

The Wind That Shakes The Barley

On 12th November, eighteen members watched the incredibly powerful *The Wind That Shakes The Barley* (15).

Ken Loach's bleak but beautifully shot film covers the period leading up to the creation of the Irish Free State and the subsequent civil war, starting in 1920. Although a piece of fiction, it reflects real events (although the timeline is a little compromised).

The plot is straightforward.

Workers from field and country unite to form volunteer guerrilla units to face the ruthless "Black and Tan" squads that are being shipped from Britain to thwart Ireland's bid for independence. There are several scenes showing the brutality meted out by these vicious soldiers, which leads to Damien O'Donnell (Cillian Murphy) abandoning his burgeoning career as a doctor to join his brother, Teddy, in a dangerous and violent fight for freedom. Their bold tactics bring the British to breaking point and both sides finally agree to a treaty to end the bloodshed. But, despite the apparent victory, civil war erupts and Damien ends up fighting against his brother Teddy, who has joined the Free State militia. The film ends with Damien being captured while trying to steal rifles, before being interrogated by Teddy and subsequently executed.

The cast included Cillian Murphy, Liam Cunningham and Padraic Delaney. Ken Loach's intelligent and undeniably powerful direction, which allowed for improvisation, made for a grim and realistic portrait that captured the solemnity of an Ireland turning on itself and the tragedy of two brothers spiraling away from each other.

At the end of the film, there was stunned silence in the Westlake Room. Several of the audience have Irish ancestry and reflected on some of the stories they had been told.

It wasn't an uplifting film (what Loach film is?), but extremely watchable and very realistic.

Thanks to Mike Fairbrother for the loan of the DVD.