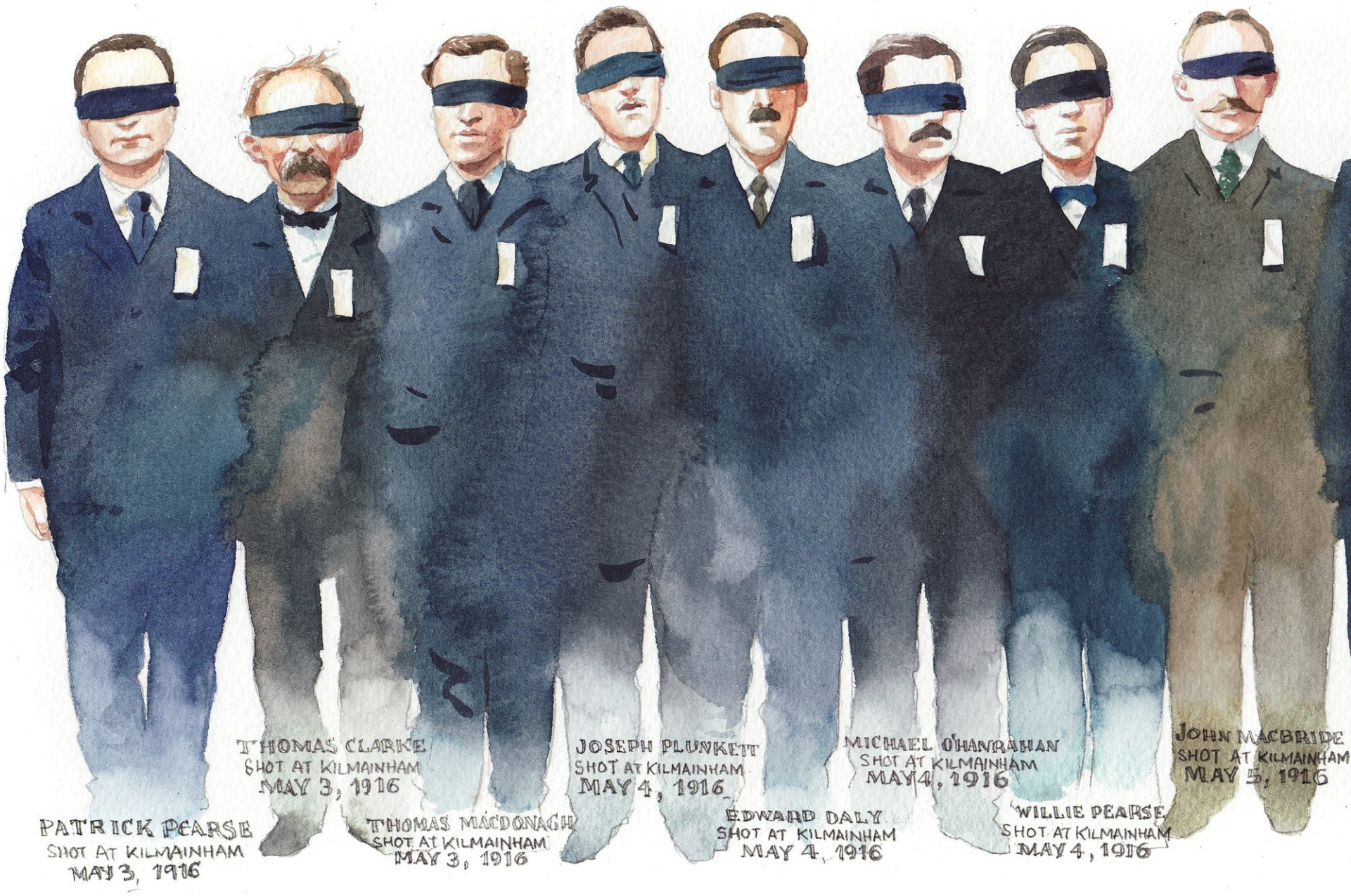


Sixteen nails

With the GPO ablaze, the end of the insurrection came swiftly —

THE 'blood sacrifice' dimension of the Rising — the idea that a Christ-like act of sacrifice was necessary in order to 'save' Ireland — has always been emphasised. But was this really the case? Certainly the chief protagonists, in particular Patrick Pearse and Tom Clarke, were convinced in the weeks leading up to the Rising that it would probably end in defeat and death for most of its participants.

