



# Peter's Key: Peter DeLoughry and the Fight for Irish Independence

Declan Dunne

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In February, 1919, three Irish revolutionary prisoners walked out of Lincoln Jail without having dug a tunnel or fired a shot. The escape was the culmination of months of planning that involved some of the greatest intellects in Ireland and Britain. Peter DeLoughry (1882–1931) was one of the founding fathers of modern Ireland. His most famous achievement was to make a key that allowed three of his fellow prisoners in Lincoln Jail to escape in February 1919. The key became a symbol of the success that could be achieved by co-operation and hard work. However, as the years went on, the key became a matter of poisonous dispute between DeLoughry and Michael Collins on one side and Eamon de Valera and Harry Boland on the other. The key emerged as a symbol of the hatred and bitterness that welled up and overflowed in the nascent years of the Irish Free State. De Loughrey was also Mayor of Kilkenny for more than six consecutive years, a record not surpassed before or since. He served in the upper and lower houses of the Irish Parliament where he became embroiled in issues such as divorce, film censorship and, most important of all, the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which he championed. He lived through an age of political and social turbulence; his childhood and adulthood bridged the time of Parnell and the birth of the Irish Free State.



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