

Edward Murphy and the Monaghan riots 1886

Background

Edward joined the Royal Irish Fusiliers (5th Battalion) on 24th March 1886, he was following his older brother Peter who had enlisted on 15th March 1886. His age is recorded as 18 years on his attestation papers, although he was only 16, (his birthday was 4th September).

In April of that year William Gladstone introduced the first Home Rule Bill to parliament, the Bill was defeated in the House of Commons on Tuesday 8th June. When the news broke that the Home Rule Bill had been defeated a number of riots broke out in many places in Ireland including; Armagh, Belfast, Lurgan and Monaghan. The worst riots took place in Belfast with many people being killed and injured, police were drafted into Belfast from other areas in anticipation of the riots including a contingent from Monaghan.

The rioting was reported in many newspapers in Ireland, England Scotland and Wales, in fact details of Edward's shooting, death, funeral and subsequent court case appeared in over 60 newspapers. Many were very brief, and obviously came from the same source. Two or three papers stated that it was "Edmund Murphy" who was shot. I have even found one report in the Toronto Daily Mail. The reports do vary in details, probably due to the political views of the Newspapers as well as the views of the witnesses.



The Event

On the evening, about 8pm, of Tuesday, 8th June 1886 the Monaghan Orangemen had gathered to celebrate the defeat of the Home Rule Bill. They had processed through the town headed by the local brass band. The parade ended when they reached their meeting hall. Four men, George Girvan, John Mitchell as well as brothers John and Andrew Crawford all headed off. Their path took them through the area known as the Shambles / Old Cross Square, there were a number of militiamen in uniform and civilians on the footpath in the Shambles. A disturbance took place and shots were fired at the militiamen, Edward was hit, he fell forward and when his companions lifted him up they found he had a gun shot wound on the right side of his nose which exited on left side of his neck. Edward was taken to the infirmary by his fellow soldiers. It was found that a second militiaman, John Murray, was also shot, he received a wound to his left thigh.

The Orangemen ran off in the direction of the country, towards the Fever hospital with the Militiamen in pursuit. John Crawford was assaulted and was taken to the infirmary where it was discovered that he had a fractured skull. Both Edward and John Crawford were reported as being in a dangerous condition. R.J. Blakeley J.P. took Edward's witness statement, Edward identified George Girvan as the man who shot him.

George Girvan was arrested for wounding Edward Murphy.

George Girvan identified 10 members of the militia who he accused of attacking John Crawford. The accused were; James Connolly, Patrick Connolly, James Donnelly, Joseph Healy, Patrick Keenan, James M^C Donagh, John M^C Teague, Peter Murphy, Edward Smith and Patrick Smith. The men were all arrested and charged with riotous assembly and assault appearing at the Petty session on 12th June him. John Crawford stated that he was assaulted by a number of militiamen but was unable to identify any of them.

Edward died at one o'clock in the morning on Friday, 11th June 1886.

MAP OF MONAGHAN TOWN 1859



The Inquest

The inquest into Edward's death was opened at 10 a.m. on Friday 11th June, in the Boardroom of the infirmary, it was concluded the following day. The jury comprised of 11 Catholics and 11 Protestants, which was unusual at the time. The Murphy family were represented by a solicitor from Armagh (Mr), there were solicitors also present for the Crown and George Girvan. Mr Williamson requested to have their own medical team perform a post-mortem examination, Girvan's solicitor said if the request was granted he wanted to have a team on behalf of the accused. The crown had no objections to these examinations and permission was granted

His father James Murphy identified Edward's body.

The militiamen were the first to give evidence. Their accounts describe that there were about 30 members of the Militia in the Shambles, standing on the footpath, when four men, George Girvan, John Mitchell and brothers Andrew and John Crawford, came down Dublin Street and through the Shambles. The men went past the militiamen as far as Pound Hill, when they then turned and John Crawford fired two shots. A crowd of militiamen ran towards the four men who in turn began to run away, George Girvan then turned and fired three shots, it was the third shot that injured Edward. Patrick Holland, gave evidence that he saw Girvan fire his gun. James Duffy, gave evidence that there was "two yards, or perhaps more, between the wounded man and the man who had the pistol in his hand". The evidence from the militiamen was that Edward was facing Girvan when the shot was fired.

