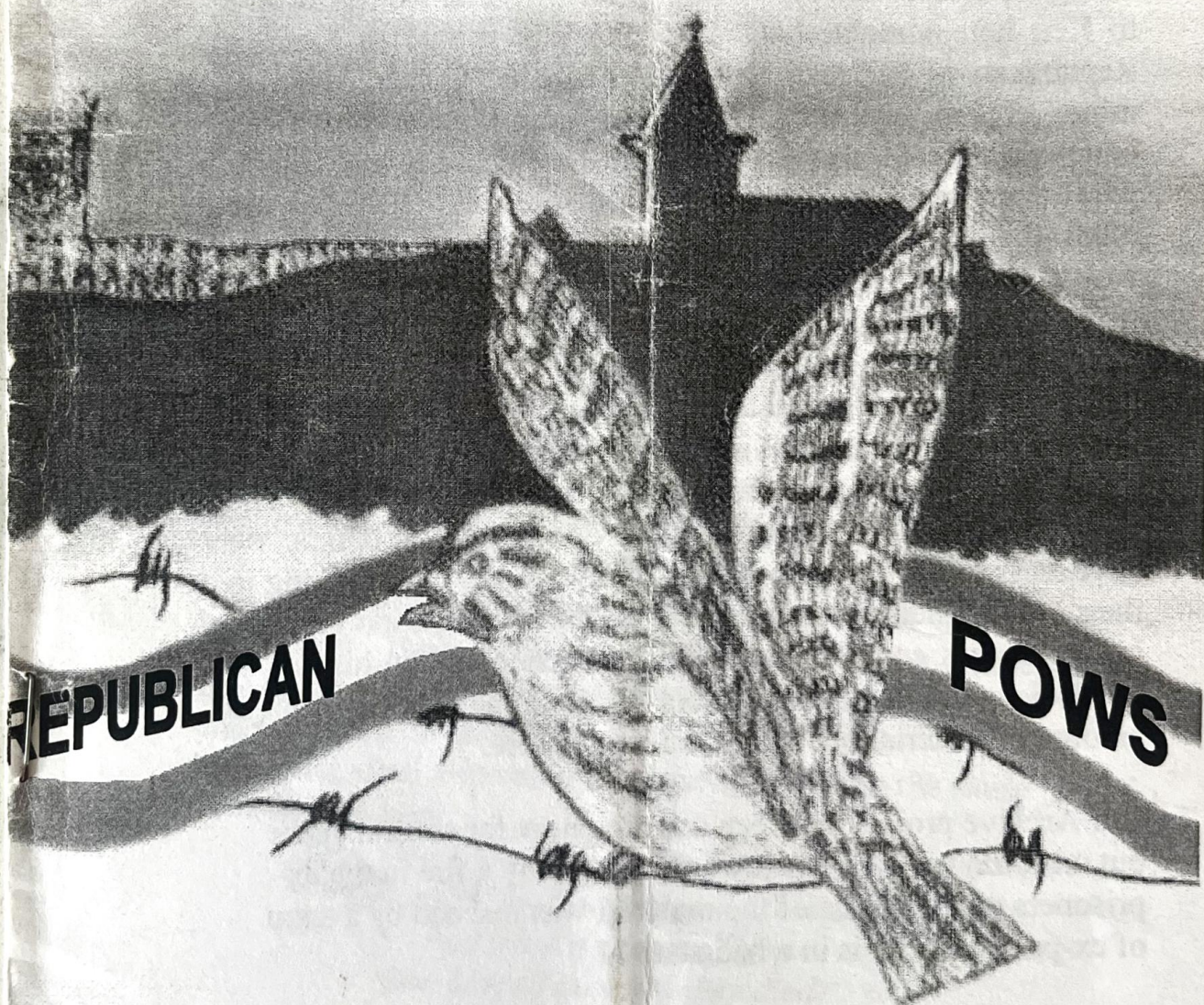


# Failte Abhaile



REPUBLICAN

POWS

A chara,

I want to take the opportunity tonight to welcome Ken O'Donohue home from Portlaoise Gaol where he was held as a Republican prisoner for 4 years. I also want to pay tribute to him as a Republican. During that time I got to know Ken and his comrades well. It wasn't easy being in jail during an IRA ceasefire but he conducted himself with integrity and good humour.

Tonight we celebrate the release of Ken. While we pay tribute to Ken here tonight, I also want to pay tribute to Kerri, a Republican in her own right, who became a firm friend of mine. I can say with all honesty that I never heard her complain once. I also pay tribute to Ken's family and friends who supported him during his imprisonment. Families are often the backbone of the Republican struggle something which is not always recognised when history is written.

