

Sandes

Soldiers Home

By Joe Murray

I have two fleeting childhood memories with Sandes Soldiers Home as a backdrop. The year was most probably 1954 and I'm in my father's arms outside Sandes. The footpath facing the Glasshouse is thronged with people standing and sitting, they are all waiting to view the racing cars which were stowed overnight in a big red corrugated shed nearby. One after another the open topped motors were driven noisily passed Sandes making their way to the starting point of the Curragh Motor Racing circuit. Leap forward a couple of years to 1957 and I'm playing in the grassy area between Sandes and Murphy's house; outside the Glasshouse soldiers are standing guard around canvased covered trucks. In the back of the parked vehicles men are sitting on benches, some are talking, others are reading newspapers. One of the older children in our group says he has "spotted a man crying behind his paper". The men are members of the I.R.A. waiting to begin the process of internment.

The Home was situated at the west end of the Curragh Camp between the Glasshouse (a military prison) and the Internment Camp. Before 1957 it was possible to walk around the entire Sandes structure. When Internment was introduced in the late 50s barbed wire was positioned right up to the south facing garden of Sandes. From that time onward we could no longer take the short cut behind Sandes while walking to school from our home in Hare Park.

Sandes Soldiers Home was opened in late 1911 the building then consisted of a large canteen, kitchen and yard with a glass roof plus a reading and recreation room with living quarters overhead. Outside Miss Sandes living quarters was a south facing garden with a glasshouse. A thin strip of garden with white painted picket fence fronted the west end of the building.

Miss Elise Sandes was born in Co. Kerry and the future Lord Kitchener was one of her childhood friends. Both these children were destined to do major work for the British army. Miss Sandes was only 17 years of age when she began to take an interest in the welfare of soldiers at first welcoming them to a room in her parent's house and later when this proved too small, she rented a larger property in town and started a club for the men. From this small beginning in Tralee her Homes grew. The first official home i.e. with the name 'Sandes Home for Soldiers' was opened in King St. Cork in June 1877. It is described as been a plain ordinary dwelling-house thanks to the generosity of a retired Naval Officer it was purchased for £259- Elise made every effort to ensure its rooms were bright and cosy. The prayer and religious services were always provided on a voluntary basis. By 1902 they had 21 Soldiers Homes 15 in Ireland and 6 in India in addition 40 ladies worked in these Homes all of them gratuitously. In an article in the IRISH TIMES published in 1893 Miss Sandes said **'there was no such thing as religious distinction in her establishments they welcomed all religions. A very large proportion of Sandes visitors are Roman Catholics. We have a room set apart for meetings, but nobody is compelled to go there. It is entirely optional, and as to Roman Catholics we discriminate them by fish dinners on Fridays. "Force in these matters defeats your own ends and none is used here"** When asked about soldiers turning up a bit the worse from drink, she said that they would never turn him away. No matter how bad he is we take him in, and we have a dormitory where he can rest while under the influence. We will not give him drink, but we would not drive him away to do worse. We make him quiet welcome'.



In 1882 Mrs. Emily Perry who also took an interest in the welfare of soldiers opened a home at Lumville which was situated at the edge of the Curragh plains. This was an area close to the Curragh Camp it was not possible for her to get a site on the Camp itself. That said, the military did corporate and assist the Home where possible in a letter to Perry from the Major Commanding Army Service Corps dated 28th of November 1893 it was stated that the Perry Home could be supplied with whatever bread it needed from the army canteen. They would also be supplied with up to 5lb. of meat per day from the Government Abattoir. It would be necessary for the Lumville home to send in their order for meat to the Librarian the day before they required it. The bills were to be paid monthly and as soon after the 1st as possible.

Mrs. Perry was a close friend of Miss Sandes. If she found it impossible to get a place on government lands it seems that Miss Sandes had no such problems. She was actively encouraged by Lord Wolseley to build a home on the Curragh Camp. Miss Sandes would not use her influence to obtain a site on the Camp as this would have brought her into competition with Perry. The Lumville building was referred to as Miss Perry's Home nevertheless Emily Perry was married to a John William Perry from Balinagore Co. Westmeath who died at 49 Leinster Road, Dublin on November 24th, 1895. On Fri. 5th of May 1899 a seventy-year-old Mrs. Emily Patience Perry died at the Soldiers Home Lumville. The following Tuesday morning her funeral left the Home at 7A.M. arriving at Kingsbridge station at 9A.M. followed by burial at Temple Hill Cemetery Blackrock. Emily's husband was also interred in this Quaker graveyard. Perry left the Lumville Home to Miss Sandes. Eliza was not content with the location of the Perry Home. It was nearly a mile from the Curragh Camp which made it difficult for the men to visit on wet winter days. In summer when the number of soldiers on the Camp could grow to 12,000 it was her regulars who helped in the kitchen and worked in the tea and coffee rooms. The home was crowded night after night.

The 1901 census has Emily Sandes living in the Soldiers Home, Ballincollig. Co. Cork.

In 1902 Elise Sandes wrote the following; **"Thirty-three years ago I asked God to give me a long day, and ere it closed to let me see a Soldier's Home working- and working well- in every Garrison town in Ireland. This the dream of my life, is now nearly fulfilled"**

The 1911 census taken on the 2nd of April. A sixty-year-old Miss Sandes was then living in the Lumville Home. The house is described as been first class she

has two servants one male, one female and a visitor named Miss Caroline Sherard Mason who's occupation like Miss Sandes is described as 'Superintendent Soldiers Home.'

Surname	Forename	Age	Sex	Relation to head	Religion	Birthplace	Occupation
Sandes	Elizabeth Anne	60	Female	Head of Family	Church of Ireland	Co Kerry	Superintendent Soldiers Home
Mason	Caroline Sherard	45	Female	Visitor	Ch of Ireland	Gloucestershire	Superintendent Soldiers Home
Bapty	Robert	22	Male	Servant	Ch of Ireland	Co Roxburgh	Domestic Servant Waiter
Malone	Jane	43	Female	Servant	Ch of Ireland	Co Monaghan	Domestic Servant General

A location on the Curragh Camp chosen by Sir Gerald Morton was granted to Miss Sandes and after some years of planning, raising funds and building the Home was opened in November 1911. Morton did not live to see the opening of the Hare Park Home he died suddenly on the 20th of April 1906. Later funds were collected by his colleagues in India and a memorial to him was placed in Christchurch, Simla. As he had always taken a keen interest in the work of Miss Sandes the surplus of the India collection was donated to the Curragh Home to fund a reading room. Morton was buried in the military cemetery near the Curragh Camp. The excess subscriptions from a collection for a memorial stone for Morton's grave also went to the Sandes fund. A Mr. John Cory who died in Cardiff in 1910 left Elise Sandes £2,000. Cory who had made his fortune in coal mining and shipping was a devout Christian and as a philanthropist was one of the most generous men in the United Kingdom. Some people said when they saw the spacious building "Miss Sandes has overbuilt herself" but her experience during the first year was the building could be filled four times over. Some years later Elise Sandes wrote: " **It's walls speak to me of many old friends. The splendid, spacious hall which we use for social gatherings of all kinds and for our large Sunday Evening Services bear the inscription- 'This Hall is given in loving memory of Maud McCausland the friend of Soldiers and Policemen for twenty years'. The Meeting Room is sacred to the memory of another valued fellow- workers Mrs. Wallace and is the gift of her sister Mrs. Booth. Night after night, as I see this beautiful Home crowded from stem to stern with a thoughtful heart, I feel the friends who helped to build it have already had their reward.**"



Another Sandes Soldiers Home was opened in Edward Street Newbridge in September 1910. It was described in the Freemans Journal as been extremely large with a splendid concert hall, recreation, dining, and mess rooms. The kitchen and bathrooms are fitted in the most modern manner, the place throughout being installed with electric light. Just twelve months previous an advertisement was placed in the Belfast Newsletter seeking bids for the building of the Newbridge Home. Plans could be viewed at the Wolsey Home Dublin and tenders to be lodged with Miss Sandes at the Perry Home Curragh Camp. Miss Sandes attended a meeting in Belfast in January 1910 where the Lord mayor welcomed her and explained that she wanted to raise £10,000 to build three new homes at the Curragh, Newbridge and Athlone. The reason why the Newbridge Home was built so quickly was it was mostly made of timber. After the Treaty of 1922 the Homes in Athlone, Kildare and Newbridge were dismantled and moved to the North.

The area of the Curragh Camp where Sandes stood presented the staff and employees a fine view of the Curragh plains looking south towards Maddenstown and east to the Wicklow mountains. The view to the west was apart from a few buildings and huts in the Hare Park area a sea of green dotted here and there with furze bushes. Looking north and just across the road was Eliza Sandes nearest neighbours the 'bold boys' of the British army locked up for some misdemeanour in the Detention barrack A.K.A. The Glasshouse. The public

entrance to the Home was almost directly opposite the entrance to the military prison. Sandes was possibly one of the last major building projects completed on the Camp during British times. It became Eliza Sandes base and headquarters for most of the following ten years.



In 1913 “The Curragh Mutiny” transpired when Brigadier Hubert Gough and as many as a hundred officers stationed at the Curragh chose to resign their commissions rather than take part in any potential military moves against Ulster Loyalists. Tradition has it that Miss Sandes assistant Miss Eve Maguire, at the request of the officers concerned wired a friend in England asking him to let the British people know their position, which he did through the columns of ‘The Daily Mail’.