Francis McGuigan and John M^C Entee took Edward to the Infirmary, where he was attended by Mr Young and Dr Farris. There was disagreement from the doctors who examined Edward which di-

rection the bullet took; the infirmary doctor said the route was from neck to face and the doctors representing the family said the route was face to neck. The team who examined Edward on behalf of Girvan refused to give an opinion as the wound was “too cut about” from previous examinations. The cause of death was given as exhaustion and loss of blood.

Arthur Martin, a militiaman, gave evidence that he found a revolver bullet about three feet from where Edward was shot. He gave the bullet to a man named Peter Murphy, who in turn gave the bullet to Sergeant O’Rorke. When George Girvan was arrested three empty revolver cartridge were found in his pocket. Sergeant O’Rourke stated that the bullet found by Martin would have fitted into any of the three cartridge cases.

John Mitchell, one of the men who was with Girvan, gave evidence that there were approximately 150-200 militiamen and civilians in the Shamble when they arrived. He described being attacked by the mob and was knocked down and kicked. When he got up he had become separated from his companions and recounted that as he was on the town side of the mob he tried to run and inform the police but when he reached Meeting-house gate he was attacked again. He managed to get away again and was in the town when he heard the shots. They were fired five minutes after the first attack made on him and his companions.

A member of the jury became unwell during the proceeding and was allowed to leave. The jury were unable to come a unanimous decision, they declared that there were eleven for returning a verdict of wilful murder and ten against. The Coroner explained that twelve jurors were needed to carry a decision, so the matter would have to go with the judge of assizes. The jury was discharged.

The Funeral

Edward’s funeral took place at half past eleven on Sunday 13th June 1886. The authorities drafted in 72 more policemen as they were concerned that there would be some “disturbances” particularly if the funeral processed round the town. It was estimated that between three to four thousand people, from the town and surrounding country, gathered in the shambles to take part.

The cortège left from the family home to the parish church burial ground, they did not process through the town. The Monaghan Young Ireland Society brass band played the Death March in Saul.

Father J Reeve officiated at the service and it was reported that he “..in a very earnest manner he sought his hearers to abstain from revenge even in a case of cold blooded murder.” Those attending the funeral quietly returned home.

Militiamen’s Trial

The Militiamen’s trial was opened on Saturday 12th June at 4 o’clock, the 10 men were charged with riotous assembly and an assault on John Crawford. Captain Keogh RM was the chair of the Bench. The ten accused militiamen were; Joseph Healy, James Donnelly, Patrick Smith, James M^C Donagh, Peter Murphy, James Connolly, John M^CTeague, Patrick Connolly, Edward Smith and Patrick Keenan.

The head constable informed the Court that the prisoners were in custody based on the evidence of George Girvan, who was in custody himself on a serious charge. He at that time was the only witness but would not be called as a witness until the Crown’s council had been consulted. In fact Girvan was never called as a witness. The magistrates were informed that although John Crawford had given a statement, he was unable to identify any of the men who assaulted him. The head constable stated he would not raise any objections to discharge any of the prisoners if evidence was given to prove they were not involved with the riot. Mr James B Ross, solicitor for the

accused, presented evidence showing that James Donnelly, James M^C Donagh, John M^C Teague and Edward Smith had not participated in the riot, they were all discharged. The court adjourned.

When the Court recommenced at 11 o'clock on Monday 14th June, there were six militiamen in the dock. Joseph Healy, James Connolly, Patrick Smith, Patrick Keenan, Patrick Connolly and Peter Murphy.

