



The Daly family in the rowing boat presented to John Daly by local nationalists after Shannon Rowing Club refused him admittance. Ominously, he named it Lua-Tagna (Swift to Avenge). (Left to right): Eileen, Madge, Agnes, John, Kathleen and Ned (Special Collections, Glucksman Library, University of Limerick).

# 6 The Dalys: A Family at War





On the night before his execution, Ned Daly was visited in Kilmainham Jail by his 'three grief-stricken sisters', Kathleen, Madge and Laura. Madge later recalled that:

He looked so proud and strong and noble that, with eyes alert and full of fire, that it seemed impossible to believe that he was a doomed captive, destined to be shot in a few hours. Rather did he look like a brave young knight, who had won some great victory.<sup>231</sup>

Their conversation was all too brief but Madge remembered that 'our last talk with Ned, except for one or two brief family references, were all of Ireland.' She also wrote that among his last words to them were:

Tell Uncle John I did my best.<sup>232</sup>



Although this comment, may have been invented by Madge 'to spare John's feelings', its symbolism was nevertheless profound.<sup>233</sup>

For, almost exactly twenty years before Ned Daly became 'another martyr for old Ireland,' his 'Uncle John's' martyrdom in British prisons had come to an end.<sup>234</sup> On the evening of the 14 September 1896, a 'monster crowd... with bands and torchlights and blazing tar barrels' gathered at Limerick railway station. 'As the train steamed in, fog signals were exploded and fireworks were displayed.' From one of the carriages, a tall, distinguished looking man, with a black beard streaked with grey, emerged and 'was carried triumphantly along by the surging crowd to the carriage in waiting outside.'

John Daly, IRB activist and national leader, who had spent the last twelve terrible years in English prisons, was home. Outside the station, he bowed



## THE NINE DALY CHILDREN IN 1901

BACK (LEFT TO RIGHT): **NORA (1889-1977)** MARRIED **EAMONN DORE (1896-1972)**;  
**ANNIE (1886-1908)**; **AGNES (1879-1969)**; **CARRIE (1884-1972)**;  
**LAURA (1882-1967)** MARRIED **JAMES O'SULLIVAN (1891-1974)**.

FRONT (LEFT TO RIGHT): **EILEEN (1875-1955)** MARRIED **NED O'TOOLE (1873-1963)**;  
**KATHLEEN (1878-1972)** MARRIED **TOM CLARKE (1858-1916)**; **MADGE (1877-1969)**;  
**NED (1891-1916)**. (HELEN LITTON, DUBLIN AND THE O'SULLIVAN FAMILY, LIMERICK).

his thanks to the ecstatic crowd and then drove in triumph through the streets of Limerick, past brightly lit buildings and blazing bonfires, past a sea of cheering people waving hats and handkerchiefs.<sup>235</sup>

Arriving at the O'Connell Monument in the Crescent, Daly was officially welcomed home by the Mayor and Corporation of Limerick. When he rose to speak, 'a tremendous cheer was raised which must have been heard all over the city.' Although thin and weak from his imprisonment, Daly was a born orator and gave a long speech in his fine tenor voice. He spoke of his sufferings, but emphasised that:

I went into an  
English prison an  
Irish nationalist...  
[and] I have come  
out an Irish  
nationalist.

He also told his audience that he was 'willing to represent you anywhere that you choose.' It was clear that a dynamic new force had arrived in Limerick.<sup>236</sup>



Daly was fortunate to be returning to a large welcoming family, consisting of his sister Lollie, his late brother Edward's widow Catherine, plus Catherine's eight daughters and one son. But the Dalys were no ordinary family. They were virtually Fenian royalty, with a pedigree of service to separatism greater than that of any other Irish family.