Republicans must record their own history and we cannot leave it to others to write the revised version. To that end the prisoners who served time in English jails have almost finished recording their history. We hope to publish this next year. The POW department is archiving any documents or photos we have and would welcome copies if anyone has history lying in their attic. When the definitive account of the prison struggle in England is complete we will commence on the history of Portlaoise and Limerick Gaols. We already have a large amount of material but would welcome more.

Our Archive project has been ongoing now for several years but unfortunately a lot of it was damaged by a fire in the ex-prisoners office. Some of the material was rescued by a team of ex-prisoners but is in a bad state of

repair and must be restored. This costs a lot of money if it is to be of any worth in later years. To that end we hope that ex-prisoners will become involved in the project.

I want to thank most sincerely all those who helped keep the POW department functioning over the past 30 years. Most of the money raised was due to a monthly raffle, with tickets sold at a local level across Dublin which was organised by Rab Hunter, himself a former prisoner. I want to thank all those who sold tickets for us over the years. We are organising a new raffle now to help fund the restoration and archiving of current and past prison history. I hope you will all support this raffle as much as you did the previous one. Tickets will be on sale soon.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all those who helped out tonight, those who sold tickets and those who turned up here tonight. I also want to thank those who tried and failed to get tickets. Due to strict Fire and safety regulations we were limited in the amount of tickets we could sell. Finally I want to pay tribute to Andy Kavanagh and An Cumann Cabhrach for the work they put in assisting the families of Republican prisoners.

Please remember the Republican prisoners still in jail. Remember those still on the run and the three Republicans fighting extradition to England. Remember and support their families.

And most of all remember all those who died in the cause of Irish Freedom.

*We know their dream; enough  
To know they dreamed and are dead.*

*And what if excess of love  
Bewildered them till they died?*

W.B. Yeats, Easter 1916

## Portlaoise Prison Historical Time Line 1830's – January 2008



- 1830s Portlaoise Prison known as Maryboro prison was built.
- 1921 December 6th. Anglo-Irish Treaty signed and IRA split
- 1919-1921 A small number of IRA prisoners held in Maryboro including Pádraig Fleming mounted a single handed campaign to win political status in the face of considerable brutality.
- 1922 Portlaoise Prison changed from Maryboro to Portlaoise Prison.
- 1922 Portlaoise Prison filled to overflowing with between 700 and 800 prisoners during the Civil War and burnt by the Anti-Treaty IRA prisoners in August 1922. Three prisoners wounded by Free State soldiers.
- 1924 Most of those 700 prisoners were released
- 1939 June 14th Offences Against the State Act introduced by the Free State government after the IRA bombing campaign in England.
- 1940 January 4th internment was introduced and “hard-core” Republicans imprisoned in Portlaoise Jail, with others jailed in Mountjoy, The Curragh and Arbour Hill, these prisoners were allowed wear their own clothes but in contrast those in Portlaoise were expected to wear prison uniforms.

- 1940 Thomas MacCurtain sentenced to life was sent to Portlaoise prison
- 1940 April Tony Darcy and Jack McNeela died on hunger strike.
- 1940 August 16th Emergency Powers (Amendment) Act was altered and Paddy McGrath and Thomas Harte were summarily executed in Mountjoy. Between 1940 and 1944 a further four prisoners were executed.
- 1941 August 9th Execution of Volunteer Richard Goss in Portlaoise Prison.
- 1941 September 4th. Seán McCaughey, Tyrone, sentenced to life in Portlaoise Prison.
- March 5th Execution by military police firing squad of Volunteer George Plant, in Portlaoise Prison under a Fianna Fáil government
- 1946 April 19th Seán McCaughey OC of the Northern Command went on hunger and thirst strike in Portlaoise Prison after a 23 day protest. He died on May 11th after four and three quarter years without visits and in solitary confinement.
- 1940 and 1948 when the last of the political prisoners were released 11 POWs were held in Portlaoise. Only prisoners who offered armed resistance or commuted from a death sentence were held. Prisoners wore only a blanket.
- 1956. December 11th the beginning of the IRA Border Campaign again large numbers of Republicans arrested and held in Mountjoy.
- July 8th Internment again introduced and by September there were 115 Republicans held in the Curragh Camp.

