

# **JIMMY GRALTON: DEPORTED WITHOUT TRIAL**

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This project discusses Jimmy Gralton, the only man since the beginning of the Free State in Ireland to be deported without trial. He was targeted by both the Catholic Church, landlords and the Royal Irish Constabulary due to his socialist beliefs. He could also be considered one of the first targeted by the anti-jazz movement as those who attended the Pearse-Connolly dancehall Gralton founded were often threatened by the local priests.

## **EARLY LIFE**

Jimmy Galton was born in Effernagh, Leitrim on 17 April 1886. His parents were Michael Galton and Alice Campbell, and he had five siblings. Jimmy grew up well-educated and well-liked by teachers. He lived on a farm with bad land, surrounded by good land. At the time, Leitrim, and especially Effernagh, was extremely poor. Men had to go to Scotland and send money back, while the children stayed home and worked on the farms. Jimmy's family was fortunately quite comfortable, but he grew up to help people that no one else would help.

He left school at fourteen and went to work for Owen McCann in his shop. Jimmy didn't like it there. When the clock in Carrick-On-Shannon was erected in McCann's honor, Jimmy said he couldn't understand why a man who never fed his workers, or treated them well, got a memorial. This was the beginning of Jimmy's passion for worker's rights.

## **TIME IN THE ARMY**

When he was older, he joined the British Army, and at one point was ordered to shine the officer's boots. He refused and was put on bread and water rations for seventy-four days. He was ordered to shine the same officer's shoes, refused again, and was given the same punishment. When moved to a different regiment he was assigned to serve in India. Jimmy stated he didn't want to oppress the Indian people, so he refused to go. Due to this defiance, he was held in prison for a year. While in prison, a priest refused him absolution, saying he was too ignorant to have such strong opinions on topics like oppression. After this, he deserted the army and went on to travel the world.

Jimmy eventually emigrated to the United States in 1907, and joined the U.S Navy, automatically making him a U.S citizen. During his time in America, he was actively involved in many political groups, including the James Connolly Club, and was in multiple groups defending Jim Larkin – an Irish Republican figure who was wrongly jailed during the Red Scare.

Jimmy met Eamonn DeValera in 1919 and he went on to raise a large sum of money for the republican cause back in Ireland – the exact numerical figure is unknown.

## **RETURN HOME**

After fourteen years in New York, Jimmy returned home on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1921, the end of the Anglo-Irish war. He brought with him money that he handed directly to IRA leaders. He defied

his pacifist beliefs to help train new IRA members as he was one the most qualified in the area, due to his army training.

The previous town hall in Gowel, Leitrim had been burned down by the Black and Tans, so Jimmy gathered volunteers to build a new hall on his father's land in Effernagh. It was christened the Pearse-Connolly Hall.

*'It was a big hall...built with galvanized iron on a stone foundation, lined all inside with ceilings boards, a good few windows, a nice big stage for plays, and suchlike, and a dais for a band.'* - ***My Cousin Jimmy, by Margaret Galton***

Once it opened on New Year's Eve 1921, it held many activities like education, dance, and bodybuilding. This highly upset the clergy as they were normally in charge of education, and they deemed activities like dancing to be sinful. This, combined with the fact that Jimmy was openly socialist, led to a deep hatred for him. The clergy were convinced he was a Russian spy, though the only pieces of evidence they had was that the book *Labour in Irish History* by James Connolly was discussed in the hall, and the Jimmy didn't attend Sunday Mass.

From his stay in America, Jimmy brought home jazz records and a gramophone. People now joke that it was Ireland's first sound-system, but at the time protests were held in Mohill, declaring 'Out with Paganism. Down with Jazz'.

*'On New Year's Day 1934 over three thousand people from South Leitrim and surrounding areas marched through Mohill to begin the Anti – Jazz campaign. The procession was accompanied by five bands and the demonstrators carried banners inscribed with slogans such as 'Down with Jazz' and 'Out with Paganism.'* A meeting was then held in the Canon Donohoe Memorial Hall organised by Fr. Conefrey and Canon Masterson, the parish priest of Mohill.' ***The Anti-Jazz Campaign, at theirishstory.com***

The Pearse-Connolly Hall was also used as a People's Court. This is where issues pertaining to evictions of tenants and land disputes were held, with Jimmy heading the court. Jimmy quickly grew popular with small farmers, but the landlords turned on him just as quick.