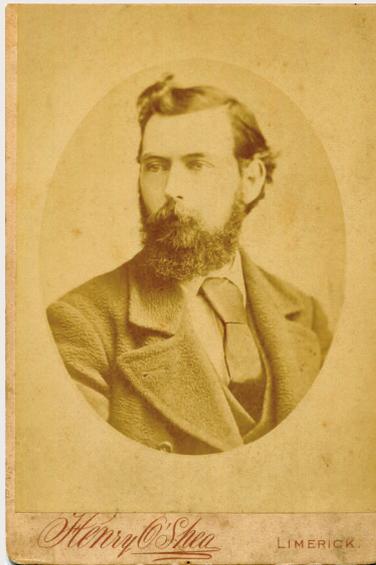
From 1898 until his death in 1916, John Daly's Limerick residence, first at 26 William

Street and later at 15 Barrington Street, became the spiritual home of Fenianism in Ireland.<sup>237</sup> The Daly household was a warm, bustling place, which acted as a social centre, a refuge and a headquarters for separatism and anti-British sentiment. A veritable procession of prominent republicans came there to meet with John Daly, including Padraig Pearse, Sean MacDiarmada, Roger Casement, Sean Heuston and Con Colbert. Of course, the most frequent visitor of all was Tom Clarke, John Daly's oldest friend and fellow Fenian prisoner who met Daly's niece Kathleen there and later married her.<sup>238</sup>



The first generation of Daly republicans consisted of the siblings John (1845-1916), Edward (1848-90) and Laura (Lollie) (1841-1925).<sup>239</sup> In turn, they passed on their staunch nationalist beliefs to the next generation, Edward Daly's

nine children. Their aunt Lollie 'would keep the Daly children enthralled with her tales of Irish history, dwelling on glorious and romantic deeds, particularly in relation to the Fenians whom she had known in her youth.'<sup>240</sup> Of Edward's eight daughters, Madge became president of the Limerick branch of Cumann na nBan, Kathleen was married to Easter Rising leader Tom Clarke, Laura to Seamus O'Sullivan and Nora to Eamonn



Dore. All were active in the fight for freedom, while Edward's youngest child and only son Ned was one of the 1916 leaders executed after the Rising.<sup>241</sup>



The death of Edward Daly senior in 1890 threatened his family with near poverty, from which they were rescued by his brother James who had made a fortune in the French Pacific Ocean colony of New Caledonia. He provided them with financial security for a number of years until John Daly took over the task by establishing his famous bakery at 26 William Street. Accordingly, from the 1890s onwards, the Dalys enjoyed the comfortable lifestyle of the Limerick middle classes as portrayed in Kate O'Brien's novels, complete with fine houses, servants, elegant clothes and holidays in Kilkee.<sup>242</sup>



The Dalys had a major influence on Irish revolutionary nationalism. Working as an IRB organiser, John Daly enrolled Tom Clarke in the organisation, thus recruiting one of the leading organisers of the 1916 Rising. Not the least of the Daly family's achievements was the re-integration of both John Daly and Tom Clarke into normal society after their long years of imprisonment, without which neither could have achieved so much for the separatist cause.

The Daly family also used their wealth to fund advanced nationalism for many years. Their highly successful business in Limerick became one of the major sources of the IRB's financial support. It is no exaggeration to state that the Daly fortune was crucial to the Easter Rising. The family supported Tom and Kathleen Clarke by helping them buy a farm in Long Island, New York where they lived from 1906 to 1907 and set them up in a



The Daly family in mourning after the executions. Back (left to right): Madge, Catherine and Agnes.  
Front (left to right): Laura, Nora and Carrie (Courtesy Helen Litton, Dublin and the O'Sullivan family, Limerick).

tobacconist shop in Dublin in 1907. In 1911, the Dalys provided land and built a hall for the Limerick Fianna on Barrington Street. They also helped to fund and equip the two Limerick City Battalions of the Irish Volunteers and financed *Irish Freedom*, the IRB newspaper founded in 1910.<sup>243</sup> Above all, through Clarke, they provided the money which kept the IRB from collapsing after its American sister organisation Clan na Gael had temporarily ceased funding it. Without this vital lifeline, the IRB would not have survived and the Easter Rising, which the IRB planned and carried into effect, could not have happened.<sup>244</sup>



## JOHN DALY (1845–1916)

Born in Frederick (now O'Curry) Street, Limerick,

John Daly was educated at a national school in Mary Street, where 'according to custom, he had to carry his sod of turf to the class room every morning.'<sup>245</sup> Later, he went to Sexton Street CBS and left school at thirteen to train as a joiner. Influenced by his nationalist family background he was sworn into the IRB in 1863. John later recalled that his father would tell him 'stories about his father who was a United Irishman, though my father himself never got beyond being a Repealer.'



