

Time & Tide

Volume
-7-



PUBLISHED BY

Skerries Historical Society

ISSN 1649 1378

Designed by
Steven Hope

PHOTOGRAPHS:
Joe Murray & the SHS archive

Stained glass windows photographed by
Diarmuid Synnott BA (Hons) NCAD

p 87-90,106
Ken Ryan
Abbey Stained Glass Studios
Kilmainham
Dublin 8

Printed by
Beta Printing Services

Published by
© *Skerries Historical Society* 2010
email: skhistsoc@eircom.net

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Front Cover
Sammy Shiels, *Breadman* 1960

Back cover
Tom McDermott, *Carrier* 1930

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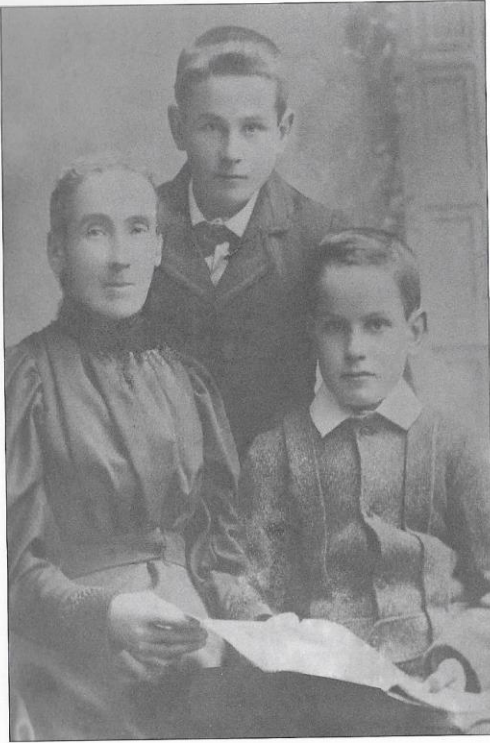
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*Brothers in Arms -
Matthias and Joseph Derham
Irish Volunteers 1916*

FRANK WHEARITY

This story is about two Skerries brothers, Matthias and Joseph Derham (hereafter cited as they were in life, Matt and Joe). The pair served as Irish Volunteers during the so-called revolutionary period when the fight for Irish freedom was paramount in many people's minds. So much so, that some people were prepared to make huge sacrifices in the pursuit of it, and Matt and Joe were two such people. However, as interesting and as eventful as their lives undoubtedly were, nevertheless, the author wishes to capture, not only their experiences, but also something of the flavour of the times that they lived in, of their families, and of the wider community in which they were an integral part. Their stories were originally researched and written as separate papers for the Skerries Historical Society (S.H.S), and the author hopes that having brought their experiences together into one article, that their combined story is enhanced, rather than diminished by so doing. It might be appropriate to begin with a brief look at the Derham family background

Catherine Derham with her sons Matt & Joe.
Courtesy of Lillie Derham



*Back Row: Matt & Joe Derham. Centre Row: Jennie McGowan nee Derham, Matthias "Sea Captain" with grandson & Totty. Front Row: Granddaughters.
Courtesy of Lillie Derham*

as it applied to Skerries, a town with which they have had a long and fruitful association stretching back into the latter part of the nineteenth century.

The early years

The earliest mention of the family in the church records was of Matthias Derham, Hoar Rock, Skerries and Catherine Morgan, Church Street, Skerries, who were married in 1869. Their children were, Peter, born 1870; John, born 1872; Jane (Jenny), born 1874; Thomas, born 1876; Catherine (Totty), born 1881; and the subjects of this article, Matt, born 1883, and last but not least, Joe, born 1886.¹

The 1901 census shows the Derham family living at house number seven Hoar Rock, with nineteen year old Totty acting as head of the household. Her mother Catherine had died in 1899, while her father Matthias, a sea captain, spent a lot of time at sea. Living with her were her brothers John, aged twenty-nine years, and Thomas, aged twenty-five years, whose occupations were given as sailors. Also living there was Joe,



Sketch of Derham's home at Hoar Rock, by local artist Hugh Ryan.
Courtesy of Tom Derham

then aged fourteen years and attending school. Matt's name was absent from the census form as he was then serving an indentured apprenticeship with William Flanagan, New Street, and was presumably living with his master as was usual for that time. Moving onto the next census in 1911, which shows the family then living at number thirty-five Hoar Rock, and with the head of the household having been taken over by Matthias Derham, who had retired, and was then aged seventy years. Totty was single and living with her dad, and though she had no occupation in 1911, she later worked as a librarian in the Skerries Carnegie free library. Maree Baker recalls Totty as being a very strict librarian who took a keen interest in what her younger borrowers were reading. The census showed that Matt was again living with his family, and working as a carpenter and joiner. Meanwhile, Joe had secured a job as an assistant clerk (abstractor class), in the Irish Land Commission's Dublin office.² Joe had been

a class monitor at St Patrick's National School, Church Street. It had been thought that he would go into teaching, however, when he passed the boy clerk examination for the civil service, he changed his mind and opted for the job mentioned above.³ Matthias, who despite his retirement had a continuing, interest in the ownership of two Skerries schooners the *Foam* and the *Esperanza*,⁴ However, he subsequently passed away in October 1914 at the age of seventy-four years.