After one particular case where a man named Wilton Waugh was displeased with the outcome, the Free State Troops were contacted and arrested Jimmy in May 1926. The local people rebelled against this arrest, and he was released within a week. However, on 24 May, the Troops attempted to arrest him again and arrived at the Pearse-Connolly Hall while a meeting was being held with over three-hundred people in attendance. Jimmy had a suspicion the Troops would return, and so he surrounded the Hall with barbed wire as a preventative measure. When the Troops made themselves known, Jimmy and some others escaped through a window. The crowd stayed and occupied the Troops, and only left when they were threatened to be shot.

Jimmy and John Mahon were arrested a few days later and were held in Carrick Jail. Jimmy went on the run.

During his two-week period of hiding, the local priests were visiting people's houses, threatening to refuse absolution if they go to the hall. They declared Jimmy the Anti-Christ.

Jimmy decided to return to the USA, knowing he wasn't wanted.

## **SECOND RETURN**

Jimmy spent the next ten years in America. Charlie, his brother, worked on the family farm, as their parents were getting old. Charlie died young in 1930, so the Galton parents were left alone, and the farm had no one to maintain it. This, plus the fact that by now the Fine Gael government had fallen, Jimmy decided to return home in 1932.

Even before he arrived home, Fr O'Dowd preached against his return in Mass. Sister Dominic, Jimmy's sister, and fellow nun from the same convent came home to Ireland for the Eucharistic convent being held in June of that year. Jimmy hired a taxi and showed them around, including taking them to the hall. After a meeting with Fr O'Dowd, the nuns never went to the hall again.

John Milmoie worked on an estate owned by the Earl of Kingston, in Roscommon. The Earl wanted to raise Milmoie's rent, but Milmoie couldn't afford so the Earl evicted him and his family. Local people asked Jimmy to speak on Milmoie's behalf. They paraded Milmoie on a horse and cart up to the Earl's estate in Keadue. As part of the speech Jimmy, the spoke of how the economic issues in Ireland were the result of an international capitalist system.

Jimmy set up the Drumsna branch of Fianna Fáil. His parents were huge Fianna Fáil supporters, same as many small farmers in the locality. One of the suggestions made by Jimmy to the Fianna Fáil government was given that the local area was poor and in bad repair, to hire those without a job to fix the roads or clean the rivers. Fianna Fáil headquarters found out Jimmy was a socialist and said he must be expelled from the party. Seamus Beirne, a politician friendly with Jimmy, told him this and suggested he step back.

## **ANTI-COMMUNISM ON THE RISE**

Meanwhile, in Belfast, a historic event was taking place – a 'workers' unite' between Catholics and Protestants. One of the leaders of this protest was from the UK originally, and he was soon deported from Ireland. It's widely believed this event is what inspired the DeValera government to deport Jimmy.

The hate against communists and socialists continued to increase. Multiple Labour TDs expressed their distaste for communists and socialists. The Bishop of Derry called on the congregation to ‘clear out any foreign agitators’.

On 20 November 1932, the Pearse-Connolly Hall was shot at in the middle of a dancing session – windows were broken, but no one was harmed.

On Christmas Eve, 1932, the Pearse-Connolly Hall was soaked in petrol and burned to the ground. Where the hall once stood now stands a memorial in Jimmy’s honour.

DeValera dissolved the Dáil and called a surprise election on 24 January 1933. Jimmy’s father left his sick bed to vote for DeValera. His father died soon after – two days later, Minister Geoghagan, a minister elected through the recent election, declared Jimmy as an undesirable alien and issued a deportation order against him. Jimmy had to be gone by 4 March.

### **FIGHT AGAINST DEPORTATION**

In Dublin, a Gralton Defence League was formed and on 26 February a meeting was held in the Rotunda. The members included Peadar O’Donnell, Lyle Donaghy, Frank O’Connor, and Francis Stuart. They demanded that Jimmy at least be given the opportunity to be taken to court to answer the charges against him.

Days before the order was due, two Gardaí arrived at the Gralton residence to arrest Jimmy. Jimmy was busy replacing the thatch on the roof of the house. He told the Guards he was going upstairs for clothes and escaped through the uncovered roof.

On 5 March, friends and supporters arranged to hold open air meetings in Drumsna and Gowel after Mass to highlight and protest the case.

### **SPEAKERS AT THE PROTEST**

*Peadar O’Donnell*

*Lyle Donaghy*

*Sean Murray*

*Donal O’Reilly*

Fr. Cosgrave of Drumsna Church knew they were coming so he had the curate say Mass. When the protesters arrived, he spoke at the altar and declared they were ‘six to seven anti-God men outside’ who were ‘agents of the Anti-Christ’.