Three witnesses, John Ballantine, John Allister and John Henry Houston, had walked through the Shambles on 8th June, they saw no signs of disturbance although they did hear people shouting at them to come back when they reached Irwin's Gate. They were up near the fever hospital when they heard five or six shots fired in the Shambles, then they saw Girvan and the two Crawford brothers running towards them being pursued by militiamen armed with their belts. Ballantine and Allister reported seeing a revolver in John Crawford's hand. The next time the witnesses saw Crawford was on the other side of the Fever Hospital, he was being helped along by three men, he was bleeding from the head and looked in a weakened state. None of these witnesses could identify any of the militiamen.

George Irwin's evidence was that he met a crowd of about 200 militiamen coming into the Shambles from the direction of the cathedral at about half past nine. He stated that some of them were armed with belts or sticks. He identified Patrick Smith as being one of the crowd, as well as the other four militiamen who were in the dock. He could not identify Peter Murphy who was dressed in plain clothes.

Andrew Crawford testified that he thought there was a crowd "of above two hundred militiamen and civilians" standing on the upper side of the bridge in the Shambles. Once they reached the crowd his brother and Girvan were knocked down, when he next saw his brother the side of his head was covered with mud. John Crawford, Girvan and he then ran towards the Cathedral and the crowd followed them. Two shots were fired, but he could not tell who fired them. When they reached the Fever Hospital he ran into the garden and the other two ran on. About fifteen minutes after the crowd had passed by he came back into town. He did see his brother with a revolver.

Evidence from members of the Royal Irish Fusiliers showed that James Connolly was not in the Shambles on the evening in question. Both he and Peter Murphy were discharged. The Court adjourned.

The proceedings continued the following day, Tuesday 15th, with four militiamen on trial, Joseph Healy, Patrick Smith, Patrick Connolly and Patrick Keenan. The first witness was John Mitchell, he was with the Crawford brothers and Girvan on 8th June. He states that they met a crowd of 200 militiamen and civilians in the Shambles. When they attempted to pass that were knocked down and beaten with sticks. Mitchell managed to get up and run towards the town, when he reached Meeting house gate he was attacked again, receiving a blow to his eye from a militiaman's belt and was severely kicked. Two other witnesses, John Ards, and Thomas Gillanders gave evidence that they also were attacked by the militiamen in the Shambles. John Creighton swore that he was in Dublin street and saw John Mitchell being chased and assaulted. None of the witnesses were able to identify any of the men who carried out the attacks.

Dr Faris from the County Infirmary told the Court that John Crawford was still under treatment and was too ill to give any evidence. He reported that he had a fractured temporal bone and eight to nine incised wounds on his head.

The police thought that they could gather more evidence and the prisoners were remanded for seven days. When the men appeared on 26th June they were discharged. In the Petty Assizes Records the militiamen's case is recorded under Joseph Healy and others. In the section headed 'particulars of order or dismissal' it is recorded "*Informations refused*"

George Girvan's Trial

Girvan was arrested on 8th June and charged with wilfully and feloniously firing shots from a revolver pistol on the 8th day of June 1886 thereby dangerously wounding Edward Murphy. The charge did not change to murder until his appearance at the Petty Assizes on 28th June. The case was then adjourned until the next Court of Assizes.

The Court of Assizes opened on, Wednesday 7th July, and the grand jury was asked to consider whether Girvan had been satisfactorily identified as the person who fired the shot which killed Edward. Following their deliberations the charge was changed to manslaughter. The case was considered very important by the Crown, it was regarded by the Executive as of vast importance considering the condition of the country during the past few months. The Solicitor-General put forward an argument that a fair and impartial trial was not possible in Monaghan at the time, he believed that a postponement was essential. Girvan's legal team argued against this, they did not believe the Crown had a case for a postponement. They declared that an important witness for them, John Crawford, who had been badly beaten was now sufficiently recovered to give evidence but he was due to have surgery and may not survive to give evidence at the next assizes. They asserted that the Crown had ...*"not taken the same course of reference to other cases in which there was party feeling. Person accused of a similar offence belonging to the other side had been put upon their trial and these assizes"*. The accused's team complained about the fact Girvan was brought into court wearing handcuffs and was handcuffed to a man who had already been convicted. The judge agreed with the Solicitor General in that a fair trial was not possible as Monaghan has been in a state of excitement and holding the trial at the time would do nothing to allay the excitement. He proposed postponing the trial until the winter assizes but agreed to the defence's argument that it was important that the jury should see the place where the events occurred so the case was deferred until March 1887. The Judge refused the application for bail and Girvan was sent to Armagh Goal.

