

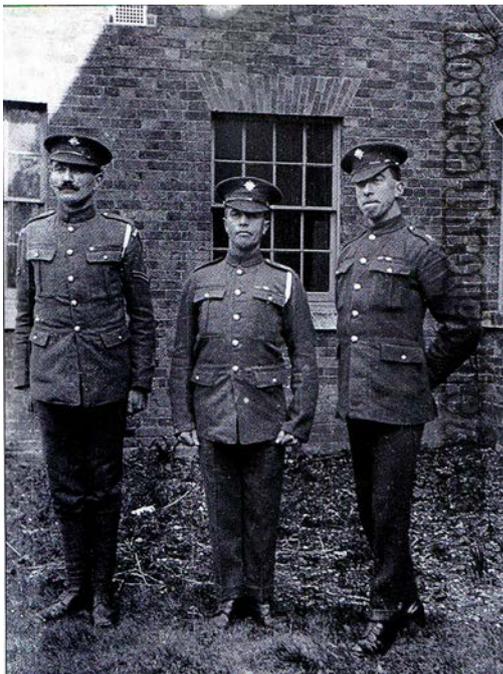
Jack Moyney

by Joe Coughlan

In 1977 John (Jack) Moyney did an interview with Christy Maher telling his story of his exploits in world war one and how he won his Victoria Cross. When Jack came back from the war he lived in Roscrea until his death in November 1980 aged 85.

Jack was born to a poor working class family in Rathdowney. He got very little schooling as he had to go to work at a young age to help support the family. Work at that time was plentiful in country areas such as Rathdowney – not like the big towns and cities where people were selling their furniture just to put food on the table. He went to work as a labourer with a local farmer and then when war broke out in 1914 he decided to join the army. In 1915 he and his friend Mick Tobin joined the Irish Guards at 19 years of age. When Jack was asked why he decided to join the army he said:

"We joined for the heck of it and to see a bit of the world! There were posters going around encouraging people to join up. Some of the big employers were offering half wages to anyone who enlisted and the clergy were encouraging it off the altar."



Fr. Browne Collection



They were so eager for action and excitement that they thought they would never get there before the war was over. During their training they were told that if they didn't behave that they wouldn't be allowed to fight. They spent 6 months training in Surrey before they were shipped out for France at the end of 1915. Jack doesn't say whether Mick Tobin and he were kept together.

Life in the trenches was very tough. On their first engagement they were sent up to the front line with rations and ammunition. *"It gave me a look at what it was like and it let you know what was coming."* When asked was he afraid he said *"we didn't give a damn as we had no responsibilities only for ourselves. When you joined up and went to France you knew you went going on a holiday."*

Their equipment was fairly good for the day but they had to carry everything with them at all times including a pick and a trenching tool so as they would be able to dig in whenever they needed to. The food at the front was terrible as some people were taking the best of it and selling it on the black market before it reached them. Their ration was a quarter of a loaf and a tin of bully beef. Their chaplain at the time was the Jesuit priest Father Brown who was the same Father Brown whose photographs have become famous. Included in some of his books are pictures of Jack and his family.

When asked about the football match played between the Germans and English during the Christmas truce he stated he had never heard of it. In 1915 during the ceasefire on Christmas Eve the Germans were only 100 yards away. Many of them spoke English and they taunted Jack's men by asking them how they would like to be back in Grafton St. That Christmas day they had a tin of bully beef and four biscuits each. The next day the Germans fired 6 shells into their trench killing and injuring 70 men forcing them to retreat. While he was in the trenches a party of Scots guards had too much rum during the Christmas ceasefire and went halfway across to meet the Germans. When the high command heard about this they banned rum from the trenches. When he was asked about the 1916 rising he said that the only thing they knew was what they were told by soldiers coming back from leave and they didn't understand much about what was going on. He said that they were very brave men to do what they did.



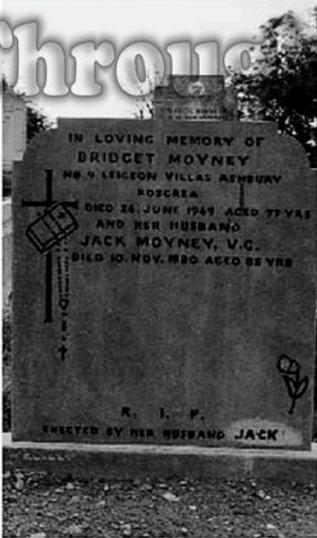
Jack was very reluctant to talk about his exploits during the war especially the blood and killing and slaughter but, in the interview with Christy Maher, he told the story of winning the V.C. It was the third battle of Ypres and the Irish guards had to relieve the Grenadier guards on the front line. They marched 15 miles with full pack through bullet and shell fire to get there – Crossing the Broenbeek River. Jack who was a company sergeant was

allocated 2 shell holes for his men. No.2 Company was on his right but before they had time to get settled the Germans attacked them and took them all prisoner. Both the French and the English retreated leaving Jack and his men holding their position for 96 hours without food or water. On the first night he sent out 2 men to make contact with HQ but he never heard from them again. They had to try to sleep during the day and keep awake during the night. To raise the spirits of the men who were losing hope Jack told them that some day they would all be back in Dublin together and have a good pint of Guinness.

