, the O/C of 'F' Company (Killeigh), 1st Battalion (Tullamore). They used the victim's address to pass letters to the Crown forces.

GHQ: The Outside Influence

There is evidence of unease within the Offaly IRA when ordered out on ambush operations where there was a prospect of killing. Thomas Dunne, O/C 2nd Battalion (Daingean), No. 1 Brigade, revealed his distaste at '...having to obey, to be forced to lie in wait for men -

it is a thing never went down with [me]... not even when it meant a policeman or Black and Tans. If this was the mentality of senior leaders such as Dunne it can be expected that the concerns of rank and file Volunteers were more pronounced. In other words GHQ demands for fatalities did not rest well with leadership figures in Offaly. In many ways the Offaly IRA was far too soft when waging war. GHQ retained a tight grip over the Offaly IRA. By the time of the Truce both Offaly Brigades were commanded by GHQ appointed men from outside the county. It was the outsider Thomas Burke who decided on the execution of the Pearson brothers and the burning of their house. He was the calibre of person Fr Philip Callery, P.P. Tullamore con-



Coolacree House in its former days.

the British Army began taking their intelligence operations far more seriously. Unit and Brigade Intelligence Officers were ordered to go out into the country in mufti (civilian disguise) 'as much as possible.' They were struck off other duties so that they could 'devote their whole energies to their intelligence work.' Although dangerous, the favoured method of obtaining information was by personal interview, preferably at night under the cover of darkness. While Intelligence Officers worked in close co-operation with the RIC they also had independent sources of information throughout their districts. Blacklists were drawn up on local Sinn Féin, IRB, and IRA leaders, with an emphasis on 'the really dangerous men.' It was impressed on all ranks, especially officers, on reporting important incidents as well as 'scraps of information' to their nearest regimental Intelligence Officer. It is inconceivable British Army soldiers would not have utilised their regular visits to Coolacree to gather intelligence.

The Pearsons As Large Farmers

According to the RIC, large farmers were one of the most hostile groups to the Republican movement in Offaly. The British Army's The Record of the Rebellion in Ireland in 1920-21 disclosed how 'Farmers were often willing to make friends even with officers and voluntary or involuntary told them much that was of interest.' British Army accounts of the loyalist allegiance of large land owners were echoed by Republicans. Tom Barry, the West Cork IRA Commander, pointed out how 'The unpaid informers came from the wealthier landowning class who hated the Republican movement and all it stood for.'

A member of the Farmers' County Executive in Offaly was unmasked as an informer. He was sentenced to death for

TWO BROTHERS KILLED SONS OF OFFALY FARMER

Richd. Pearson (23) and his brother Abraham (20), Cadamstown, Offaly, were fatally shot on Thurs., and their house burned.

They were the sons of an extensive farmer. Few details are available, but the Dublin Castle report, giving the victims' address as Coolacree, Kinnitty, declares they were "shot by a party of about 30 armed men. Richard died 2 hours later, and Abraham died yesterday at 6 a.m. After the shooting the raiders set fire to the house of the Pearson family, the building being completely destroyed."

The Irish Independent, 2 July 1921, coverage of the execution of Richard and Abraham Pearson. The ages are incorrect as is the time it took Richard to die.

demned as the 'outside fanatics' sent by GHQ to escalate the war in Offaly. The action against the Pearsons was more of reflection on the GHQ hard-line mentality, enforced by their representative Burke, than the timid local IRA. The RIC blamed an outside influence for the increase in IRA activities in the counties of Cavan, Laois, Leitrim, Kildare, Carlow and Wicklow. The Subterfuge of William Stanley

William Stanley and David Pearson, the youngest brother, engaged in a spirit of denial by fostering the myth the family was innocent. It was a psychological defence mechanism where guilt was suppressed. They were adamant Richard and Abraham were 'killed for no reason.' In what was a fabrication, Stanley stated the Pearson family received a warning from a Volunteer present at the No. 2 Brigade's 3rd Battalion meeting in Killoormac where Thomas Burke gave his order. How reliable was Stanley? He invented a fictitious story of dum dum bullets used in the execution. He also misled his son over the attempting killing by the Pearson brothers of Volunteers engaged in a road-block operation. Two Volunteers were wounded, one seriously. William Stanley's unconvincing spin was that Richard Pearson fired a shot 'over the heads of intruders.'