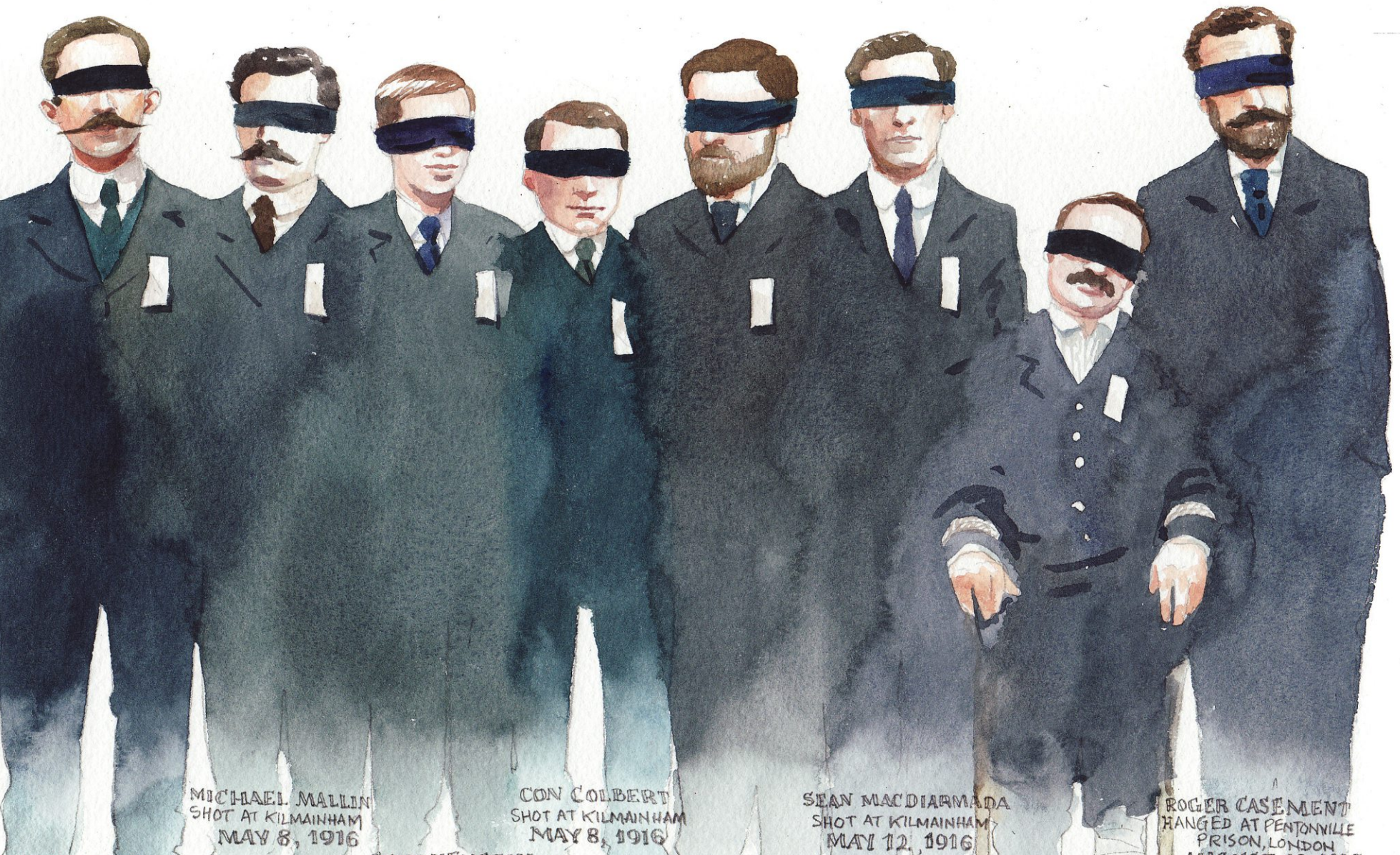
Famously, at a meeting convened for the officers of the Dublin Brigade of the Volunteers, a few weeks prior to the Rising, Pearse apparently asked those assembled if they were ready 'to meet... God?' Allegedly, only a handful of the audience members were unnerved by his implication. Tales of Éamonn Ceannt preparing his will and Thomas Ashe's last act as Principal of Corduff National School in instructing his assistant to take flowers from the school garden and place them on the local church altar in front of the Blessed Sacrament, further imply that many of the leaders involved in the Rising were also aware that their actions would result in their deaths. Yet, as with so many other aspects of the Rising, it would be contentious to argue that death was the accepted — and expected — outcome for all those involved in staging the Rising.