However, his mother 'never missed an opportunity to advocate the cause of the Irish extremists to her children and to sing the praises of the Irish republic and separatists.'<sup>246</sup>

In 1867, during the Fenian Rising, John Daly participated in the attack on Kilmallock Barracks. For the next sixteen years, he was one of the most prominent and active member of the Fenians, travelling all over Ireland, as well as in Britain and the USA. In 1878, he so impressed a young man named Tom Clarke that he joined the IRB four years later. In 1883, Daly was arrested in Britain for being in possession of explosives that had allegedly been given to him by a police agent. He was sentenced to twelve years of imprisonment, which he served in England, at Chatham and later Portland Prison.<sup>247</sup>



In Chatham Prison, Daly met Tom Clarke again and they became close friends. Both endured the harsh conditions of the 'scientific' Victorian prison system which was designed to punish first and rehabilitate later, if at all.

During the day, prisoners spent most of their time in solitary confinement, to prevent 'moral contagion' from their fellow convicts. They worked in total silence to prevent them from conspiring together. At night, their sleep was frequently disturbed by warders checking on them, ostensibly to prevent escapes.



Visits were rare and diet was just sufficient to enable prisoners to work. Daly and Clarke were among the few prisoners to emerge from this terrible experience with their sanity intact. They drew on their inner strength of character and passed each other messages on scraps of paper, or by Morse code, tapping on tin plates. On his release, one of Daly's abiding memories was how strange he found women's voices, which he had only heard in prison when his sister Lollie visited him, and his shock at seeing how old he looked in a





mirror.<sup>248</sup> For the remainder of his life, 'he would never allow a wild bird to be caged'; 'always pleaded for the release of the little fish' that his young relatives caught on holidays in Kilkee and hated hare coursing.<sup>249</sup>

Following his release from prison, John Daly returned to Limerick permanently in 1898. From the funds he had raised on a successful lecture tour in America he set up a bakery business on 26 William Street Limerick. This was the first shop in Limerick to have the owner's name in Irish over the door and on the delivery vans. On 9 December 1898, it was opened with considerable ceremony. Daly hired a traditional singer to chant his praises, and gave a free loaf to everyone in the huge crowd gathered outside the door. The business was actually run by his niece Madge, a born entrepreneur with immense organisational abilities.<sup>250</sup>

Instead, John Daly immersed himself in politics. Determined, eloquent and gregarious, he was well suited to public life. He sat on Limerick City Council from 1899 to 1906 and served as a very high profile and controversial Mayor from 1899 to 1902. He arranged for the Freedom of Limerick to be granted to Tom Clarke and to Maud Gonne, renowned nationalist and love interest of W B Yeats. Daly also removed the Royal coat of arms from the Town Hall and added a link to the mayoral chain which depicted revolutionary symbols.

In many ways, he was a social conservative. A wealthy businessman, he became part of the respectable Limerick middle classes and lived in a large house, first over the bakery on William Street and later at 15 Barrington Street.<sup>251</sup>



In the years leading up to the Easter Rising, though largely confined to a wheelchair, Daly remained close to the IRB leadership, and received a steady stream of prominent visitors in his Limerick home, including Tom Clarke, Sean MacDiarmada, Ernest Blythe, Bulmer Hobson and Pdraig Pearse.<sup>252</sup>

During the Rising itself, 'John Daly lived the most anxious days of his life.' Desperately worried about Clarke and MacDiarmada, and above all his nephew Ned, he was also intensely frustrated at not being involved. The insurgents 'were fighting the fight he had hoped for and longed for all his life and there he was, tied to an invalid chair, unable to be with them.' When news of the executions reached him, 'he broke down' for 'they had died the heroic and soldierly death he would have welcomed for himself.'<sup>253</sup>

John Daly died soon afterwards on 30 June 1916 and



was buried in Mount Saint Lawrence Cemetery. He had devoted his entire life to the ideal of 'living in a free Irish Republic [where] there would be no political interference from any quarter, from any sect or any power outside our own island.'<sup>254</sup> As a lifelong activist, source of funding and inspiration to others, Daly was a giant figure in the history of Irish republicanism for some fifty years.