Stanley later told his son how a Volunteer supposedly warned the Pearson family. The Volunteer apparently told the family how Richard and Abraham Pearson as well as William Stanley were to be executed. But if this phantom Volunteer was genuinely present at the meeting he would have related the exact details of Burke's order: Execute the three eldest Pearson brothers and burn down their house. William Stanley was never under sentence of death which was why he was later released when captured by the IRA. Land Grab Theory Not Verified by RIC

The flimsy claim of David Pearson that the motive for the execution was a land grab was unfounded. David said his

brother Sidney arrived back to Coolacree from England twelve months after the execution and started ploughing. It was alleged that the next morning a note was attached to the plough warning him to stop or he would be shot. David concluded: '...it is evident their main objective was to take over our land.' Curiously in Sidney's application to the Irish Grants Committee (IGC), Pearson's allegation of the death threat by a note left on a plough was a concoction. If land was the motive the local IRA would have executed the Pearsons on any pretext and on the slightest provocation, especially after it was established they were passing information and were openly collaborating with the Crown forces.

If the extent of the alleged persecution of the Pearsons existed it would surely have come to the attention of the RIC. Yet neither the RIC County Inspector reports nor the RIC Breaches of the Truce documentation referred to land agitation at Coolacree. Agrarian disturbances in Offaly peaked in May 1920 with the RIC reporting twelve cases for that month. There was soon a dramatic fall off in similar incidents. By 1921 agrarian disturbances were negligible in RIC reports for Co. Offaly. In June 1921, when the Pearson brothers were executed, there were only twelve agrarian disturbances recorded for that month in the entire country as opposed to the huge figure of 2,244 political cases. Republican arbitration courts and tighter IRA discipline successfully subdued land hunger. In land disputes most of the courts sided with the legal owner. While Sinn Féin supported a policy of land redistribution the violent seizure of land was anathema to its leaders. GHQ was opposed to IRA involvement in land disputes. That Burke, GHQ's representative in south Offaly, would discredit and risk the ire of the IRA Chief of Staff by getting sidetracked on an impulsive whim over land is highly implausible. Well educated, disciplined, and clinical it was these qualities that set him

apart from the local IRA.

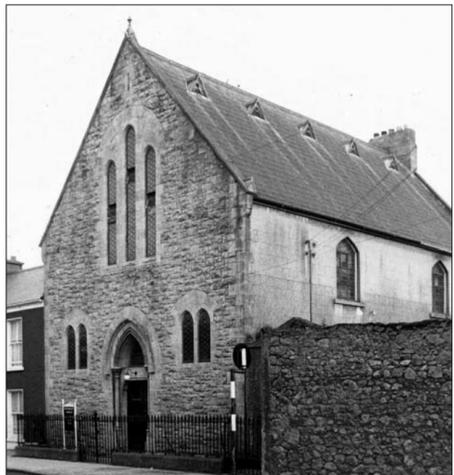
The Pearson's Distortions

With the prospect of a money-spinning compensation payout it was to the Pearson's advantage to exploit the helpless victim tag. In 1929 William Pearson was awarded £7,440 in compensation by the IGC. The ample distortions and lies put forward by William Pearson while seeking compensation from this Committee left his credibility strained. His son, Sidney, had a claim of £20,000 rejected. Sidney did not seek a reference from anyone in Co. Offaly when it came to his unsuccessful application for compensation to the IGC. Instead he turned to two Protestants in Co. Laois. Local sympathy for the Pearson family was thin on the ground. People in Cadamstown and Kinnitty were aware the activities of the family brought suffering to their community. Protestants did not speak out or express solidarity with the family: 'They brought it on themselves.'

