

Barry, Kevin Gerard

by Richard Hawkins

Barry, Kevin Gerard (1902–20), republican, was born 20 January 1902 at 8 Fleet St., Dublin, fourth of seven children of Thomas Barry, dairyman, and Mary Barry (née Dowling), both originally from north-east Co. Carlow. Educated at several schools in Dublin and Carlow, he joined the Irish Volunteers while still at Belvedere College, and entered UCD (1919) to study medicine. As a member of 1st Battalion, Dublin Brigade (and on attachment to 3rd Battalion, Carlow Brigade), he took part in a successful raid for arms on the military post in King's Inns, Dublin (1 June 1920); an abortive attempt to burn Aughavanagh House, Aughrim, Co. Wicklow (July); and an attack on a British ration party in Church St., Dublin (20 September), with the aim of seizing arms. The final operation failed: firing broke out, three soldiers of around Barry's own age were killed or fatally wounded, and he became the first Volunteer to be captured in an armed attack since 1916. During interrogation he was threatened with a bayonet and mistreated. A general court martial, which he refused to recognise, condemned him to death (20 October) for murdering the three soldiers. Despite widespread appeals on grounds of both clemency and expediency, the cabinet in London and officials in Dublin decided separately against a reprieve, probably because of its likely effect on the morale of soldiers and police. He was hanged in Mountjoy prison, Dublin (1 November), a week after the death of Terence MacSwiney (qv). His conduct in custody was marked by cheerfulness and fortitude.

Barry was the first person to be tried and executed for a capital offence under the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act, 1920, passed twelve weeks earlier. Together with his youth, this made him a republican martyr celebrated in many ballads and verses; the best-known, set to a tune popular with British servicemen, was recorded by the American singer Paul Robeson, among others. A memorial stained-glass window by Richard King (qv) was later installed in the former UCD council chamber (afterwards called the Kevin Barry Room), Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin.

---

Donal O'Donovan, *Kevin Barry and his time* (1989); M. A. Doherty, 'Kevin Barry and the Anglo–Irish propaganda war', *IHS*, xxxii (2000–01), 217–31