

## Thomas Kent

Before we begin, I have a question for everyone.

**Q: How many men were executed in Dublin after the Easter Rising, 1916?**

- A) 17      B) 16      C) 15      D) 14      E) 13**

We remember the 'forgotten patriot' Thomas Kent, one of 16 men executed for his role in the 1916 Rising. After 99 years in a shallow grave on the grounds of Cork prison, he was recently given a full State funeral. He was laid to rest alongside his brothers David, Richard and William in his home village of Castlelyons in Co. Cork.

President Michael D Higgins was in attendance at the State funeral along with the Taoiseach Enda Kenny, the Tánaiste (deputy Taoiseach of Ireland) Joan Burton, Fianna Fáil leader Michéal Martin and Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams.

The diplomatic corps was represented by the British ambassador Dominick Chilcott, the US ambassador Kevin O'Malley and the Papal Nuncio Archbishop Charles Brown.

Forty-six organized companies of the Irish Volunteers in Cork city and county, though poorly armed, believed they were denied the participation in the 1916 events when they accepted Eoin MacNeill's cancellation orders that Easter. Because of the participation of the Volunteers, some families or individuals were singled out for harassment. The Kent's of Fermoy, who had been active in the Volunteers, were the first family to be on the receiving end of the backlash.

Now about Thomas Kent.

Kent was 50 years old when the 1916 Rising happened. He grew up in Castlelyons, a few miles from Fermoy, Co Cork. His family were squeezed off their land by the British Crown's incremental rate increases. Kent left for Boston in the United States, but returned to Ireland several years later, owing to illness. He and his three brothers were often jailed for their political activities, chiefly their support for the Land League and their membership of Sinn Féin and the Irish Volunteers.

When the Easter Rising kicked off in April 1916, Kent and his brothers obeyed Eoin MacNeill's countermanding order and stayed home, Kent having planned to head to Dublin to fight. In a swoop for known Republican sympathizers, however, the RIC made a dawn raid on the Kent family home in Castlelyons. The Kent's resisted arrest and had a shootout with the RIC, which lasted four hours. The RIC's head constable was killed, his face blown off, before the Kent's surrendered.

When they arrested Kent he was paraded through the town of Fermoy in an effort to humiliate him. His mother was 89 and took part by cooling down the guns and supplying her sons with ammunition during the raid. She was too old to walk so they put her on a cart with her dying son. The youngest son, his name was Richard. He suffered from his nerves, as they said in those days. He had mental issues. He was terrified when he was arrested and he ran away and was shot in the back. He was dying. He died about a day later from his wounds.

Kent and his younger brother William, were taken to Cork Barracks for trial. The judge in the case was blunt in his assessment of Kent's predicament.

"You stand before me guilty of the most heinous of crimes against the British Crown. You are guilty of treason. In my view, when a head constable has been murdered, when your brother lost his life, I am left with no option but to sentence you to death by firing squad. You will be taken to Cork Army Barracks where on the ninth of this month you will be shot until you are dead. May God have mercy on your soul. Take him down!"

Kent's brother, William, got a reprieve. Kent was shot at 4am on May 9, 1916. With the exception of Roger Casement, he was the only 1916 Rising leader to be shot outside Dublin. His dying wish was that no Irishman would be part of the firing squad.



Photo: Thomas and his brother William being marched across the bridge in Fermoy following their arrest.

Liam Lynch (general of the Irish Republican Army during the civil war) was standing on Fermoy Bridge that morning when he saw the Kent family after they had been arrested by British soldiers. Thomas was in bare feet, William and their mother were prisoners, and a horse was drawing a cart on which Richard and David lay wounded. It was a scene which cut to Liam's very heart. That night he made a resolution that he would atone as far as possible to dedicate his life for the sacrifices of the martyred dead: he was determined to make the Irish Republic a reality. Believing that the only way to achieve freedom was by force – that it was in arms and only in arms that Ireland would achieve liberty.