William changed his story about his whereabouts on the day of the execution. In October 1921 at Birr Quarter Sessions before Judge Fleming he declared he was in Mountmellick. In 1927 in a statement to the IGC he related how he was away seeking help from the Crown forces, presumably at Crinkle Barracks near Birr, from where he returned to find his house burned and two sons 'lying dead [sic].'

He asserted he could not sell his farm as no auction was permitted. This was a falsehood. There was an auction but the reserve price was not reached and the sale was withdrawn as reported in the local press, the nationalist Midland Tribune and the unionist King's County Chronicle. Some of the dishonest claims were tantamount to fraud. William Pearson claimed £100 for 100 acres of pasture land he alleged Republicans wilfully flooded. The claim was disallowed as the Committee detected the lie maintaining the fields in question flooded every year since about 1885.

Continued.....



Members of Tullamore Methodist Church were vocal in their condemnation of the anti-Catholic pogroms in Belfast while adding 'the South of Ireland has been notably free from sectarian violence...'



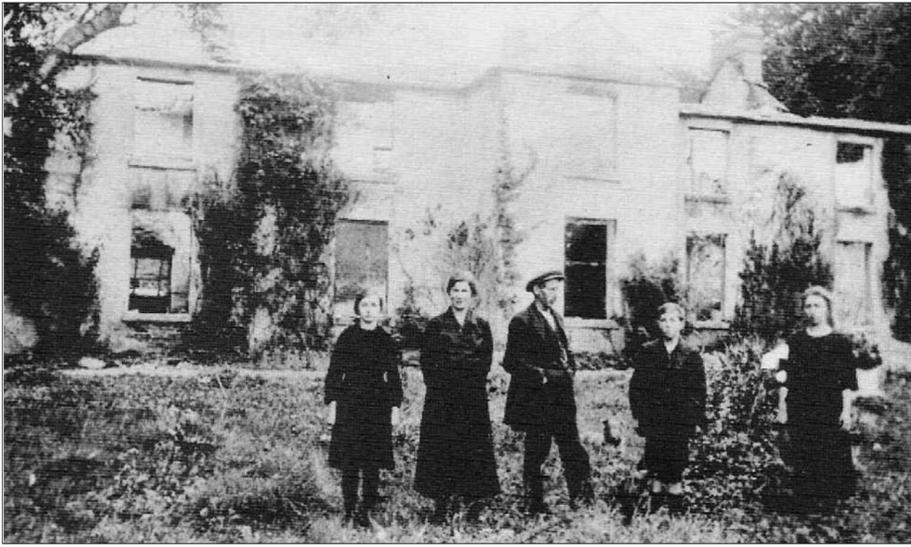
The burnt out remains of Kinnitty RIC barracks. This was one of two ambush positions occupied by the IRA ASU, numbering five Volunteers, who fatally wounded two RIC men on 17 May 1921.

In an exaggerated claim for £1,850 he stated he could graze and fatten 150 cattle on 150 acres of pasture land. This was apparently 'ruined by public trespass.' It was recommended by the valuer that he be awarded £240 as the maximum number of cattle on that acreage of land was eighty, not the inflated figure of 150 put forward by Pearson.

A glaring untruth by William Pearson to the IGC was the charge that 500 men were involved in the execution. The hyperbole was repeated to a reporter of The Melbourne Argus on their arrival in Australia. Aided by skilled legal advice William Pearson was determined to maximise his perceived victim status. He spun a web of deceit even maintaining one of his daughters was shot by the IRA: 'One of their sisters tried to save them [Richard and Abraham Pearson] and a volley was fired at her and the hair was cut away from her scalp by bullets.'

From August 1921 to July 1923 William Pearson claimed he 'endeavoured' to carry work on his farm where he lived in the outhouses. He alleged he could not work as he was 'prosecuted.' It is questionable if he was physically fit to do farm work. Prior to the execution he did minimal work on his farm owing to ill-health. Indeed his health was so poor he was advised on medical grounds to leave England for a more suitable climate to alleviate his bronchitis. The London-based Southern Irish Loyalists Relief Association highlighted his poor physical health and went so far as to question his mental state: '...mentally he is not able to think quickly, and I would ask that due consideration be made by your committee if he is called upon to answer questions.'

