



# From Buckingham Street to the Western Front

**IN THE SECOND OF A TWO-PART SERIES, LAS FALLON RECOUNTS THE LIFE OF SERGEANT PATRICK BRUTON, A FORMER MEMBER OF DUBLIN FIRE BRIGADE AND THE IRISH GUARDS, WHO SERVED IN WORLD WAR I.**

**A**t Easter 1916, units of the Irish volunteers and Irish Citizen Army had taken over positions in Dublin city and declared a republic. The fighting went on for a week and at the end the Volunteers and Citizen Army units surrendered to British troops in the face of overwhelming odds. The leaders were court-martialed and shot. The Rising and the British reaction to it began to change opinion in Ireland. Sympathy for the Republican position began to affect people's

attitude to the war. Recruiting for the Irish regiments all but ground to a halt. Shortfalls in numbers began to be made up by posting English recruits and conscripts to make up numbers in the Irish regiments.

Bruton returned to the front on October 4th 1916. His unit was heavily involved in operations and suffered heavy casualties. It was a brutal, savage war of trench raids, local attacks and counter-attacks and major battles. Patrick Bruton did well. Not alone did he survive but on

November 29th 1916 he was awarded the Military Medal. The Military Medal (MM) was instituted by royal warrant on March 25th 1916. It was to be awarded for 'acts of gallantry and devotion to duty performed by non-commissioned officers and men of our army in the field'. Fireman Patrick Bruton was a war hero.

### RETURNING HOME

Wounded again on August 13th 1917, Bruton was evacuated to England, this time to the Northern General Hospital, Sheffield. He had a gunshot wound to the head and was lucky to be alive. By this stage, Bruton had been promoted to sergeant and on his eventual release from hospital he was posted to the regimental training depot at Warley. The Great War ended at 11am on November 11th 1918, 'the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month'. It was over, and Patrick Bruton could return to civilian life

Demobilised on April 1st 1919, Sergeant Patrick Bruton, Irish Guards, regimental number 5115, was awarded the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal and the British Victory Medal in addition to his Military Medal. He returned to Dublin and reported back for duty with the DFB. He was posted to 'B' district station (Tara Street) in April 1919.

The Dublin Bruton returned to was vastly different to the one he had left in 1914. On January 21st, Dáil Éireann had met for the first time. 'As the newly elected Sinn Fein TDs spoke in Dublin's Mansion House of their determination to achieve Irish freedom, many miles away on a quiet road in Tipperary, Volunteers from the South Tipperary brigade of the IRA had ambushed and killed two RIC constables who were escorting a delivery of dynamite to a quarry at Soloheadbeg. The Irish Revolution had entered its next phase. The first shooting of a policeman in Dublin occurred on July 30th 1919, when Detective Patrick Smyth of the DMP's 'G' (political detective) division was shot in Drumcondra.

### THE BIRTH OF A NATION?

The story of the DFBs role in the War of Independence is one which I have researched and written of and hope to publish elsewhere. Suffice to say that life was dangerous for the members of the DFB in those years. The truce and treaty of 1921 did not end the fighting in Dublin. On June 28th 1922, the new Free State army opened fire on their former colleagues in the Four Courts and the Civil War began its ugly course. By this time, Patrick Bruton had returned to his pre-war posting in Buckingham Street fire station. He was one of the members of the brigade awarded a chevron for bravery



DFB crew at Buckingham Street Fire station 1920s. Paddy Bruton circled.

by Dublin Corporation in 1923 in acknowledgement of their firefighting and rescue work during the street fighting in Dublin the previous summer.

Patrick Bruton died in May 1932, while still a serving fireman. He is buried in Glasnevin in a quiet grave far from the horrors of the trenches of the Western Front. Like many of that generation of men who served in the British Army of World War I, his story was lost to history. I was honoured to play a small part

in restoring his memory.

I started this article with a poem by Kipling; 'the poet of the Empire'. I will finish it with one by Patrick MacGill, 'the navy poet'. MacGill, from Donegal, served with the London Irish Rifles. His poem, 'La Bassee Road', written in 1915, is set in the La Bassee-Bethune sector of the front. This was an area where the Irish Guards also served and one with which Paddy Bruton would have been familiar. He would have often walked the La Bassee road himself.