## THOMAS CLARKE [1858-1916] AND KATHLEEN CLARKE [1878-1972]

Kathleen was the third eldest of the Daly sisters. After leaving school, she trained as a seamstress and established her own thriving dress making business. Strong-willed even by the standards of the Daly sisters, she refused to work in

the family bakery under her domineering uncle John. A proud Limerick woman, she liked to make Limerick lace as a hobby.<sup>255</sup>

In March 1899, she met Tom Clarke, who became a regular visitor to the Daly household in Limerick.<sup>256</sup> Traumatized by years of harsh imprisonment, he blossomed in the warmth of the Daly household and showed an unexpectedly light-hearted side to his personality. Although he was small, prematurely aged and twenty years her senior, Kathleen soon fell in love with him. Their romance was opposed by her mother and even her uncle John who feared that he would not be able to support her, but the formidable Kathleen swept aside their objections. They were married in New York in 1901 and later had a family of three boys. The Clarkes lived in New York until 1907 when they returned to Ireland. They settled in Dublin where they ran a successful tobacconist business that eventually cons-

isted of two shops.<sup>257</sup>

In 1926, future President Sean T O'Kelly wrote that 'Clarke can truthfully be described as the man, above all others, who made the Easter Rising. He, it was, who inspired it originally, and he, it was, who, in broad outline, laid the plans.'<sup>258</sup> The Clarkes' home in Dublin became the centre of the IRB which underwent a much-needed reform and revival after 1907, largely under Tom's inspiration. During this period, Sean MacDiarmada became his close friend and right-hand man. Kathleen Clarke was also very busy, running two shops, rearing three sons and playing a major role in republicanism. She helped run the *Irish Freedom* newspaper and in 1914 became a founding member of Cumann na mBan. She served as president of its central branch, where she organised classes in first-aid and military training and published short profiles of Irish republican heroes.<sup>259</sup>

A month after the war began, in September 1914 the IRB decided to stage a rebellion. Clarke and MacDiarmada were the main planners, assisted later by the other five signatories of the 1916 proclamation. Although immensely proud of her husband's role, Kathleen dreaded it. On Tuesday 18 April, she recorded that 'Tom was wild with excitement' about the forthcoming Rising, but she felt differently, that in fact 'the world was tumbling around me.' She knew that it would not be a success and that 'it would be the end for him [Tom] but I would have to remain and bear the separation as well as I could.' On the night of Easter Sunday, 23 April 1916, she 'slept in my husband's arms for the last time' knowing that he would go into battle the next day.<sup>260</sup>

One of Kathleen's finest moments came in early 1916 when she was entrusted with the plans for the Rising and in the event of its failure, given

responsibility for maintaining contact with Clan na Gael in the USA. Tom Clarke's prominent role was acknowledged when he was given the honour of being the first to sign the proclamation. He served in the GPO garrison, where it was remarked that despite the certainty of defeat, he looked happy that his life's ambition was finally being achieved.<sup>261</sup>

After the Rising, both Tom and Kathleen Clarke were arrested. He greatly feared being sent back to prison and was delighted to hear that he was to be shot instead. Kathleen had to bear the unimaginable trauma of her husband being executed on 3 May and her brother Ned Daly on 4 May, while being pregnant with her fourth child (which she later miscarried).<sup>262</sup>

After the Rising, Kathleen Clarke established the Volunteer Dependents' Fund of which she appointed Michael Collins secretary, thus giving

him a position of national prominence for the first time. During the War of Independence, she sheltered men and women on the run and worked as a District Justice in the Sinn Féin courts in Dublin. She opposed the Treaty and in 1926 became a founder member of Fianna Fail. She sat on Dublin Corporation (1919-42) and served as Lord Mayor (1939-41), Ireland's first ever female mayor. She was also a member of the Dáil (1921-22; June-September 1927) and the Senate (1928-36). A supporter of women's rights, she opposed the 1937 Constitution. She always maintained that her husband's role in the Rising had been downplayed in favour of Padraig Pearse, whom she described as being:

as vain as a  
peacock.

She is buried in Deansgrange Cemetery.<sup>263</sup>



Mrs. Tom Blake - John Daly Blake  
Tom Blake + Emmet Blake  
Geo. Geoghegan