Matt's apprenticeship indenture form is still held by his family, and it provides an opportunity to look back in time to see what was expected of an apprentice learning his trade at the turn of the twentieth century. The indenture document in Matt's case ensued on 1 August, 1901 and remained



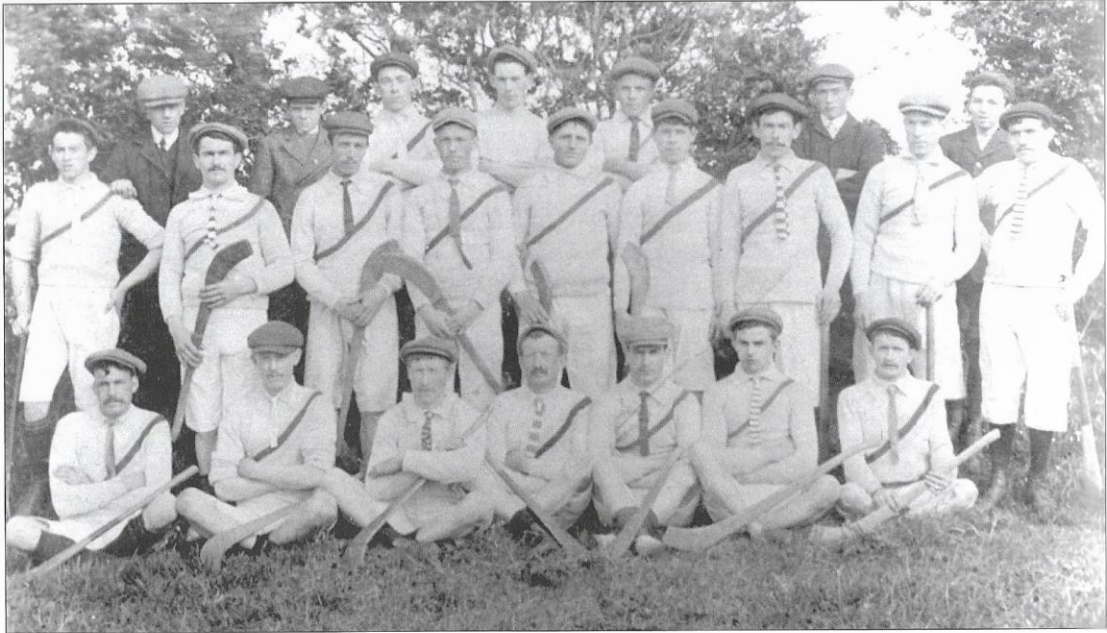
Joe Derham
Courtesy of Tom Derham

in force until 1906 when Matt became a journeyman carpenter and joiner. All parties were legally bound to its terms and signed by the employer, W. H. Flanagan, Matthias Derham, Rats Row [Hoar Rock] and by Matt himself. The procedure was witnessed by Francis Flanagan who also signed the form. The employer, whom thenceforth would be considered the trainee's master, received £20 sterling prior to the commencement of the training period. On the other hand, Matt would not get any wage until two full years training had been successfully completed, after which he would receive three shillings a week. In subsequent years his pay would rise by yearly increments until a sum of six shillings per week was paid to him in his final year of training. The section regarding the rules and regulations as pertained to Matt, makes for interesting reading:

... during which Term the said Apprentice his Master faithfully shall serve, his Secrets keep, his lawful Commands everywhere gladly [to carry out]. He shall do no damage to his said Master nor see it to be done of others, but that he to his Power shall let or forthwith give warning to his said master of the same. He shall not waste the goods of his said Master, or give or lend them unlawfully to any. He shall not commit Fornication or contract Matrimony within the said Term. Hurt to his said Master he shall not do, or cause or procure to be done by others. He shall not play at Cards, Dice Tables, or any other unlawful games, whereby his said Master may have Loss with his own or others [smudged word] during said term. Without licence of his said Master he would neither buy nor sell. He shall not haunt or use Taverns, Ale houses, or



Matt Derham
Courtesy of Lillie Derham



HURLING TEAM 1909

Back row: Richard McLoughlin, Christy Dolan, Larry Carr.

Middle row: Jack Healy, Matt Derham, Pat Casey, Tom Coleman, Robert Beggs, John Kirwin, Tom Keating, Tommy Grimley, Mick Grimes.

Front row: Peter Derham, Nick Kelly, Phil McCormack, John Joe Farrell, Joe Derham, Syl Healy, Pat Phillips.

Play houses, nor absent himself from his said Masters Service Day or Night unlawfully, but in all things, as an honest and faithful Apprentice he shall behave himself towards his Master and all his, during said term. And the said master his said apprentice in the same art which he seth, by the best way and means that he can, shall teach and instruct, or cause to be taught and instructed, with due Correction; finding unto his said Apprentice'.⁵

Though the strictures placed on Matt were severe, nevertheless he had other ways of passing his leisure time. He had an interest in hurling, as did many other young men at that time. There is an extant photograph of the Skerries Hurling Club team, c. 1909, which depicts Matt, and his brothers, Peter and Joe.⁶ Peter later emigrated to New York State where he worked on the Lehigh Valley barges, until his untimely death from a work accident in 1931. Thomas also emigrated to New York where he later married Maria Alicia Shaw of New Street, Skerries. He died in 1925. Another brother, John, who remained living with his sister at Hoar Rock, died in 1931.⁷ Meanwhile, their sister Jenny married Vincent Gowan (McGowan), in 1898 in Skerries. Their son John (Jack) was killed in action while fighting on the Anti-treaty side in the Civil War, in July 1922.

The 1916 Rising and its aftermath

In Easter week 1916, Matt and Joe found themselves involved in rather dramatic fashion, Matt was with the Skerries Company of Volunteers, then known as C company which along with companies at Lusk, Swords, and St Margaret's, were collectively known as the Fifth battalion of the Dublin brigade, and locally under the command of Thomas Ashe.⁸ Joe, by that time was resident in Dublin to be near his job, and was a member of F company, First battalion, Dublin brigade, and was assigned to the General Post Office (GPO) garrison, under the command of James Connolly and Patrick Pearse. In the interest of clarity, Matt's experiences will be looked at first, before returning to what was happening to Joe at that time, and whose experiences were no less dramatic than his older brother.

