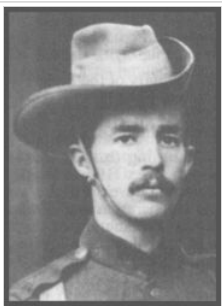


Robert Erskine Childers

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Robert Erskine Childers DSO (25 June 1870 - 24 November 1922) was an author and Irish nationalist who was executed by the authorities of the newly independent Irish Free State during the Irish Civil War.



Robert Erskine Childers

He was the son of British Orientalist scholar Robert Caesar Childers; the cousin of Hugh Childers and Robert Barton; and the father of the fourth President of Ireland, Erskine Hamilton Childers.

Contents

- 1 Early life
- 2 Military career
- 3 Home Rule
- 4 Civil War and death
- 5 External links

Early life

Childers was born in London to a Protestant family originally from Glendalough, Ireland. His father was English and his mother Irish, but he was orphaned as a child and raised by an uncle in County Wicklow.

He was sent to Haileybury College and then studied at Trinity College, Cambridge and after graduation took a job in 1895 as a clerk in the House of Commons. He was an enthusiastic yachtsman, owning several boats during his life and sailing them regularly. At this point in his career he was a supporter of the British Empire.

Military career

On the outbreak of the Second Boer War in 1899 he volunteered for action, serving as an officer in the City Imperial Volunteers, while he was part of the Honourable Artillery Company in the British Army. He was wounded in South Africa and invalided back to Britain. On his return he wrote the novel *The Riddle of the Sands* which was published in 1903. Based on his own sailing trips along the German coast, it predicted war with Germany and called for British preparedness.

It has been called the first spy novel (a claim challenged by advocates of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, published two years earlier), and enjoyed immense popularity in the years before World War I. It was an extremely influential book: Winston Churchill later credited it as a major reason that the Admiralty decided to establish naval bases at Invergordon, Rosyth on the Firth of Forth and Scapa Flow in Orkney.

In 1903, Childers visited the United States. There he met and married Mollie Osgood, who shared his love of sailing.

He wrote Volume V of the Times' *History of the War in South Africa* (1907), which drew attention

to British errors in that war and praised the tactics of the Boer guerrillas. He also wrote two books on cavalry warfare based on his experiences, *War and the Arme Blanche* (1910) and the *German Influence on British Cavalry* (1911). Both books were strongly critical of the British Army.

Home Rule

Around this time Childers became increasingly attracted to Irish Nationalism and became an advocate of Home Rule. He resigned his post at the House of Commons in 1910 in order to campaign for this cause, writing *The Form and Purpose of Home Rule* in 1912. In July 1914 he and his wife even smuggled German arms to Howth, County Dublin, in their yacht *Asgard* - days before the outbreak of World War I. These weapons would later arm the Irish Volunteers during the Easter Rising of 1916. This had been organised in response to the Larne gunrunning of the Ulster Volunteer Force. The remainder of the consignment of guns purchased in Germany for the Irish Volunteers was landed a week later at Kilcoole, county Wicklow by Sir Thomas Myles from his own yacht, the *Chotah*.

With the start of war, Childers joined the Royal Navy as an Intelligence Officer and was active in the North Sea and the Dardanelles. He was awarded the DSO and promoted to Lieutenant Commander in 1916.

However the violent suppression of the Easter Rising had angered Childers, and after the war he moved to Dublin to become fully involved in the struggle against British rule. He joined Sinn Féin, forming a close association with Éamon de Valera and Michael Collins.

In 1919 he was made Director of Publicity for the First Irish Parliament and represented the Irish nationalists at the Versailles conference in Paris. In 1920 Childers published *Military Rule in Ireland*, a strong attack on British policy. In 1921 he was elected (unopposed) to the Dáil as member for Wicklow and published the pamphlet *Is Ireland a Danger to England?*, which attacked the British prime minister, David Lloyd George. He became editor of the Irish Bulletin after the arrest of Desmond FitzGerald.

Civil War and death

Childers was secretary-general of the Irish delegation that negotiated the Anglo-Irish Treaty with the British government. He stayed at the delegation headquarters in Hans Place throughout the period of the negotiations, 11 October-6 December 1921. Childers became vehemently opposed to the final draft of the agreement, particularly the clauses that required Irish leaders to take an Oath of Allegiance to the British king.

The Treaty bitterly divided Sinn Féin and the IRA, and Ireland slipped into civil war. Soon Childers was regarded as a traitor not only by the British, but by the pro-Treaty Free State government in Dublin.

Said to be the inspiration behind the irregulars' propaganda, Childers was hunted by Free State soldiers and had to travel secretly. In November 1922 he was arrested by Free State forces at his home, Glendalough, in County Wicklow, while travelling to meet De Valera. He was court-martialled because he was carrying an automatic pistol, which was said to have been a gift from Michael Collins, and was one of the first to be sentenced to death under the Free State's Emergency Powers legislation. He was executed

by firing squad at the Beggar's Bush Barracks in Dublin. He was 52 years old. He is buried in Glasnevin Cemetery.

His last words were a joke at the expense of his executioners: "Take a step or two forward, lads. It will be easier that way."

Winston Churchill, on hearing of his capture, expressed the British establishment view of Childers: "No man has done more harm or done more genuine malice or endeavoured to bring a greater curse upon the common people of Ireland than this strange being, actuated by a deadly and malignant hatred for the land of his birth."

External links

- BIOGRAPHY by Leonard PIPER:
"Dangerous Waters: The Life and Death of Erskine Childers" (*aka* "The Tragedy of Erskine Childers" (Hambleton)
- BIOGRAPHY by Jim RING: "Erskine Childers: A Biography" (John Murray)
- Works by Erskine Childers at Project Gutenberg
- Free ebooks of "Riddle of the Sands" and "In

the Ranks of the CIV", optimized for printing, plus selected Childers bibliography

- Childer's rebuttal to the Dail in 1922 that he had served in the British Secret Service.

Retrieved from

"http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Erskine_Childers

Categories: 1870 births | 1922 deaths | British non-fiction writers | British novelists | Irish politicians | People from London | Old Haileyburians | Alumni of Trinity College, Cambridge | British military personnel of the Boer War | British military personnel of World War I | Companions of the Distinguished Service Order | Members of the 2nd Dáil | Honourable Artillery Company | Teachtaí Dála | Burials at Glasnevin Cemetery | Irish Republican Army members 1917-1922 | Irish Republican Army members 1922-1969 | People executed by firing squad | Legion of Frontiersmen members | Irish executions

- This page was last modified 17:36, 29 July 2007.
- All text is available under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License. (See **Copyrights** for details.)
Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the

Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a US-registered
501(c)(3) tax-deductible nonprofit charity.