



'I rejoiced when we heard three English officers would be shot for every Irishman hanged'

The diaries of **Celia Shaw** reveal how the execution of UCD contemporary Kevin Barry converted so many to the republican cause

The following is the personal diary of Celia Shaw. Born in Slane, Co Meath, she was a county scholar and, by the autumn of 1920, a 21-year-old final-year BA student studying English and Irish at University College Dublin.

Shaw recounts vividly both the feelings and the lived experience of the university's students as they witnessed one of their own facing the death penalty for his role in the botched arms raid on Monk's Bakery on North King Street in September 1920.

Having flown a tricolour over the college on the day of Kevin Barry's execution, UCD students were subjected to a raid by Crown forces. As Shaw vividly illustrates, such actions turned unaligned students who had not even known Barry into firm sympathisers with the republican cause.

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Celia Shaw — Strictly private and personal (1920)

October

I'm afraid this will be a very largely political as our whole minds are turned in one direction... The country, especially the South, was terribly disturbed and a few disquieting events happened in Dublin, but it was later still we were to feel what we were passing through.

November

We had all heard of the affair at North King St Bakery when a party of Auxiliaries were attacked and one of them killed. We knew a medical student had been captured but no one seemed really to believe it as the affair was over and gone a long time before any steps were taken.

To our horror we read in the papers one day that Kevin Barry was being tried for 'murder', as we read the evidence and the summing up of the prosecutor, who mentioned that even if Kevin did not fire the fatal shot, the fact that he was levying

war was quite sufficient to condemn him.

I did not know Kevin but the 1st medicals Hon[oria] Aughney, May McGreen and the crowd who frequent ceildhithé [sic] knew him well. It was ages before the sentence was promulgated but no one was too downhearted until the sentence was known.

There were terrible stories current of how the poor fellow was being tortured in Mountjoy to make him reveal the names of his companions. I never experienced anything like the surging fury which this news produced in everyone.

One night Molly and I were leaving the Lib. About 9o'clock. We heard a stop-press [late newspaper edition] being shouted and we interviewed the DMP [Dublin Metropolitan Police] man at the gates. In the latest news was the announcement that Kevin was guilty of murder and sentenced to death, and that the execution would be carried out on 1st Nov.

We were dumbfounded and stunned. The more optimistic hoped for a reprieve on account of his age but many others felt there was no hope for him, he was the first person captured and we felt England

would make an example of him to deter others.

It was a dreadful fortnight listening to the awful tales of his tortures and suffering in prison. Everyone was depressed and furiously enraged at the very thought of such cruelty, the whole country wanted a reprieve — Dr [William] Walshe [sic] [Archbishop of Dublin] personally interviewed [Viscount John] French [Lord Lieutenant of Ireland] who would take no responsibility for the deed, every influential person moved and there seemed to be hopes of a reprieve.

Kevin was to be hanged on Monday and on Sunday we all went up to Mountjoy where Fr Albert [Bibby] said the Rosary.

It was dreadful kneeling before the grim gaunt walls and knowing the tragedy which would take place next day. As



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armoured car patrolled the place. Cannon [John] Waters passed out looking disconsolate while Fr Albert gave Kevin's last message to the university students and to the 2nd medicals in particular. It was an exhortation to fight for the cause for which he was dying.

And yet all that day we hoped for a reprieve — we spent our day awaiting the shout of stop—press, we made a holy hour in the Hall, our minds were completely given over to the stupendous tragedy.

Next morning the Cumann na mBan went to Mountjoy to show their last respects to Kevin. I shall never forget my feelings when the poster "He must die" met my gaze — there was not an unmoved countenance outside Mountjoy.

That day a grey pall seemed to hang over the city: nature itself seemed to be protesting against the fiendish act, there was no gleam of hope; all was gloomy — deep dark and miserable — everyone wore an expression of helpless misery and defiant sadness.

Had we not prayed that day as we never prayed before I don't know what might have happened to us. It was the first warning of the strength of the enemy we were fighting.

We lost all our humanitarian feelings and actually rejoiced when later we heard three English officers would be shot for every Irishman hanged.

Next day we were at lectures as usual, it

was 11o'clock (the day of the execution a Sinn Féin flag was flying half-mast over the college) and I was doing some work in the library when someone informed me there was a raid on the college.

We went down and found our way from the lib to the centre Hall blocked by two armed men. We strolled around, the Tommies were harmless until two officers — supercilious cads — came along and ordered us all into one room.

It chanced to be the geological lab and no sooner did we pass in than we emerged out into the courtyard by the other door; the officer discovered this when about 20 of us were out and came fuming out threatening all kind of pains and penalties if we didn't obey orders.