It is fortuitous that Matt saw the necessity of putting down on paper for the benefit of his family an account of his activities during Easter week, and this allows an insight into what he and others acting with him got up to during that momentous week in Irish history. He names the Volunteers from Skerries who were with him, on the heading of his note and these were, Séamus McDonnell, Terry Sherlock, Thomas Hand, James Kelly, Peter Gibbons, Jack McGowan, and Joe Thornton. The note relates:



1916 Medal
Courtesy of Lillie Derham

Mobilised at 4.30, Easter Sunday at crossroads, Rathbeal, Saucerstown, Swords, with amassed 'Fingal Brigade', was on outpost duty until 10.30 withdrew to Mr Frank Lawless's yard and dismissed at 12.30 [am] and sent home. Monday, got garbled accounts of the happenings in the city, but nothing definite until some residents of there, returning by the last train, told me about the Post Office being occupied, went round to the Volunteer who had rifles and ammunition. The railway arch at Skerries, the only direct exit from the town, was then already guarded from the evening. However, I got the boys who had rifles and ammunition and we succeeded in running the guards for the rifles and ammunition on the countryside of the railway, stored in an old farmhouse. We were told by the country people that there was no possibility of going the roads in the area as any person crossing had been held up by the military and police. We decided to send on scouts without arms in two directions to locate the brigade [Ashe and his Volunteers from Lusk, Swords, and St Margaret's] as they were supposed to be about Kileek or Santry. The scouts got in touch with the Volunteers but did not return, but on the Tuesday afternoon I received a message to hold on in Skerries until Wednesday, as the brigade were coming to attack the military wireless station in Skerries. Wednesday, received a message that the attack on the wireless station was off, that the brigade went west to Garristown. Under cover of evening I got out of Skerries and proceeded to form up with the remaining Volunteers and arranged to go singly and meet at Kileek next morning. Four of us met there and could not find the brigade or any trace of them. We cycled for hours without getting in touch and decided to go into the city and see if we could get in touch with the city forces. We were held up at the metal bridge in

Drumcondra, so we detoured down Clonliffe Road to the North Strand. We got held up there by soldiers and retreated back to the metal bridge and as curfew was on, we left the city again and cycled through Fingal, without getting in touch with the Volunteers. We went through Oldtown, Ballyboughal, Garristown, and towards evening we met a man, an over-seer on the roads who told us that there was fighting going on in the direction of Ashbourne, we proceeded hence, 'only to get in touch with the Volunteers, after the fight was over'. We camped that night, next morning broke camp and proceeded in a body to new base camp. On Saturday night, fearing an attack on camp, took up duty on the outskirts of the farmyard until recalled at dawn. We got the order to surrender from headquarters, which order was verified by a messenger going into the city on a motorcycle sidecar. We were rounded up on Monday evening by the military and taken into Swords and then by lorry to Richmond barracks. With many others I was deported on May 2nd, to Knutsford prison, hence to Frongoch [North Wales] and released at the end of July. Signed Matt Derham, 72 Church St, Skerries. [His] address in 1916 [was] Hoar Rock, Skerries.⁹

Meanwhile, in regard to the general situation in Skerries during Easter week 1916, an extract from a report in the *Irish Weekly Times*, rebellion handbook, provides interesting reading:

... Destroyers land troops at Skerries. Of the outlying portions of County Dublin affected by the rising, Skerries had not the least exciting experience. On Easter Monday a war demonstration had been advertised, with Mr John J. Clancy, KC, member for North Dublin, in the chair, and speakers from the Recruiting Department. When the occupants of the platform had taken their places word reached the local committee that the bridge at Donabate had been blown up, that the train bringing the Chairman and speakers was held up, and that the Sinn Feiners were out. Notwithstanding this grave news, it was decided not to alarm the audience, but to hold the meeting. Mr Battersby, KC, was accordingly moved to the chair. Local speakers – Captain Taylor, Mr Fitzpatrick, and Mr Malone, with Lieutenant Clancy – took the place of the absentees, and

certificates were given to the relatives of Skerries soldiers – one hundred in all – and the meeting passed off successfully.

On Tuesday, 25th April, the police got word that the Marconi station recently erected by the Admiralty was to be attacked and some of the principal houses raided. There was consternation at this report, as the wireless operators were unarmed, and there were only seven soldiers to guard the station, while the police force, under Sergeant Burke, to whose energy and ability throughout the week a warm tribute must be paid, was wholly inadequate to protect the town. So great was the alarm that some of the townfolk left their houses, and paced the shore as the safest place in case of a raid. The attack, however, did not come off; but on Wednesday morning information was received of the capture in succession of Swords, Donabate, where a second attempt was made to blow up the railway, and Lusk, which had the reputation of being a hot-bed of Sinn Feiners, and it was definitely stated that the rebels were on their way to Skerries. Preparations were at once made to receive them. Captain Battersby, on sick leave, wounded, took command of the small force in charge of the wireless station. Miss McGusty and the Misses Clifford and Dr Healy, organised a Red Cross hospital in the Carnegie Library.