During the Civil War he asserted his land was 'used by anyone who cared to drive their cattle upon it.' This may be true as anarchy reined when law and order collapsed. Extreme measures were taken by the Free State in Offaly. On 26 January 1923 three boys Patrick Cunningham, William Conroy and Colum Kelly were officially executed in Birr in a desperate if ultimately futile



The aftermath of the burning of Coolacrease House. L-R: Emily, Matilda, William Pearson, David and Ethel.

the people receiving grants were far wealthier than the British taxpayer contributing to them. The IGC report was not published nor was the recipients and how much they were awarded. Far from struggling financially William Pearson had £6,000 in a bank account which brought in £240 per year before he applied for compensation to the IGC. Fears that the IGC were akin to a gravy train were justified in the case of the Pearsons.

Offaly IRA's War Unsullied by Sectarianism

In an act of further dishonesty David Pearson hinted at a sectarian motive for the execution. As with the allegation of a land grab this was a smoke-screen.

Religious bigotry derived from the Pearsons not Republicans. There is no evidence to suggest the Offaly IRA deliberately stoked religious tension or that Protestants and minority groups were systematically targeted. An examination of RIC County Inspector reports, local and national newspapers have not uncovered evidence of sectarian animosity in Offaly attributable to the IRA.

Infirmary Committee, Tullamore, was against the proposed take over of the infirmary by the County Council and removal of the patients elsewhere.

In Clara, where there was a modest Protestant population, the historian D.B. Quinn argues '...there was no danger to Protestants on the street at night...' F.R. Mountgomery Hitchcock, the Rector of Kinnitty and distinguished historian, categorically denied the presence of any Republican inspired sectarianism where he lived. The south of Ireland, where he lived and worked as a clergyman in the Church of Ireland for twenty five years, was 'absolutely free from sectarian feeling, not to say bitterness. Both Churches are on the friendliest terms.' He had 'never known one case of religious intolerance. We can only live and let live down here.'

At Belfast on 7 June 1920 there was a similar announcement from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland: '...nowhere had a hand been raised against one of the isolated buildings nor against a single individual Presbyterian, as such, in the south and west...'

In April 1922 Reverend Neil of Limerick, repeated these sentiments at a Presbyterian meeting in Dublin proclaiming how his coreligionists remained unharmed during the War of Independence: 'We have practically suffered nothing in the South of Ireland... There have been abnormal cases, but the great body of our people have not suffered, and I state here, without fear of contradiction, that no one has suffered as a Presbyterian. There is no religious animus...' The most vigorous denials of sectarianism came from leading Protestants not Republicans.

Offaly Protestants expressed revulsion over sectarianism, emanating from the North not the South. Tullamore Methodists, headed by Reverend William R. Martin issued an appeal published in the Offaly Independent (22 April, 1922) expressing '...their abhorrence of the sectional bitterness manifesting itself in acts of violence in the North of Ireland' while expressing horror at the 'recent horrible reprisals culminating in the killing of children' in Belfast. The Tullamore Methodist appeal concluded: 'We further desire as members of 6 religious minorities in Southern Ireland, to put on record that the South of Ireland has been notably free from sectarian violence...'

Walter Mitchell, a Rahan native and IRA Volunteer of the No. 2 Brigade, was a Protestant and a formidable Republican stalwart. For the remainder of his life he was



Fr Philip Callary, PP Tullamore, condemned the fatal shooting of RIC Sergeant Henry Cronin at Tullamore on 31 October 1920 on 'outside fanatics.'

one of the most prominent Republicans in Offaly. Mitchell ran as a Sinn Féin candidate in the 1927 general election in the five seat Laois-Offaly constituency. He polled an impressive 2,939 first preferences coming sixth out of a field of ten candidates.