The National Library of Ireland photography collection has some outstanding photographs of Sandes Curragh Camp taken in the first few years of its existence. From these photos, it can be seen that the Home was built in two stages. One photo shows Sandes with the main entrance in the middle of the building, inscribed over the door is” Miss Sandes Soldiers Home.” Walking through this door the coffee shop is on the left and the recreation room is on the right. In another photo taken some years later a window with the engraving” Soldiers Home Coffee Shop” has been removed and the building in this area has been extended. This was done to make an entry area for the “Great Hall” Two more

windows were added to the ground floor and the timber sign “Sandes Soldiers Home” is positioned over these new windows. This red sign stood the test of time and was still there in the 1980s. Brigadier General Lowe opened the “Great Hall” in August 1916. He explained that the opening had been delayed because of the recent rebellion. The hall could accommodate a thousand men. In late 1915 early 1916 Elisa Sandes was in negotiation with the military for a plot of land to build a manager’s residence. The Chief Engineer was prepared to recommend the matter to the War Office and the proposed rent had been assessed at £10 per annum. This two-story house to the rear of Sandes was probably built at the same time as the “Great Hall”.



THE GREAT WAR.

Miss Sandes and Miss Maguire spent most of the Great War on the Curragh Camp. Tens of thousands of men passed through the Curragh on their way to the Western Front. Extra accommodation was constructed on the Camp to house these soldiers and Eliza Sandes room overlooked the huts built in the Hare Park area. These were conceivably the busiest years Sandes would ever have. Mr. John Kinhan O.B.E. writes of those days in August 1914; - **One after another our regiments slipped quietly away across the Curragh to the railway siding, and we saw them no more, and the camp was left empty. In a few days, however, reservists began to pour in splendid seasoned old soldiers suddenly called away from wife, family, and business’, too, soon left us and then the recruits for the new armies began to arrive.**

It was a lively time at the Home, Sandes was an absolute magnet in those days remaining open till the early hours of the morning preparing meals for incoming and outgoing soldiers. Miss Sandes wrote "Happily for us we are kept so busy with troops coming and going at the Curragh, that we have little time to think of the horrors of this awful war"



In the book **Elisa Sandes and Theodora Schofield. Twenty-one years of unrecorded service for the British Army 1913-1934** by Ella Potter. The following is written: - **It is Sunday; the big room is crowded, and the atmosphere is dense with smoke and heat. Some hundreds of men are seated, smoking, reading, thinking while waiting for the next draft. Perhaps to-night they may see their names on the list for France or "Mespot" (Mesopotamia). There is a small notice on the board stating that Miss Sandes will speak. A few well-known hymns are sung and then Miss Sandes steps on the platform. Instantly caps come off, pipes are put out and papers laid aside. The "Old Lady" is going to speak. Miss Sandes is flushed and when roused to deep feeling, as she is to-night, can speak as few others. There is something thrilling in her beautiful voice. There is a solemn hush. Most of her hearers know that probably they will soon be facing that great Enemy; but she speaks to them not of death but of life.** The concert hall was used for recitals and prayers, for sing songs and when soldiers required some piano backup the Sandes ladies would oblige. The Leinster Leader advertised a Grand Concert Recital in Sandes Soldiers Home in

aid of the funds of Kildare and Curragh War Hospital Supply Depot. This was to take place on the 16th of May 1918. The following artists would appear **Miss Margaret Cooper, Songs at the piano. Mr. Gervase Elwes, Tenor. Assisted by- Miss Margaret Wishart, Violinist, Mr. George Woodhouse, Pianist. Admission 7/6, 5/-, 3/-, 2/- and 1/-.** All seats numbered and reserved. Bookings at Todd Burns & Co. Curragh, Telephone 78, Curragh. Plans for seating may be seen at; - Mr. Youngs, Newbridge, Miss Malone's, Kildare and Miss Heiderman's Naas. A photo from the Eason's collection taken during the war shows a packed Hall, extra chairs have been brought in and nearly every foot of floor space is covered with soldiers, some smoking pipes other's cigarettes. Older men sport heavy moustaches others are clearly too young to shave. A N.C.O. stands at the back left of the hall beside the fire exit, behind him pinned to the door is what looks like a map of the Western Front. At the next door to the right stands the only female in the room. This woman and a male civilian colleague are part of the Sandes staff.



During the war years Miss Sandes was dealing personally with the reorganization and enlargement of almost every home, with huge volumes of correspondence including letters to the Sandes headquarters from the workers in the various Homes describing how they were coping or not with the huge increase of business. There were also parcels, packages of Testaments, literature, and 'Forward' the official magazine of the Homes for the men at the front. During this period Bertha McComas who had just completed her Degree in Trinity College paid what was intended to be a short visit to Sandes, but she remained

to become private secretary to “the Chief” dealing with the vast amount of mail, work which she carried on for many years.



Troops leaving for the Front where continually been replaced and the Home was again crowded with fresh faces. Elisa Sandes wrote; - **“Looking round upon them tonight we cannot help thinking of many who were with us only a few weeks ago, and whose names we have just seen in the casualty list”.**

Those who came back from France recount how, as they stood in the trenches just before going over the top, they passed the word from man to man “What about the Sandes Home at the Curragh?” They said it heartened them up wonderfully, and one “Jock” said afterwards. “I would have liked fine to have had a wee blink of the good old Home; even the thought of it bucked me up grand”.

ARMISTICE DAY.

After more than four years the war finally ended on the 11th of November 1918- Armistice Day. The cheering came from all parts of the Camp when the buglers sounded “Cease Fire”. Bands came out on the square and to the strains of the National Anthems of all the Allies and the strains of “The King” the troops cheered till they could cheer no more. Miss Sandes went out: her bent figure could be seen mingling with the crowd who knew her so well. Asked

subsequently to recall that day she always said that the only sound she was conscious of was the sobbing of a woman, and the cheering of soldiers.

One soldier when asked how he first heard the news, replied "I was just walking along the road when I saw the biggest flock of birds I have ever saw. They seemed to swoop down over the Curragh, and I thought to myself 'they look as if they are celebrating something'. Just then I heard the cheering and thought it might be peace, but I didn't feel sure till a chap stopped me and told me".



Crowds of soldiers thronged the Soldiers Home reading room, and enthusiasm had to express itself in song. They sang the "Star- Spangled Banner" and the "Marsellaise". The Welsh lads sang "Land of my Fathers"; the Jocks sang "Annie Laurie" while the Irish lads responded with "Danny Boy". The younger men were exuberant; the men who had seen the most fighting said the least.

King George V. included Miss Sandes in the War honours, grateful as she was for the recognition, she was unable to travel to London to receive it, so the decoration was sent to her at the Curragh.

April 1919 Miss M. Watney of Surrey left £10,000 to Miss Sandes Soldiers Home Ireland.

On October 1919 in recognition of her 50 years work amongst the military General Burnett presented Miss Sandes with an inscribed inkwell and armchair. This event took place in the big Reading Room on the Curragh Camp.

The Curragh Home continued to function as normal throughout the War of Independence or at least that's how it appeared on the surface, a paragraph from the book **The Trumpet Call Obey** sheds some light on how things really were;- **Miss Sandes and her helpers quietly carried on the work among the soldiers. Not for the first time her calm expression had a heart that was torn and distressed.** All around her were reminders that the situation in Ireland was not as it should be. The huts near Sandes which had been built to accommodate British soldiers during the Great War were now surrounded by barbed wire fencing and watchtowers and used as Internment Camps for Republicans. In early 1919 Patrick Gavin from Maddenstown was taking a cow across the Curragh heading to a mart in Newbridge, on that dark winters morning he was shot by a nervous British soldier who alleged that Gavin had failed to halt when the sentry challenged him.



THE CURRAGH HANDOVER.

In 1922 apart from a couple of bases the British army pulled out of 'southern' Ireland. During the days leading up to the British withdrawal Miss Sandes worried about what would happen when both armies met From her bedroom window on the morning of the handover of the Curragh Camp Elisa Sandes witnessed two drummer boys one British the other Irish military approach one another, upon meeting both stopped and for a few seconds the boys faced each other. and then shook hands. She knew then that all was well, the transfer would

be completed peacefully. From the description in the book "Trumpet Call" it would seem that this meeting of drummer boys took place at the corner wall of the Glasshouse



The foundation of the Irish Free State might have meant the end of all the Soldiers Home in the 26 counties. Elise Sandes a proud Kerry woman, but her background was of the Unionists' tradition. Thirteen of Miss Sandes Home's closed, she accepted the request of the Irish Army authorities and kept three homes open one in Cork, another in Dublin and the third in the Curragh Camp. The Homes in Cork and Dublin did not survive long.

When the British army evacuated the Curragh, the Camp could be described as been like a ghost town. Where it had garrisoned thousands of troops now the soldiers could be counted in their hundreds. The National army expanded over the next few months and years, but it was never going to reach the numbers of the British military it replaced, this meant a big drop-in trade for all the businesses around the Curragh. Another problem for Sandes was the soldiers were now mostly of the Catholic faith thus some of the local clergy would be keeping a suspicious eye on the Sandes ladies (Home Rule was unquestionably Rome Rule). It would have been easier for the Sandes organization to sell off stock and fittings and shut up shop altogether. A sizable advertisement appeared in the Nationalist & Leinster Times stating that on Monday April the 10th 1922 the Soldiers Home Kilbride Camp Co. Wicklow plus furniture and

other effects carpets, chairs, tables, delph, billiard table etc. were to be sold off. Describing it as" the most beautiful and extensive buildings known as The Soldiers Home 90ft by 70ft lined with ¾ inch pine boards and felt and roofed with best galvanized iron."

