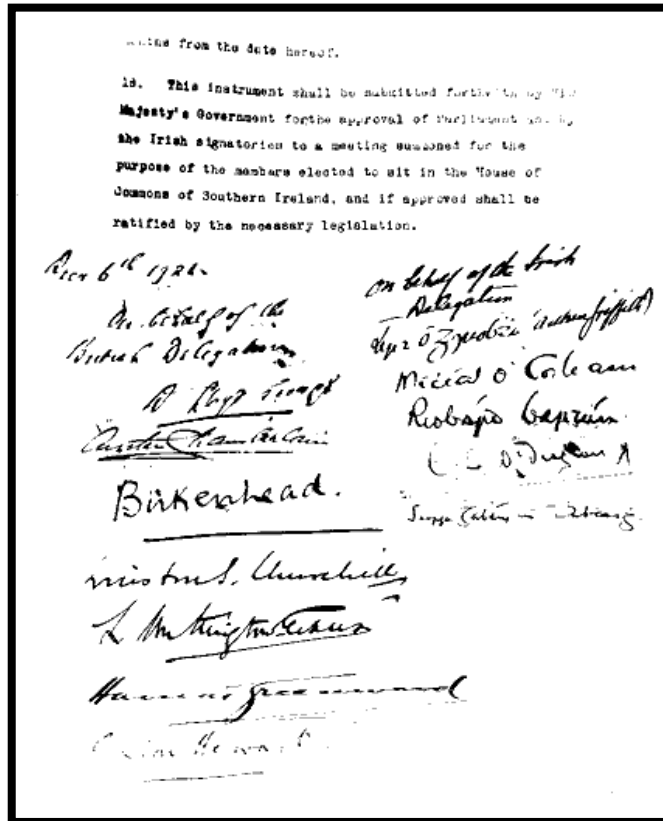


Curragh Camp

Handover Centenary

1922 - 2022

Ireland's War of Independence 1919 – 1921 was a brutal campaign that eventually resulted in a truce and an end to hostilities on 11th July 1921. In the weeks and months that followed, negotiations took place between the Irish representatives and the British administration which resulted in the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty on the 6th December 1921 at Downing Street, London.



The treaty established the Irish Free State and brought about the withdrawal of Crown Forces from the 26 Counties. The National Army was established in January 1922 and assumed the role of defending the new state. The transfer of authority began on 16th January 1922 with the handover of Dublin Castle to Michael Collins. This was followed by a phased withdrawal of Crown Forces and the handing over of military establishments throughout the country, with the Curragh Camp scheduled for the 16th May 1922.

