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2015

Ruth Barton, ‘Haunted memories: Rex Ingram, Francis Hitchcock and World War One’ in *Offaly Heritage*, vol. 8, pp 139–144 (Tullamore, 2015).

Article

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In 1926, two men met in a hospital in Davos, Switzerland. One was still recovering from the terrible effects of being gassed in the trenches during the First World War. The other was a famous Hollywood director, then living in Nice. Francis Clere Hitchcock, the veteran soldier, and Rex Ingram, his glamorous older brother had come a long way from Kinnitty where their father, Reverend Francis Ryan Montgomery Hitchcock, was appointed rector in 1903. As they reminisced about their childhood, the two brothers would have remembered a life lived between the shadow of the domineering reverend and the freedom of the outdoors. Like many Church of Ireland children, they had been born neither wealthy nor impoverished; their first years spent in solid red-brick middle class Dublin houses before moving to the countryside. By the time the family settled in Kinnitty, the boys had already lived in Nenagh and Borrisokane in county Tipperary.

When the brothers grew older, they adopted a jocular tone when referring to their father, the ‘Old Man’ as Rex called him, or just ‘O.M.’ But when they were children, they were subjected to their parents rigorous ideas on what constituted a proper upbringing. This included lessons in the rectory, with an emphasis on the Classics. Revd. Hitchcock held the prestigious Donnellan scholarship at Trinity College Dublin and filled his spare moments writing his many books. The newly popularised theories of Sigmund Freud and Charles Darwin had made him rethink the question of evil, wondering if it was a product of nature or nurture. If such questions belonged firmly to the realm of theology or philosophy, his Types of Celtic Life and Art, published in 1906, was a celebration of earthiness and Irish superstitious practices, much of it drawn from the Reverend’s own travels around the country and from listening to folk tales told locally in Kinnitty. He writes of ghosts and spectres, shape-shifters and magic. He tells of the stone fort that stands on a hill in the demesne of Castle Bernard (Kinnitty Castle) and of his visits to the crannogs at Loughrea and Lough Derg, which were once the homes of Celtic chiefs. Most of all, he celebrates the bravery of the ancient Celts of Ireland and their learning.

Nor had he any sympathy with the colonial invaders, reminding his readers that it wasn’t until the reign of Queen Elizabeth I that capital punishment was introduced into Ireland.¹ Overall, his is a picture of a society at once enlightened and fierce, ruled over by just

lords and the 'fair ladies of Erin’, a society, in its day, infinitely more civilised than that of neighbouring England.² In his exploration of the old lores of ancient times and his celebration of a muscular Celticism, Francis Hitchcock was reflecting a way of thinking that has commonly been associated with the Celtic revivalists. A short distance away, at Leap Castle, another writer was making her contribution to Irish literature. Mildred Darby, wife of Jonathan Darby, was a prolific author. Under her nom de plume of Andrew Merry, she contributed numerous short stories to The Irish Times. Her range ran from light society fripperies, to murder mysteries, to historical melodramas such as ‘The True Story of an Irishwoman’s Experience in the Zulu War’.³ The Irishwoman in this case allegedly being her cousin. In 1900, she published The Naked Truth and in 1902, The Green Country. These were followed by Paddy–Risky: Irish Realities of To-day (1903), Anthropoid Apes. A modern novel (1909); The Hunger: being realities of the famine years in Ireland, 1845 to 1848 (1910). Between these novels and collections of stories, she also published stories in the Occult Review. One of these, ‘Kilman Castle: The House of Horror’, very evidently draws on Leap Castle, even if it is now relocated to the North West of Ireland and inhabited by the O’Connells. Kilman Castle is home to an unholy, festering apparition referred to only as ‘the Elemental’, which appears at night to unsuspecting guests and terrifies domestic staff and household pets alike. Writing a private letter to a Mr. Carroll, Darby describes the same apparition in very similar terms:

Whilst dressing I was startled by a loud yell of terror stricken male and female voices coming – apparently from hall, and ran out to see the cause. My husband was out ahead of me at his heels I passed through corridor of wing and onto the gallery running round two sides of hall. Two lamps on gallery, two more in hall below. On the gallery, leaning with ‘hands’ resting on its rail, I saw the ‘Thing’ – the Elemental and smelt it only too well. At the same time, my husband pulled up sharply about 10 feet from the Thing, and half-turning let fly a volley of abuse at me ending up ‘Dressing up a thing like that to try and scare the fools of women and servants – to try and make a fool of me.’⁴

The letter reveals not only Mildred Darby’s belief in the supernatural but her husband’s dismissal of such beliefs. Other letters clearly indicate that there was little love lost between the two and Mildred evidently did not share Jonathan Darby’s fervent Unionist (and Orange) beliefs. Matters cannot have been improved between the couple when Jonathan forbade his wife to ever write again after the publication of her novel of the Famine, The Hunger.

The two Hitchcock boys were frequent visitors to Leap Castle and Rex was much taken by his host’s blood-curdling ghost stories. At the same time, as he recalls in his own diaries, he was absorbed in local life, following the stories of horrible murders and learning folk remedies and other superstitions.⁵ It should not come as any surprise then that Rex would himself turn to supernatural events and mystical apparitions when he came to make his

² Ibid., p.52.
³ The Weekly Irish Times, 21 Dec. 1901.
⁴ Mildred to Darby to Mr. Carroll, 15 Feb. 1922 (NU, Ms.17877). I have retained the somewhat idiosyncratic turn of phrase in the letter. Published works do not reflect this style. For more on Mildred Darby at Leap Castle, see Andrew Tierney, ‘The Gothic and the Gaelic: Exploring the place of castles in Ireland’s Celtic Revival’ in International Journal of Historical Archaeology, vol. 8, no. 3 (Sept, 2004), pp. 185-98.
⁵ Rex Ingram, A long way from Tipperary (Unpublished memoirs, Trinity College Dublin Archives, MS 11,448).
own films. However, Celtic tales and Gothic gore were not the only influences on the two young boys. When he was not engaged in scholarly pursuits and attempting to teach his sons (in Rex’s case, a pretty hopeless cause), Revd. Hitchcock turned his energies to their physical improvement. A keen boxer, he hung a punch bag in the coach house at the rectory in Kinnitty and taught his boys how to fight. He also rigged up rugby posts in the field and encouraged Rex and Frank to practice their kicking. He himself liked to jog around the village.

The other, quite contrasting influence on the boys was that of their mother, Kathleen Hitchcock, née Ingram. She was a gentle, quiet woman who carved decorations in wood for her husband’s churches, sang, and played the piano. She was frail, and the boys’ childhoods were punctuated by her illnesses. Her early death in 1908 drew Rex and Frank closer together, but it was this too that finally decided Rex that he must move on and that his future lay, not in Ireland, but America. In 1911, aged eighteen, he did so, setting sail for New York on the S.S. Celtic. Frank left home soon after, enrolling as a boarder at Campbell College in Belfast and in 1913 becoming a cadet at Sandhurst.

The meeting at Davos was the first reunion for Rex and Frank since the former left for America. In the intervening years, Frank had served with distinction in World War One with the Second Battalion of the Leinster Regiment. Rex had commenced studies in sculpture at Yale under Lee Lawrie, the renowned public artist. However, he soon found himself lured into the exciting, protean world of the moving pictures, working firstly in New York and then departing with the industry to Los Angeles. Rex’s own war service was less than distinguished. When America entered the war, he filled out an application for pilot training with the U.S. Signal Corps. However, after some wait to hear back, he discovered that, as he had not yet completed his citizenship application, he was not eligible to join up. The alternative was to join Great Britain’s newly formed Royal Flying Corps Canada (RFC Canada), which had been set up to train Canadian volunteers. As Rex still had British citizenship, enlistment was not a problem. In March 1918, Rex Ingram started life as a cadet in the RFC.