*You'll see from the La Bassee Road, on any summers day,  
The children herding nanny-goats, the women making hay.  
You'll see the soldiers, khaki clad, in column and platoon,  
Come swinging up La Bassee Road from billets in Bethune.  
There's hay to save and corn to cut, but harder work by far  
Awaits the soldier boys who reap the harvest fields of war.  
You'll see them swinging up the road where women work  
at hay  
The long straight road – La Bassee Road – on any  
summer's day.*

*The night breeze sweeps La Bassee Road, the night dews  
wet the hay.  
The boys are coming back again, a straggling crowd are  
they.  
The columns lines are broken, there are gaps in the platoon  
They'll not need many billets now, for soldiers in Bethune,  
For many boys, good lusty boys, who marched away so  
fine,  
Have now got little homes of clay, beside the firing line.  
Good luck to them, God speed to them, the boys who  
march away,  
A-singing up La Bassee Road each sunny summer day  
(‘La Bassee Road’, Patrick MacGill, 1915)*

Houghton/Bruton family papers, Patrick married in 1898 and had four sons: John (1899), Patrick (1901), Joseph (1903) and James (1904), Ref: Yvonne Houghton. Dublin Corporation Annual Reports 1923, Report no. 86

# The Bruton family history

BY YVONNE HOUGHTON

I began researching my husband's family intending to put together a family tree as a surprise for him. Particularly his father's side of the family as he knew very little about him or them. My husband is Robert Brian Houghton, he was adopted as a child and was baptised Robert Patrick Bruton. His father was Patrick Joseph Burton.

The only information I had about Patrick Burton was his name and date of birth and there was no one left to enlighten me further. So I sent away for his death certificate hoping to find out more. From this I obtained his birth certificate and names of his parents – Mary and Leo Burton. I spent a long time looking for 'Leo' who's name incidentally was Patrick Leo. Name changes, or using one name I found is common but can cause confusion when researching family histories. However, from this I obtained a wedding certificate naming Leo's residence – which at that time (1922) was 'Fire Station', Buckingham Street and his father's name – Patrick Bruton.

I was amazed and delighted at this information, as coincidentally my husband had worked over 30 years in Durham County Fire Brigade, in the UK. I then looked at the 1901/1911 Census and found more details of the Bruton family. At the same time I wrote to Las Fallon at the DFB Museum to see if he could give me any information on Patrick. Las was fantastic. He helped me immensely in my family searching. It was Las that informed me that not only Patrick, but his youngest son James, had served in DFB. Las provided me with many photographs of Patrick and James too. He also directed me to other helpful sources.

As the time, Las had been researching two firefighters who had served in WWI. He was particularly interested in Patrick's time in the military, so I contacted the Irish Guards for a copy of Patrick's service records. It was from these that I found out Patrick's accomplishments, war medals, as well as the serious injuries he sustained. Following WWI Patrick returned to the DFB.

I presented my husband with this information as well as a book – *The Dublin Fire Brigade: A History of the Brigade, the Fires and the Emergencies* by Tom Geraghty as a Christmas gift. He was greatly moved by it all and delighted at the brigade link.

I have kept in touch with Las over time and promised we would meet up at some point. I arranged a trip to Dublin to carry out further research. This gave me the opportunity to meet up with Las and thank him personally as well as introduce him to my husband. We visited Dublin in August 2011. One of the first things on our schedule was visiting the DFB Museum. This was fantastic, and holds many artefacts of life, and equipment of DFB. Las was very informative and extremely enthusiastic – a veritable walking



DFB history book! However, it is with great sadness, that he will no longer be passing on his vast knowledge or passion for this history, as it is being disbanded.

During the trip to Dublin, we visited Glasnevin Cemetery Trust, which holds information for genealogists searching for family members. We also visited Diamor, and found a small quaint street of cottages where Patrick lived with his parents and siblings. Nearby, Kilskyre Church kindly provided baptism records for my research.

To date, records show that Patrick came from a family who were well educated. Like many others in their time, some immigrated to other countries. Patrick had three brothers, Martin Joseph, who became Chief of Police in Regina, and named as a prominent citizen of Saskatchewan in Canada. His brother James was a police sergeant in Winnipeg, and his brother John, a farmer in Dauphin, Manitoba, Canada. His sister Mary immigrated to New York and became a cashier in a large hotel on Fifth Avenue. While others like Patrick remained in Ireland.

The Brutons may have been lost in the past and largely forgotten over the years. However, my family researching, and Las Fallon's help, along with individuals with an avid interest in history, have resurrected them and they are now known in my family. Finally, my husband now knows about his father and his ancestors going back many generations. It is with pride he speaks of them, especially his great great grandfather, Patrick Bruton.