Girvan appeared in court on Tuesday 24th August 1886 to be considered for bail. The argument put forward by his defence was that the Orangemen were subjected to an unprovoked attack and that it was unreasonable to keep him in jail until the spring assizes. The Crown did not oppose bail if a substantial amount was set. He stated that the evidence against Girvan was that he was found with three empty cartridges in his possession which fitted the bullet. He had been fully identified as that man who fired the shots but there was no doubt that some provocation was given as the men were being chased by the militia men when the shots were fired. It was reported that the Crown's barrister told the court that the case had been postponed at the insistence of Girvan's counsel Mr Justice Monroe granted bail stating that... *"manifestly there was great provocation"*. Bail was set at £100 and two sureties £50 each.

George Girvan's trial for the manslaughter of Edward Murphy took place on Monday 7th August 1887. A number of militiamen told how they had seen Girvan in the Shambles on the night in question firing a revolver and Edward being hit. One witness, James Duffy, said that Edward was not wearing his red coat that night and that he was standing at the sidewalk and Girvan in the middle of the road. They all denied that there was any trouble prior to the shots being fired.

Sergeant O'Rorke, testified that on hearing there had been a row in the Shambles he went out on the main road and met George Girvan and Andrew Crawford. Girvan told him, when asked what had happened, that John Crawford had been badly beaten and that he had been followed out of town by a lot of militiamen. O'Rorke arranged to have John Crawford taken to the infirmary, when Girvan declined to accompany him to town he arrested him. Searching him he found three empty revolver cartridges but no revolver.

Girvan's mother told the court that her son did not leave the house with his revolver on the 8th June. He had fired three shots that evening in his own garden as it was the anniversary of the day his father stormed the walls of Sebastopol. She said that some of the family always fired a few shots on that day.

John Crawford recounted that he accompanied Girvan on 8th June and on reaching the Shambles he was knocked down, as he had a revolver he fired two shots. He denied seeing Girvan with a revolver but did hear a number of other shots. His brother Andrew gave corroborating evidence and Mitchell's evidence was similar to the account he gave in the militiamen's trial.

After a short consultation the jury found George Girvan not guilty and he was discharged.