Boatloads of soldiers: people from the village gathered on the hill above the Marconi station in order to see the coming fight, when a destroyer was seen steaming at a great pace from Lambay Island. As she drew nearer, it was seen that she was crowded with soldiers. A rush was made by the townfolk to the harbour, and in a very few minutes boatloads of military were quickly rowed to the pier, and two hundred men of the North Staffordshire's, under the command of Captain Clay, were landed and marched to the wireless station, where they entrenched in the ditches surrounding the station. The town was saved, and in the offing two gunboats patrolled, their guns being within reach of the coast roads, by which the rebels were expected to arrive.

On Thursday, 27th April, the Stafford's dug themselves in, put up barricades of carts and sandbags on all the roads leading into Skerries, and made every preparation for a siege. The Harristown and Ashbourne rebels were stated to have joined the Lusk contingent, but if this were

so they must have received news of the military force which landed, and the guns of the warships trained on the town and roads, and come to the conclusion that discretion was the better part of valour, as the next news was that they had returned to Dublin. The scare was subsequently at an end.

The North Staffords remained some time in Skerries, and nearly twenty persons were arrested and sent to Dublin . . .¹⁰

Before Matt was despatched to Knutsford prison, Cheshire on 2 May, he had been held for a number of days at Richmond barracks, Dublin, where, perhaps unbeknown to him, Joe was also held. In any event, two other Skerries men accompanied Matt to Britain, along with over 300 other Volunteers, they were Séamus McDonnell, druggist, Little Strand Street, and John Kelly, grocer's assistant, Balbriggan Street. Meanwhile in Skerries, the North Staffords had rounded up and sent to Arbour Hill prison, the following, Joseph Beggs, fishmonger, The Square; Robert Derham, motor mechanic, Hoar Rock; William Ganly, farmer, Baldungan; Peter Gibbons, farmer, Baldungan; Thomas Hand, traveller, Milverton; Peter Keane, teacher, Strand Street; Michael Lacey, blacksmith, Strifeland, The Hills; Denis Maguire, farmer, Strifeland; Joseph McGuinness, bootmaker, Cross Street; Thomas O'Reilly, baker, North Bank; Henry Reynolds, warehouseman, Balbriggan Street; Michael Shanley, vanman, Hoar Rock; John Terry Sherlock, labourer, Town Parks; Joseph Shields, clerk, Cross Street.¹¹ From the above it appears that some of those men named on Matt's note, had rather unfortunately as it turned out, managed to return to Skerries prior to the military roundup and thus found themselves prisoners of her Majesties Government. These were Sherlock, Hand, and Gibbons. In the case of Joseph Thornton, seed merchant, he had been arrested elsewhere and was subsequently sent to Wakefield prison along with 273 others on 13 May 1916.¹²

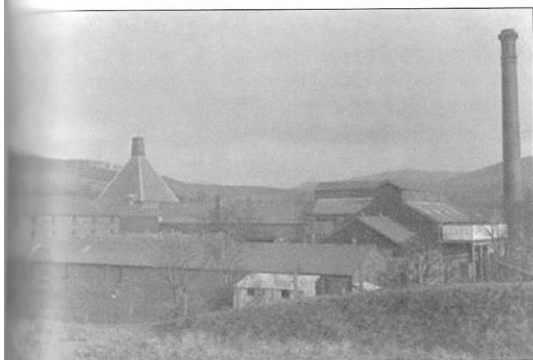
While Matt was in jail, only one of the presumed numerous letters sent home by him still survives. It was dated 26 June 1916 and had to do with a job of work that Matt had started but could not finish due to his arrest. The note was headed; Matthias Derham, no. 369, Irish prisoner of war, Frongoch [camp], North Wales:

Dear Mrs Monks. It is time I should write to you after my hasty departure and leaving your house unfinished. I need hardly say how much I regretted having to cause you such worry and trouble, but I have word from home sometime since to say J. Flanagan finished the work. I hope everything is done to your satisfaction and that you will be lucky in letting this summer, but I suppose there will not be as many visitors out this summer. Totty told me in her letter you gave her some money, if it suits you to give her the remainder you can do so. You can keep £5 or more if you like which will be security for you that I will see everything is done to your satisfaction when I go home, which I hope will not be long now, the weather here is very unsettled so far. Trusting this finds you and daughter in good health.

Yours very sincerely, Matt Derham.¹³

The above note provides an insight into how Matt viewed the circumstances in which he found himself. It shows that his primary concern was for the welfare of Mrs Monks, and not one hint of his own negative predicament comes through in the letter.

The Irish prisoners had control of many of the day-to-day affairs of the camp, and William Ganly, farmer, Baldungan, was elected chairman of the General Council, which was a select committee set up by the prisoners to look after the welfare of the camps Irish prisoners.¹⁴ Matt had, at some point after 9 June 1916 when Frongoch Camp opened to receive them, been transferred there from Knutsford. He was subsequently released along with Peter Gibbons, on 27 July 1916, and the pair made their way home to Skerries.¹⁵ However, prior to the ending of his term in captivity, Matt's situation had caused something of a stir within the St Vincent de Paul Society. A research paper by Margaret Harford carried out in 1973 relates what occurred. Matt had been a long-standing member of the Skerries branch and acted as its president on occasion. However, it was his membership of Sinn Fein and his internment for Irish Volunteer activities which saw the St Patrick's branch of the above society come under scrutiny from its Dublin headquarters. An extract from Harford's paper relates the situation:



Frongoch Camp, Merionethshire, Wales

... In early April, 1916, the Skerries branch were asked to send two delegates to the Council meeting at Drogheda, the President and another were to go. There were meetings of this Conference on 16th and 23rd April, both of which the president attended, but there was not another meeting until 25th June, and no one represented Skerries at Drogheda on 7th May, if indeed that council meeting was held, for the president of Skerries Conference was in jail. There is no reference in the minute books as to the 'no meetings', nor to the fact the Rising of Easter week had brought the president, Mr Matt Derham, to jail, in Knutsford barracks. Nor is there ever any reference to any political event in these 114 year old records, not even as explanations of a particular spell of hardship.