Indeed, observation of witness statements recorded by the Bureau of Military History in the late 1940s and early 1950s demonstrate that many of the participants in the rebellion were wholly unprepared for the realities of battle. Their naivety can be attributed to two things. Firstly, their age. Typically, the Volunteers were comprised of young men and women, many of them teenagers or in their early twenties who had come to join the Volunteers having previously been active within the GAA, Na Fianna, Cumann na mBan or had family associations with the Fenians. Secondly, owing to the confusion and secrecy surrounding the organisation of the Rising, very few of the 'foot-soldiers' within the Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army (ICA) comprehended the difficulties that they and their comrades faced.

As the week progressed and the Dublin rebels learned of their harsh reality, that there would be no German support nor had any of the planned provincial rebellions been successful, the rebels began to prepare for the worst — especially as the fighting intensified.

Thus when Father John Flanagan, a priest in the Pro-Cathedral (who had heard confessions in the GPO on Easter Monday and had spent the subsequent days anointing the wounded lying on the Dublin streets and in Jervis Street Hospital), returned to the GPO on Thursday to tend the wounded, he was besieged by requests from various rebels to deliver notes to their wives and mothers. Aware that there was a strong likelihood that they would not be returning home following the end of the insurgency, the rebels chose to put their affairs in order on any available scraps of paper. By the time Fr Flanagan left on the Friday morning, his pockets were full of scraps of paper and envelopes (pinched from the Post Office supplies) spelling out final instructions and parting messages for various loved ones.

While hopes of a victory were diminished by the Friday of Easter Week, few would have suspected that the official surrender was only a matter of hours away. With the exception of the GPO, most of the



in the coffin

with deadly consequences for its leaders, writes **Leanne Blaney**

garrisons had managed to avoid coming under direct assault and serious artillery bombardment. However the Volunteers had been forced out of their Headquarters in the GPO on the Friday evening on account of the building being ablaze. Even then, Louise Gavan Duffy was convinced that the plan was for the remaining Volunteers to join other garrisons. Including the one at Jameson's Distillery on Marrowbone Lane, where spirits remained high following the capture of a load of cabbages and preparations were underway for Mass to be held within the garrison on the Sunday.

Instead on the Saturday morning, having held a council of war in the backroom of 16 Moore Street, where James Connolly lay injured in bed, the assembled members of the Provisional Government — Pearse, Connolly, Joseph Plunkett, Tom Clarke and Seán MacDiarmada — chose to send Elizabeth O'Farrell to meet with the Commander of the British Forces, General William Lowe, and express the Irish Republican Army's desire to agree terms of surrender. Within three hours, Pearse (accompanied by Elizabeth O'Farrell) officially surrendered unconditionally to General Lowe at the top of Moore Street.