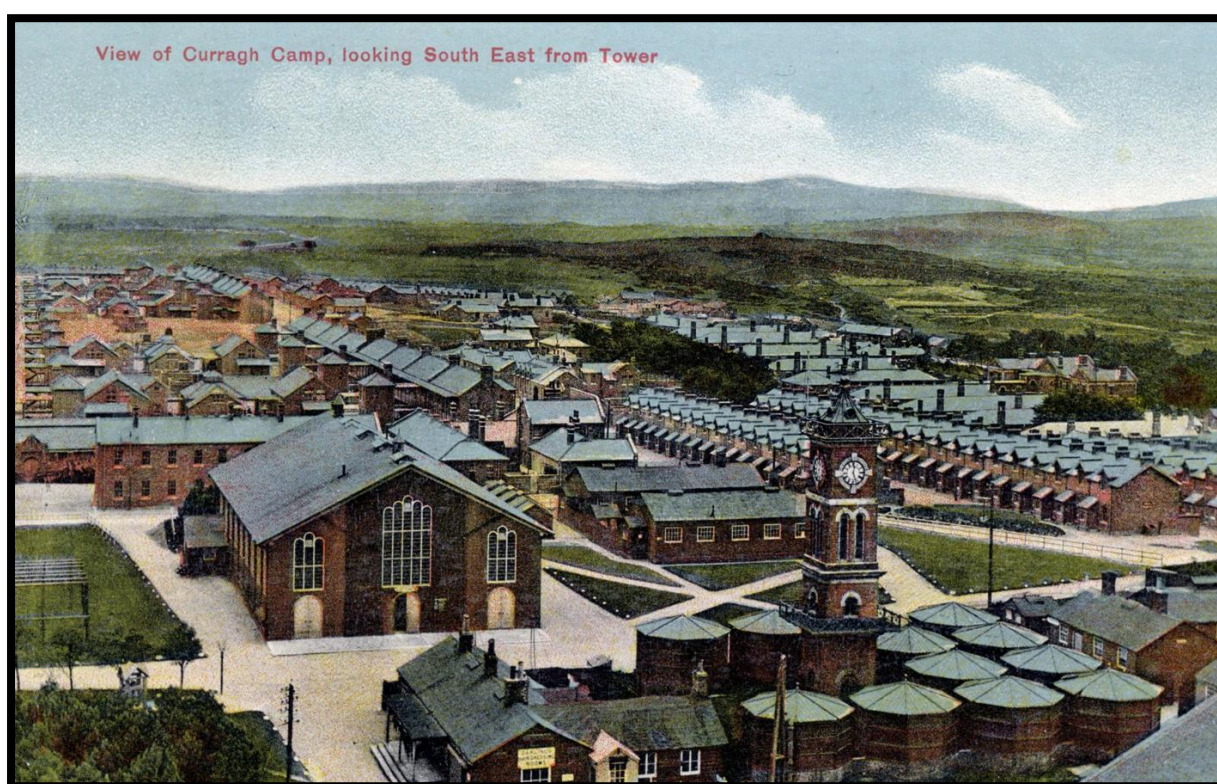




In February 1922, Gen. Richard Mulcahy, then Minister of Defence, and later Commander in Chief of the National Army, made a scheduled visit to the Curragh Camp. The purpose of this visit was to illustrate how large and developed the military camp was compared to other establishments. The Curragh Camp consisted of seven barracks and was constructed to accommodate over ten thousand troops. Since its establishment, the Camp developed into a large military community and was comparable to any large town of its time.



However, unlike many towns of the time, the Curragh had far superior facilities and amenities which distinguished it as the centre for the British military training in Ireland. The camp contained three churches, three hospitals, two picture houses, married quarters in every barracks, schools, Officer's NCO's and men's mess and canteens, five Soldier's Homes, a bakery and abattoir. Recreational amenities on the camp also included a swimming pool, football, rugby, cricket and polo grounds, tennis and racquet courts, a golf club, and the finest shooting ranges in all of Europe, with ranges exceeding 1,000 yards. Also unique to the Curragh were utility services such as electric power station, freshwater pumping stations, fire station, ammunition magazine and military prison. The Camp also boasted a purpose-built post office with numerous additional shops and traders.



On Monday evening, 15th May 1922, the Union Jack was lowered for the last time on the Water Tower and all flagstaffs were cut down. This act was not as sinister as it may appear and was an accepted military practice when evacuating a military post. Later that evening an advance party of about eighty troops arrived at Hare Park Camp on the western edge of the Curragh Camp. This advance party was under the command of Capt. Hugh McNally and Lt. Eamon Prendergast, neither of whom were no strangers to the Camp and were in fact internees there during the War of Independence. The advance party was later joined by Lt. Gen. J.J. "Ginger" O'Connell, Comdts. Bisette and Cronin and Cpts. O'Byrne and Irwin.



In the early hours of Tuesday morning 16th May, the remaining British troops on the Curragh Camp were busy packing the last of their equipment for transportation to Dublin. At 9 a.m. a convoy of over one hundred and thirty motor vehicles departed the camp. The remaining garrison troops, consisting of troops from the Leicester and Northampton Regiments, proceeded to the railway siding at the Curragh Racecourse and made their way to Dublin by special trains.



At precisely 10 a.m. the Irish troops marched out of Hare Park Camp under the command of Lt. Gen. O'Connell amid a torrent of rain. On reaching Staff House on the western edge of the camp, they were met by a group of British officers headed by Lt. Col. Sir Francis Dalrymple and Lt. Col. Stockwell.



Having exchanged greetings, the senior officers “walked and talked” their way to Beresford Barracks, now Ceannt Barracks, where the official handover took place. Meanwhile, at the various guardrooms and magazines across the camp, Irish troops took over regimental duties from the departing British troops who mounted up onto waiting trucks and followed the convoy to Dublin.



Comdt. Barra O'Briain, marching from Newbridge Railway Station with addition troops for the Curragh Camp; observed a party of senior British officers in the vicinity of Ballymany looking back through field glasses at the Curragh Camp and the Water Tower. He believed the former GOC of the Curragh was in this group.



At 1130 a.m. the handover party made their way along the top road to the Water Tower where a British staff car was waiting for Lt. Cols. Dalrymple and Stockwell. With the formalities of the handover completed the two British officers departed, ending over 70 years of permanent British presence on the Camp. At 12 noon Lt. Gen. O'Connell climbed the Water Tower to hoist the tricolour. A replacement flagpole had been sourced by the Board of Works.



Lt. Gen. O'Connell raised the tricolour on top of the Water Tower in the presence of Mr. Desmond Fitzgerald T.D., a member of cabinet representing Dáil Éireann, and a group of National Army officers who rendered a salute. Without any honour guards, bands, or fanfare the handover of the Curragh Camp had taken place. The military camp designed for ten thousand was now in possession of about five hundred Irish troops.





Óglaigh na hÉireann
Irish Defence Forces **1922**
2022
Strengthening the Nation for 100 years

Curragh Camp

100 Year Anniversary of the Handover

1922 — 2022

Ag ardú na Brataí:
Céad Bliain ó Tugadh na
Beairicí ar Lámh

Raising the Flag:
the Centenary of the Handovers
of our Military Barracks

Flt Sgt. Matt McNamara

Curragh Local History Group

16th May 2022

“And straight I will repair to The Curragh of Kildare”