In June the Conference paid debts of £10.19.9. No other meeting was held until 1917. Presumably the other members waited until their revered president was released in the general amnesty. Two members came from the General Council or the Superior Council of Dublin and expressed their opinion that new executive officers be appointed, or it would be its painful duty, to obtain powers from Paris, to abolish St Patrick's Conference. The minutes of this meeting were adopted, as a faithful record of what happened at it, and signed on 6th May, 1917, by the said Matt Derham. It was attended by Peter Keane, national teacher, Thomas MacNamee, national teacher, and James Grimes. No comment then, no criticism but obviously and typically of Skerries, no further meetings were they forced to hold. In obedience to Canon Dolan's [PP] advice, they did not meet until after the anniversary of Easter Sunday, actually not until 25th September. Mr Derham declared he had resigned 18 months before and he proposed Mr John Flanagan as president, unanimously elected, he presided over meetings for a year and resigned, Mr Derham was president again, Skerries loyalty to men and ideals asserted itself. These meetings were held in the band room in the Square...¹⁶



Watch GPO 1916
Courtesy of Tom Derham

While all the commotion was happening in Fingal and Skerries; what was the experience of Joe Derham at that time? As already mentioned Joe was then living and working in Dublin, which, in Easter week 1916 was a battleground with British military hardware and troops being brought to bear on the Volunteers then holed up in various buildings [garrisons] around the city centre. However, unlike at Skerries where the mere show of military might was sufficient to ward off Thomas Ashe and his Volunteer force, such was not the case in Dublin, where a campaign of bombing was brought to bear on the city's central infrastructure until much of it lay in ruins at the end of a mere few days. Dublin Castle records show that at the beginning of that week, Joe was under surveillance by the Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP). An entry in their records relates that 'Joseph Derham left his lodgings at 26 North Frederick Street on Monday evening and was in the general surrender at the end of that week'.¹⁷ Many of his colleagues in F company also found themselves in the GPO garrison on Dublin's O'Connell Street. Joe was given the responsibility for the garrison time-keeping by the fabled Fenian, Thomas J. Clarke. A timepiece intercepted from the mail, was entrusted to Joe on the basis that it would later be returned to its rightful owner. However, as the owner could not be found, Joe had to keep it.¹⁸

The traumatic events in the GPO during Easter week are well documented elsewhere, however, Joe shared the hellish experience alongside several of the leading figures behind the rebellion, two examples being James Connolly, and Patrick Pearse. In other garrisons dispersed throughout the inner city were several other Skerries Volunteers. Bairbre Curtis in her work 'Fingal and the Easter Rising 1916', provides the following names, Thomas O'Reilly, Robert Beggs, Joseph McGuinness, William Fox, James Shields, William Woodcock, and Joseph Derham.¹⁹ Woodcock served in Boland's Mills, while Beggs was in the Four Courts, where, according to a family source, he sustained a serious leg injury in the fighting there.²⁰

After being held for a short time in Richmond barracks, Joe was despatched along with 198 other Volunteers to Wandsworth prison, London, on 8 May 1916. Additional information from Dublin Castle records state that he was placed as number 43 C, by the DMP, on a list of subversive suspects. The letter C denotes a classification of how likely a prisoner was to re-offend against the peace of the realm. Those classified as A prisoners were deemed the most dangerous, while C the least. The authorities at the time

listed ten Volunteers in the A category, thirty-four in the B, while in C, Joe was one of 212 prisoners. Skerries had one man in the highest category, Séamus McDonnell, whose file states that 'he was an active local organizer of Irish Volunteers, who appeared to have plenty of money but had no employment. He surrendered with the other rebels after Ashbourne to the police'.²¹ Joe, like his brother, eventually found himself in Frongoch, and remained there several months after Matt had gone home. He was however, given an offer of early release on 26 October 1916, provided he agreed to terms of a bond to keep the peace. The chief commissioner of the DMP had consented to the release of ten prisoners, one of whom was Joe. Six of the men, were, like Joe, public servants at the time of the rebellion, and they were not to be reinstated in their former positions after release.²² However, while all this was going on, it appears that a telegram had arrived at Frongoch in regard to a sick relative at home. The ill person was probably his brother John whose health had long been poor. A letter dated 9 November 1916, gives details:

A. P. Magill, Irish Office, Queen Anne's Gate, S.W., London. Dear Magill, enclosed is a copy of a letter for the information of Mr Dukes. 'Sir, I am directed by the secretary of state to refer to your telegram of the sixth instant, with regard to the temporary release of the Irish prisoner Joseph Derham, to say that the secretary of state has authorised Derham's release for one week on parole, to visit his brother who is reported as being seriously ill, and had wired directions to that effect to the commandant of Frongoch interment camp. I am, to ask you to be so good as to see that the prisoner is sent back to Frongoch in due course. Your obedient servant, G. H. Waller, under-secretary, Dublin Castle'.²³

Another letter dated 11 November 1916

Mr Magill, the enclosed copy is sent to you for Mr Duke's information. Sir, I am directed by the secretary of state to refer to your letter of 26 October, in which you forwarded the names of ten



