

List of Suspected Civilian Spies Killed by the IRA, 1920-21

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Note about the form of entries in this database: Each of the entries in the Cork Spy Files follows the same format: (1) the name of the suspected spy, including certain variations in the forename or surname that appear in the sources; (2) the victim's age (if known, and usually as derived from the 1911 census); (3) the victim's residence if known and given without parentheses; (4) the place of death, given within parentheses; (5) the exact date of the incident, i.e., the date on which the suspected spy was killed or mortally wounded, or the date on which the victim was abducted or otherwise disappeared, though death took place on a later date; (6) the full range of our sources for each death, with abbreviations as needed, and for which a full list will soon be supplied on the website as part of a comprehensive bibliography; and (7) a note providing all valuable information about the victim available to us and considered relevant.

3. Civilian John Crowley of Lissagroom near Upton (Ballymurphy)

Date of incident: 10 July 1920 (ex-soldier executed as suspected spy by IRA on 24 July)

Sources: *CE*, 16 July 1920; Executions by IRA in 1920 (Military Archives, A/0535); IRA Executions in 1921 (Collins Papers, Military Archives, A/0649); MSP34/ REF29651 (Military Archives); Frank Neville's WS 443, 4 (BMH); Tadhg O'Sullivan's WS 792, 5 (BMH).

Note: The ex-soldier John Crowley of Lissagroom near Upton went missing on 10 July 1920, according to a newspaper notice placed by his brother Michael. See *CE*, 16 July 1921. In his BMH witness statement Frank Neville reported that John Crowley had been executed as a spy on 24 July 1920 by members of the Knockavilla Company of the Bandon Battalion of the Cork No. 3 Brigade: 'Word came out from Cork at this time that there was an ex-British soldier named Crowley in the company area who had informed on members of the [IRA] party which had ambushed the R.I.C. at Upton. For this he had got an award of £20 . . . and had been promised another like sum. He was arrested and executed.' Along with Tadhg O'Sullivan, quartermaster of the Cork No. 3 Brigade, Volunteer leaders Tom Hales, Dick Barrett, and Charlie Hurley were reportedly involved in the arrest, trial, and sentencing to death of John Crowley at Crosspound. See Tadhg O'Sullivan's WS 792, 5 (BMH). The former Volunteer John O'Sullivan declared in his pension claim that he was present at Ballymurphy at the execution of a spy—probably John Crowley—who was an ex-soldier; O'Sullivan also asserted that he had been the first to detect the spy and had reported the matter at the next meeting of his Volunteer company. See MSP34/ REF29651 (Military Archives).

In 1901 John Crowley was one of the at least six children (four sons and two daughters and probably many more—see below) of the Lissagroom (Ballymurphy) agricultural labourer Daniel Crowley and his wife Mary. Five of their children (not including their son John) were co-resident with them in that year. The oldest son then at home was Andrew Crowley (aged 15). It is therefore likely that the absent John Crowley was the oldest child (or among the oldest); it is uncertain when he began serving the British crown as a soldier. According to local historian John Desmond of Bandon, John Crowley's brother Cornelius worked for the Protestant farmer Charles Harrold of

Lissagroom, whose house was to be at the centre of the site of the famous Crossbarry ambush of 19 March 1921. By the time of the 1911 census Mary Crowley had become a widow and all of her children except her daughter Eliza had left the family home. Mary Crowley was by local report the mother of as many as twenty-one children—a brood known in the vicinity as the ‘Crowley Thousand’. The Crowleys were all Catholic.

The victim’s sister Mary (Crowley) Murphy declared in a letter (from Belrose near Upton) dated 11 April 1922 [?], ‘I am sorry to say or think I had a spy belong to me. If I only knew he was one, I would have shot him myself.’ Crowley had left some money deposited with the Post Office, and his sister Mary Murphy had said reasonably enough on 27 December 1921, ‘I might as well have it as to leave it to the government.’ See IRA Executions in 1920 (Collins Papers, Military Archives, A/0535). According to local historian John Desmond of Bandon, Mary Murphy’s husband worked as a ploughman for the Protestant Beazley family of Lissagroom, who gained unwelcome notoriety on 19 March 1921, when their farmhouse too featured prominently in the famous Crossbarry ambush laid by the IRA for British forces. Mary Murphy and her husband occupied a cottage and an acre of land at Belrose in the Upton district. The acre on which the cottage was built was once part of the substantial farm of the O’Mahonys of Belrose—the famous Cork republican family. This would help to explain her hypersensitivity on the subject of suspected spies in her family.