The Curragh Home was fortunate that it had at the helm a lady named Nora Kathleen Magill a native of Beaufort Co. Kerry who took charge when Elise Sandes moved to Ballykinlar. It was her determination and desire to look after the Irish soldiers that kept the Curragh Home functioning. Miss Magill was a niece of Miss Sandes.

Ernest Wilson joined the Royal Irish Rifles on the 3th of November 1915 putting his home address down as Sandes Soldiers Home Curragh Camp he had been working there as a baker since 1911. Due to poor eyesight he was discharged from the army on the 31th of December 1915. Wilson then returned to his old job in Sandes. In 1922 he went with Eliza to Ballykinlar and worked in the Home for the rest of his life, even after retirement he was often seen in the canteen giving a helping hand. He died in March 1964 at the age of 73.

SANDES HOME 1920's TO 1940's.

In 1927 Mr. L Gerdas in the Nationalist & Leinster Times stated that" **the Homes are financed purely by voluntary subscription and the proceeds of the Coffee Bar. The scheme was originally put forward for the welfare of the soldiers, morally, socially and spiritually and the religious portion was still a foremost part of it. The debt on the Curragh Home for 1927 was £600, and the year before £300. If at the end of any year they had a considerable sum on hands it would be remitted to Headquarters to be applied to other parts of the organization. The contributions in late years were not so good as they had been.**"

William Brent commenced working in Sandes in 1911 and eventually earned a wage of £3-15s a week as a carpenter. He worked from 8AM till 6PM. By the mid-1920s due to a decline in business he was employed as a handyman at £2-10s a week. His work as such included repairs to the cinema. Due to a shortage of work Brent lost his job in May 1927. His claim for unemployment assistance was turned down because no monies for insurance stamps had been paid during his years of employment. Mr. Gerdas who managed Sandes Picture House argued that as the Homes were not run for the purpose of making money but merely for the social and moral good of the soldiers, consequently Sandes

should not be asked to pay insurance benefit. The Brent versus Sandes impasse was raised in Dail Eireann where the Minister had said that the man's cards should be stamped.

In the Kildare Circuit Court, the former Sandes worker sued Elisa Sandes for £280 owed to him for box office work for the years 1924 to 1927 and also £18-18s due in respect of unstamped unemployment cards. W. Brent claimed that since 1924 his work began at 10 o'clock in the morning and he had breakfast, dinner, and tea at the Home. He did not leave the place between 2 o'clock and 6 o'clock except when sent on business. Miss McGill payed him his wages every Saturday when the work was done, and he never objected to having his unemployment cards stamped. Mr. Gerdas stated that Brent's son was employed in the cinema at the door and Brent had asked that his son be trained as a film operator. It was then arranged that Brett would get the afternoons off and return to work between 6.30 and 10 PM to cover box office duties so his son could work with the projectionist. Miss McGill Superintendent of the Home said that when Brent took on the work in the ticket office, he was released from his ordinary duties at 2PM.

The judge summing up said it was a very interesting case and the parties had given their evidence very clearly, so he had no difficulty with the case. He believed that Brett, now that his son was a fully qualified operator, forgot the time he was a ticket collector. The compromise being he finished his own work at 2PM and had the afternoon off. Therefore, the claim for overtime was unfounded and on the claim for unemployment benefit that question has apparently been settled by the Minister beyond yea or nay and he could not go behind that, he would give a decree for £18-18. and cost of the case.



On the 14th of May 1929 according to a report in the local press a very enjoyable concert was held at Sandes Home, Curragh Camp. The majority of the items produced being supplied by local talent and where very pleasing and up to date.

Miss Elise Sandes spent her declining years in Ballykinlar Camp Co. Down. Built on the fringe of the sand hills four miles from the station and described as a healthy place, Miss Sandes did not mind the loneliness "She is concerned only with her work" said her friend. Elisa died on the 19th of August 1934. She had as near a military funeral as possible. Her coffin draped with a Union Jack was carried by eight soldiers, a military guard of honour lined the road leading out of the Camp. Miss Sandes had requested no flowers on her grave the money instead should go to the Sandes Homes. A single wreath was placed on the coffin it was sent by the War Office on behalf of all ranks of British Army throughout the world. No volleys were fired over her grave, buglers of the North Staffordshire regiment sounded the "Last Post" and "Reveille".



In March 1937 Nora Magill wrote to the IRISH TIMES; *In these days it is extremely difficult to make ends meet in fact, they do not meet. Now we are faced with great extra expenditure in the changeover from the Camp system for providing electric currant to that of the national (Shannon) supply. This has entailed new outlay as the Camp voltage is different from the Shannon and to comply with regulations switches, holders, lamps, fuse boxes and much wiring had to be altered. All this, with electrician's time is £114 and £600 is required annually to keep the Home working. We are*

troubled how to meet these charges. I wonder if any of your readers would help by donations or subscriptions? These could be sent to W.H. Fry, Esq. 14 Lower Mount St. or to me.

Sandes had a boost in business during the Emergency years 1939 to 1945 when the Irish Defence Forces had a vast intake of recruits. Most of the civilian population were moved off the Curragh Camp as their homes were needed to house the additional troops. In the Hare Park area two prison compounds were built, one for suspected I.R.A. members and another for German air and seamen. The camp for British internees was at the other end of the Curragh. The south side of Sandes Home looked directly down on these prisons and the front of the Home overlooked the Glasshouse. Just as during the War of Independence period it was possible for Miss Sandes to view Republican prisoners Miss Magill could see both I.R.A. and German internees from her upstairs bedroom window. One of the Republican inmates who did not think much of the prison meals recalled the delightful smell of food coming from Sandes kitchen. The Germans and British were allowed out on parole to visit Dublin and nearby towns. Many of the Germans took employment in the locality. They also became patrons of Sandes.



In 1942 the Larne Times paid tribute to the late Miss Ella Potter. Born in India she came to Ireland in her young days to assist in the Sandes Homes and gave

continuous service for 32 years. She assisted in many of the homes including the Curragh, affectionately known as "Grannie" she had an enormous correspondence coming from all over the British Empire and if addressed to "Grannie" Sandes Home none went astray. She specialized in looking after lonely soldiers and to accomplish this object her Christmas mail commenced in September of each year.

On the 4th of December 1943 Miss Frances Sandes of Sandes Home, Parkgate Street and formerly of Allendale, Clonsilla. Dublin died. She left an estate of £4,109.

Chris O' Callaghan who was stationed in the Curragh Camp penned the following: ***I remember the last day of the war in Europe the 8th of May 1945. I was standing outside Sandes Soldiers Home with a group of people which included a few Germans watching a violent lightning storm directly over the adjacent Magazine complex. Flash after flash of orange/blue bolts of lightning struck the barbed wire perimeter of the magazine causing it to glow like ionized neon. Some of the soldiers made the sign of the cross in anticipation of the magazine blowing up. Nothing like this happened but I do recall one of the Germans exclaiming "God is angry with the German people". The Sandes Soldiers Home a hand-over from British times, was run by a friendly group of tweedy old-world people of the Protestant British tradition. On that particular day, in true blue fashion they arranged a "Victory Night" for the troops, providing them with free cinema, tea and buns.***

The Germans, who had been regular patrons of the cinema over the past year and a half were effectively denied admission since no tickets were sold. A group of Irish soldiers protested at this and no one would go until the forlorn Germans were admitted. At the other end of the Curragh the owners of another tea rooms whose clientele was largely German and Irish Officers heralded the occasion by firing a few rockets in acclamation of the Allied victory.

In 1948 Sandes Picture House was one of three cinemas in the Kildare area to have their license renewed on condition that certain improvements recommended by the Co. Manager and Fire Brigade were carried out. The other two picture houses were in Kilcullen and Kildare town.

SANDES HOME 1950's TO 1960's.

In early 1952 the following was written; *Presided over by a buttonhole relation of Florence Nightingale – one Miss Nora Magill. Back in the early 1920s Miss Magill came to spend three weeks holidays with her aunt Elisa Sandes of Tralee the founder of Sandes Soldiers Homes and kind of forgot to leave. Without doubt Sandes is a real home-from- home for army personnel. A place where he can bring his girlfriend or wife for an evening outing or to see a film show. Miss Magill is unofficial mother to all these boys, knows everyone by name and where he comes from. Hears and helps with personal problems and allows them to have their library subscriptions of 3/- back until pay day.*

Miss Magill died in Sandes Home in 1956. She was the daughter of Captain Magill of Churchtown House Beaufort and was the last of the family to be connected to the Home. Her funeral service conducted by Rev. Frederick Knowles chaplain took place at the Garrison Church Curragh Camp where a tribute by Colonel A.T. Lawlor Officer Commanding was read by Comdt. Bunworth. She was buried in her home place. Her passing might have been a major blow to the Curragh Homes chances of survival, fortunately a very skilled manager was waiting in the wings. Miss Patricia Carson had joined the staff of Sandes in 1942 first learning from and later looking after Miss Magill in her declining years. She took up the challenge of running the Curragh Home and quietly put her own stamp on the place.

The Irish Times

TRIBUTE TO WORKER FOR SOLDIERS' HOME

A tribute by Colonel A. T. Lawlor, O.C., Curragh Training Camp, to the late Miss Nora Kathleen Magill, niece of the late Miss Elsie Sandes, founder of the Sandes Soldiers' Homes, was read by Comdt. Bunworth at a special service in the Garrison Church in the camp yesterday. Miss Magill will be buried to-day in Beaufort, Co. Kerry, where she was born. She had worked at the Curragh for 34 years.