Flying turned out to be more difficult than he had anticipated. He struggled with pilot training as he had with his father’s lessons in the rectory at Kinnitty. Always prone to dreaminess, once up in the air, the words of his instructor faded into oblivion:

In a few seconds I had forgotten him and his advice. I was in an airplane, alone, the sky above us, resplendent now with the crimson of sunset. A good omen! For some reason – later I realised it was not enough right rudder – the machine began to describe a circle. Instead of heeding instructions, I gritted my teeth and opened the throttle full. With a roar the machine and I left the ground in something approaching a flat turn and rose with the wind instead of against it.6

So thrilled was the trainee pilot that he roared high above the aerodrome and out of sight. Forty-five minutes later, Rex crash landed his Curtis Jenny, taking out another stationary plane as he hit the aerodrome. Fortunately, perhaps, as he readied himself to travel to Europe, the news came through. War was over; the armistice had been signed.

6 Ingram, A long way from Tipperary, p. 376.
If Rex and Frank’s war experiences were as unlike as could be, their responses to the war were equally contrasting. When the brothers were reunited in Davos, Frank had not yet written his account of serving with the Leinsters, *Stand To: A Diary of the Trenches 1915-1918*. Rex, however, had directed what had become one of the greatest anti-war films ever, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, released in 1921. When *Stand To* was first published in 1937, it swiftly became recognised as one of the most clear-eyed accounts of an Irish regiment during the war.

Rex’s impracticality and dreaminess were immediately forgotten when he had to command armies of extras, camera operators, propmen, carpenters and lighting crew, not to mention the notoriously insecure actors who took the leads in his vast films. Filmmaking awoke the tyrant in him, and no one breathed on set as he roared his orders through a megaphone. His films, of which *Four Horsemen* remains the masterpiece, are now best remembered for their extraordinary visuals, the play with light and shadow that endows them with a three-dimensionality that harks back to his incomplete training as a sculptor at Yale.

Frank Hitchcock’s journal, by contrast, was written with documentary clarity. His style is matter-of-fact, detailing what he sees. Yet, it is also personal. As he sets off for war, his opening entry, dated Sunday 16 May 1915, sees the young officer undeterred by the sight that meets his eyes on arrival in Queenstown (Cobh). Whole platforms were stacked with coffins for the victims of the Lusitania, yet, ‘my morale was excellent at the prospect of getting out to the Front’.\(^7\) He soon found that he would be reporting to Lieut N.G. Young, who had been at St Columba’s with his brother, Rex. Young was, Frank wrote in his diary, ‘a fine-looking fellow, who had won the first military cross for bravery on the Aisne in September’.\(^8\) In early July 1915, Young was wounded in the shoulder by shrapnel. To Frank and the men’s shock, two weeks later they learned that Young had died of his wounds at Bologne. Although the injury was slight, gangrene had set in. His parting words to the unit as he left to for the dressing station had been “Jammy One!”\(^9\) Frank’s diary records encounters not only with family friends, but neighbours from Offaly and Tipperary. He had barely landed in France when he met up with Bertie Biddulph, son of one of the prominent Kinnitty families, whose father Frank and Rex knew well as Master of the Foxhounds. Later Frank would meet another friend from Kinnitty, Willy McBride of South Irish Horse.

At Ypres, the 2\(^{nd}\) Battalion placed artillery posts on the cathedral towers. The Germans soon spotted them:

A new Boche Taube came over our lines; it had very large Maltese crosses on its wings. We opened fire on it, as it was flying quite low, but our fire did not seem to affect it in the least. It turned out to be plated with steel underneath. It continued to fly low over our lines every evening throughout this tour, and it was alluded to as ‘Iron-Arsed Fritz’.

That night, Frank and a covering party lay out all night guarding the dug-outs. There he was joined by another neighbour, Captain Grant Saunders of Killavala. It was Captain Saunders’ father who had given Rex his first pony and saddle; Cecil Saunders, Grant’s brother, and

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8 Ibid., p. 22.
9 Ibid., p. 56.
10 Ibid., pp 48-9.
Rex had been particularly close friends. Grant was to survive the war and rise to the rank of Major, and later visited Rex in Nice to watch him as he worked on his latest film.