After the execution, the Pearson family resided at Crinkle Barracks, Birr. The British Army arrived at Coolacrease to protect the livestock. Some unscrupulous locals exploited the Pearsons' troubles to steal property from their farm. An exaggerated report from Dublin Castle alleged that on the night of 12 July 1921 'ten horses, ten cows, one bull, eighty-eight young cattle, fifty-one sheep and lambs, three rams, three fat pigs, one dray and creel, and a set of common harness stolen off Pearson's lands.'

The inaccuracy of this report is indicated in the misspelling of Coolacrease and gave the location in the Tullamore area instead of Birr. The RIC County Inspector's report is

more reliable recording the stolen items as three pigs, a cart and a set of harness. One wonders how diligent the British Army were in protecting the property when this theft occurred on their watch. Two men who stole property were later brought before a Republican Court and ordered to compensate the family.

In October 1921 at the Birr Quarter Sessions William Pearson was awarded £7,800 compensation. Judge Fleming intimated if Pearson agreed to rebuild his house a larger award would have been granted. The family eventually emigrated to Australia. In 1923 their farm was sold to the Irish Land Commission who later divided up the land among local people. Initial preference was granted to British Army ex-soldiers.

The plot of 'Bridge to Terabithia' centres on 12-year-old Jess Aarons and 12-year-old Leslie Burke. Jess is a shy, withdrawn elementary school boy living in a financially-struggling, rural family in Virginia, USA. Leslie is the new girl at Jess' school, and she arrives on the school's athletics day. She enters a running event which she wins with ease, despite her classmates calling it a "boys only" race. Jess is, at first, quite sour about this and wants nothing to do with Leslie, but Leslie's persistence in meeting him soon pays off, and soon the two become good friends. Their friendship starts when Leslie offers Jess a piece of gum on the bus, and he accepts.

Jess shares his secret love of drawing with Leslie and together they venture into the woods located beside their homes in the countryside, where they swing across a stream (or 'creek' in American parlance) on a rope and find an abandoned tree house on the other side. Here, Leslie invites Jess to open his mind and release the imaginary and frequently beautiful worlds within him. He agrees to this and the two friends invent a new world they call

An Colún

What's So Great About Reality Anyway?

By Derek Fanning

I had not heard of the novel 'Bridge to Terabithia' (by Katherine Paterson) until I saw the 2007 film of the same name. 'Terabithia' is a really important film as it deals with the themes of alienation and imagination in children, but these themes are crucial for adults too. Adults can be just as unthinking, conformist and unimaginative. 'Terabithia' reveals to us that which we already knew but which we have to constantly remind ourselves of as it is absolutely vital, which is that we must free our minds, release our imaginations and thereby come into communion with beauty and therefore with God. Freeing our minds in this manner is actually an incredibly practical thing to do but sadly many human beings are not as practical as they like to think they are.

One of my favourite poets is Lord Byron, a man whose name is synonymous with flamboyance and romanticism, and Byron often wrote of the cruciality of devoting ourselves to beautiful things, of devoting ourselves to the realm of imagination. He contrasted this imaginary and aesthetic realm with the realm of reality; he saw reality in a negative light. In one poem he wrote of,

'The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow.'

Another writer that I admire and who had many valuable things to say on this theme was Howard Lovecraft who lived from August 1890 to March 1937. Lovecraft was a child prodigy, reciting poetry at the age of two and writing complete poems by six. His grandfather encouraged his reading, providing him with classics such as The Arabian Nights, Bulfinch's Age of Fable and children's versions of The Iliad and The Odyssey. When he became an adult and started writing fiction, he was frequently critical of people, pointing out that they lacked aesthetic and imaginative sensibility. For example, he once commented powerfully that, 'Whilst they strove to strip from life its embroidered robes of myth and to show in naked ugliness the foul thing that is reality ... I sought for beauty alone.'

