



Bea, Mattie, W. B. & The Irish War Of Independence

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The year after the 1916 Rising in Ireland, William Butler Yeats, a great lyric poet of the English language who wrote Easter 1916 in memory of the men who had immediately been executed, bought his beloved Thoor Ballylee. It is a Norman Castle near Gort, Co. Galway, within sight of where I was born in a thatched cottage on the Gregory estate. The wonderful 'Easter, 1916' which, as poetry written about a revolution in his own country, is still the envy of fellow poets, was written a few months before Yeats took possession of his future holiday home. It was the middle of the first World War, and shortly after writing 'Easter 1916' he had to do several eulogies to the only son of his friend and mentor Lady Augusta Gregory of Coole House, Kiltartan. Her enterprise had fulfilled for him, in the shape of Dublin's Abbey Theatre, the theatrical ambitions he had been nourishing since, in his twenties, he first fell in love with the outstandingly beautiful Maud Gonne.

Ironically, since the death of Charles Stewart Parnell, a landlord who had started the Land League with Michael Davitt a Fenian activist in neighbouring Co. Mayo, even in 'The Big House' there was a feeling that revolt was brewing among the peasantry. Davitt's family had barely avoided succumbing to The Great Famine (1845 - 49). He was radicalised by the Fenians/Irish Republican Brotherhood which was an oathbound organisation, recognising only its own Supreme Council as the 'legitimate government' of Ireland. Covertly, under the guise of The Gaelic League, there were active members of the IRB even on the Gregory Estate. The local *múinteoir taistil* for the League was Pádraig Fahy. He had recruited hundreds of members for the Irish Volunteers/Óglaigh na hÉireann and brought them through the earliest stages of military training, drilling them at Irish dancing classes before IRB headquarters in Dublin sent Commandant Liam Mellows who had a military education to take charge of the Rebellion in South Galway. They had 600 fighting men waiting in Gort for arms off the SS Aud when news arrived that it had been scuttled in Tralee Bay. Had it not been for this tragedy which left them with arms Liam Mellows and Padraig Fahy would have the prominent place that they deserve in our Centenary commemorations.



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