

'We followed him to Montague Street, Paddy Daly shot him under the ear'

The history of a family home revealed the tragic story of a police officer, killed 100 years ago this week, writes **Alun Evans**



OUR mother had a unique ability to rationalise events when fact was in short supply. Thus when she moved into our new house on the Malone Ridge in Belfast her boys 'received' a couple of truths.

The first was that our house dated from the first year of Queen Victoria's reign, which agreed with its absence from the 1836 map of the area. In fact, it did not appear on a map until 1858.

We eventually took over the house, and I began to research its history.

Montpelier House was built, with many late Georgian features, by an enterprising Quaker couple soon after they acquired the site in 1846.

I think it was Diane of Poitiers who remarked: "The years that women subtract from their own ages are not lost they are added to the ages of other women."

In our mother's case they were added to the age of our house.

The house was bought by a wholesale druggist in 1870 who stole the name for the Hatter's Castle which he erected next door in 1878.

His son took over, became a resident magistrate in 1908 and our house, disdainfully rechristened 'The Nook', was let to a succession of policemen.

As to our mother's second 'truth': she disliked our drawing room which she found cold and unsettling, and, oblivious to its north-facing position, blamed this on a high-ranking policeman being shot outside, and carried into our drawing room where he died.

Serendipitously, years later we were having tea with the mother of a friend when she let slip that she knew the people who rented our house in the early 1900s and they had photographs of it.

She furnished us with their address and an introduction. Inexplicably, we did not pursue this for some years, but when we did, as well as finding stunning images of our house, we encountered a family tragedy.

William Charles Forbes Redmond was born in 1872 in Co Armagh.

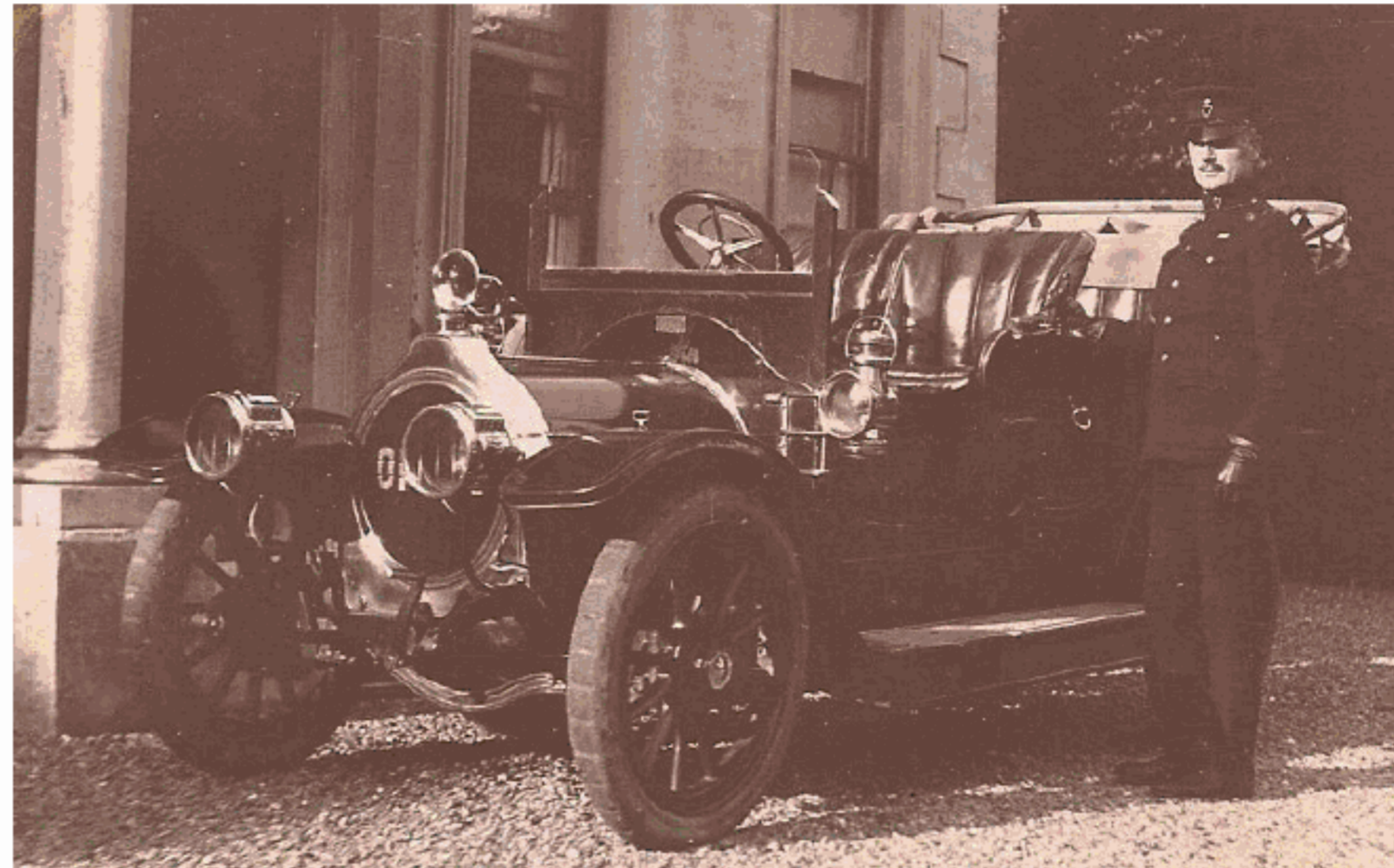
He was educated at Friends' School, Lisburn, and Corrig School, Kingstown, joined the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) in 1896, married Ethel Todd, a native of Dublin, in 1902 and the couple had two daughters.

