

Jack Keogh - Ballinasloe IRA

Damian Mac Con Uladh

Jack (John) Keogh (1902-1945) was a prominent member of the IRA in and around Ballinasloe during the War of Independence.

His parents were Jack Keogh and Bridget Colahan. He had a number of brothers and sisters, including: Mary Rose, Kathleen, Bridget, Ellen, and James.

Depending on one's viewpoint, Keogh gained notoriety or fame during the ensuing Civil War, which commenced in June 1922. Arrested by Free State troops in Clonbrock, Ahascragh, in August 1922, he was interned in Athlone army barracks, from where he escaped on 4 January 1923. Although the anti-Treaty IRA called its forces to dump arms on 24 May 1923, Keogh and a number of individuals (including John Downey of Ahascragh and Matthew Hughes of Ardnaglug) continued their fight in and around Ballinasloe (documented in the article). In May 1924 he was arraigned for trial at Ballinasloe. Keogh was sentenced the following July to ten years penal servitude, and incarcerated in Maryborough (now Portlaoise) Jail. Here, allegedly owing to maltreatment, he was certified as insane and was transferred to the Central Lunatic Asylum in Dundrum (now Central Mental Hospital) in April 1926. The same year, the IRA organised his dramatic escape by commandeering a Cleary's bread van, which was used to spirit him out.

In the late 1920s/early 1930s, Keogh subsequently emigrated to the US via London. Trouble seemed to follow him, and he survived an attempted assassination attempt there.

According to his nephew, Martin J. Cunningham, Keogh married a Helen Curley in Los Angeles in around 1930. They had a son Jim (or Jack) and a daughter Frances, and later moved to Florida. Keogh returned to Ballinasloe around 1939/40. He left again soon after, and the East Galway Democrat of 9 May 1942 reported:

Farewell!

A large number of friends assembled at the Railway Station on Thursday to bid farewell to Mr Jack Keogh (Jnr.), who was leaving Ballinasloe. Mr Keogh was well-thought and popular among the people. We wish him the highest of good luck in a land not unknown to him, and where there will be a big welcome for him when he arrives.

Keogh subsequently returned to his native town. On 6 May 1945 he died after it is claimed he inadvertently mistook a bottle of "Kilcro" (bird poison) for whiskey on his way home one night. He is buried in Creagh Cemetery.

See related articles on **ballinasloe.org**:

- [Biography of Jack Keogh](#)
- [Jack Keogh arrested, August 1922](#)
- [Jack Keogh escapes from Athlone Barracks, January 1923](#)
- [Jack Keogh sent for trial, May 1924](#)
- [Death of Jack Keogh, May 1945](#)