

*BORN TO STAND ALONE*  
*BY NUALA STARKEY*

David Joseph Byrne was born at 6 Lawber Buildings, Dublin South on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1874. His parents were Joseph Byrne and Mary Lee. They married on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1873, in St Andrew's Catholic Church Westland Row, Dublin. The wedding had all the appearance of an elopement. Both gave the address of 26 Wicklow Street, possibly a hotel. Mary signed with an X.

The Irish Home Rule movement was the dominant political movement of [Irish nationalism](#) from 1870 to the end of [World War I](#). It campaigned for [self-government](#) (or "home rule") for Ireland within the [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland](#). The Lees would almost certainly have opposed it while the Ryans were probably pro Home Rule. John Lee had been a Royal Irish Constable. His sworn allegiance was to the British Crown. The RIC was a quasi-military police force. Unlike police elsewhere in the United Kingdom, RIC constables were routinely armed (including with carbines) and billeted in barracks. The force had a militaristic structure. David's declaration of being an Irish speaker, the only one in the Lee household in the 1901 Census, could be interpreted as an act of defiance and support for the Home Rule Movement. But would this division have mattered to Romeo and Juliet?

On David Joseph Byrne's birth certificate his father Joseph was a car driver. His father died when he was ten, of a 'disease of the Lungs with Dysentery (4 months certified)', in 1884. Present at the death<sup>1</sup> was Joseph's younger sister, Mary Ryan (David's aunt).

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[https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths\\_returns/deaths\\_1907/05540/4553469.pdf](https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths_returns/deaths_1907/05540/4553469.pdf)

David had one younger brother, Joseph, born 7<sup>th</sup> June 1877. His mother Mary was a widow at thirty-two years, with two sons aged seven and ten.

In 1901 they are all living in Upper Grand Canal Street, Pembroke West, Dublin, with the family of Mary's brother, a retired policeman called John Lee. All can read and write but only David speaks Irish. John (forty-seven) and Elizabeth (thirty-eight) Lee, have six children: four of them scholars and two employed as a French polisher and a waitress. David Byrne, at twenty-six is a superannuated telegraphist and his brother Joseph, twenty-six, is a carpenter.

The 1911 Census shows David Joseph Byrne living as a farm servant. He is at the farm 1 Bregoreen (Kilbride, Wexford), of his father's widowed sister, Mary Ryan. She has three children old enough to help on the farm and three scholars. Presumably David had been sent to help after her husband Francis's death from pneumonia in 1899. When David retired from the GPO on health grounds in 1901 he had only ten years service and a small pension. His Aunt Mary Ryan was recently widowed in 1899 and possibly could no longer pay her two servants.

David's maternal Uncle John Lee – the retired policeman -- had died of 'Apoplexy Cerebral and Paralysis' certified aged fifty-one. After his death in 1907, the Lee family moved to Hasting Street, Pembroke West, Dublin. In 1911, David's cousin Elizabeth is still a French polisher; Margaret is now a dressmaker; as is Mary. John is a low fireman and Annie is a machinist. They seem to have been a hardworking, fully employed family.

According to the 1911 census David's mother Mary Byrne is a provision merchant, presumably a street trader, living with her son Joseph (a carpenter and joiner) and her three unmarried sisters (two also provision merchants) in Haddington Road, Pembroke West, Dublin. So it seems between 1901 and 1911 David moved to Wexford. Maybe there were too many women for David! More likely for both health and economic reasons it was better that he moved to the country, where he could support his aunt, Mary Ryan. His father and uncle Francis had died young of lung

related illnesses, possibly TB and the death of John Lee, aged fifty-one must have frightened him.

David Joseph Byrne did not marry and had no children. The 1911 Census shows him still single but no longer speaking Irish, only English. Had disenchantment with a peaceful settlement of the Home Rule movement set in? [Charles Stewart Parnell](#) sought through the "constitutional movement", an interim measure of a parliament in [Dublin](#) with limited legislative powers. For [Unionists](#), Home Rule meant a Dublin parliament dominated by the [Catholic Church](#) to the detriment of Ireland's economic progress. To them it was a threat to their cultural identity as both British and Irish and could lead to discrimination against them as a religious minority. Under the leadership of [Charles Stewart Parnell](#), the Home Rule movement came close to success. The [Liberal](#) government of [William Ewart Gladstone](#) introduced the [First Home Rule Bill](#) in 1886, but the bill was defeated in the House of Commons after a split in the Liberal Party.

After Parnell's death, Gladstone introduced the [Second Home Rule Bill](#) in 1893. It passed the Commons but was defeated in the [House of Lords](#). After the [removal of the Lords' veto in 1911](#), the [Third Home Rule Bill](#) was introduced in 1912, leading to the [Home Rule Crisis](#). Unionists were concerned that Home Rule would be the first step in an eventual total separation of Ireland and Britain. Shortly after the outbreak of World War I (1914–18) it was enacted, but implementation [was suspended](#) until the conclusion of the war. People in Ireland were being asked to trust the British establishment and many had lost patience. The Nationalist movement divided leading to the [Easter Rising](#) in Dublin (1916). As a result of the Rising, and the executions and mass imprisonment that followed it, some Irish people became disillusioned with the nationalist Home Rulers. The [Conscription Crisis of 1918](#) further galvanised support for political separatism. A month after the end of the war, the Irish party was routed by [Sinn Féin](#) in the [1918 general election](#), leading to the establishment of the [First Dáil](#) and the Declaration of Independence. The [Government of Ireland Act 1920](#) partitioned Ireland, setting up separate Home Rule Parliaments in Dublin and

in [Northern Ireland](#). The [Anglo-Irish Treaty](#), which ended the [Irish War of Independence](#), led to the creation of the self-governing [Irish Free State](#) in 1922.