He was transferred to Belfast in 1906.

Some of these were members of The Ulster Volunteer Force. It was a 180-mile run to Ballinasloe. In all, "... around 300 police with their munitions, provisions and supplies



MURDERED: Dublin Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner William Redmond, an avid car fan and motoring correspondent, was shot dead in Harcourt Street, Dublin. Inset below: Michael Collins whose Squad launched a campaign against the British during the War of Independence



1906.

Redmond was a sportsman, an accomplished watercolourist, and a motoring enthusiast.

He had complete mastery of the motor car, conveying his expertise, through a clear and economic style, in a series of articles for the *Belfast Newsletter*; initially in early 1913 and then as weekly 'Motor Notes' by 'CR' over two years from August 1915.

Showing commendable restraint for a male motoring correspondent, Redmond takes only two swipes at women drivers, eg 'The Lady Novice', begins: "It was evidently her first time to drive the car through town, and a courageous friend sat beside her in the front seat and hoped for the best."

His 'Motor Notes' are collated in a scrapbook: his entry for May 6, 1916, 'In the Wake of the Rebellion', records that

he led a motor convoy to the west of Ireland just two days after the onset of the Easter Rebellion.

This was crucial because the rail links were cut so easily. The cars were volunteered by loyal Northerners who either drove them themselves

'I fired and he fell mortally wounded, shot through the head'

or sent their drivers.

Some of these were members of The Ulster Volunteer Force.

It was a 180-mile run to Ballinasloe. In all, "... around 300 police with their munitions, provisions and supplies

must have been transported to places where they were urgently required..."

The convoy's strategy owed much to that of the Ulster Gun Running of April 1914.

In December 1919, Redmond was appointed Assistant Commissioner of the Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP).

He was to lead G-Division, which specialised in plainclothes detective work.

Redmond was there to spearhead the fightback against Michael Collins and his 'Squad', which was systematically assassinating officers.

Redmond brought a team of RIC plainclothes detectives from Belfast who lived around the city as civilians.

Redmond took less care himself, choosing the G-Man, James McNamara, as a guide to Dublin as he himself was unfamiliar with the city.

Unfortunately, McNamara was also an agent for Collins.

Redmond's rooms in Dublin Castle were unfinished, so he stayed in the Standard Hotel in Harcourt Street.

The Squad's Frank Thornton was sent to Belfast to obtain a photograph of Redmond so that Squad members could recognise him.

Thornton got one through a contact in Chichester Street police station.

A few days later, on January 21, 1920, Redmond was fatally shot near his hotel.

Squad member Joseph Dolan's testimony to Roinn Cosanta (Bureau of Military History, 1913-21) ran: "Redmond went straight up Dame Street, Grafton Street and Harcourt Street, and we followed him. Just as he came as far as Montague Street Paddy Daly pulled out his revolver and shot him under the ear..."

Paddy Daly's testimony added: "When Redmond was about two yards from me I fired and he fell mortally wounded, shot through the head."

Redmond was buried in Mount Jerome Cemetery on January 23, after a small private service.

The scrapbook contains a letter Redmond wrote to his daughters two nights before his death.

That night, Helen, who was 18, and Rhona, 15, were on a ferry to England to attend boarding school and must have received the letter almost simultaneously with the tragic news about their father.

It is a lovely letter in which sound fatherly advice is given, eg: "You will find some quite nice girls & of course some you won't like, but don't show it much & not at all at first. Just keep clear of them quietly."

Redmond was the highest ranking officer in the DMP to be killed by the Squad.

Neil Jordan's 1996 film *Michael Collins* depicts the Northerner drafted in to lead the Squad's response to Collins being dispatched by a car bomb, seconds after he asserts, in an ear-scraping Belfast accent, that "a bit of Belfast efficiency is what they'll need".

This portrayal of Redmond looks like provincial stereotyping but Redmond wouldn't have had a Belfast accent. In having an ex-motoring correspondent killed by a car bomb, like inadvertent poetic justice, artistic licence was involved too, because car bombs were not deployed on this island for another half century.

In February 2003, our friend's mother took us to meet Helen Redmond in a home in Co Down; she was mentally bright, some weeks before her 100th birthday, which she celebrated.

She had worked as a catering officer, turning down two marriage proposals to which she ascribed her long, happy life. Most poignantly, every time 'Daddy' was mentioned, tears welled in her eyes.

She had a story about her Daddy who had been starting a car outside The Nook using a handle when it took off at a steady pace and ploughed through a high wooden fence into the garden of Sir Samuel Dill, the celebrated classicist, next door.

Lady Dill came out remonstrating: "Mr Redmond, what are you doing?" to which he replied: "I really don't know!"

It is hardly worth pointing out that there is no mention whatsoever of this incident in 'Motor Notes'.

Maybe there was a slight touch of the 'Lady Novice' in him too?

Alun Evans, former head (now retired) of epidemiology in QUB

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