The plot of 'Bridge to Terabithia' centres on 12-year-old Jess Aarons and 12-year-old Leslie Burke. Jess is a shy, withdrawn elementary school boy living in a financially-struggling, rural family in Virginia, USA. Leslie is the new girl at Jess' school, and she arrives on the school's athletics day. She enters a running event which she wins with ease, despite her classmates calling it a "boys only" race. Jess is, at first, quite sour about this and wants nothing to do with Leslie, but Leslie's persistence in meeting him soon pays off, and soon the two become good friends. Their friendship starts when Leslie offers Jess a piece of gum on the bus, and he accepts.

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Terabithia, which comes to life through their imaginations as they explore together. Jess and Leslie base the menacing creatures of Terabithia on the people (i.e. the bullies) that give them a hard time at school.

The last portion of the film is emotionally overpowering and one movie critic said it would move even the most cynical of people to tears. In its last portion the film brings us through profound suffering before we emerge into a brighter and happier place. What it seems to be saying is that suffering is inevitable and unavoidable in this life, but we do have a choice as to how we respond to that suffering. We can respond to it in an optimistic and stoic frame of mind, or else in a negative, pessimistic way. Jess goes through terrible suffering and he grieves awfully for a long time but eventually he transcends that and the way he transcends it is by embracing even more fervently the beauties within his imaginary worlds. The English 19th Century Poetess Elizabeth Barrett Browning will provide more illumination on what I am talking about. In her poem 'Greek Slave' Browning shows that she is on the same side as the Jesses of this world for she urges people to,

'Pierce to the centre
Arts' fiery finger, and break up ere long
The serfdom of this world.
Appeal, fair stone,
From God's pure height of beauty against man's wrong!'

Browning claimed that atheists are dullards because they 'cannot guess God's presence out of sight.' Like Jess, she was an enemy of excessive worldliness and materialism as she knew the wrong that it could lead to. The 19th Century was a period of developing industrialisation, of the confident and pragmatic bourgeois; its atmosphere was often antipathetic to dreamers, artists and aesthetes. Jess finds himself in a world which is capitalistic and materialistic. Such atmospheres inevitably lead to the production of outsider-artists, men and women who are dissatisfied with life and yearn for something spiritual, for something beyond. In one striking statement, Jess says 'What's so great about reality anyway?'

Precisely. As I said already, people frequently pride themselves on their great pragmatism but it is often impractical to be too practical (if you follow!) because excessive pragmatism can lead to all sorts of bad things, including what we call nowadays 'dysfunctional' families; it can lead to suffering and anguish.

Browning knew what was the opposite of this suffering and she knew what was really important: 'They say Ideal Beauty cannot enter
The house of anguish.'

I am also presently reading another great book which ties in neatly with all of the preceding. This is 'Against Nature' which was written by a Frenchman called Huysmans in 1884. It was considered a scandalous book and one can see why as it spoke about homosexuality, and as there are still many sexually prudish people in society today its content would still scandalise. However to become all scandalised and moralistic would miss the point of the book which is daydreaming. 'Against Nature' is driven by the phenomenon we call daydreaming and as this experience is common to every human being upon the

planet then we can all relate to this book.

'Against Nature' centres on just one character called Des Esseintes, who is an ailing, languid, and sometimes not-very-nice aristocrat. Des Esseintes pushes his daydreaming to such an extreme that he becomes eccentric which briefly entertains his bourgeois visitors. There is a famous description of a funeral feast to mark a minor personal misfortune: 'The dining-room, draped in black, opened out on to a garden metamorphosed for the occasion, the paths being strewn with charcoal, the ornamental pond filled with black basalt and edged with ink, and the shrubberies replanted with cypresses and pines. The dinner itself was served on a black cloth adorned with baskets of violets and scabious; candelabra shed an eerie green light over the table and tapers flickered in the chandeliers. While a hidden orchestra played funeral marches, the guests were waited on by naked nesses wearing only slippers and stockings in cloth of silver embroidered with tears.'