War of Independence
Medal
Courtesy of Tom Derham

Irish prisoners who might be released on giving the usual undertaking and on the execution of a bond. A foot-note was attached to the effect that five of these persons, namely, Joseph Derham, Michael Lynch, Joseph Lyons, Edward Price, and Michael Sheppard, all of Dublin, are stated to have been civil servants and are only to be released on condition that they are not to be reinstated in their former positions. In these circumstances, the usual letter was sent to the commandant, Frongoch, as regards the other five, they should be given the opportunity to sign the undertaking. As regards the first five, an inquiry was addressed to you unofficially through the Irish office in London, as to whether these persons had in fact been dismissed from the Civil Service, since without this information the secretary of state would not be in a position to take any steps towards their release. The Irish office, yesterday evening furnished a list of seven persons dismissed from the public service, and in which occurred three out of the five names, namely, Derham, Lynch, and Sheppard. The usual letter has therefore been sent to Frongoch about these three also. As regards one of them, Joseph Derham, I am to say that this man is at present in Dublin, having been granted a week's leave on parole to see a relative who is reported seriously ill. The telegram authorising his discharge was sent to Frongoch on the 6th instant and the man is therefore due back on the fifteenth or sixteenth, according to the time of his leaving. I am to suggest therefore that should there be time before his return to Frongoch, advantage might be taken of his presence in Dublin, to give him an opportunity to sign an undertaking, of which a copy is enclosed, and if he does so, to arrange for the execution of a bond. Should the lord lieutenant think fit to adopt this course, the secretary of state would concur in any reasonable extension of Derham's temporary leave of absence, which his excellency might think fit to grant. The original police report is enclosed. The secretary of state will be glad to learn as early as possible whether the remaining two civil servants mentioned in your letter of October 28th, namely, Joseph Lyons, and Edward Price have been dismissed. I am your obedient servant
G. H. Waller.²⁴

Another letter dated 21 November 1916

A. P. Magill, Irish office, London. November 21st, 1916. Dear Magill, Joseph Derham, of North Frederick Street, Dublin, has been given an opportunity to sign the usual undertaking, but has failed to do so. This man was an assistant clerk in the land commission and has been dismissed from the public service. Yours, G. H. Waller.²⁵

Joe appeared to have set his mind against participating in any way with the terms of the early release bond offered to him and to many other Volunteers at that time. Nevertheless, not all detained men shared Joe's views on the matter, after all each Volunteer's circumstances were different. One Volunteer, who chose to comply with the bond terms and thereby secured his early release from Frongoch, was Joseph Thornton, Balcunnin, Skerries. A report in the Chief Secretaries registered papers in the National Archive relates that he agreed to sign the bond on 25 September 1916, and subsequently on 30 October, the bail fee of £100 was paid for him by John Thornton, Skerries, and Peter Collins, Donabate. Subsequently Thornton was released on 10 November 1916 and returned home.²⁶

Perhaps due to the confusion surrounding the coming and going of Joe from Frongoch, and the authorities unsuccessful plans to get him to sign a bond, his actual release date is not known. However, the most likely date appears to have been in December 1916, though the possibility remains that he may not have gone back after his release on compassionate grounds to visit his sick brother. The authorities may simply have grown weary of him and allowed the order for his return to Frongoch to lapse. In any event, he and his brother Matt would have endeavoured to pick up the threads of their erstwhile lives once again. However, in the case of Joe, his appointment with the Land Commission had ended and along with it the opportunity to find work in any part of the public service.

Meanwhile, Matt took up his carpentry business in Skerries as before. In addition, in 1919, at St Patrick's Roman Catholic Church, Skerries, he married Elizabeth (Eilis), Kelly. She had been born at Birkenhead, England, but had been living with her aunt at Illford, Essex. Her aunt's surname was also Kelly, and she was of Irish stock. It appears that Eilis used to holiday in Skerries and had met her future

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husband there. After their marriage the couple lived at 'Shamrock Cottage, Little Strand Street, with their first child Matthew who was born earlier in 1920. Curiously, the baptismal records of this child and the next were not found in the St Patrick's Parish Church record.

In 1918, Joe was residing at 56 Eccles Street, and had acquired work as a commercial traveller. Also in that year, on 29 July he had travelled to London to secure his marriage to Annie Fitzmaurice. Family sources relate that the pair had met while Joe was interned in 1916, probably while he was in Wandsworth prison. She used to visit the Irish prisoners with a group of likeminded ladies. Her family background was Irish, her parents having emigrated from Ballygar, County Galway, to Liverpool for a time and thereafter to London. In 1921, Joe, Annie and their two children were living at 48 Hollybank Road, Drumcondra. Joe was working as an independent sales agent supplying the products of a 'Fine Chemicals Company' based in Dublin, to customers throughout that county and also in Meath. From his invoice book it can be shown that among his customers, a few were based in his hometown of Skerries. He made regular sales of 'Dromona sticks and cream', along with a product called 'Nynos cream' to J. F. McGowan, merchant, Dublin Street; Frank Murray, merchant, Church Street; Francis Flanagan, Commercial house; Harold Power, hairdresser, Cross Street; and also to Martin J. Usher, chemist, Strand Street.

