

# North Mayo Heritage Centre Mayo Heritage

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Ellison Street, Castlebar where O'Malley was born  
(weebly.com)

We profile  
**Ernie O'Malley**

Cover image – Ernie O'Malley in earlier years  
(image: alchetron.com)

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## Ernie O'Malley 1897 - 1957

**Ernie O'Malley was born on Ellison Street, Castlebar on the 26<sup>th</sup> May 1897, the second of eleven children. His father Luke was a clerk for the Crown Solicitor for Co. Mayo, Malachy Kelly. The family belonged to the comfortable Catholic middle class, a class which identified itself with the British administration in Ireland.**

His parents would never speak about Irish nationalism to the young Ernie, although his father was a conservative Irish nationalist. The family moved to Dublin in 1906, where his father took up a position with the Congested Districts Board. Ernie went to school at CBS North Richmond Street, and later won a scholarship to study medicine at UCD.



Ernie O'Malley's state funeral in 1957. (*image historyireland.com*)

In Dublin at that time there was great unrest. O'Malley in his autobiography recalled the great lockout of workers in Dublin in 1913, the ceremonial nationalist funerals, the gun running at Howth, the marching and drilling by the Irish Citizen Army, and the outbreak of World War 1. O'Malley's family remained staunchly in favour of British rule and staunchly Catholic. Frank, the older brother, had joined the British army as a cadet. By the time of the Easter Rising in 1916, Ernie was thinking about following him. The turning point for Ernie was the execution of the leaders of the Rising.

He joined the Irish Volunteers as a member of F company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Dublin Brigade. The volunteers drilled with broom handles in halls used for teaching Irish language and dance. When he finally received a rifle, O'Malley had to hide it beneath the floorboards of his room, in his parents house. In June 1918, having twice failed his second year university exams, O'Malley committed himself fully to the republican cause. He was initially a volunteer organiser under the instruction of Richard Mulcahy, operating in the northern counties.

Then in August 1918, he was sent to London to buy arms by Michael Collins.

During 1919 he worked as an IRA staff captain attached to GHQ in Dublin, while also training volunteers in Clare, Tipperary, and Dublin.

During the War of Independence, O'Malley was a leading figure in attacks on barracks. He was captured in December 1920, but managed to escape Kilmainham Jail in February 1921, and took command of the IRA's 2<sup>nd</sup> Southern Division. O'Malley rejected the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty.

He was captured in the Four Courts on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 1922, but again escaped. In November 1922 he was captured and badly wounded by the Irish Free State Army in Dublin.

Imprisoned until July 1924, it was during this imprisonment he was elected as a TD for Dublin North in the 1923 general election. Following his release, he went home to live with his parents, and tried to complete his medical degree at UCD.

Increasingly he began to become interested in travelling and writing. From 1924 until 1926 O'Malley travelled around France, Spain, and Italy. From 1928 to 1935 he travelled in North America. While in New Mexico he began writing on his two autobiographies, '*On Another Man's Wound*', and '*The Singing Flame*'.

O'Malley married Helen Hooker in London in 1935, and from 1938 they settled in Burrishoole Lodge near Newport, where they had three children. This was to be his base until 1954 when he moved to Dublin.

In 1953 O'Malley suffered a heart attack and his later years were scarred by ill health. He died of heart failure on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1957.

He was given a state funeral and is buried in the O'Malley plot in Glasnevin cemetery. A sculpture of Manannán Mac Lir, an Irish Sea God, donated by O'Malley's family, stands in the Mall in Castlebar, County Mayo.

### Sources

[www.rte.ie/history](http://www.rte.ie/history)  
[www.irishtimes.com](http://www.irishtimes.com)  
[www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)



Left: Burrishoole Lodge, Newport where O'Malley lived from 1938-1954 (*buildingsofireland.ie*)