



09.0 The Executed

09.6 Con Colbert

Cornelius (Con) Colbert (1888-1916) was born at Monaleena, Castlemahon, Co. Limerick, the son of Michael Colbert, a small farmer, and Nora MacDermott. While he was still a child the family moved to the Athea area in West Limerick where his father farmed some old family land at Templeathea. He attended Athea national school and for a brief period the national school at Kilcolman near Ballysteen. In early adolescence, he went to live with a sister in Dublin where he received secondary education at the Christian Brothers' schools at Saint Mary's Place and North Richmond Street (O'Connell's Schools). When he had completed his secondary education he secured a clerkship at Kennedy's bakery in Parnell Street where he worked until his death.

Both sides of Colbert's family had a tradition of nationalist and Fenian involvement, and he became politically aware from an early age. He developed an interest in local and national history, and picked up expressions in Irish from some of the old people around West Limerick where the language had not yet entirely died out. He is also said to have become a devout Roman Catholic from early on. In Dublin, he joined the Gaelic League and assiduously attended Irish classes, lectures and the various cultural and social activities provided for members. He enrolled in Fianna Éireann, the scouting organisation for boys first established by Bulmer Hobson in 1903 and revived by Hobson and Countess Markievicz in August 1909. He was a model member of Fianna Éireann: he applied

himself to gaining proficiency in its various activities and skills which included drill, marching, scouting, signalling, map-reading, first aid and the use of small arms. His diligence and level of achievement were soon acknowledged by his promotion to the captaincy of his branch and eventually to the Council.

When Patrick Pearse required a part-time drill instructor with Irish for Saint Enda's in 1910, Colbert was ideally suited for the position on both counts. He took on the task with his usual enthusiasm, indignantly refusing remuneration when the matter was raised. He is believed, however, to have recruited some of the older students to Fianna Éireann without Pearse's knowledge or consent. Meanwhile, he was recruited to the Irish Republican Brotherhood, later becoming head of an IRB circle consisting of Fianna Éireann members formed in 1912 by Bulmer Hobson, who was then head of the IRB in Dublin.

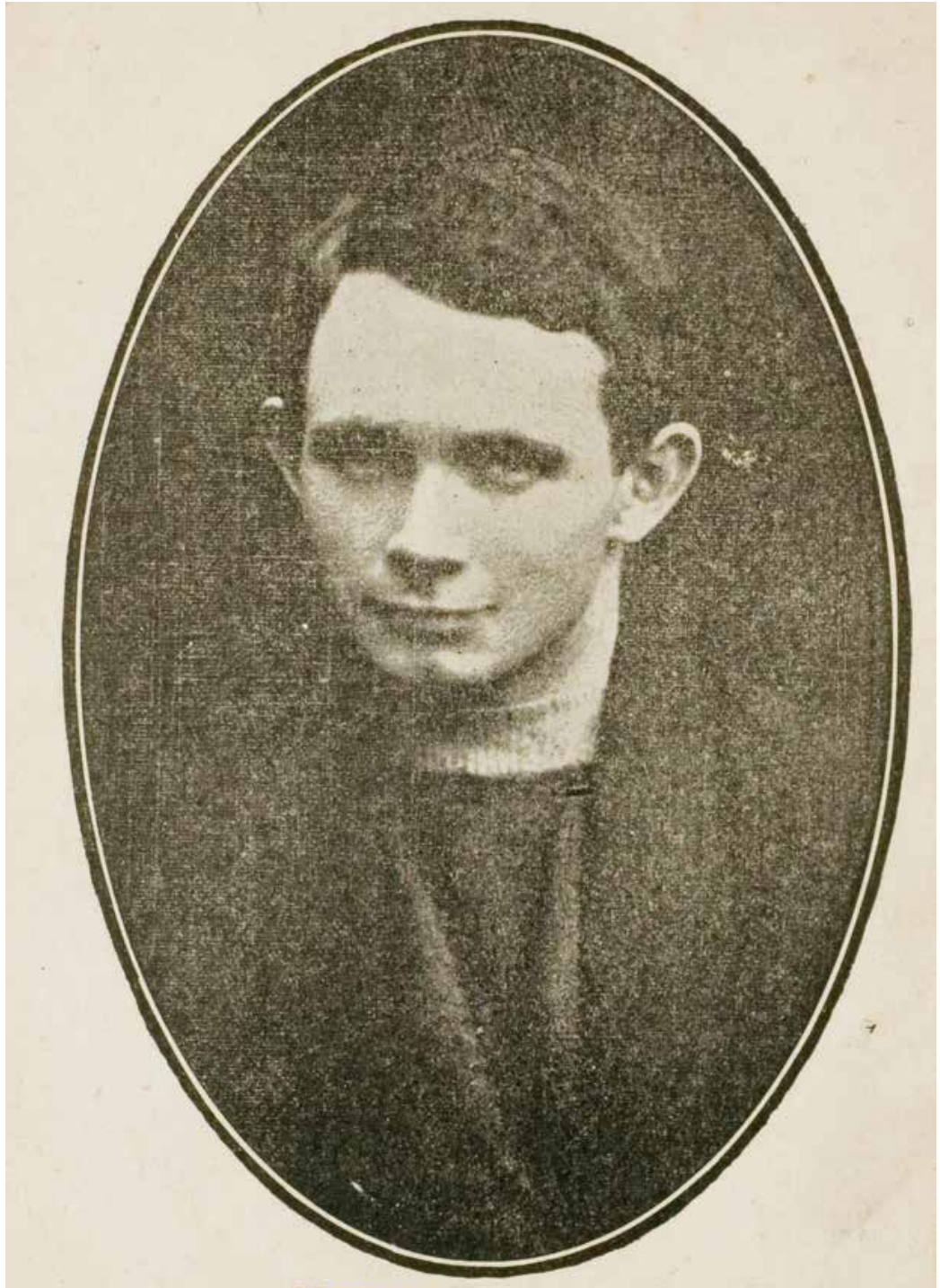
Colbert was elected to the provisional committee of the Irish Volunteers on their formation in November 1913. He attained the rank of captain in Éamonn Ceannt's 4th Battalion of the Dublin Brigade, in which capacity he became heavily involved in training and developing his company. Although small in stature, being just over five feet tall, he had considerable presence and was a charismatic trainer and leader; he was highly respected by the Fianna, by the students at Saint Enda's, and by the Volunteers.