McCann stood on a stump and began to introduce O’Donnell who was going to make a speech. Fr. Cosgrave interrupted and shouted, ‘you’ll be the next one for Waterloo!’ He then turned and ordered the crowd to ‘take them down!’

Sarah Colreavy, an elderly woman who minded the church, picked up a clump of dirt and threw it at O’Donnell - and so the Mud Battle of Drumsna began. The crowd pelted the men with mud. Gardaí stood by and watched, only stepping in when the crowd blocked the men’s car from leaving, chanting ‘Down with Russia! Down with Communism! Throw them in the Shannon!’

The meeting in Gowel was cancelled. A meeting was held on the crossroads in Efferagh instead.

*‘It was not for fun the hall was burned, Galton driven from his home, and the outrages committed in Drumsna. These attacks were designed to try to stop the Irish workers and farmers in their fight against poverty and oppression. The fight would go on until the Irish people overcame their enemies, and Galton was reinstated on his own farm.’ - **Packie Galton, at the crossroads in Efferagh***

Redemptorists were brought to Gowel to preach against communists. They told people to shun Galton’s followers, told people that they couldn’t read *An Phoblacht* or *The Worker’s Voice*, and told them they couldn’t associate with the Revolutionary Worker’s Group.

On 1 July 1933, Jimmy’s mother went to the Leitrim County Council to plead his case, but not even Jimmy’s own cousin had sympathy for him. Councillor Pat Kilkenny tried to do something for her as with Jimmy being deported, she was left with no one to care for her, but his arguments fell on deaf ears.

*‘I would ask you, in the interests of common decency and honesty to bring the following facts before the Council for consideration at the next meeting. Immediately after the Board of Health resolution was passed, I started on a tour of the country. I went from townland to townland and from parish to parish. I held meetings with from five to fifteen people every place I stopped, and I find that after the miserable story behind the deportation order was made known the people everywhere resented it. As a result of this tour and those meetings I have with me now 41 resolutions condemning the attitude of the Board of Health and calling on the Government to place me on trial to answer whatever charges may be brought against me. In view of the fact that the Council has interested itself in my case, at least to the extent of inquiring into my private family affairs such as ‘Was my father attended by the priest previous to his death?’ and in view of the further fact that the*

*considered opinion of the Council, embodied in a resolution, is held by many to reflect the sentiment of the common people in cases such as mine, I ask the Council to comply with the wishes of the vast majority of the people of Breffni, who undoubtedly stand for fair play, and place itself on record as being opposed to secret tyranny by demanding a trial by jury for me.’ -A letter written by Jimmy and brought to the council by his mother, published in **The Leitrim Observer, 8 July 1933***

Fourteen houses were raided in one night in an attempt to find Jimmy. James Morrison ran through fields to find Jimmy to warn him the Gardaí were close. But Jimmy couldn't hide forever – after five months of avoiding arrest, Jimmy was found on midnight of 10 August 1933 in Frank Beirne's house in Gorvagh. Before he was taken away, he shook hands with the ramblers who were also staying in the house, and said 'so long, lads. I'll see you all when we have a Worker's Republic.'

## **DEPORTATION AND ARRIVAL AT AMERICA**

Jimmy was taken to Ballinamore Barracks, but quickly moved to Carrick Barracks, then Cork Jail. He wasn't allowed a change of clothes, yet he was described by newspapers as fresh looking.

*'Gralton, who wore a cap, a heavy overcoat, and a red cardigan, appeared fresh, despite his long journey from Leitrim. He was in good spirits and chatted with some of his escort during the trip through the harbour... When...interviewed... Gralton said he felt disgusted at being shipped from his native land in this way. He had thought, he said, that he would at least have been given a trial by the Government that he supported in his own small way... 'I went on the run' he added 'because I did not want to be railroaded out of the country on the quiet. I wanted to get all the publicity possible. It is a very dangerous procedure to ship a man out of the country without the semblance of a trial.' -The Leitrim Observer, 19 August 1933*

He was shipped off on the Britannica at Cobh. The ticket was paid for with his own money – Packie Gralton had sold cattle for him and had given him £30 while he was on the run. That same day, a guard went to the Gralton residence, and told Jimmy's mother she couldn't visit her son before he was deported, and he was never allowed to return.

## REACTION TO DEPORTATION

When Jimmy was deported, his supporters in Dublin cabled the Irish Left in New York, telling them when he was due to arrive. A reception committee organised by Gerard O'Reilly, Hugh McKiernan, Charlie Beirne, James Beirne, Michael Moriarty, and many more old friends greeted him. Once settled in, Jimmy sent home money for all the people who helped him to hold a party.

As Margaret was in America at the time, she went and visited Jimmy when he was staying at Charlie Beirne's.

*'We chatted for a good while, and he told me all about his exploits in Ireland. He was very sad that he could never go back to Ireland. "Margaret, maybe some day we will have a government in Ireland that will allow me back", he'd say' - 'My Cousin Jimmy' by Margaret Gralton*

Jimmy stayed active in politics while he was in America. In particular, he invested a lot of his time into the Irish Worker's Club – they assisted Irish workers in getting jobs and in becoming union members. His last job was working in WOV, a local radio station in New York.

Shortly before he died, he married a woman called Bessie Cosgrave. No one at home knew of the marriage. On 29 December 1945, Jimmy died in Bellevue Hospital, New York, from a stomach complaint that affected him his whole life – some who knew him claim it was stomach cancer.

He was buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx. A headstone was erected in his memory by the Irish Workers Club.

*'Stone monuments were built in memory of men in the past. This is not the kind of monument Jim Gralton would want, but a world in which human beings can have security, be free from hunger and misery, and culture. A world in which there will be no more wars, famine, and depression, in the midst of plenty.' - John Mullally, at Jimmy's burial*

The Local Defence Committee covered South Leitrim in flyers and graffiti saying, 'GRALTON FIRST VICTIM OF COSGRAVE/DE VALERA ACT.' Young boys were sent out by priests to tear them down.

Margaret and Packie Gralton, both close friends and avid defenders of Jimmy, had difficulty getting married. They needed Fr. O'Dowd's writings (his permission), but when Packie went to

him to request the writings, Fr. O'Dowd sat him down and refused to give them – to hand them over, Packie would have to promise to have nothing to do with the Revolutionary Worker's Group or the IRA. Packie refused. After an hour of arguments and attempts to persuade Packie, Fr. O'Dowd gave in.

Margaret and Packie cared for Jimmy's mother, but after the loss of her two sons and her husband, she became senile and remained depressed for the rest of her life. Unable to properly care for her, they eventually had to put her in a hospital, where she died a few years later.

*'People of Ireland - I am an old woman; I am near my end;*

*I have lived, now, for seventy-five years in your midst;*

*I have grown up among you, toiled among you, suffered with you and enjoyed with you;*

...

*I am old now and near to death;*

*Those who would have supported me and eased my going have been taken from me –*

*I looked for a little peace before the hour of my departure,*

*My last son in the house with me, to see me into the grave - the have driven him forth*

*May the curse of heaven, if there be a heaven, light on them;*

*The curse of the widow and childless light on them,*

*The curse of the poor without advocates,*

*The curse of the old without protection,*

*The curse of a mother light on them.'*

**- 'A LEITRIM WOMAN', a poem Lyle Doneghy about Jimmy's mother**

## JIMMY'S LEGACY

In 1986, the anniversary of Jimmy's birth, the Gralton Centenary Committee was formed by some of his old friends and supporters. They held a seminar in the Country Hotel in Carrick-On-Shannon. People travelled from across the world to be there. The G.C.C erected the first memorial to Jimmy. During the first year of the seminar, the local priest asked the congregation to pray for Jimmy and the people who persecuted him.

Unfortunately, as the years grew closer to the millennium, the main members of the G.C.C grew older and passed away. Eventually, the seminars stopped.

The son of Andrew Mooney, a county councillor who was opposed to Jimmy, apologised publicly in the newspaper.

Three official books have been written about Jimmy;

- *'My Cousin Jimmy'* – Margaret Gralton
- *'Deported'* – Des Guckian
- *'The Gralton Affair'* – Pat Feeley

He's also been mentioned in many other pieces of literature about Irish History, particularly literature about communism and Leitrim. A radio documentary was made by RTÉ One, and film documentary was made by Michael Carolan – both are available in full on YouTube. In 2014, the film *Jimmy's Hall* directed by Ken Loach was released to the public. It was later adapted to the stage by the Abbey Theatre in 2017 – years prior, a play had been written by John Rooney, but it was never brought to life.

In 2016, President Michael D. Higgins held a ceremony where a new memorial was erected in Jimmy's memory. President Higgins apologised to Jimmy and his family, and he officially revoked the deportation order – or attempted to do so. As previously discovered in 1996, the deportation order could not be revoked as it legally doesn't exist.

Fianna Fáil, who were in power when Jimmy was deported, have been accused multiple times of destroying files associated with the deportation. When asked, they said while the files should be stored in one location, they had most likely been moved to a second location – the files were never found in this second location. Fianna Fáil have barely acknowledged the deportation, or the destruction of the files, and have never apologised to the Gralton family.

Many say Jimmy's life can be best summed by a story that occurred while he was staying in America – a story where upon finding a man down on his luck, Jimmy brought the man back to

his apartment to spend the night. When Jimmy woke up, he discovered the man had stolen his trousers.

Many of the people who knew him described him as being a hundred years ahead of his time. He still continued to try and help people, even while the majority turned against him. His work may not have changed the world, but it changed people's lives. Yet, despite all those lives changed and how him being forced to leave the country negatively affected dozens of people and a local community, he was never given the basic right to fight his case in court – and that is an injustice this country should never forget.

*'I felt I had to write this down if only for my children and grandchildren to read some day about a great and generous man, as I knew him' -My Cousin Jimmy, by Margaret Gralton*

## EVALUATION OF SOURCES

### SOURCE ONE

Margaret Galton, **'My Cousin Jimmy'** (Leitrim: Drumlin Publications, 1991)

This source is a biography of Jimmy's life and was incredibly useful as the woman who wrote it was close to Jimmy her entire life – growing up with him, caring for his mother, and staying in constant contact until Jimmy died. The book included images and references to letters, pictures and newspapers articles that had been produced during the time Jimmy was alive, also giving me access to primary sources on top of this secondary source.

### SOURCE TWO

Michael O'Flynn, Odette Clark, Paul M. Hayes, Martin J. Power, **Marxist Perspectives on Irish Society'** (Newcastle, U.K: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, July 2011)

While this source is primarily focused on socialism and communism in Ireland in general, chapter two goes into great detail about Jimmy's life and sites sources throughout. It discusses Jimmy's life from an objective perspective, focusing more on his politics and actions, which helps prevents bias.

### SOURCE THREE

**'Deported'**, directed and produced by Michael Carolan, first produced in 1996 but never officially broadcast – shown 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2016 at the unveiling of the memorial

(Available on YouTube)

This documentary was useful as it contained interviews with people who knew Jimmy personally, including Margaret Galton. This allowed me to learn how people perceived Jimmy, and this told the story of the deportation through the eyes of those most affected.

[Deported - The Galton Story](#)

## REVIEW OF PROCESS

In my outline plan, I set out to address why Jimmy was deemed a threat by the Catholic Church and their attempts to stop him, and to also address Fianna Fáil and Eamonn De Valera's involvement in the deportation – within this document, I discuss these topics in depth. Being the great-grandchild of Margaret Galton, I've grown up hearing Jimmy's story, so I had assumed I knew it inside-out – yet, while researching, I was genuinely surprised at the lengths Jimmy went to defend himself, and how much those who knew him fought for him to represent himself in court.

I got the majority of my sources from my grandmother who has a mass collection of newspaper articles, books, documents and pictures focused on Jimmy. I also got a lot of my information from the Leitrim County Library who assisted me in finding more newspapers my grandmother had failed to find, and books from where I took notes and quotes I deemed relevant. The main difficulty I had with sources was trying to find unbiased ones as most works discussing Jimmy were made by those who knew him personally – most repeated the same information, so I knew at least the basic gist of the story was accurate. This helped me develop the skill of determining tone within text to judge whether it was written from a biased perspective.

To keep my research as organised as possible, I photocopied the majority of the information I parsed through to keep everything I needed on hand at all times. Having photocopies also allowed me to mark the information with highlighters and notes so I could keep track of the relevant information, i.e., I had a photocopy of the entirety of 'My Cousin Jimmy' by Margaret Galton so I could highlight passages with information and quotes I wanted to include, saving me time as I wouldn't have to read through the book again and again to find what I needed.

If I were advising another student on how to tackle this topic, I would advise they start at the County Library and begin with one of the three biographies written about Jimmy, as these all go over his entire life. For specific dates and events, I would advise they stay at the library and ask for newspaper articles relating to Jimmy – The Leitrim Observer and socialist newspapers often covered his escapades.