It is notable that while Joe was servicing a relatively wide sales area, that he did not own or drive a car. He went everywhere locally by bicycle and used public transport for longer journeys. However, his sales were posted to his many customers directly from his supplier's premises without the necessity of passing through Joe's hands at all. Joe took little if any direct part in the War of Independence, and according to family sources, during the subsequent Civil War he told anyone who would listen 'that it was all madness'. The family relate that Joe on occasion used refer to Frank O'Connor's book *The Big Fellow*, which describes an incident on the evening prior to the killing of Michael Collins on 22 August 1922:

... Collins went on to Limerick and from there to Cork. On Monday he saw friends and people with whom he had business. In the evening there arrived an old friend of Frongoch days. Collins

sprang to his feet, delighted, and had the room cleared. He pretended to believe that his friend had come to ask for a commission in the army. But his friend did not agree with either side. He thought they were all mad. Collins fell serious at once. They argued, pulling the threadbare theme to and fro again . . . His friend pleaded earnestly for agreement, any sort of agreement that would save the nation. Very well said Collins, see me tomorrow night, I may have news for you. His friend interpreted this as a hope that he might be in a position to negotiate with some republican leaders next day or at least was in touch with someone who might . . .²⁷

While on a trip to Cork in 1951, when the topic of the book came up in conversation, Joe Derham remarked to his son Joseph 'that man was me'. Meanwhile returning to the period after the Civil War, in 1923 Joe served on a committee whose purpose was to investigate how best the country's resources could be utilised for the greater good and prosperity of the Irish people.²⁸

While Joe appeared to have come through the War of Independence relatively unscathed, the same could not be said for his brother Matt, who was fortunate to have escaped with his life. In fact a newspaper headline described his ordeal as 'a miraculous escape'.²⁹ After the sack of Balbriggan in September 1920, 'things got so hot around the Skerries area that the Volunteers had to go on the run'.³⁰ Though Matt had stayed away from his home on occasion, however, he was there on the night of 27 October 1920 when the Black and Tans paid a nocturnal visit to the town. A report in the *Drogheda Independent* of 30 October 1920 provides details under headlines such as 'brutal murder in Skerries' [Terry Sherlock] 'a night of terror', and 'raids and loots by armed men'. An extract is shown below:

. . . Word reached Drogheda on Wednesday afternoon [27 Oct.] that the quiet and peaceable little town of Skerries was made the scene of an exhibition of 'frightfulness' in the early hours of that morning. It appears that about three-quarters of an hour after midnight on Tuesday night, a party of men in semi-uniform invaded the town of Skerries, and searched a number of

houses. A boy named Terence Sherlock was dragged out of bed, brought into a field and shot dead, his corpse being found in a ditch at seven o'clock on Wednesday morning. The visitors then proceeded to the house of Mr M[att] Derham, and were admitted by him. Rushing upstairs they subjected the different apartments to an exhaustive scrutiny. Mr Derham was in a room on the ground floor when the raiders subsequently passed out and was not observed by them. They were evidently under the impression that he had already been taken away by another party, and when they discovered their mistake they rushed back, to find that he had escaped. Every house in the vicinity was searched in an unsuccessful effort to unearth Mr Derham. Mrs Derham and her young child were terrified by this savage nocturnal visit . . .³¹

An account by members of the Dowling family is revealing; 'Matt having made his escape, subsequently made his way to the home of James Dowling [Doolin] at 58 Holmpatrick, beside Dr Healy's lane. He found sanctuary there for a time before being moved to a safe house at Lusk. Some time afterwards, with the help of Captain Landy of Skerries, who was an officer with the White Star line, and another Skerries man John-Joe Mansfield, Matt worked his passage on a ship to New York'.³² This is one of several accounts of the aftermath of Matt's escape from the Black and Tans, and all are equally feasible in one way or another. In any event he did go to New York and appears to have remained there for a year or more. While there, he participated in a Sinn Fein commission of inquiry into atrocities by the Black and Tans in Ireland.³³

Reports of the happenings in Skerries on that Tuesday and Wednesday night were carried in no less than five newspapers; the *Irish Independent*, 28 Oct. 1920; the *Freeman's Journal*, 28 Oct. 1920; the *Evening Telegraph*, 28 Oct. 1920; the *Freeman's Journal*, 29 Oct. 1920; the *Drogheda Independent*, 30 Oct. and 6 Nov. 1920. While Matt's experience was mentioned in the majority of the above reports, nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that the major interest by the newspapers was in the total happenings, especially the brutal killing of poor Sherlock, and not necessarily about the part played by Matt Derham. In any event, he was fortunate to escape with his life intact. A young fellow called

Joseph Tyrrell who lived with his family on Main (Strand) Street, Skerries, had been hauled out of his bed for questioning. The ordeal was such that he subsequently fled to America.³⁴ Such was the fear of the Black and Tans that not one but two Skerries men had made their way to America and in circumstances not of their own choosing. A letter written by a man called Liam, a friend of Matt, and

whose address was Strand Street, Skerries, was sent to Matt by way of a Miss Duffe who was travelling to New York in February 1921. While the contents of the letter were relatively benign it nevertheless placed Matt in America at that time. A letter to Matt from Charlie Murray, Skerries, was one of introduction to a J.J. Molony, 2 Dusenbury Place, White Plains, New York, to the effect that the bearer [Matt] was 'a victim of tyranny' and may need your [Molony's] help.³⁵

MATT DERHAM

Builder, Contractor and Undertaker,

"ST. BRENDAN'S,"

72 CHURCH STREET

SKERRIES

New Buildings, Reconstruction, and Alterations,
also Water Installation (Hot and Cold),
and Sewerage carried out under
personal supervision.

ESTIMATES FREE.

*Funerals Arranged at Shortest Notice to
any Distance.*

Life after the Troubles

When Matt returned to Ireland he continued on with his building business and added to it by becoming an under-taker. He built two houses in Church Street, and lived in number 72, (St Brendan's). He made coffins in a shed on that street which was known as the 'long hall'. Coffins put out on the wide path to dry the varnish and oft reminded passers by of their own mortality. He later bought ready-made coffins from Fanagan's of Aungier Street, Dublin, and these were sent to Skerries by train. Some local men who worked with Matt in his business were, Tomás Hand, who served an apprenticeship with Matt; and others who helped with grave digging and general building work were John Carr, Tommy Gosson and Bob Manson. In later years when Matt gave up the undertaking business, Basil Costello of Sherlock Park, took it over for a time.