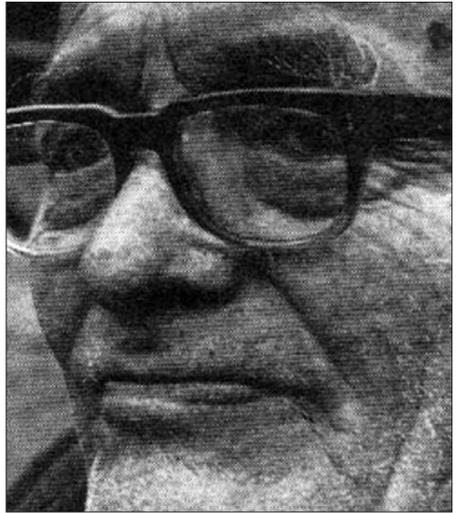
This is 'Decadence' which was a literary movement in the late 19th Century. One of its famous advocates was our own Oscar Wilde who refers to 'Against Nature' in 'The Picture of Dorian Gray'. In the awful and hypocritical trial against Wilde, Huysmans' book was produced as evidence against the defendant. Homophobia, sexual prudery and hypocrisy are still common in 2007 and we have a long way to go before we arrive at an openminded and compassionate attitude to sexuality instead of a judgemental, harsh and moralistic one.

Des Esseintes has a room which is illuminated by a soft, warm pink hue created by lamps shining through Indian Satin. Here he brings his lovers (all women in this instance) and as he makes love to these women in this pink room he appreciates 'the beneficial effect which this tinted atmosphere had in bringing a ruddy flush' to their complexions.

The women themselves like this room: 'They loved steeping their nakedness in this warm bath of rosy light and breathing in the aromatic odours given off by the camphor-wood.'

Des Esseintes turns away in distaste from the ugliness, superficiality and stupidity of society and confines himself to an isolated Parisian villa where he expresses his desire for luxury and excess. He feeds his aesthetic appetites with classical literature and art, exotic jewels, rich perfumes and a kaleidoscope of sensual experiences. Des Esseintes, like Baudelaire before him, was a dandy and there is a marvellous and eccentric scene in the first chapter, 'His final caprice had been to fit up a lofty hall in which to receive his tradesmen. They used to troop in and take their place side by side in a row of church stalls; then he would ascend an imposing pulpit and preach them a sermon on dandyism, adjuring his bootmakers and tailors to conform strictly to his encyclicals on matters of cut, and threatening them with pecuniary excommunication if they did not follow to the letter the instructions contained in his monitories and bulls.'

Eventually, like Oscar Wilde in real life, Des Esseintes turns to Roman Catholicism, because a dissatisfaction with life is essentially a spiritual problem and its solution lies in mysticism.



Walter Mitchell, a Protestant, was a formidable Republican stalwart.

attempt to stamp out the level of freelance criminality.

Of the twenty-six different claims of William Pearson to the IGC only twelve were upheld as 'fair'. John Wheatley, a Labour MP, expressed concern about the overly generous payments of the IGC to Irish people who sought to get 'their hands into the pockets of the British Exchequer.' He contended that

In January 1921 a potential ominous development occurred when the Reverend R.S. Craig, Rector, Tullamore, found the words 'IRA Beware Craige [sic] you are doomed by the High St. boys...' Any suggestion that this was motivated by sectarianism was quickly dispelled by the RIC who stressed the incident was political in its origins. Craig, as a member of the County



In a major blunder the IRA failed to capture any arms after the ambush at Kinnitty.



Chathaoirleach of Offaly County Council Cllr Eamon Dooley, Citizen's Information Board Representatives and Mr. Jim Stone Chairperson of Co. Offaly Citizen's Information Service pictured at last weeks Launch of the Disability Advocacy Service in the Tullamore Court Hotel were standing at back L R Tom Kelly Area Manager CIB, John Long Regional Manager CIB and Jim Stone Chairperson Offaly Citizen's Information Service with seated in front L-R Helen Lahert Citizen's Information Board Advocacy and Accessibility Manager, Cllr Eamon Dooley, Chairman Offaly Co. Council and Eileen Fitzgerald Senior Manager Regional Services CIB.