On the second day they had no food or water and Jack told his men that sooner or later the Germans would attack and that they should be ready; but that no one should fire a shot until he gave the order. At this stage they were in a line of fire between their own and the German artillery and were presumed dead or captured. On the fifth morning at 3 am the Germans attacked. They came within 25 yards and Jack ordered his men to fire a load of Mills bombs (hand grenades) and they blew up a lot of them. They returned to attack the second time and Jack's soldiers did the same thing. After an hour and a half of this their ammunition was getting low and Jack gave the order to retreat while he covered them. The artillery then started to fire at the Germans and saved their lives. Jack made sure that every man was across the river while he manned the machine gun never moving till he was sure they were all safe. When they retreated they ran into a French battalion and when they told them of their exploits they gave them coffee with rum in it which was very welcome.

A few months later Jack got word that he was to go to London to be presented with the Victoria Cross. He was presented with his award and given a week's leave before he went back to the trenches. Their pay at the time was three shillings and sixpence per week.

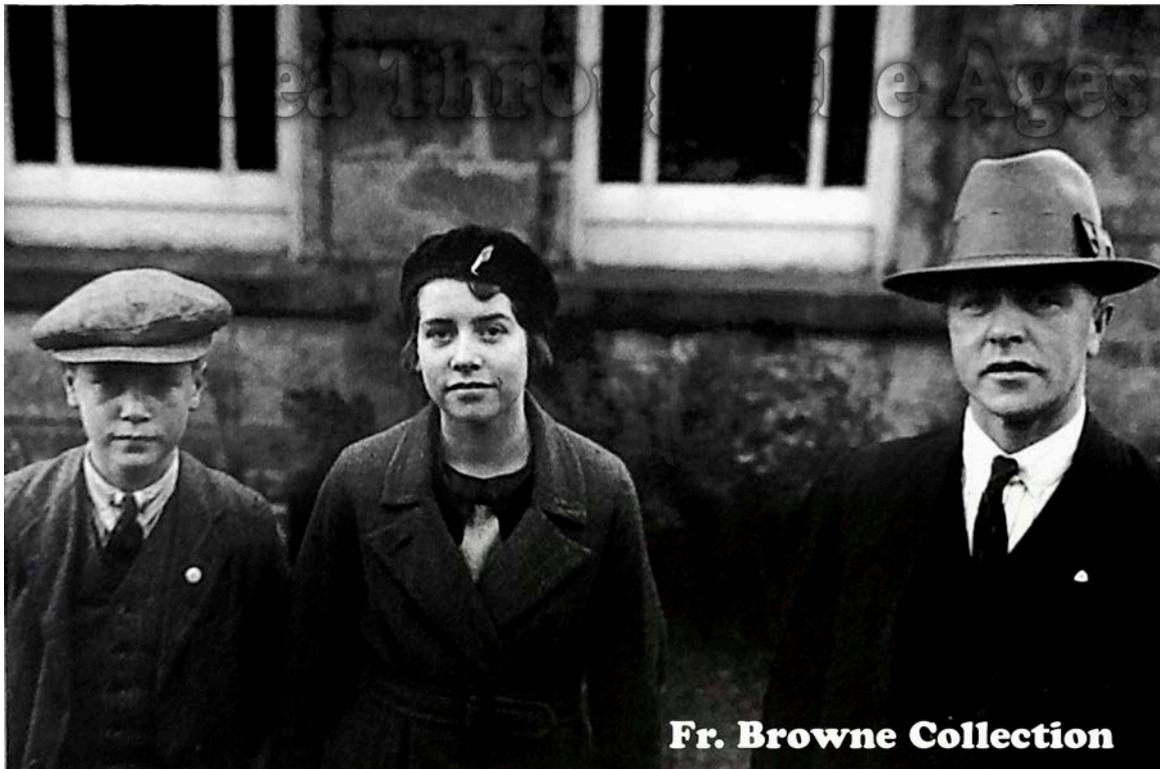
Rathdowney Through the Ages


873	<p>MOYNEY John VC Sergeant 2nd Battalion, Irish Guards</p> <p>Born: 8 January 1895 - Rathdowney, Queen's Co. (now Co. Laoise), Ireland Died: 10 November 1980 aged 85, at Roscrea, Co. Tipperary, Ireland Buried: 12 November at Roscrea Roman Catholic Cemetery, Abbey Street, Roscrea. Headstone Deed/Service: 12 - 13 September 1917 (Lance-Sergeant) When in command of fifteen men forming two advanced posts surrounded by the enemy, he held out for four days with no water and very little food. On the fifth day, with the enemy advancing on his position, he attacked them with bombs and used his Lewis gun with great effect. Finding himself surrounded he led his men in a charge through the enemy, reaching a stream where he and Woodcock (874) covered the party while they crossed unscathed, before crossing themselves under a hail of bullets Commemoration: i) Headstone ii) Medals at The Irish Guards Museum</p>	<p>Ney Copse, Broenbeek Belgium 895</p> <p>Gazette: 17 October 1917</p>
-----	---	---

When the war ended he, like everyone else, thought that this was going to be the last war but when they came home war was still going on in their own country. After the fighting

they were shipped to the south of France for some R and R before they marched 150 miles to Mons in Germany as part of the army of occupation.



When he came back after the war he settled in Roscrea. He worked as head porter in the railway station until he retired after 40 years. He will be remembered as a tall straight man on his bicycle riding in and out of town from where he lived in Ashbury. He died on 10th November 1980 aged 85. He was the last surviving Irishman to win the V.C. in the Great War.