The service was conducted by the Rev. Frederick Knowles, chaplain of the Curragh Camp, assisted by Canon C. A. P. Fisher. Mrs. Fisher was the organist, and Mrs. Rowden was the soloist. Mr. Knowles also paid tribute to Miss Magill.

A year or so after Miss Carson became superintendent of the Sandes Home the Hare Park Internment Camp was reopened in July 1957. Army engineers had carried out some hurried repairs on the huts and sentry boxes. They also reinforced the old fencing bringing barbed wire entanglements right up to Sandes garden. This was not good for business with the added security in that area of the Curragh. On my way home from school in December 1958 I had just passed Sandes when I noticed a sizeable group of men running across the Curragh plains towards Maddenstown. At the same time the siren sounded and soldiers working in the nearby engineer's yard stopped what they were doing and rushed towards the Internment camp. I ran into our house shouting to my mother "The prisoners have escaped; the prisoners have escaped!".

Carson's rooms commanded a clear view over the prison compound and plains beyond. On the night following the escape she would have observed the burning furze, flames illuminated the Maddenstown area. The furze had been set alight by the military in a futile attempt to flush out 16 escaped prisoners. The fugitives were of course long gone.

Sandes did get some extra business due to its proximity to the Internment camp. Come morning many of the soldiers who were on night duty manning the various watchtowers would call to Sands for tea and sandwiches. The number of internees reached over 130 at peak. Gradually men were released and by mid-1959 the camp was closed. Life in the Curragh Camp went back to its normal routine.



THE CONGO AND CYPRUS.

In July 1960 the first batch of Irish soldiers were gathered on the Curragh before posting to the former Belgian Congo. 650 troops from all army commands spent nearly a week on the Camp. It was boom time for all the Curragh businesses including Sandes. The cinema, canteen and recreation room were packed. This was one of the few occasions Miss Carson would work the counter. On my way home for lunch it was my task to collect two cans of milk from Sandes. During these busy periods in order to avoid a long wait I would go around to the back of the building and the cook (whose name I've forgotten) would give me the milk. I also collected our copy of the Irish Independent. a couple of Hare Park families had their daily newspaper delivered to Sandes by the Eason's messenger boy.



Throughout those “Congo/Cyprus Days” the extra volume of business made it difficult for the Sandes staff to keep up to their normal high standards. The usual spick and span tables would remain cluttered with soiled crockery and cutlery for longer periods of time. With waves and waves of soldiers at the counter looking for service the clearing of tables had to wait. Some years later when Miss

Carson felt we were old enough she employed Davy Wilson and I in the washup during those busy periods. We washed cups, saucers and egg and bean incrustated plates in an old Belfast sink. A photo of the canteen taken circa 1916 shows a section of this washup area with cups resting on the wooden draining board. I don't believe it had changed much in the fifty years. The washup station was behind a display area for cakes, buns and sandwiches, very tempting for two young lads. Trays laid out with Chester cakes, donuts, cream slices and Russian cakes. The fact that Miss Carson could appear at any time meant we seldom if ever yielded to the temptation. The embarrassment of been caught with your mouth stuffed with cake! Besides, we were usually up to our eyes in suds and water. Everything had to be washed and dried by hand. When the rush of business eased off, we were allowed have half hour breaks and would take turns to go back and forth to the Picture House perhaps with a small bag of chips. Over a couple of nights, we might get to watch an entire film albeit not in its running order. Possibly catching the end of a film on Monday and the beginning on Tuesday night. I do recall Miss Carson handing me a brown envelope at the end of the week I think there was 3/6 in it. I was delighted with that, my first wage packet! We probably would have done the work for the free chips and visits to the cinema. Not to mention having the chance to hear all those great records played on the juke box. After a week or so the soldiers left the Camp heading off to Cyprus or the Congo Sandes trade settled back to its normal flow. It would be six months before another battalion would muster on the Curragh, so Davy and I were out of a job till then.



In the late 1960s the IRISH TIMES set up a nationwide appeal for funds for the comfort of the soldiers and families serving in the Congo. It was very successful campaign and by November they had collected £10,551-7-2. The gross proceeds of three very well attended special film shows in the Palace and Odeon cinemas Newbridge and the Curragh Picture House raised £146-18-6. Separately the staff of Sandes Soldiers home donated £4-.

In February 1961 Miss Carson wrote the following to the IRISH TIMES; ***The Sandes Soldiers Home in the Curragh- the oldest Home of its kind in Ireland- needs money urgently if it is to continue to remain open a place where soldiers can spend their off- duty time in relaxation; Where they could buy goods cheaply and where their families could buy provisions with only very small profits for the Homes themselves. Only one remains in the republic. In recent years the Curragh Home has needed between £1,200 and £1,500 a year over and above its profits to continue to remain open. It is not subsidized by any State body. Subscriptions are needed urgently, and cheques should be sent to Miss Carson at the Sandes Soldiers Home Curragh Camp Co. Kildare. Cheques should be made out to "The Curragh Home".***

From the time of Independence, the Curragh Home had seldom if ever featured in the Sandes monthly magazine FORWARD. The overall feeling among the Sandes organization was that their work was for the assistance of British soldiers and they should not be backing a Home for soldiers of the Irish Army. The Curragh Home did not even feature in their printed annual report. This thinking clashed with their awareness that the wants of the Irish soldiers was just as great as it had always been. The Business Committee felt it right to support Miss Carson in whatever way they could. This financial help if indeed Miss Carson received any, would at best be limited since the Sandes Homes Group was always in need of funds itself.

In January 1961 Miss Bessie Maconachie M.P. spoke on behalf of Sandes Soldiers and Airmen's Homes at "The Week's Good Cause" broadcast from B.B.C. Northern Ireland saying they were nine Homes one at the Curragh. Six in Northern Ireland, one at Catterick Yorkshire and one in Singapore. The Sandes Homes required £10,000 a year for running expenses and much more could be used on development.

M. Helen Jeffrey writing some years later about the Curragh Sandes said: -- **Finances were difficult, always there was a feeling that the Committee might close the Home. When I joined Sandes I occasionally accompanied the**

Chairman on his visits to the Curragh – visits intended to be reassuring, but sometimes, to the Curragh people apparently posing a threat. Later as with other Homes I would stay for a few days once a year to prepare the books for audit. Although Patricia was kindness itself and the spartan conditions I experienced where only what the other workers endured everyday of their lives. I always felt that I was treated with a certain reserve and perhaps because of that I don't know as much about Patricia her background and her service. I know she had a tough assignment and a lonely one too.



Going into Sandes in the 1960s when the front door was unlocked a patron would step into a small porch. This area had a fire exit door for the cinema directly opposite the entry door plus two windows which were just about big enough for a person to sit on its windowsill. Here a young soldier might wait for his date while he puffed on a cigarette and maybe drank a bottle of Taylor Keith orange. From the porch through another door on the right and he was in the cinema foyer (although we never referred to it as such). The high walls of this part were decorated with posters of upcoming film features. This area also had a serving hatch where cinema tickets could be purchased. A door into the cinema, to the right of the cinema entrance were two more doors one for the projectors room and just beside that the lady's toilet. Then a window which looked out towards the back of Sandes alongside this was the entry into the gent's toilet with its long dark corridor down to the cubicles and urinals. The display windows nearby were filled with the likes of St. Patrick's Day badges. Easter eggs, children's clothes or toys depending on the season. From here a customer would next step into the canteen area "The Drapery" was on the left, while it

shared the same general area as the canteen it was divided from the food part. The female customers could step into the clothes shop by means of an opening counter door. The long canteen counter was divided by pillars. A juke box was situated to the front of the middle column. A record could be played for 3d. I was told of a soldier who whenever he went into Sandes for a snack would play Frank Ifield's "I Remember You" on the juke box for one of the counter girls whose regular boyfriend was away in the Congo. During busy times the juke box would disappear behind the equivalent of a rugby scrum of soldiers as they each tried to play their favourite record. Elvis's "Return to Sender". Ray Charles's "I Can't Stop Loving You". Nat King Cole's "Ramblin' Rose" and Brendan Bowyer's "Hucklebuck" were firm favourites. Niall Power recalls been with his teenage pals standing around the juke box usually playing obscure B sides. Miss Carson was not shy about letting them know she was not pleased with them hanging around the canteen or their choice of songs. The blaring pop music was mixed with the smells of baked beans, fries, chips and malt vinegar. The elbow high timber and glass counter with its display of sweets; Eclairs, Rollo, Lucky Bags, Fizz Bags, Trigger Bars, Fruit Pastilles, Fruit Gums and numerous penny toffees. A shop scales occupied part of the counter, this was used to weight the loose sweets, sugar tea etc. At the end of the counter was a kiosk area which held soaps and toiletries, Omo, Sunlight Soap, Lux Flakes, Persil, Colgate toothpaste, Brylcreem, shaving sticks and razors etc. In those pre domestic fridge days Sandes was the only shop in our end of the Curragh where you could buy a block of ice cream plus wafers for home consumption. A block of ice cream in the early 60s would cost you 2 shillings. Like every other shop Sandes only sold ice cream during the summer months. Behind the serving counter, high on the wall was a clock with Latin numerals. This timepiece was in the exact position as the clock in the 1916 photo. It would be nice to suggest that maybe it was the same clock (50 years later, who knows?) Beside this timepiece some wit had written on cardboard in bold letters "NO TICK THE CLOCK HAS STOPPED" i.e. don't ask for credit. The floor from entrance to canteen was covered with red and dark colour tiles which were worn in parts by generations of hob nailed boots. The walls were covered with white and light green tiles. From the canteen area you walked through another door into the Recreation Room. Ah, but stop there! Miss Carson had at some stage felt that perhaps some of the clientele in this room were too young and short of stature She devised a timber T-shaped measuring stick of a certain height standing alongside it If the top of your head could touch the cross

bar you were okay to enter the recreation room, otherwise try again in another few months.