John Crawford

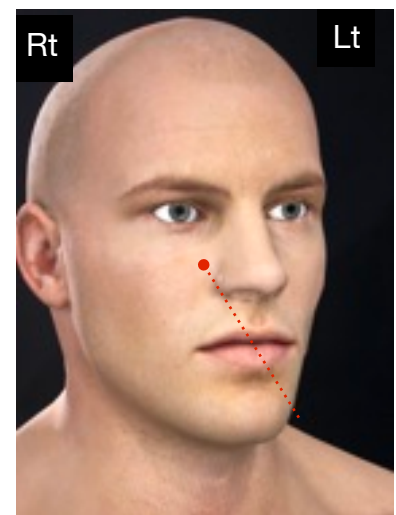
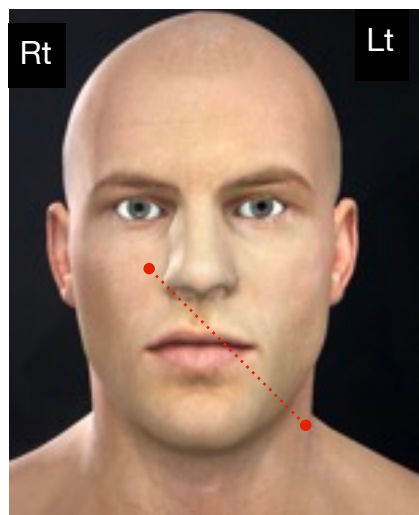
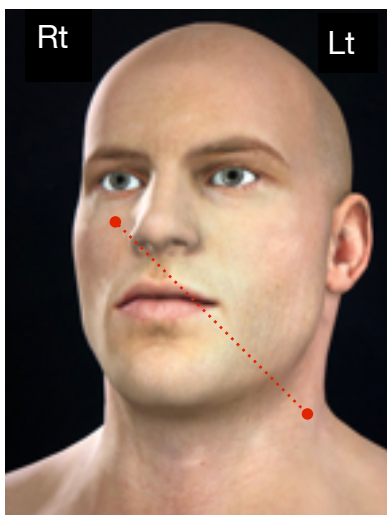
John Crawford spent two months in the county infirmary following his beating. He appeared in the petty assizes on 27th July 1886 charged with unlawfully and feloniously firing shots from a revolver pistol wounding John Murray. The case was adjourned and he was bailed for the sum of £50 with two sureties of £25. He next appeared on 3rd August, the case was again adjourned until 10th August where he was discharged, "informations refused" was recorded in the petty assizes record.

Points To Consider

National Events - The Home Rule Bill was introduced by William Gladstone on 8th April 1886, Unionists and the Orange Order were fiercely opposed to any measure of Home Rule. Following two months of debate the Bill was defeated, which in turn led to the dissolution of Parliament on 26th June. The General Election took place from 1st July until 27th July. This is most likely the cause of the '*great excitement*' in Monaghan and in fact the whole of Ireland during the trials concerned with Edward's shooting.

Family - This incident would have had a profound effect on the rest of the family, we will never truly know how it effected their lives. His eldest brother James was 29 and was probably living at home with the rest of the family. Patrick was 28, did he know Elizabeth Tierney at this time? Margaret his eldest sister would have been 26 and already a mother herself. Peter was a young man of 19. Was he with Edward in the Shambles on 8th June? Was he the Peter Murphy who had been handed the empty bullet cartridges and arrested for assaulting John Crawford? If so was he able to attend his brother's funeral or was he in prison? Francis would have been about 15 years old, Elizabeth 11 and Thomas just 8.

Edward's Injury - There seems to have been a lot of debate about which way the bullet hit Edward I do not understand the rationale for this question. He was shot and killed so what was the relevance of whether he was facing Girvan or not the outcome was the same. Was it considered a greater crime for Girvan to be facing Edward when he pulled the trigger? I have considered this matter and think for a bullet to take the route from by his right nostril to the left side of his neck or vice versa. Although we do not know exactly where Edward's wounds were this may have been the path the bullet took.



As you can see the bullet hit him at an angle, if the bullet travelled from nose to neck then I surmise that the shooter was above Edward, if it travelled the other way the shooter was below Edward.

The evidence given was that that Girvan and his companions were running from the Shambles towards Pound Hill when he fired his pistol. I believe he was going up hill when he fired the shots and thus he was facing Edward.

Conclusion

This account has been put together from newspaper reports, record books of the Petty Assizes were very brief and not really helpful, for example in the section marked defendant they recorded *...Joseph Healy and others..* . I do not know if there are any Court records that may shed any more light on these events. Looking at this event with my “modern” eyes I cannot believe that the fact Girvan and John Crawford were carrying pistols did not seem to raise any questions. Why did they leave their homes armed? I also find it unbelievable that Girvan was not convicted of Edward’s murder or even manslaughter. In fact no one was found guilty of any crime but two men were shot and one lost his life.

I have transcribed a number of newspaper reports for you to read yourself, if you want to. I found them all on the British Newspaper Archive website (britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk).