



'Most Irish families have a connection to the Civil War'

Barry Andrews' grandfather Todd was proud of his republicanism, writes **Kathy Donaghy**

When Barry Andrews looks at the photograph of his grandfather Todd Andrews, he finds it difficult to imagine that the man in the picture is only 20, five years older than his eldest son is today.

The picture was taken inside the Four Courts in 1922, the headquarters of the anti-Treaty forces, and Andrews is conversing with fellow anti-Treaty IRA men Ernie O'Malley, Seán MacBride and Andy Cooney. All are young men. MacBride, who was assistant to O'Malley, the director of organisation at the Four Courts, was still a teenager.

While Barry Andrews, a scion of the Andrews political dynasty in Dublin, is immensely proud of his grandfather, he wears the historical weight of his heritage lightly. It has, however, been hugely influential in his own life: he studied history and politics at University College Dublin and worked as a history teacher before following his father David Andrews, the former foreign minister, into politics.

Now a Fianna Fáil MEP for Dublin, he believes that it is only in recent years that we have become more aware of some of the areas of social history that had long remained hidden. What he calls the "greyer" areas are coming into focus today.

While many people will be familiar with the prominent roles that his paternal grandfather Todd held in public life in his later years — he was the first managing director of Bord na Móna and chairman of CIÉ and RTÉ — he was revolutionary first.

Growing up, Barry was always aware his grandfather had been in the IRA. When he and his cousins would arrive at his house, they would plead to see a shrapnel wound in his wrist, evidence of his front-seat view of a bloody history. As a youngster, Barry and his cousins were fascinated with this aspect of their grandfather's life, without attaching any political significance to those wounds.

What Barry does recall, however, is his grandfather's distinctly anti-British attitude, something he was conscious of not passing on to his children or grandchildren. "He wanted each of us and his own children to make up their own minds. But you could tell from what he wrote that he didn't let all of the bitterness go," he says.

Todd Andrews could be an intimidating figure but, even so, on a trip to London, Barry once sent a postcard of the queen to him as a joke.

It was as he came into his teenage years that Barry's own political awareness began to sharpen and he better understood the important contribution Todd had made to the formation of the state and the extraordinary things he had done.

In his military pension file, Todd

Todd Andrews (extreme right) conversing with fellow anti-Treaty IRA men Seán MacBride, Andy Cooney and Ernie O'Malley inside the Four Courts in 1922



Andrews revealed that he joined the Irish Volunteers while at university. His first task was making bombs. In 1919, he claimed to have been a full-time organiser raiding for guns.

In March 1920 he was arrested while attempting to raid income tax receipts. He went on hunger strike in jail and was released after 10 days. He quickly returned to the Volunteers. "I had no other interests," he said.

On Bloody Sunday 1920, he went to 7

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Ranelagh Road to execute Lieutenant William Noble, a British intelligence officer, but he was not there. The house was burned down instead.

In May 1921, he was interned but escaped through an underground tunnel from Rath camp at the Curragh in August 1921. He rejoined the IRA and was placed in charge of the divisional camp in Dungloe, Co Donegal. He joined the anti-Treaty side and was injured during fighting in O'Connell Street in June 1922.

At the age of about 12 or 13, Barry read the first volume of his grandfather's memoirs, which he says made the things he had heard about seem more real. *Dublin Made Me*, the first of Todd Andrews' two celebrated volumes of autobiography, describes in loving detail the pre-independence Dublin in which he grew up and provides a vivid participant's account of the War of Independence and Civil War.

The book is described as a unique

account of an ordinary childhood transformed by war and revolution. Together with its sequel, *Man of No Property*, it provides an unmatched first-person chronicle of the making of 20th-century Ireland.

Married to Mary Coyle, the couple had five children. Two of his sons, David and Niall, would become Fianna Fáil TDs. Before her marriage, Mary had been a member of the executive of Cumann na mBan. Her life is being thoroughly researched by Barry's younger sister Sinead.

Todd was a loving grandfather to Barry and to his brothers and sisters and cousins, including the broadcaster Ryan Tubridy and Sinn Féin TD Chris Andrews.

Barry recalls how on visits to the home his grandfather shared with his second wife Joyce, he would put the grandchildren to work trying to find where she had hidden his cigars.

In the last years of his life, the cousins operated something of a rota, coming in to help in their grandfather's care for a few hours every morning, which brought them very close to him.

He died in October 1985, when Barry was in first year at UCD at the time. That day he was in the university's debating society — or the L&H as it is known — when the society's chairman Eamon Delaney asked him to go to the back of the theatre for an urgent message. Todd had died. He was 83.