Into the Recreation Room with the dull thud of the bagatelle balls as they fell into the holes of the table. The tap, tap sound of the table tennis ball and the “ping” of billiard and snooker balls as they hit off one another. This area also had several small tables used for board games and reading purposes, the tabletops were covered with heavy duty coverings. The reading material available was a collection of magazines such as **‘Country Life’**, **‘Soldier’**, **‘Look and Learn’**, and **‘Time Magazine’** These well-thumbed publications were fixed and preserved inside weighty cardboard folders. In this room the youth of the Curragh learned to play billiards, draughts and chess. They also had another game which involved throwing sandbags weighing about a lb. or more into the numbered holes of a wooden bin. Card games were never allowed. The kind of indoor recreation that, as Miss Sandes used to put it. “a wise mother would give to her son”. Perhaps we also got some education from the many periodicals.

“The Reck” as we called it was our refuge on cold and wet days. We didn’t need money except to play on the snooker tables and possibly someone with a few shillings might invite you to play a game. Overseen all this the lady in charge set on an elevated area at the end of the room, she took the money and logged the starting and finishing time for billiard and snooker games. The light over the game table would be switched off when the allotted time was up. Most of the time someone else was waiting to use the table. No messing was tolerated. The sign on the wall behind her read ‘WELCOME’ but good conduct and manners were expected. In all my (younger!) years using the recreation room I never witnessed any trouble it always seemed to be a happy, calm and relaxing place.

WORKING IN SANDES

Kathleen Murray worked full time in Sandes for about 18 months, she was 15 years old when she started. Kathleen left a job in Kingsware (a clothing factory) where she was earning £2-10s a week for a job working behind the counter in Sandes where she received £1-10s. That may sound like a bad move but the work in Naas necessitated her getting up at 6.45 AM walking about a mile “up the Camp” (as we used to say) to the bus stop at Powell’s shop. Then a bus trip to Naas to clock in at 8AM in the factory. Kingsware allowed them a coffee break in the morning plus an hour for lunch. Clock out time was 5PM. Then onto the crowded bus for the journey back to the Curragh and that long walk home to

Hare Park in all kinds of weather arriving home sometime after 6PM. The fact that she also had to pay 7/6 a week for bus fares was another consideration that convinced her the Sandes job was the better deal.

Her working day in Sandes required her to do split shifts 9.30AM till 2PM and 5PM till closing. The finishing time was determined by the length of the film that night. The counter staff got one day a week off plus two half days. They also had one Sunday a month off. She described her job as easy, doing split shifts did not trouble her as our home was a three-minute walk from Sandes. Before the canteen was opened staff would spend the morning making sandwiches and cleaning up. Their duties then were serving behind the counter and cleaning down the tables after the soldiers had eaten. They would lock up at 2PM and head out by the back of Sandes. Passing through the kitchen the in-house staff where usually sitting down around the large table having their lunch. Miss Carson would at times eat there with her staff. Unless it was her half day Kathleen would head back to work at 5PM. When business had eased off the nighttime staff would take turns to go on their break which was usually spent in the cinema. If Miss Carson was not around which did not happen too often, they might have a sneaky bun. Sunday was her favorite working day no food was served which meant she did not have to wear the dreaded house coat. I recall Kathleen working on Christmas Day, which she enjoyed as there was a pleasant buzz around the place.

One day Miss Carson informed Kathleen she would have to let her go as she needed to employ a male. Her replacement Mr. Murphy appears in the only 1960s photo I've seen of Sandes canteen. He is standing behind the counter in his white house coat serving a group of soldiers. Kathleen gave me the original copy of that photo she could not recall who took the snap; it can be viewed on the Curragh F.B. History Site. Margie Doyle was also working in Sandes at that time, she was there long before Kathleen. So, it was a case of last in first out. Margie continued to spend her afternoon break in our house in Hare Park as her parents had moved out to Athgarvan and it was not practical for her to travel the four miles home and back on her three-hour break. Jack Guidera who worked in the Water Pumping station next door to 2 Hare Park would sometimes drop Margie home on his way to Kilcullen. Kathleen went back to her job in Kingsware.

SEARCHING FOR STAFF

Sandes had numerous advertisements in the National and local papers looking for employees such as; - ***Lady Workers wanted to supervise recreation room, help in house and garden; interesting, worthwhile work; Might suit sisters or friends; Salary and Keep. Full particulars to Miss Carson.***

GENERAL handyman wanted for maintenance work, some cleaning, able to do plain gardening, scope for energetic worker. Apply with references to Miss Carson Sandes Soldiers Home.

Capable Cook required for Sandes Soldiers Home Curragh Camp. Protestant preferred, comfortable conditions, good hours, interesting work, 10 in household. Apply with references, Lady Superintendent.

Residential Post offered to energetic man interested in welfare of soldiers and prepared to help either in cleaning and maintenance work or as a counter hand in canteen. Apply giving full details and experience.

Christian Lady required to take charge of recreation room; rewarding interesting work. Small salary board and lodging. Apply giving particulars to Miss Carson.

Sandes was one of the few businesses on the Curragh that provided work for civilians. The inhouse staff generally of the Protestant faith looked after maintenance, recreation room, and gardens. The Drapery, canteen service and cooking were usually done by locals. Sandes was located in Hare Park so the families living in that area tended to get jobs in the Home. When Marie Murphy left her job in the Drapery Margaret Wilson was her replacement both girls were from Hare Park. Mrs. Murphy (Marie's mother) worked at various jobs in Sandes including the Drapery she used to travel to Dublin with Miss Carson and advise her on what cloths to buy for the shop. At some stage during the 1950s 60s and 70s you would have a member of the Coyne, Murphy, Murray or Wilson families employed in Sandes.

My mother worked there, spending a couple of hours in the afternoon peeling and chipping potatoes then returning at evening time to cook the chips. Sometimes my sisters Mary, Dymrna or myself would call in on our way home from school to give her a hand. Filling a bucket from the potato bunker outside, carrying it into the prep area where the contents would be emptied into a hand-cranked potato peeler. One by one each peeled potato would be placed on the

chipper and a handle pulled down forcing the potato through the blades and the chips would drop into an aluminium bath and covered with water. Mrs. Murray and Mrs. Murphy would usually debate on whether five or six baths full of chips was enough for the night-time business.



In the late 1950s television aerials began appearing on the chimneys of the Curragh Camp as they did all over the east coast of the country and like many Picture Houses in Ireland Sandes cinema began to struggle. Miss Carson would drive to Dublin twice weekly in her Morris Traveller usually Tuesday and Thursday to drop off and collect the film canisters. Sandes showed films from Monday to Saturday running each film for two nights, no films were shown on a Sunday. In the early 60s admission was 8pence for the hard benches. The comfier seats were more expensive, us Murray's got to sit in the posh seats for the cheaper entry price on account of our mother working in Sandes and Oliver Murphy got in for free any night as his mother and brother worked there and also his sister Marie. I recall him shown me his free pass and I was very envious. The hard benches ran down both sides of the cinema and the area to the front

of screen. The soft chairs were in a corralled zone from the middle to the back. It was not unusual to hear someone making a leap over the 'fence' when the film started. That move could be spotted very quickly by the man with the torch. Like all cinemas it was difficult to keep the place warm on very cold nights. I know of at least one Curragh lady who during winter nights took a hot water bottle in her bag to the cinema. Whenever I went to the pictures with my school pals, we usually seat spread out on the long benches with our backs rested against the warm radiators. The walls of the cinema were covered with film posters, unlike the prints in the lobby these were of pictures that Sandes had shown months or years back. I don't know if this display was done as a form of decoration or to cover up some flaw or stain on the wall. Before the film started the younger punters would point up at the various posters saying, "I've watched that, and I saw that" and a debate would rage about who viewed the most films. Some of the picture posters I remember were **'The Scamp'** **'The Bride of Frankenstein'** **'The One Who Got Away'** of course there was plenty of Western posters. The local joke went: - "I just saw a trailer load of hay going into Sandes – there must be a Cowboy film on tonight"! The heating for the cinema and indeed the entire Sandes building was provided by a boiler in a bricked off area behind the film screen. I would occasionally see one of the handy men shovelling coke (as in coal) into the boiler room. This would have been tipped out of a delivery truck and then manhandled into the boiler room. It was not easy work.