In the Rising, Colbert and his company were assigned to Watkins's brewery to the east of the South Dublin Union, which was held by Ceannt and the main body of the 4th Battalion. As Watkins's proved to have no strategic significance, Colbert and his company joined Séamus Murphy at Jameson's distillery in Marrowbone Lane closer to the South Dublin Union. As this position was by-passed by the cordon of British troops that gradually encircled the city centre, the garrison did little fighting, eventually surrendering on Sunday.

Con Colbert was tried by court-martial and sentenced to death. He was executed on 8 May. He was unmarried.

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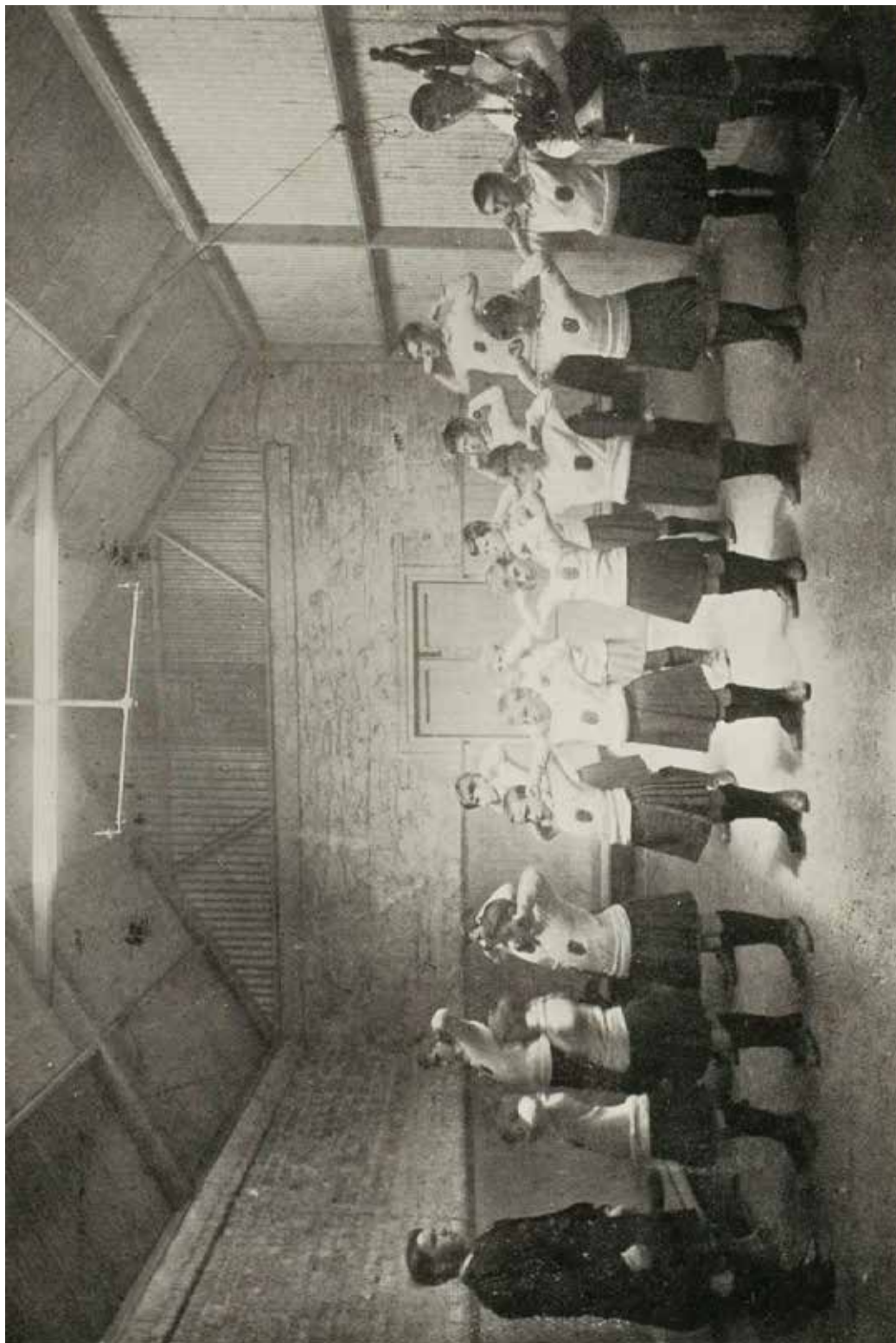
Con Colbert



A commemorative postcard for Con Colbert. The parish hall and leisure centre at Athea have been named in his memory.

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Con Colbert conducting a drill class in the gymnasium at Saint Enda's School. (An Macaomh).

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The Fianna Éireann Council. Front row, left to right: Paddy Holahan, Michael Lonergan, Con Colbert. Back row: Garry Holahan, Pádraig Ryan. The two Holahan brothers attempted to blow up the Magazine Fort in the Phoenix Park on the morning of Easter Monday; they afterwards fought on the North Quays under Ned Daly. (Keogh 78).