While the moment of surrender captured by a British army photographer appears peaceful and reserved, in reality it was very different. O'Farrell delivered the order signed by Pearse and countersigned by Connolly lying in his Red Cross bed in Dublin Castle, to the various garrisons around Dublin during the next 24 hours. High emotions ranging from sorrow to great anger were evident among the rebels as they learned of their leaders' decision. Some such as the Moore Street fighters, had to be talked out of disobeying orders and continuing the fight by (ironically) the two most strident leaders, Clarke and Mac Diarmada.

> *High emotions ranging from sorrow to great anger were evident among the rebels as they learned of their leaders' decision to surrender*

Justification for the leaders' decision to surrender has often been attributed to their concern for the lives of ordinary Dublin civilians. Unfortunately, these civilians did not universally acknowledge the rebels' noble intentions. Instead as the army rounded up the surrendering rebels and marched them towards the Rotunda Hospital and later Richmond Barracks, large crowds gathered along the route and gave the rebels what Bridget Lyons, niece of Joseph McGuinness, described as 'a mixed reception, cheering, jeering, booing and making remarks, mostly uncomplimentary'.

By the May 1, the rebellion was over and the military's investigations were underway. General Sir John Maxwell, the newly arrived British commander-in-chief, lived up to his military credentials and by May 5, 3,430 men and 79 women were arrested on suspicion of being 'Sinn Féiners'. Confusion persisted among Dubliners who assumed the Rising was lead by Sinn Féin owing to the similarity between the Volunteers and Sinn Féin's rhetoric as well as the public knowledge that a number of the prominent rebels were members of Sinn Féin.

However, Arthur Griffith's political organisation was not behind the Rising, and instead only in 1917 would Sinn Féin formally join with republicans to form

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6 >>>

Sixteen nails in the coffin

>>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

a new political party. Consequently, following inquiry, 1,424 men and 73 women imprisoned on suspicion had to be released without charge — after their homes had been ransacked and many had lost their jobs due to their association with the rebellion. The court martial trials began immediately, as General Maxwell continued to impose martial law.

The first batch of rebels to be tried and sentenced to death by Brigadier Charles Blackader on a charge of 'waging war against His Majesty the King, with the intention and for the purpose of assisting the enemy' were Pearse, Clarke and MacDonagh. The three were shot in the disused prison yard of Kilmainham Gaol at dawn on May 3. The executions of Edward 'Ned' Daly, Willie Pearse, Joseph Plunkett and Michael O'Hanrahan followed on the May 4. John MacBride was executed on May 5 while Éamonn Ceantt, Michael Mallin, Sean Heuston and Con Colbert were executed on May 8.

Thomas Kent was the only individual executed outside of Dublin and who did not participate in the Dublin Rising. Found guilty of shooting dead a Royal Irish Constabulary officer, his execution occurred on May 9 in the yard of Cork Detention Barracks. Séan Mac Diarmada and the injured James Connolly were the last of the two rebel leaders to be executed in Kilmainham on May 12. By then the British Prime Minister Herbert Asquith had arrived in Dublin and insisted on suspending further executions.

Learning of the sympathetic romanticism developing around the dead leaders, as well as the controversial shooting of Francis Sheehy-Skeffington and the journalists Thomas Dickson and Patrick MacIntyre on the orders of Captain JC Bowen-Colthurst, the remaining male prisoners were deported to prison camps in England and Wales. Though many received lengthy prison sentences they would all be released by the end of 1917.

Choosing a suitable punishment for the female prisoners perplexed the authorities, as they had no precedent for punishment of female prisoners of war. Held in Richmond Barracks, the women were all interviewed by the barrister William Wylie.