Sandes film shows usually consisted of a short film generally British and black and white, like 'Edgar Wallace Presents' followed by some sword and sandal epic set somewhere in the Mediterranean perhaps starring Steve Reeves and dubbed into English. No matter what part of the ancient world these films were set, to us they were always "Roman pictures". That said I saw some fine films in Sandes such as **'A Night to Remember'** in my view a far superior and moving picture on the Titanic sinking then the James Cameron film. I also remember been frightened out of my skin by the appearance of the banshee in **'Darby O'Gill and The Little People'** Sandes was unusual in that unlike other Kildare cinemas they did not advertise their upcoming film program in the local papers. Sandes film listing did feature in a weekly Curragh event guide called the 'CURRAGH BULLETIN' in a surviving copy dated 19th of September 1958 the following films are listed for Sandes; **Mon/Tue. "Slave Woman"-also- "History of Cinema"** **Wed/Thur. "Crowded Paradise"-also- "Train to Tombstone".** **Fri/Sat. "Touch of Evil"-also- Shorts. Mon/Tue. "Mohawk"-also-Shorts.**

The Camp's other cinema the Curragh Picture House was situated on the main road which ran through the center of the Curragh. That cinema could draw customers from both ends of the camp and was only a two-minute walk away from the bus stop with a regular service to the local towns of Kildare and Newbridge. Brownstown was also just a short walk away. The Curragh Picture House also showed the latest film features, where Sandes had to contend with second runs. Younger courting couples tended to frequent the Curragh Picture House rather than Sandes as it had a balcony. I remember a time when Sandes closed for a few days to install a larger screen to show more up-to-date CinemaScope films. Sandes situated on the west end of the Curragh and the military could be awkward about allowing civilians into that area of the Camp. When the weather was kind picture goers would walk across the plains from Maddenstown to view a film in Sandes. Later that night walking back home across the darkened plains possibly after watching **"The Bride of Frankenstein"** pondering what demon might be lurking in the shadows of the furze waiting to pounce on them--- OooH! Sandes purpose as a Home was to look after the welfare of soldiers and their families, they had little if any desire to attract custom from elsewhere. Perhaps that's the main reason they did not advertise their films in the local Press. Once a month Miss Carson would type out a list of the films for the coming four weeks this list would be displayed on a window near the box office.



Years later I was sitting in front of the television not given much attention to the war film on view when a scene of a burning tank with a wounded soldier on the ground nearby came on the screen. From this one scene I was instantly transported to a Christmas night (40 plus years previous) in Sandes Picture House. The film's title was **"The Black Tent"** and it was a free show that night. Sandes never charged for their Christmas night program.

When the children of the Military Police had their Christmas party it was held in the 'Glasshouse'. The party consisted of sandwiches cakes, buns and bottles of minerals. After we had finished stuffing ourselves Santa would arrive and distribute the Christmas presents, there might be a song or two then armed with a bag of sweets we would make our way across the road to Sandes Picture House for a film. All very simple stuff but complete joy for us kids.

Like everyone else of a certain age I can remember where I was when I first heard the news of President Kennedy's assassination, I can also recall going to Sandes Picture's later that evening, nothing could stop our little gang's Friday night routine. That's the last date I can positively recall going to Sandes Picture House. I'm sure there were more Friday night film visits, my belief is Sandes cinema closed down sometime in 1964. The reason had to be financial and I believe it was around this time that one the men who worked the film projector died and was never replaced. As a twelve-year-old I was now considered old enough to make the longer trek to the Curragh Picture House. The Friday night visit to the 'flicks' continued in a new home.

I passed Sandes every day coming and going to school. One day I noticed men working constructing a ramp from the fire exit door out. I peeked into the old cinema; it was empty of seats the screen was gone even the old film posters were no longer on the walls (I would have loved one of them) a sad sight indeed. Miss Carson had put the following advertisement in the local papers: - ***Large dry clean, storage space with wooden floor, easy access, with drive-in entrance. Any offers to Superintendent, Sandes Soldiers Home Tel. 41234.***

Miss Carson had just opened Irelands first and only Drive-in Movie theatre, but alas it no longer showed films. Her old cinema was now used by Kildare locals to store their caravans over the winter months and by soldiers to keep their cars when they were serving abroad with the U.N.

From what I recall there was only ever one wedding celebration in Sandes during the 1950s 60s period that was in June 1963. Marie Murphy and John Tobin (Military Police) were married in the Garrison Church at 10AM and later that day had their wedding breakfast in Sandes. Marie had made her own three-tiered cake and a baker from the Curragh had iced it. The Hare Park neighbours had helped make the dessert which was sherry trifle. The main course was a cold meat and salad plate. Miss Carson who had generously loaned out the Reading room for the occasion was not prepared to relax Sandes prohibition on the consumption of alcohol even for a wedding. The sherry in the trifle was the only alcohol the guests had during the meal. Later that day the wedding party went across to the bride's parents house to continue the celebration. By all accounts it was a splendid day.

This same Sandes Reading Room was used to provide tea, coffee and sandwiches for the officer cadets when they were training in the Hare Park area. They did not have to use the normal entrance and went into the building by way of the door into Miss Carson's private quarters. I don't recall ever seen a uniformed officer using Sandes Canteen. Indeed, we used to see the soldiers peep around the corner of Sandes towards the entry to the Glasshouse to make sure that they were not going to run into the military police. When the coast was clear they would make a quick dash up to their barracks. This would happen when soldiers had not bothered to wear their full uniform correctly.

On Sunday evenings on our way home from the matinee it was usual to come across lots of cars parked outside the Reading Room. At times we would stop and listen at the window especially if there was singing coming from the room, we liked the spiritual songs and one or two of them felt familiar to us from BBC radio and western films. These prayer meetings were very popular, so much so that some of the Catholic clergy worried that they may be drawing in some vulnerable young Catholic soldiers. Years later a Hare Park resident told me that a military policeman used her upstairs room on a couple of Sundays to observe the comings and goings from these Sunday gatherings. He plonked himself on an armchair in front of the window with pencil and notebook watching down on Sandes. She was warned by her dad not to discuss anything about this covert operation, outside the house. She remembered that he never had anything written in the notebook. The absence of anything to report would tally with the Sandes organizations rules on religious matters. In an interview in 1905 Miss Sandes mentioned two of the rules Sandes workers must follow. **First, the men must not be pressed to attend the religious meetings; invited they may be, but**

urged, pressed, “badgered” no. Secondly, no attempt is permitted to be made to shake a man’s belief in the cause in which he has been brought up.

Occasionally some of the elderly Sandes ladies would give us little books of prayers and when we brought them home my mother would throw them into the fire, reminding us that it was sinful for Catholics to read Protestant prayer books. (The past is a different country!).



Sandes Bible Club Reunion

The robust religious beliefs of the time tended to be a force keeping otherwise very friendly neighbours apart. My mother recalled a day in the 1960s when following the death of a member of Sandes in-house staff Mrs. Murphy and herself went to his quarters to wash the body. While tidying his room they found a box of money perhaps part of the late gentleman’s life savings, this they passed on to Miss Carson. In preparing the deceased for burial they felt they were doing the Christian thing, but the religious etiquette of the time made it difficult if indeed impossible for them to attend his Protestant funeral service.

In 1968 the opening hours of Sandes Home were as follows; -

Canteen; Open. Mon-Fri. 10.30-2PM and 5PM-10.30. Sat. 10.30AM -10.30PM. Sun. 12 Noon-7.30.PM. Friday. Prayer meeting starting 11PM. Sunday. Fireside Fellowship 8.PM.

“We Manage” replied a smiling Miss Carson when asked by The Nationalist reporter Tim Moore how Sandes can offer tasty morsels to the soldiers at incredibly keen prices. For example; tea 4d. cocoa, coffee 6d. Bovril 9d. Soup 1/-. Bread and butter 3d. Cakes 3d, 4d, and 5d Sandwiches 6d, and 9d. Eggs, beans, bread, tea, 2/7.

The same article dated October 1969 described Sandes ***as a comfortable off-duty haven where troops can avail of the canteen or games room with seven or eight snooker and billiards table. Or relax in the Reading Room.***

The year 1969 was Sandes one hundred anniversary. **“The Trumpet Call Obey”** written by M. Helen Jeffrey a history of Elisa Sandes was published by Marshall, Morgan and Scott. The book was favourably reviewed in the Irish Independent by Kildare writer and historian Con Costello it retailed at 16/-.

The same year the Canadian Ambassador to Ireland Mr. James J. McCardle along with Colonel James J. Quinn visited Sandes and were shown around the establishment by Patricia Carson.

To mark the centenary of the Soldiers Homes Miss Carson was offering prizes for a verse on Sandes. The verse should be at least six lines and less than thirty lines and can be satirical, critical or sentimental but must have a definite bearing on the centenary.

That same year it was reported that Miss Carson could do with some helpers, as she was now running the home almost single handed.

SANDES 1970's & 80's

The Curragh Camp started to lose family homes in the 1970s. Between 1971 and 1974 the Murray's, Downes, Wilsons, and Coyne's left Hare Park. The Murphy household had left in 1967. These families had been long time patrons and employees of Sandes since the 1950s. In the earlier years such departures would not matter as once a house became vacant it was quickly occupied by another family. Now the unoccupied houses were boarded up and eventually demolished. The Troubles in Northern Ireland required the authorities on the

Curragh Camp to become more security conscious. I was stopped one day outside Sandes by a couple of civilian men who were looking down towards the Internment camp. We had a friendly chat about the prison, and I gave them a brief history of the place and continued on home. About an hour later a couple of officers called to our house and wanted to know who these men were and what we talked about? The times were a changing on the Curragh Camp.

Following a riot in Mountjoy 40 prisoners were transferred to the Glasshouse in the Curragh Camp. In a photograph on the front page of the Irish Independent dated 20th of May 1972 you can clearly see the Detention barracks, Sandes Home plus a bus load of prisoners. One reporter described the scene as been like the 1940s. Except for the change of uniforms and mode of transport this photo reminded me of the scenes I had witnessed as a child back in 1957.

