

Early Life

Thomas Curtin was born in Mourne Abbey, County Cork on the 20th of March 1884 and was the son of Patrick Curtin a farmer and Julia Sheehan. In 1897 the family moved to Cork City where he attended the North Monastery School.

MacCurtain, as he would later be known, was active in a number of cultural and political movements. He had a great interest in the Irish language and joined the Blackpool branch of The Gaelic League, becoming its secretary in 1902, not long after leaving school.

Picture (right): Photo of Tomás MacCurtain playing his fiddle

Irish Volunteers

At the beginning of the Easter Rising MacCurtain commanded 1,000 Irish Volunteers who assembled at a number of venues in and around Cork City. Tomás and his officers, who were based at the volunteer's headquarters at Sheare's St, in the city, awaited orders from their superiors in Dublin. As a result of receiving confusing and differing instructions, the Cork volunteers did not enter the fray. A stand-off began as British troops surrounded the volunteer hall and continued for a week until a negotiated agreement led to the surrender of the volunteers' arms to the then Lord Mayor of Cork Thomas Butterfield, on the understanding that they would be returned at a later date. This did not happen however and MacCurtain was later jailed.

MacCurtain the Musician

Tomás MacCurtain was an accomplished musician and held a deep love for music during his life. He played both the war pipes and the fiddle. Indeed, Tomás even found the time to play the fiddle while in Frongoch Prison after the 1916 Rising. His favourite song was "The Lark in the Clear Air" which he played at all hours whenever the mood took him.



Death

On the 20th March 1920, on his 36th birthday, MacCurtain was shot dead in front of his wife and son by a group of men with blackened faces, who were later identified by the official inquest, as being members of the Royal Irish Constabulary. The killing caused widespread outrage across the country. The coroners' passed a verdict of wilful murder against British Prime Minister Lloyd George and against certain members of the RIC. Michael Collins later ordered his squad of assassins to uncover and assassinate the police officers involved in the attack. RIC District Inspector Oswald Swanzy, who had ordered the attack, was fatally shot, with MacCurtain's own revolver, whilst leaving a Protestant church in Lisburn, County Antrim, on August 22nd 1920.

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Tomás MacCurtain

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