On his recommendation, Maxwell released 62 of them but held on to 18 'prominent and dangerous' women who were placed in Mountjoy Prison. Of this number, eight were deported to Britain, including Countess Markievicz who, as the only one of the Rising's leaders witnessed shooting dead a British soldier, should have received the death penalty. Instead 'owing to her sex', she was eventually sentenced to penal servitude for life. She remained in Aylesbury Prison until her release in 1917.

Roger Casement was the final individual linked to the Rising to be executed. Following a lengthy trial, his hanging was carried out on August 3 in Pentonville Prison, London. Eventually his body would be repatriated back to Ireland in 1965, by which time the legacy of the Rising was assured.

Dr Leanne Blaney is a social and transport historian who recently completed her PhD in the School of History (UCD). Her research focuses on 20th century Irish and Northern Irish history with a particular focus on cross-border relations during the early

The Rising that

Tremors from the momentous Easter 1916 events in Dublin were felt on the other side of the globe, sparking anger — and action, writes **Eoin Hahessy**

PAUSE and think of life in 1916. A world two years etched into a weary world war. The one superpower being challenged as it grappled to assert its influence across its Empire. A social struggle, as a heaving mass of working class resentment and frustration simmered under a dominant social order nervous of its position.

In such a world where embers of disaffection flickered, information was controlled and constrained by those who held power. The leaders of the Easter Rising knew that in this historical window of opportunity they had to make the case for freedom to the world and they put a plan into action.

On the corner of O'Connell Street and Abbey Street in Dublin sits the Grand Central. Striking yet easily missed in a Dublin throng, in 1916 it was the site of the Reis building, and on its top floor was occupied by the Dublin Wireless School of Telegraphy. Closed by the British upon the outbreak of the First World War, in Easter week Joseph Plunkett ordered seven men to occupy that building and to restore the radio equipment. Setting up the antenna on the roof, the rebels came under sniper fire from McBirney's Department Store on Aston Quay. Their perseverance paid off and in what is considered the world's first pirate broadcast, they sent the following Morse code."Irish Republic declared in Dublin today. Irish troops have captured city and are in full possession. Enemy cannot move in city. The whole country rising."

Meanwhile in Kerry, two Valentia Island brothers under British noses in a heavily guarded cable station provided a coded tip off to American and German Irish sympathisers that the Rising had begun. These actions propelled a small uprising into global front page news.

Ireland's Rising would occupy the front page of *The New York Times* for 14 days. A fact owing largely to New Jersey-born Joyce Kilmer, whose contribution has been traced elegantly by Robert Schmuhl. A poet and staff writer with the *Sunday Magazine* of *The New York Times*, Kilmer had converted to Catholicism in 1913 and despite his American lineage declared himself to be 'half-Irish'.

On May 7 1916, as the Irish rebels were being executed, Kilmer published 'Poets March in the Van of Irish Revolt' that stressed the involvement of writers in the Rising noting with flurry that 'the Leaders of the revolutionary forces were almost without exception men of literary tastes and training, who went into battle, as one of the dispatches phrased it, 'with a revolver in one had and a copy of Sophocles in the other.' Kilmer's reporting was joined by a slew of journalism throughout the year, the first 20th century challenge to British imperial power was news, as were the tales of courage and sacrifice. The British grew fearful that faith in the Empire would be shaken.

A press censor's office was established in Dublin to swat any international reporting that could have an impact in surly Ireland or across the Empire. One notable missive that got through was Kilmer's vividly descriptive article

CARPETS CLEANED
CARPETS SHAKEN
PRESCOTTS

EVENING HERALD

VOL. 23 NO. 101. DUBLIN, FRIDAY, MAY 5, 1916. PRICE ONE

"MAJOR" McBRIDE EXECUTED
Other Notable Sinn Fein Leaders Sentenced
MORE TRIALS AND PENALTIES

SCENE IN ABBEY STREET

GAS MAIN BURSTS
City Shaken With the Force

IRISH EXECUTIVE
Mr. Birrell a Successor Appointed

"I AM DE VALERA"
Story of the Surrender at Ringsend