In April 1973 the Sandes Home Ladies club held an exhibition and sale of handcrafts and home baking in the Wesleyan Hall Curragh Camp. Proceeds were in aid of K.A.R.E. and all were welcome. This event could not take place in the Soldiers Home itself as passes would be required to enter the Camp. This was not necessary for the Wesleyan Home as it was on the main road.

In August 1974 the government announced plans to make a new prison in the Curragh Camp They would spend £250,000 upgrading three former Cavalry billets all of which would be internally re-structured and enclosed by a 20ft high double fence These billets were across the road from the Glasshouse and a two-minute walk from Sandes. Losing the potential business from three billets of soldiers and building a new jail practically at her door was not the news Miss Carson wanted to hear.

In late October of the same year a massive car bomb explosion completely destroyed the Sandes Soldiers Home in Ballykinlar Co. Down killing two and injuring over thirty soldiers and civilians.

Hillary Murray (nee Quinlan) recalls moving into Sandes in the mid-1970s. Her dad George had retired from the army, so her family could no longer live in an army house and moved into Sandes. She describes Miss Carson as a firm and polite lady and remembers she carried a black leather bag across her shoulder. While living in Sandes she got to know three ladies Alice, Rosemary and Martha. These women started a 'Christian Club' for kids. My sister Brenda was in this Club and remembers making a cover for a schoolbook she also recalled making a basket with ice pop sticks.it was quite a successful club with up to twenty

attending at any time. Hillary and the three ladies became firm friends so much so that when Hillary married in 1980 the Sandes women attended her wedding. Hillary had photographs taken on the morning of her nuptials in Sandes garden. She and her husband Martin lived the first few months of their married life in a flat in Sandes. She said the upstairs rooms in Sandes were difficult to heat and remembers lifting a cardboard box off the floor when the wedding present inside fell out as the base of the box had become damp. From her flat she could partly see down into the Glasshouse and remembers seeing the prisoners walking around an open area during exercise breaks. Hillary's mother Bridie worked behind the counter in the canteen. During her family's time in Sandes Miss Carson retired. Hillary recalls her years in the Soldiers Home as a very happy time in her life. She practically had the run of the Sandes building but was never allowed into the recreation room that was one rule that never changed.

Derek Meade along with his sister Desiree and mother Collette spent his childhood in Sandes his dad Michael worked as a fitter for Board Na Mona in Newbridge. He lived at first in the back part of Sandes overlooking the old Internment Camp he recalls his dad on the occasions he arrived home late or had forgotten his key having to climb up a drainpipe into their living quarters. His family then moved to a flat in the front part of the building, his window was just beside the 'Sandes Soldiers Home' logo facing out towards the Glasshouse. He was so near the guard towers that he would chat with the bored soldiers on sentry duty. During televised football games they would frequently ask him to check out the latest score. He recalls that the old cinema was then been used as a basketball arena. He waited anxiously at the door one day with ball in hand hoping that one of the men would invite him in to play. It did not happen. Like Hillary, recollections of Sandes beautiful garden stay with him. When the Glasshouse was no longer used as a prison the army Ranger Wing took over that building. Derek recalls been rudely awakened very early in the morning when the soldiers would go for their run singing -- "We are Rangers! we are Rangers!" at the top of their voices.

It was to be 1983 before Sandes could get shut of "the neighbours from hell" that year all the civilian prisoners were removed from the Glasshouse. Government Minister Paddy Power said (in August 1980) ***he had always been opposed to the Curragh been used for civilian prisoners. The Curragh Camp had once been a great center for integration within the community "But this went with the need for greater security"***. In 1977 Patricia Carson informed the Sandes Committee that she wished to retire perhaps feeling that

it was now time to handover to a younger manager. The daily toil of running a business in an ageing building with ongoing problems of repair and maintenance. She had by then completed thirty-five years' service. This lady who we also called Ma Carson (but never to her face!) The Ma title was a hangover from the early years of Sandes when the young soldiers were encouraged to think of the ladies who looked after the Homes as mother figures. In an article on the Sandes Homes in the Kerry Post newspaper dated March 1899 Miss Sandes said the following:- ***There were two words sweet to every soldier which found a ready entrance to his heart and they were "mother" and "home" and the lady at the head of the home should have a mother's kindness for the men.*** These sentiments might appear to have been out of favour in a 1960s Ireland Michael Kelly who grew up on the Curragh recalls going to the children's Christmas party in 1961 he was then 14 and a half years old, seven months later he was in the Army Apprentice School in Naas. In her book 'A 1950s Irish Childhood' Ruth Illingworth wrote; **Theoretically, only soldiers of 18 or over were supposed to serve overseas, but it didn't always work out like that. There were lads who would go out to the Congo in 1960 and 1961 whose mothers were still collecting child benefit for them back in Ireland.**



Miss Carson and indeed the building itself were also referred to as "Ma Sandes" or "Ma Budgies". Patricia had numerous farewell parties; from the attendants at the monthly prayer meeting; from the Ladies Club who met in the Home every Thursday and later from the Sandes Council. At a retirement function hosted by the army Miss Carson was presented with flowers and a fine carriage clock bought from the proceeds of various collections among the Curragh barracks. She also had to remind Colonel P. Hogan Officer Commanding Curragh Training Camp that he was in the habit of calling her 'Miss Magill' as when he was a young officer going into Sandes Miss Magill was in charge.

Roger and Sandra Hurford first went to the Curragh in 1971. Roger had served with the R.A.F. for eleven years 1960—71. He married Sandra in 1968 and their first child was born in 1969. It was soon after that Roger and Sandra's life took a change in direction. Roger describes it thus "Within three days of each other we both had conversion experiences to Evangelical Christianity and were radically changed". While on his final tour of duty in Singapore the couple first came across Sandes and became regular visitors to the Home and grew as Christians to the point that on Rogers approaching discharge from the R.A.F. he applied to work in Sandes and was accepted. He went back to the U.K. in January 1971 and then to the Curragh for a few days and met up with Miss Carson and agreed with her to assist her there. He then travelled to Scotland and met up with his second child for the first time. Due to her pregnancy Sandra had left Singapore early.

The Hurford family then went to the Curragh in March 1971 and after six months they moved to Glasgow where Roger went to Bible College. After graduation the Hurford's who now had three children Alan, Stephen and Sarah returned to the Curragh in July 1974. In 1975 the household were on the move again firstly to assist at Palace Barracks and then to take over at Ballykinlar. The Home there had to be completely rebuilt after an I.R.A. explosion in 1974. When Miss Carson's decided to retire the Hurford's were asked to take over after her. As the reconstruction of Ballykinlar was not complete Sandra went to the Curragh and Roger stayed on in Ballykinlar to finish that task. He re-joined his wife on the Curragh some months later and they both ran the Home.

The Hurford's worked along with another Mission- Bible Club and three of their lady missionaries lived and worked in Sandes. With each week some 250 at the Children's Club; 20-30 at the Ladies Group and 24 or so men at the Men's Group. It was full on and hectic looking after the 'fast-food' facility and the large Games Room. All of this required staffing and service, supplies purchased etc. The old

Sandes building required a lot of maintenance and upkeep which by-in-large Roger had to do. The Hurford's were also rearing their three very young children. Yet, Roger and Sandra described their work and exertions in Sandes as a tremendous privilege- never knowing who they might meet or what problems might arise, or who they might be able to help along life's journey.

Dick Milner lived and worked in Sandes for many years and did much of the day-to-day maintenance of the Games Room furniture and tables. He also looked after the floors throughout the building.

CLOSING DOWN

By the end of the 1970s Sandes Home badly needed major repairs. The old building had over the years developed weaknesses which it was beyond Sandes resources to rectify and the continuous strain of trying to keep the place watertight was very wearing, in fact the Hurford team were hoping for a rebuild. The Sandes organization simply did not have the capital to fund such a project. That, plus other extenuating problems led to the decision to close down Sandes. Roger sold off the furniture and fittings the snooker tables went to a Dublin snooker equipment company. The Bible Club Mission found a new home in Newbridge and Sandes closed to the public in June 1980.

The Hurford family moved to Wales where for the next ten years they managed the Centre at R.A.F. St. Athan in South Glamorgan. This was the base Roger had joined the R.A.F. as a boy entrant in 1960.

Once Sandes closed its doors the apartment that had been the home of Eliza Sandes, Miss Magill, Patricia Carson and the Hurford family became the living quarters of Mattie and Rosemary Parle and their son. Mattie had for many years worked in Sandes where he met and married Rosemary they now became the caretakers of the Home.

The Meade and Quinlan families continued to live in Sandes after its shutdown. Young Derek Meade now had practically the whole building as his playground. The Games Room was now empty of tables and with his school friends he would play indoor football kicking the ball against the high wall that once hung the "WELCOME" sign. He also played in the garden the vegetable area had in time become overgrown, but Derek recalled the flower garden looking as good as it did in the early 1900s photograph. One place that was out of bounds to him was Mattie Parle's tool shed. Moving around the vacant house after dark could be

scary Hillary Murray disliked walking through the big empty kitchen. That said, no ghosts were ever spotted.