Matt and Eilis raised eight children; Matthew, born 1920; Patrick, born 1921; Brendan, born 1922 (married Maureen Drury); Margaret, born 1924 (married George Hughes); Catherine, born 1925 (married Michael Courtney); Liam, born

1927 (married Elizabeth (Lillie) O'Byrne); Eilis, born 1929, died at six months old; and Sinead, born c. 1931 (married Ronald Harrison). Matt passed away on 30 April 1959, at the age of eighty-six years. While Eilis died in January 1965.

In circa 1932, Joe Derham returned to the fold of the civil service having gotten a position in the Office of Public Works, where he remained until he retired, having attained the grade of accountant. In that same year Joe participated in the thirty-first Eucharistic Congress in Dublin, and acted as a marshal at open air masses in the Phoenix Park. He and Annie were devout Catholics, and time was set aside each evening for the Rosary. Hugh Cahill, of Glasnevin, and later Skerries, related having on many occasions to wait until prayers ended before his friend Kieran could come out to meet him. In 1929, the family had gone to live at 28 Iona Drive, Glasnevin, and where eleven children were raised, Kathleen, born 1919 (married Ben Murphy); Hugh, born 1920 (married Maura Gallan); Eithne, born 1922 (married Ted Pollard); Sinead, born 1923 (married Frank Courtney); Joseph, born 1925 (married Pam Coyle); Thomas, born 1926 (married Eleanor Davis); Kieran, born 1927 (married Imelda Kearney); Marie, born 1929 (married Peter Heath); Noel, born 1930 (married Marjorie Tuite); Breda, born 1933 (married Derek Mills); and Mairead, born 1935 (married Alan Smart). The house remained the family home until after Annie died on 2 September 1985.

Joe had retired in 1958, and subsequently preceded his wife in death passing from this life on 12 August 1966 at the age of eighty years. Joe's participation in the GPO garrison is remembered by his image in a photograph taken of the then surviving participants and which hangs in the public section of the GPO in O'Connell Street. A list of 1916 Volunteers produced by the North Inner [Dublin] City Folklore Project in 1996 also bears his name. In addition, several fine watercolours of Frongoch camp as it was in 1916, and painted by Joe's friend and erstwhile fellow prisoner Nicholas T. Murray, Dublin, were donated by the Derham family to the Kilmainham Gaol Museum, and are on display there.³⁶

The funeral of Matt took place on Saturday 2 May 1959, and the funeral arrangements were taken care of by Fanagan's of Aungier Street, with whom Matt used buy his own requirements when working as an under-taker in the past. Joe's interment took place on Saturday 13 August 1966, where

family sources relate that an Old IRA Veterans Colour Party were in attendance, and where a eulogy was read by local publican Frank Glennon. The remains of Matt's wife Eilis, and Joe's wife Annie are interred along with their husbands. While several newspaper insertions marked the passing of Joe, curiously, none could be found for Matt.

Conclusion

That Matt and Joe Derham lived through interesting if somewhat turbulent times there is no doubt. In addition, when it came to the crunch neither sat on the fence but rather threw themselves wholeheartedly into the fight for Irish freedom by joining the Irish Volunteers in 1914. Subsequently, for their valiant efforts during the 1916 Rising, Matt in Fingal and Joe in the GPO, both suffered internment in British prisons before finding themselves among the crème-de-la-crème of the Irish Volunteer movement in the so-called university of revolution Frongoch, North Wales. Joe was especially proud of his friendship with Michael Collins. After their release, the pair, unperturbed, and in common with hundreds of other Volunteers, regained the threads of their lives; they married, raised families, and worked hard to support them thereafter. In the War of Independence period, and after the 'sack of Balbriggan' in September 1920, the Black and Tans turned their wrath on Skerries. Over the course of a forty-eight hour period on the nights of 27 and 28 October, much damage was done in the town. Though Matt was fortunate to escape with his life, the same could not be said of Terry Sherlock, who, a few hours after Matt's ordeal, was dragged from his bed and murdered in cold blood. During the later Civil War period, which Joe thought was madness, their nephew Jack McGowan, died while fighting on the anti-treaty side in Dublin city.

Matt and Joe were subsequently honoured for their parts in the 1916 Rising, with each receiving medals for their valiant efforts. The brothers had come through that traumatic period in Ireland's history relatively unscathed, and thereafter, their lives were devoted to their families, and the communities in which they lived, Matt in Skerries and Joe in Glasnevin. When the old Derham home at Hoar Rock, Skerries, was torn down circa 1970, two Howth rifles were discovered within the thatch. One of these

rifles is now in the possession of the Cork City Public Museum, at The Mardyke, Cork.³⁷ What memories could be released if those rifles could relate about the experiences of their previous owners. Certainly, within the Derham family there is no doubt but that these rifles belonged to Matt and Joe and in any event, who could contradict them in that regard, or who would want to.

FRANK WHEARITY · 2004/5

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people assisted in the research for the two papers from which this article is derived. However, space considerations preclude the mention of all but a few of those who helped in the work. In any event, a full list of people who contributed in any way is to be found in the acknowledgement sections of the papers held in the S.H.S archive. More specifically, the contributions of members of the Derham family, and gained through the efforts of Thomas, Joseph and Lillie, were of paramount importance. In addition, Maree Baker, Librarian and Joseph Murray, archivist, of the S.H.S., also made valuable contributions, especially in the field of Derham genealogy. The author offers his thanks to all contributors who collectively made possible the account of the interesting lives and times of Matt and Joe Derham.

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