We were in the lab — vainly endeavouring to become interested in different stones and fragments of coal etc. Finally the men searched and we were allowed to go. They made [Denis J] Coffey [president of UCD] deliver up the register of the college and so they had all the names and addresses. I believe there was a great shuffling of digs that night.

We heard Dick Mulcahy [chief of staff of the IRA] had been in the college that morning but we never could verify that.

● *Transcription and introduction by Dr Conor Mulvagh, assistant professor of modern Irish history at UCD*

'The lorries were still flying, the rifles menacingly facing us'

The diary of **Celia Shaw** recalls the horror of Bloody Sunday

The following account by Celia Shaw provides a clear insight into the tumultuous events that unfolded over the course of Bloody Sunday. Her description of the military activity taking place across Dublin on November 21 highlights the fear and confusion that was commonplace for the capital's citizens during this period.

The assassination of both RIC member John J Fitzgerald at 28 Earlsfort Terrace and British army intelligence officer Lieutenant Peter Ashmun Ames are mentioned, alongside the locations of numerous other IRA attacks.

Yet what is striking is the urgency of British retaliation for these attacks, culminating in Crown forces opening fire on the crowds in Croke Park that afternoon. Widespread panic across the city led to speculation that up to 300 deaths had occurred, as noted in the text, although it was later discovered that 14 people lost their lives.

It is also notable that, considering the scale of violence witnessed across Dublin that day, it is the discovery of Fr Griffin's body, a young west of Ireland priest captured six days previously, that strikes perhaps the most sombre note for Shaw.

If the murder of Kevin Barry swayed those previously impartial towards the republican cause, then acts such as the murder of an innocent priest further cemented these sentiments.

November 21, 1920

Things had just become less shamed when this day 'Bloody Sunday' arrived. I generally go to Mass in Leeson St but this day I went to House Mass at 8.30. I distinctly remember hearing four revolver shells in quick succession; they gave me a frightening kind of feel but that passed away and I thought no more about it.

All the morning we noticed extraordinary military activity. Lorries were fairly flying through and revolvers and rifles were threateningly pointed at everyone. We knew there was something up and Mary Mc Mahon told that as she was coming up Baggot Street a crowd was collected around a house and a small boy said to her — Miss if you come nearer and look down the area you'll see the blood. Mary didn't avail of the invitation.

Ciss Nowlan [sic] was staying in Lower Mount St, No 16, I think, and she told of the battle there and the commotion raised. We were quite bewildered and it was only at 12o'clock. A stop-press [newspaper] came out and told of the shootings in the Gresham, in Mount St, in Pembroke St (which would explain the shooting I heard in our chapel) and in the Gresham.

There was tense excitement all the

forenoon and we didn't care to think of the night. Mollie, Mary and I had a meeting of the Working Girls Guild at 4o'clock in Thomas Street and after lunch we went there.

Sir Joseph Glynn [politician and historian] told us of the shooting of Captain Fitzgerald in Earlsfort Terrace and Lieutenant Ames in Upper Mount Street. The weirdest tales were going around and as we walked home that evening a red glare in the sky attracted our attention and we concluded that they weren't waiting for night to begin reprisals.

The lorries were still flying, the rifles menacingly facing us. I never felt happy when a lorry was in sight as I always dreaded a sudden jerk which might cause a rifle to go off.

At every step on the street we decided on a course of action in case of an ambush: we were to gracefully recline full length on the pavement — inwardly I resolved I'd make for the nearest doorway and demand admittance.

When we reached the hostel we found everyone listening terror-stricken to the tale of Croke Park. We gathered a football match had been in progress. When the military rushed in, surrounded the field and fired on the onlookers. Mary Purcell told of the Tipp goalkeeper jumping for a ball and a bullet striking him in the face — the fright, the panic, the pandemonium, the ghastliness of the whole affair startled us — the dead mounted from 10 to 300, and we listened horrorstricken [sic] to the accounts which told of the lorries, with infuriated soldiers beating drums firing their deadly volleys into the mass of people.

Bridie Redmond came in that night, telling of the hundreds who crowded around the Mater, and of the wounded who had been tended by her brother. She could give no idea of the numbers dead, wounded or merely bruised; her brother had been giving absolution for two hours.

Then the night came and we heard the heavy firing far away to the north of the city. We didn't know what to expect and all during the night the tension prevailed though as far as we know nothing happened except two outbreaks of fire, one at Ballsbridge, one on the quays.

On the next day we heard of the finding of Fr Griffin's body [a young priest who was lured and killed by British forces on November 14 and discovered six days later], and we thought a government who permitted the murder of priests could not succeed even in this world.

● *Transcription by Anthony Nolan, MA in public history, UCD*