David Joseph Byrne died young, on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1921, of 'Acute Gastritis, followed by Heart failure (certified 6 days)'. He was aged forty-six and had received a pension from the Post Office for twenty years. I wonder if he felt Irish in his heart and culture but he could not afford to be without his British pension. He had lived in a turbulent united Ireland under British rule but would be spared the experience of the turmoil of new institutions and legislation.

## Fact Sheet: David Byrne

Pensioner Details
<i>Pensioner name:</i> David Byrne
<i>Person ID:</i> IR1019
<i>Your name:</i> Nuala Starkey
<i>U3A group:</i> North Down
Part One: Birth and Family
1: When and where was your pensioner born?
David Joseph Byrne was born at 6 Lawber Buildings, Dublin South on 23rd August 1874.
2: Who were your pensioners' parents? Record any details you can find out about them here (e.g. occupation, religious affiliation, whether they could read or write)
His parents were Joseph Byrne and Mary Lee. On David Joseph Byrne's birth certificate his father Joseph was a car driver. They married on 26th May 1873 in St Andrew's Westland Row, Dublin
3: Did your pensioner have any siblings? What were their names, and how old were they in relation to your pensioner? Use this space to record anything else you have found out about them (e.g. occupation)
David Joseph Byrne had one younger brother, Joseph, born 7th June 1877.
Part Two: Marriage and children
1: Did your pensioner marry? What was their spouse's name, and when and where did they marry them? Use this space to record any extra details you can find out about their spouse (e.g. when/where they were born, their occupation)
David Joseph Byrne did not marry. His father died in 1874, when he was ten.  His mother Mary was a widow at thirty-two with two sons aged seven and ten. David Joseph Byrne lived with his mother and brother Joseph until his retirement due to ill health from the Post Office in 1901. In 1901 they are all living in Upper Grand Canal Street, Pembroke West, Dublin, with the family of Mary's brother, retired policeman, John Lee.  The 1911 Census shows David Joseph Byrne living as a farm servant at the Farm, 1 Bregoreen (Kilbride, Wexford) of his father's widowed sister, Mary Ryan. She has three children old enough to help on the farm and three Scholars. Presumably David had been sent to help after her husband Francis's death in 1899.

2: Did your pensioner have any children? What were their names, and when they were born? Use this space to record any extra details you can find out about them (e.g. occupation, where they lived later in life)

David Joseph Byrne had no children. The 1911 census shows him still single and no longer speaking Irish, only English.

### Part Three: Work

1: What occupation was your pensioner recorded as doing in census years? Please make sure to state clearly which year you are referring to

The 1901 Census declares David, a Telegraphist Superannuated, living at his maternal uncle John Lee's 1st Class home in Upper Grand Canal St. Dublin with his widowed mother and younger brother, Joseph. By 1911, he is absent from his mother's home in Haddington Road, Dublin but is found living with his father's widowed sister Mary Ryan in Bregoreen (Kilbride, Wexford), where he died.

In the 1911 Census David was a farm servant.

2: What occupations were people living with your pensioner (e.g. spouse, children, boarders) doing in the census years? Please make sure to state clearly which year you are referring to

In 1901, David was living with his Police Pensioner uncle John Lee, his brother Joseph Byrne (Carpenter), cousins Elizabeth Lee (a French Polisher), Margaret (a Waitress) and three cousins who were scholars as well as his mother and aunt Elizabeth Lee.

In 1911 David was living with his paternal aunt Mary Byrne (a farmer), and her six children, three of whom helped on the farm and three who were Scholars.

### Part Four: Anything Else

Please use this space to record anything else you have found out about your pensioner

When David retired through ill health aged twenty-six he had only ten years service and a small pension.

His aunt Mary Ryan was recently widowed and possibly could no longer pay her two servants.

Between 1901 and 1911 David moved to Wexford.

With his uncle John Lee's death in 1907 the Lee family had moved to Hasting Street, Pembroke West, Dublin and his mother had rehoused.

He left his mother Mary Byrne behind in Dublin. In 1911 she is a provision merchant, living with her son Joseph (a carpenter and joiner), and her three unmarried sisters (two also Provision Merchants) in Haddington Road, Pembroke West, Dublin.

In 1911, his cousin Elizabeth was still a French polisher, Margaret who was a waitress in 1901 is now a dressmaker, as is Mary. John is a low fireman and Annie is a machinist.

David Joseph Byrne died, aged 46, after receiving a pension from the Post Office for 20 years. He died on 24th October 1921 of "Acute Gastritis, followed by Heart failure (certified 6 days)".

### Part Five: Your Sources

Please use this space to record the sources you have used

#### **David Joseph Byrne (1874-1921)**

Birth 1874

[2150957.pdf \(irishgenealogy.ie\)](#)

Parent's Marriage

[8134225.pdf \(irishgenealogy.ie\)](#)

Birth Brother Joseph

[2103812.pdf \(irishgenealogy.ie\)](#)

1901 Census David Byrne

[National Archives: Census of Ireland 1911](#)

1911 Census

[National Archives: Census of Ireland 1911](#)

#### **Father Joseph Byrne (1847-1874)**

Death

[4808652.pdf \(irishgenealogy.ie\)](#)

Death of Francis Ryan 1899

[4636667.pdf \(irishgenealogy.ie\)](#)

Aunt Mary Ryan 1901 Census

[National Archives: Census of Ireland 1911](#)

#### **Death of Uncle John Lee (1855-1907)**

[4553469.pdf \(irishgenealogy.ie\)](#)