On page four of Sandes Annual report for 1984/85 the following is written; - **Mention of the Curragh brings me to the news that on July 6th the last remaining tenant of the flats in the Sandes Home moved out leaving the building vacant. The building is now in the care of the Irish Dept. of Defence until such time as we can surrender the lease. It is with mixed feelings of sadness and relief that I report thus. The work that Elise Sandes began at the Curragh has a long and fruitful history and it is sad to see it come to an end. However, we have the confidence that though we no longer occupy the building, the work which God has done there is an eternal work which will never come to an end.**

The following report for the years 1985/86 states: - **Curragh – Last year I reported that this Centre had been finally vacated, but negotiations continued with the Irish Dept of Defence for the transfer of the lease. The negotiations have at last reached a conclusion in the last few weeks and with a sense of relief we can report that we no longer bear any responsibility for that huge building. Sadly though, it also marks the end of what have been very happy relations with the Irish Army who have always been most appreciative of our work at the Curragh.**

We don't know the names of the first children to live in Sandes, but a Henry Williams with an address at Sandes Home, Hare Park, won 10/- in a children's poetry competition in the Evening Herald on the 9th of November 1912. Seventy-three years later the Meade's and their children Derek and Desiree left Sandes in late December 1985. On the 6th of July 1986 the same children's grandparents George and Bridie Quinlan left the Home and moved across the Curragh plains to Maddenstown. For the first time in its 75-year history Sandes was an empty home.

Some years later George died, in the early years Bridie would take walks across the Curragh Plains to the Hare Park area of the Curragh, she was also a member of the Sandes Home Ladies Club who continued to meet long after the Home had closed. To this day about six or so ladies including an 85-year-old Bridie meet up ever few weeks in one of their homes. Bridie the last person to live in Sandes Home has once more made history; on Friday the 19th of July 2019 the Curragh Post Office after 119 years of trading closed its doors for the last time.

Just before 5PM on that date Mrs.Quinlan had the honour of purchasing the last postage stamp sold in that office.



I recall visiting Hare Park in February 1986 Sandes was still standing but looking unkempt. Few things are sadder than the sight of an empty building, especially one like Sandes which held so many childhood memories for me. So much energy had been expended trying to keep this building open and here it was a house abandoned and devoid of life. Matt McNamara recalled as part of the army Ranger Wing using the Sandes building for training purposes for a few months in 1988. Sometime later on another visit Sandes was in the process of been demolished. All that was left standing was the Picture House surrounded by the rubble of the demolished building. Recalling this now I think of the words of Elise Sandes” **It’s walls speak to me of many old friends**” the living quarters, reading room, recreation room and canteen had been flattened. Sgt Dan Whelan remembered that army engineers took possession of some new heavy plant machinery and this was used to demolish parts of Sandes. Most of the salvaged material went to Brady’s Salvage Yard in Brannockstown Kilcullen. All that was left standing was the Picture House surrounded by the rubble of the demolished

building. Curragh History Group member Matt McNamara puts the date of demolishing at or around January 1989. The old cinema was judged to be structurally sound and with its high ceiling it was suitable as a training area for the military. In 1992 renovation work was carried out. Planning, design and restoration was carried out by Col. Hughes and the Corps of Engineers the work was done by Kilcullen contractor Brendan McGrath.

Patricia Carson could be a formidable businesswoman and supervisor and that's why she succeeded despite many challenges in keeping the Home open. There was another side to her which she kept under wraps and that was her kindness and care for the soldiers and their families. In the true Sandes tradition during the 1950s she would visit the Curragh hospital at Christmas time and distribute little gifts to the patients. These packages would contain 5 Woodbines, matches, biscuits and sweets.

A member of Sandes staff recalled the time when a woman called to the canteen and asked to speak to Miss Carson after they had spoken Miss Carson asked the staff member to get several food stuffs together and wrap them up. Miss Carson then handed the groceries to the woman. No money was exchanged, and nothing was said. On another occasion after a death in the family a lady asked to use Miss Carson's phone so she could telegraph her brother in England. The woman insisted on paying for what was then an expensive phone call, but Miss Carson informed her that under the circumstance she could not possibly accept payment.

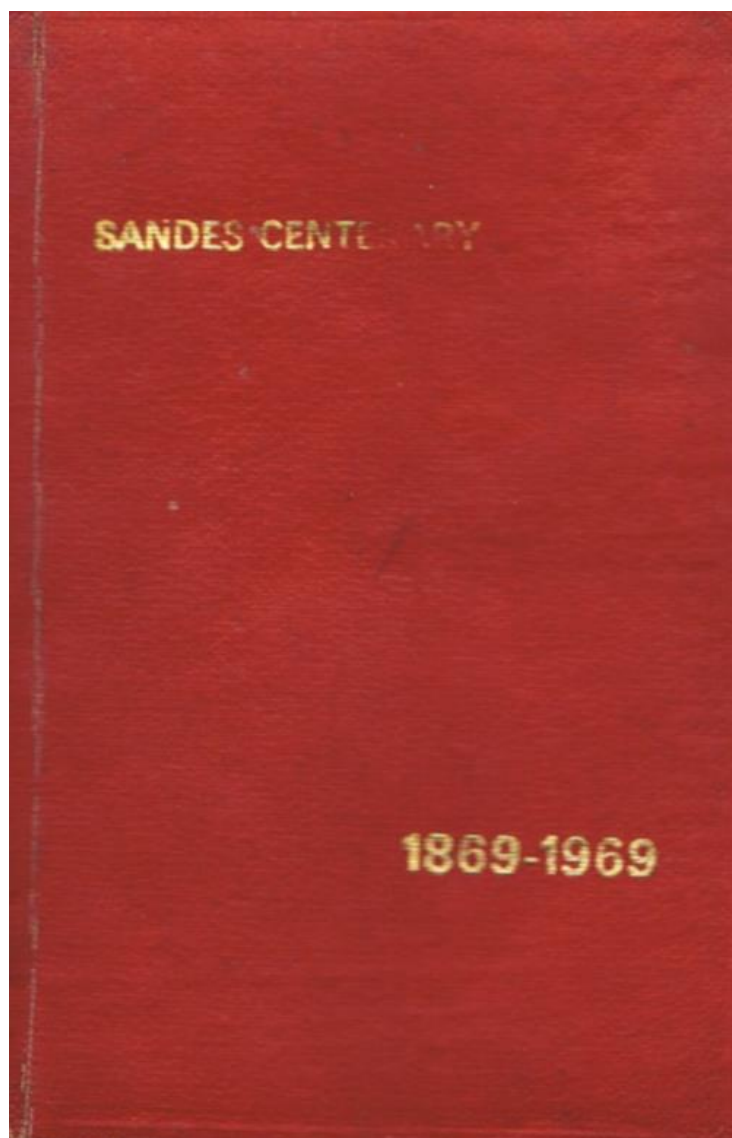
Alice Patricia (Pat) Carson lived out her retirement years in Brannockstown Co. Kildare. She studied to become a lay reader in the Church of Ireland travelling throughout the country she preached at services and spoke at woman's meetings. Roger Hurford recalled that Miss Carson (an Irishwoman) spoke English with the most highly precise 'upper-class English accent' her diction he said was much better than his. She maintained her 'soft spot' for the military and even had contact with some old British Army pensioners who lived in Ireland. She died at Larchfield Nursing Home Naas on the 23th of April in 1988. She was mourned by her nephew Mervyn and a large circle of friends. Her funeral service took place in Carnalway Church followed by cremation the next day at Glasnevin, Dublin.

James White who knew and worked with Miss Carson penned the following; -
"In the tradition of Miss Sandes herself, Patricia Carson had over the years

became the very Mother of the Curragh Camp. If her retirement left a gap in the work of Sandes, her recent passing has left an empty space in the lives of all those who knew her”

On the 18th of January 2001 after a long illness 62-year-old Mattie Parle died in Newbridge Co. Kildare leaving his wife Rosemary and sons Andy and Damien. Following a service in St Brigid’s Church, Curragh Camp he was buried in St. Conleths Cemetery, Newbridge.

I still have a Sandes pocket diary from 1969 that year the charity was celebrating their 100th birthday. This year 2019 is the organizations 150th Anniversary. There are still five Sandes Homes operating. Harrogate and Pirbright in England. Holywood, Lisburn, and Ballykinlar in Northern Ireland. The Ballykinlar Home is only opened by appointment. The Sandes organization have their head office in Belfast.



The material for the above article was gleaned from the pages of the Irish Newspaper Archives from chats with the various people I've mentioned (and those I've not). A special thanks to Derek Meade and Hillary Murray (no relation) who without knowing me agreed to chat about their memories of living in Sandes. Marie Tobin and my sister Kathleen who shared their experiences of working in Sandes. Donna, part of the Sandes team in Belfast took time from her busy day to answer my phone calls and emailed me various pages from the Sandes archive. She also kindly put me in contact with Roger and Sandra Hurford now retired and living in Malta they also were especially helpful.

By now the reader of my little history of Sandes Soldiers Home will be well aware that I'm neither historian or writer I may have got a date or detail wrong memories fade with the years and somethings were impossible to cross check. That said, my email address is at the foot of this article if you have a Sandes story to tell or some piece of memorabilia please contact me. I will include them in a (hoped-for update). There appears to be very few photos of Sandes during the 1930s/40s/50s/60s and 70s do you have any you are willing to share? Apologies for the dodgy grammar and awkward prose I'm delighted to use Rogers words on his feelings of leaving Sandes and the Curragh Camp. I believe most of us who knew the Home and lived on the Camp will echo his thoughts.

"Sandes and the Curragh in particular will always be on and in our hearts and thoughts – Given the choice, we would never have left, and for many years afterwards we hoped to return. The good Lord had/has given us a love for both the place and the people that has not faded. Indeed, it was a heart-breaking experience to leave them all behind."

Dedicated to; Eithne Murray (Mam) and all they ladies who worked in Sandes Soldiers Home Curragh Camp.

Joe Murray. 30/07/2019









