

Murder of Tomás McCurtain, Lord Mayor.

It may be of interest to record my recollections on the night of 20th March 1920, when Tomas McCurtain was murdered by British forces in his home at Blackpool. My own home, at 49 Thomas Davis St., is almost directly across the road from the McCurtain's house.

On the night in question I met Tomas going in to town with his brother-in-law, Jimmy Walsh, who resided with him. On my way back home with my sister, I noticed, on the tram, R.I.C. men in civilian clothes. They went in the direction of Blackpool R.I.C. barracks, close by. That same night, a Constable Murtagh of the R.I.C. was shot dead at Pope's Quay, Cork. The two Volunteers who shot him came along to our house after the shooting. My sister, Brighid went to a house in Sunday's Well with one of them, whilst I went with the other to a house nearby. We took their two guns with us. I came home and, when Brighid arrived later, she passed the remark



that there were "some queer looking fellows" on Blackpool Bridge (the latter is very near McCurtain's house).

We went to bed and noticed the gas lamps being put out, my sister passing a remark: "There is old Keane putting out the gas lamps". This fixed the time at about 12.30 a.m. Very shortly afterwards, we heard a thundering knock at a door, followed by shots up and down the street. My sister Annie looked out a window and said: "They are at Tomas's house". Next we heard another few shots ring out and then a cry: "A priest, a priest, will someone go for a priest?". Annie and I jumped out of bed and put on coats over our night attire. We could hear a woman's voice crying: "A priest, a priest". We ran up to the presbytery attached to the Cathedral and met Rev. Father Burts, one of the curates. He was ready to leave the house and told us he had got a 'phone message from McCurtain's to say that Tomas had been shot. Father Burts did not know where Tomas lived and asked us to show him the way. The priest, my sister Annie and myself arrived at McCurtain's in a very short time and were met by Mrs. McCurtain who said: "Thank God, Father, you are in time". Father Burts heard Tomas's confession on the stairs landing. Tomas was lying there where he was shot, but was conscious. We were present while he was being anointed and, after the anointing, he died where he lay. An ambulance arrived and the ambulance men lifted the remains on to a bed in the house.

We all knelt down by the bedside to say the Rosary when a party of British military arrived, accompanied by uniformed R.I.C. Poor Mrs. McCurtain then got very excited about her brother Jimmy (who lived on the premises) in case he had any guns with him (Jimmy was a member of the Volunteers). The military and police searched every nook and cranny in the house, even to the bed on which Tomas lay dead, but they found

nothing. Before leaving, they disclaimed all knowledge of what had happened. My sisters, Sarah and Brighid, and I stayed with Mrs. McCurtain until morning.

On the day following the funeral of Tomas, I went over to see Mrs. McCurtain and brought with me a Volunteer officer from G.H.Q., Dublin, who had come down for the funeral and who had stayed in my house. The officer was a north of Ireland man named Eoin O'Duffy, who took a most prominent part in the fight for independence and in the setting up of the State in the years following the Treaty of December 1921.