- March 15th Internment ended and the last of the internees released from the Curragh Camp
- 1970 Republicans arrests recommence and prisoners held in Mountjoy and Limerick prisons.
- 1972 IRA split. Official IRA prisoners continued to be held in Portlaoise during the 1970s
- 1973 130 Republican prisoners held in Mountjoy prison.
- 1973 Hunger strike in Mountjoy Prison led by Pat Ward and Colm Daltún led to special category status
- October 31st Three Republicans escape from Mountjoy by helicopter
- Republican prisoners moved from Mountjoy to Portlaoise Prison, and following negotiations Special category status was restored to the prisoners in Portlaoise. IRA Command structure was set up.
- 1974. An escape plan was foiled when a tunnel under construction for six weeks was discovered leading into the prison.
- August 18th 19 IRA prisoners succeeded in escaping from Portlaoise Prison.
- August 19th New security measures implemented by the Coalition government, with increasingly oppressive restrictions.
- December 29th A full scale riot erupted within the prison with Republicans taking control of the entire E Block complex.
- January a hunger strike commenced which lasted for 44 days and ended on February 14th, when it appeared that the prisoners demands had been met. These demands were soon reneged on. Two Volunteers died as a result of the hunger strike. Vol. Colm Daltún died on January 15th 1983 still in his mid-thirties and Vol. Pat Ward died 12 years after his release aged 42.

- February explosives discovered within the prison.
- March 17th Volunteer Tom Smith shot dead by Free State soldiers whilst trying to escape. The special branch locked the cemetery gate in Glasnevin denying mourners access to the graveside. Dozens were injured and many more arrested.
- The British and Dublin governments adopted a criminalisation policy by removing Special Category Status
- June onwards strip searching and brutality became the norm for Republican prisoners. Visits were restricted and closed visits were introduced. Prisoners were beaten and put in solitary confinement with no medical attention. Negotiations proved fruitless.
- 1976. Republican prisoners attempted to burn the prison with improvised incendiaries. Prisoners were put on a 23 hour lock-up in solitary confinement with no radio, cigarettes, letters, books. Prisoners clothes were taken and replaced with prison issue clothing.
- 1976 Body searches were introduced, strip searching continued unabated, assaults were commonplace. IRA Command structures were ignored.
- March 6th Twenty prisoners went on Hunger Strike in Portlaoise jail, after 32 days they were all transferred to the Curragh Military camp. The strike ended after 47 days. The Coalition government were destroyed in the ensuing election and Fianna Fáil were back in power.
- to 1983. Strip searching, solitary confinement, closed visits and beatings continued. Relatives Action Committee set up on the outside.
- 1983. October 13th Three prisoners seriously beaten and given 56 days in solitary confinement.

- Lonergan was appointed Governor and a more humane regime followed.
- 1987 The Long Sentence Review Board was introduced chaired by TK Whittaker and a programme of release began for the 10 Republicans serving life sentences.
- 1987 Portlaoise Prison protest on refusal of compassionate parole for those serving 40 years.
- Pat 'Flash' McVeigh released from Portlaoise. Attempts were made to re-arrest him outside the gates of Portlaoise Prison but he escaped.
- 1988 August Robert Russell extradited from Portlaoise to Long Kesh.
- 1989 April Paul Kane extradited to Long Kesh
- 1990 March, Jim Clarke and Dermot Finucane beat extradition on political grounds
- 1990 14th November after 35 days on Hunger Strike Dessie Ellis was taken on a stretcher from Portlaoise Prison and brought to the Curragh and then flown to England.
- The Anti-Extradition Campaign was fought in Portlaoise Prison and particularly on the outside during the eighties and continued on into the nineties
- 1992. POW Brendan Seery from Westmeath died as a result of a heart attack within the prison
- The first IRA ceasefire was called and the first early releases took place on January 9th 1995.
- February 9th. The IRA ends its ceasefire and releases are stopped.
- The European Convention on the Transfer of Prisoners was signed by the Dublin Government. This enabled prisoners serving sentences abroad to be transferred home.
- July 20th. The IRA announces a cessation.

- April the Good Friday Agreement was signed and a programme of releases followed.
- Members of the Real IRA are jailed in Portlaoise.
- 1998 May The first prisoners were repatriated from England to Portlaoise prison after a 10 year campaign
- 1998. Those not released were sent to Castlerea prison in Roscommon.
- Seven Republicans were arrested in Dublin and Bray.
- October 2nd Republican prisoners, Niall Binéad and Ken O'Donohue went on trial in the Special Criminal Court in Green Street charged with membership of the IRA and sent to Portlaoise prison for 4 years
- 2005, 22nd February 5 more Republican prisoners, John Troy, Tommy Gilson, Patrick Brennan, Stephen Birney and Seán O'Donnell were charged with IRA membership and sent to Portlaoise prison for 4 years
- July The IRA called an end to its armed campaign.
- 2007 March, Don Bulman was charged with IRA membership and sent to Portlaoise Prison for 4 years
- 2007 December 24th Niall Binéad was released from Portlaoise after serving his full sentence
- 2008 January 5th John Troy, Tommy Gilson, Patrick Brennan, Stephen Birney and Seán O'Donnell were released from Portlaoise prison after serving their full sentence.
- 2008 November Kenneth O'Donohue is released from Portlaoise prison after serving his full sentence.
- 2009 January Republicans remain in jail.

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