

THE BIG FELLOW AT THE BUSH HOTEL

Jo Holmwood

IN 2012, I was engaged in a creative residency at the Bush Hotel, an aspect of which comprised writing a series of historical fictions inspired by factual accounts and real events from the hotel's long history, which would later be brought together into a book called *Under the One Roof*.

Originally opened in the late 1700s, the Bush Hotel has played an important role in the social and economic climate of the town of Carrick-on-Shannon for over two hundred years and is well regarded by generations of Leitrim people—and people from all over Ireland—as a friendly and homely establishment.

One of the first sources of inspiration for me, as a writer, when exploring the hotel, was the discovery that Michael Collins had stayed there in 1917, just a year after the Easter Rising, and at a time when the various Republican groups – the IRB, Sinn Féin and the Volunteers were actively recruiting and promoting their cause to new members around the country. The evidence of this visit was clearly displayed on the wall of one of the bedrooms in the form of two secret intelligence reports, filed by one Sergeant Thornton, detailing the exact movement of Collins. He had arrived by train from Dublin, been met by a number of local men, and had been escorted to the Bush Hotel where he spent the night before travelling to Gowel in the morning to deliver his speech to hundreds of young men at the Sinn Féin club there. The detail of the reports had intrigued me. In the margins of the letter, someone—

presumably the Superior Officer to whom the report had been addressed—had written a comment: “Who is this Collins and where did he come from?” The comment had promptly been scribbled out, when it was presumably discovered just exactly who this fellow was!

According to the reports, Collins had also attended Mass in Gowel just before his address and a shop boy from Costello's by the name of Casey had picked him up from the Bush Hotel and taken him to Gowel. What would it be like, I wondered, to write my fictional version of this event, from the viewpoint of this shop boy?

The resulting story—*A Happy Dawn*—is a re-imagining of Collins's visit to Carrick-on-Shannon from Casey's perspective. My research, as I was preparing to write the story, revealed another interesting fact... on the very night that Collins arrived in our county town, newspaper reports showed that his close colleague, and head of the IRB, Thomas Ashe, had been arrested in Dublin; an event which very shortly afterwards led to his death. Of course Collins could not have foreseen what would happen to Ashe, and yet he had been with him when Ashe made the



of Carrick-on-Shannon.
-Who is this man taking with
himself all the time from?

21.8.17
2.37.17

Print

1824
Gowel Sinn Féin Club
Leitrim p. 19 - 8-17
I beg to report that I attended
at Gowel on this date as directed
At 11 am a man whom I afterwards
learned was of the name of Collins
accompanied by a shop boy of
John Costello's Carrick-on-Shannon
named Casey. Arrived at the
Gowel Club. They were met there by
Thomas Duggan Sec. to the
Sinn Féin Club. After some talk
they were followed by about
140 young men. All remained
in the hall from 11.45 to 1.35 pm.
I am informed Collins addressed
them on his principles and aims of
the Sinn Féin movement. The total
membership of this club is now 30
members, and it is expected all the
young men in L.D. will become
members. The meeting was not adjourned
The O.T. J Thornton L.S. 5722
Carrick-on-Shannon. 20-8-17
It is to enquire what did Collins actually say
The Sgt Leitrim
W.H. Messey 107

“seditious” speech, for which he was arrested and charged. How would this arrest impact on Collins's spirits during his short stay in Carrick?

Sadly, there is no other documentation about Collins's visit to Carrick or his stay at the Bush Hotel, and so it was with plenty of creative license that I imagine for myself the events that unfolded over those two days. Nevertheless, the fact of Collins's visit is an interesting one, and knowing as we do that he slept under the Bush Hotel's roof, in a room which remained almost as it was at the time of his stay, is a great asset to the town's historical legacy.

Under the One Roof is available to buy at The Reading Room, Bridge Street, Carrick-on-Shannon