Teaching history came easily to Barry in part, he says, because of his family history. Yet he is quick to point out that many people in Irish life have ties to this transformative and turbulent period. "Most Irish families have a connection to the Civil War," he says.

As for his own children Hugh (15), Conn (13) and Kate (8), he'll tell them about the family history if they ask. If it sparks something in them, that's a good thing, he says.



Holding history: Barry Andrews with his cousin Ryan Tubridy in 2015 with photographs of their grandfather Todd

PHOTO: STEVE HUMPHREYS

Descendants of revolutionaries:
Barry and Sinead Andrews, grandchildren of Todd Andrews and Mary Coyle

PHOTO: GERRY MOONEY



Sinead Andrews: ‘My grandmother Mary Coyle was a soldier, hiding guns and dispatching messages’

Sinead Andrews never met her grandmother Mary Coyle, but she says they are defined by the same intolerance for injustice.

The second youngest child of former foreign minister David Andrews, Andrews was always aware of the giant figure of her grandfather; his wife less so.

Todd Andrews had been a prominent anti-Treaty IRA man who played an important role in the foundation of the state. He met Mary Coyle while the two were studying for a BComm at University College Dublin in 1925.

Before that, she had been an active member of Cumann na mBan. A student at Loreto College on St Stephen's Green in 1916, she witnessed the Rising first-hand. That event was, her granddaughter believes, the spark that lit a fuse for her and she became actively involved in the Irish revolution.

Growing up, Sinead had always been curious about Coyle. Her work with the UN peacekeepers and Unicef had taken her all over the world to serve in various missions. Even far from home, in places such as Lebanon and Sierra Leone, she says she felt a bond stretching across history with a woman who, like her, was trying to make a difference.

“My family is quite patriarchal at first glance,” says Andrews, who is now working on rights-based campaigns while in lockdown in Dublin. “But the

fierceness is there with the women as well — it certainly was in Mary Coyle”.

The pandemic has forced Andrews to stay closer to home than she has been in many years and she has used the opportunity to research her grandmother's life and the role of women in the revolutionary period.

“Women were very much the espionage part of the Civil War. From my reading and talking to people, the war was as much about intelligence and espionage as it was about the military side of things. Mary Coyle was a soldier, hiding guns and dispatching messages. She taught first-aid classes too,” says Andrews.

Her grandmother's story is one of huge drama: she evaded arrest, she spent time in Kilmainham Gaol, went on hunger strike and took enormous risks.

Andrews is being helped in her research by her first cousins broadcaster Ryan Tubridy and Kate O’Riordan, the daughter of the late MEP Niall Andrews.



Sinead Andrews' grandmother Mary Coyle

Mary's father John Coyle came from Stranorlar in Co Donegal. He and his wife moved to Dublin in 1914 but her father died in 1918, leaving eight children, of whom Mary was the eldest. After school she was meant to study at UCD but ended up going to London.

On return to Dublin in 1920 she got a job as a ‘lady clerk’ at the Guinness brewery. It was a good job, although Sinead found a letter warning her grandmother that she would have to resign if she were to marry.

It was during these years of employment at Guinness that Mary Coyle was to have some of her most hair-raising experiences. She had to explain one absence from work by providing her employers with a letter from the barracks where she had been held for questioning all day.

On another occasion, she learned the Black and Tans were coming to search her flat on Mespil Road for weapons — she had hidden them on top of a wardrobe — and she jumped out the bathroom window to escape.

Eventually she was arrested and incarcerated at Kilmainham Gaol. From letters Sinead has found, Coyle tried to get her job back after her release in 1923 but Guinness was having none of it.

Letters also reveal that her activities were not going down well with family members.

In 1925, Coyle went to UCD. The trail

goes cold here but Andrews suspects that she was still active in the republican struggle, albeit in a different way.

“There seems to be some sort of shame about women who were on the anti-Treaty side — they went silent almost,” she says. “Was it because of the kind of work they were doing, and they wouldn't be speaking about espionage?”

Coyle was active in the Irish Housewives Association, a pressure group formed to speak out about the injustices and the needs of Irish women, outside and inside the home. It attracted the ire of Archbishop of Dublin John Charles McQuaid.

In later years she was appointed a director of a national organisation for rehabilitation.

“I found a speech that she gave where she starts by saying ‘I don't normally do things like this,’” says Andrews. “She had remained in the background like a lot of women at that time — they had accepted to be in background.”

Through her work, Andrews is keen that her grandmother's role in history will be brought to the fore.

In time she hopes she can pull all the threads of her grandmother's life together, weaving it into a documentary.

“She's very passionate,” Andrews says. “In her writing it's clear she wants freedom for Ireland but as I trawl through the archives she also wants the same for herself.”

Kathy Donaghy