

So who were the seven signers of the Irish Proclamation?

Though ultimately it can be said to have been a political success, in its own time the rising was an enterprise doomed at the outset. Poorly organized, orders given and then countermanded, too few men, too few guns and of the wrong kind, the leaders themselves inexperienced. Poetical men, for the most part, many of whom found the use of violence a repellent idea but who were yet forced suddenly into assuming a military stance they barely knew how to take. Instead of taking the fight to the British, the Irish were mostly bunkered down in buildings waiting for the attack. (And the British blew out buildings and tunneled through dwelling around the GPO just to get to the GPO.)

One has to look at the seven men who signed the Proclamation of the Republic on that fateful Monday afternoon to understand how warfare could have been but a last resort. Of the seven, I don't believe any one of them had ever shot much more than a rabbit, and perhaps even that under protest. To think of them as military men must have taken a rather large stretch of the imagination.

Yet here was Padraic Pearse, a poet and dramatist, in the role of the Commander General of the Irish Republican forces and President of the Provisional Government. With him in signing the Proclamation were:

Thomas MacDonagh, thirty-eight, also a poet, member of the Gaelic League, whom wrote a play for the Abbey Theater.

Eamonn Ceannt, thirty-four, a clerk in the city treasury department, beyond everything else Irish in his feelings, a performer on the Irish uilleann pipes and so expert that he went to the Vatican to play them for Pope Saint Pius X;

Joseph Mary Plunkett, twenty-nine, descendant of an illustrious family, son of a Papal count, a gentle, delicate man, deeply Catholic, who daily read Saint Theresa of Avila, Saint John of the Cross, and Saint Thomas Aquinas;

Sean MacDiarmada, thirty-two, perhaps most widely known of the Irish volunteers, who had hoped to be a teacher. He devoted himself to revitalizing the Irish Republican Brotherhood. And travelled Ireland as an organizer for the IRB.

James Connolly, forty-six, a socialist and union organizer whose unending hope was for better conditions for the working man and women of Ireland. He gave his full measure of devotion to the "cause" quite unlike most of his comrades in arms. (it was he who said, "From the moment that the first shot is fired, there will be no longer Volunteers or citizen Army, but only the Army of the Irish Republic");

and finally there was Thomas Clarke, fifty-eight, the oldest of the group—a gentle appearing man, marked by fifteen and a half years of intense suffering in English jails but undaunted, and perhaps the chief moving force behind the rising, a good part of which was organized at meetings in his tobacco shop in Parnell street.

And all of them would be shot in Kilmainham Jail in the early days of May. After a long series of mistakes, these executions were to be the greatest of England's blunders in her handling of the Irish problem.

Words by Patrick Pearse: I should like to see any and every body of Irish citizens armed. We must accustom ourselves to the thought of arms, to the sight of arms, to the use of arms. We may make mistakes in the beginning and shoot the wrong people; but bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing, and the nation which regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood. There are many things more horrible than bloodshed; and slavery is one of them. (Many of the signers of the Proclamation felt this way – i.e. bloodletting. They were committed to sacrificing their lives).

This poem was written by William Butler Yeats after the Easter Rising. The words summed up the passion of these seven men by creating a dialogue between two of the most well-known members of the 'rising.'

The men died brave. They accepted their fate. Their parting words and statements were not of men that regretted their actions but of hope that their actions would bring others to follow their path.

THE ROSE TREE

'O WORDS are lightly spoken,'
Said Pearse to Connolly,
'Maybe a breath of politic words
Has withered our Rose Tree;
Or maybe but a wind that blows
Across the bitter sea.'

'It needs to be but watered,'
James Connolly replied,
'To make the green come out again
And spread on every side,
And shake the blossom from the bud
To be the garden's pride.'

'But where can we draw water,'
Said Pearse to Connolly,
'When all the wells are parched away?
O plain as plain can be
There's nothing but our own red blood
Can make a right Rose Tree.'

Feel the passion; Feel the energy. Come out to the Easter rising presentation.

And may the Irish force be with you.