

Lynch, Patrick Gregory

by Brendan Ó Cathaoir

Lynch, Patrick Gregory (1866–1947), KC, barrister, and politician, was born 10 February 1866 in Latoon House, Co. Clare, fifth among six children of John Lynch, farmer, and Elizabeth Lynch (née Kelly) of Dromona, Dysert. He graduated from the RUI and was admitted to the bar, Trinity term 1888. He was called to the inner bar in 1906, became a member of the Munster circuit, and was appointed senior crown prosecutor for Kerry two years later.

Lynch was a protagonist in one of the most fateful Irish by-elections in Clare East in 1917. The vacancy was caused by the death of Maj. Willie Redmond (qv), MP, at the battle of Messines Ridge. Sinn Féin put forward Éamon de Valera (qv), the most senior survivor of the rising. Confronted with this challenge, and with John Redmond (qv) disabled by grief over the death of his brother, the Irish party did virtually nothing. Local nationalists held an unofficial meeting at which they adopted Lynch, who in normal times would have stood a good chance of being elected. The party managers, although privately in favour of his candidacy, decided not to identify publicly with the contest. During the election campaign a Sinn Féin wag was overheard describing Lynch as a strong candidate – ‘he has defended one half of the murderers in Clare and is related to the other half’ (NLI, Redmond papers, MS 15, 263/2/3). More accurately, Thomas O'Neill (qv) (de Valera's authorised biographer) wrote that he came from a respected Clare family with ‘a long local pedigree and a faultless national tradition’ (cf. Kevin Browne, *Éamon de Valera and the Banner County*, 9). When de Valera won by 5,010 votes to 2,035, the *Irish Times* commented (12 July 1917) that the Clare East election marked the rise of a new party, ‘which must henceforth be an important, if not a controlling factor in nationalist politics’. The Sinn Féin successes in Roscommon North and Longford South were remarkable, but nobody could have deduced from them the ‘crushing character’ of de Valera's victory. Judge Daniel Cohalan (qv), Clan na Gael, said: ‘Taken with other elections held recently, it means the end of the constitutional movement’ (*Freeman's Journal*, New York, 21 July 1917).

Lynch wrote to the chief secretary, Henry Edward Duke (qv), warning against the extension of conscription to Ireland. The defeated candidate wrote also to Redmond, insisting that he had contested the seat as an Irish Party candidate, and seeking help with election expenses. He joined Sinn Féin within a year. During the war of independence this leading member of the Irish bar ‘saved many from the hangman's noose’ (*Clare Champion*, 13 December 1947). It is not clear why he took the anti-treaty side in 1922. It may be noted that in an earlier split he had identified with the Parnellites. Evidently he was impressed by imprisoned republicans. He now followed de Valera, who would appoint him attorney general of the Irish Free State.

His youngest brother, James, on the other hand, was state solicitor for Clare under the Cumann na nGaedheal government.

Paddy Lynch became a King's Inns bencher in 1925; Fianna Fáil senator, 1934–6; attorney general in 1936; and was reappointed under the new constitution, 1937–40. A generous, honourable man, he is reputed to have refused a judgeship from the British government on account of the 1916 executions, and from the Free State because of the civil war executions. An external examiner in the law faculty of UCD, the NUI conferred an honorary doctor of laws degree on him. He died 9 December 1947 in Cork.

In *The old Munster circuit*, Maurice Healy (qv) wrote (157–60) that had he been asked to cite an example of an honest man, 'the first name that would have come to my lips would have been that of Paddy Lynch ... Always a moderate nationalist, when the gallant Willie Redmond gave his life for his beliefs, Paddy thought it would be an indecent thing if the seat of that paladin amongst Irishmen were to be abandoned without a struggle to those who had disagreed with his views.'

Lynch married (date unknown) Rita Galvin of Tralee, a widow.

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National Archives (Kew), Cab 24/20/1424; unpublished memoir by John Mackey; booklets by Patrick Lynch, *Some members of the Munster circuit* (1946) and *Reminiscences*; Kenneth Ferguson, *King's Inns barristers 1868–2004* (2005); 'Irishman's diary', *Ir. Times*, 9 July 2007