Frank and Grant Saunders’ paths would cross on several occasions during the war. The most memorable of these encounters was in January 1917. Frank’s commanding officer was now Lieut-Colonel A.D. Murphy of Ballinamona, Cashel. He, Frank, Lieutenant James Plowman and Grant Saunders were standing talking together when they were spotted by a sniper. There was the familiar ‘slat’ as the bullet embedded itself immediately behind them in the wooden backing to the trench: ‘The Colonel seemed quite unconcerned,’ Frank wrote, ‘and went on talking, with his monocle in his eye and his steel helmet tilted over at an angle on the side of his head’. Yet, Lieut-Colonel Murphy was not destined to be lucky, dying at Passchendaele on 6 November 1917, aged 27. Frank also recorded in his diary for that day that he had found a Webley revolver lying beside a skeleton when he was out exploring No Man’s Land in the mist: ‘I had the revolver cleaned up and brought it home when I came on leave, and gave it to my father who carried it for protection in Ireland in 1920-22’. Frank was awarded the Military Cross for his part in the first large-scale daylight raid at the Double Crassier—two enormous slagheaps rising over the flat landscape at Loos in France. He and his men entered and held The Triangle, an enemy stronghold that had been believed to be impregnable. So stealthy was their approach that of the eight German prisoners they took, one had been standing next to his periscope reading a newspaper when Frank sprang on him.

Throughout his diary, Frank records death after death, the relentless cold, and discomfort, the pain suffered by the wounded men, their stoicism, their humour and their loyalty. The details are often grotesque, but his tone is always spare, never distracting the reader from the detail:

Dawn broke at 4.00am and within half an hour I had two casualties. Pte. Bowes was killed by an explosive bullet in the head, and Pte. Duffy was wounded by an enfilade bullet from the Bellewaarde Farm. We buried Bowes in a disused trench behind our line. One could now make out the country all around perfectly and what an appalling sight it was. Everywhere lay the dead. The ridge in our rear was covered with dead men who had been wiped out in the final assault on the German position; their faces were blackened and swollen from the three days exposure to the August sun, and quite unrecognisable. Some of the bodies were badly dismembered; here and there a huddled up heap of khaki on top of a shell crater told of a direct hit. Haversacks, tangled heaps of webbing, splintered rifles and broken stretchers lay scattered about. The ground was pitted with shell holes of all sizes. A few solitary stakes and strands of barbed wire was all that was left of the German entanglements by our artillery. Several khaki figures were hanging on these few strands in hideous attitudes.

Rex’s films, by contrast, were filled with supernatural motifs. Ghosts, monsters and the shadows of evil permeated his works. In *The Four Horsemen*, in a tour de force of special effects, the four riders charge across the skies heralding the oncoming apocalypse. In his second film with Valentino and Alice Terry, *The Conquering Power* (1921), Rex includes a

11 Ibid., p.257.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., p.64.
chilling finale where the miser, played by Ralph Lewis, loses his mind over his gold. In his crazed greed, he sees a ghost rise out of the hoard of coins and reach out its bony hands to throttle him while all the while the walls of the room close in on top of him. Of the central character of his *Trifling Women* of 1922, one critic wrote:

It seems rather that pictures haunted him, pictures of a Circean woman, of men made foolish and mad by her, of queer medieval towers and castles, of dark dungeons and cellars, of duels and murders, and of characters, definitely stamped and oddly real characters, passing through it all to give it the passing semblance of reality.\(^{14}\)

The film that Rex was to make shortly after his reunion with Frank is a gothic masterpiece. *The Magician* (1926) once again stars Alice Terry, this time as the victim of the mad scientist, Oliver Haddo (Paul Wegener), a thinly disguised version of occultist, Aleister Crowley, who had many years previously shared the pages of the *Occult Review* with Mildred Darby.

Dreams and reality merge in these films to create a series of often hallucinatory images, none more so than those of the mystical underwater ending of Rex’s second World One film, *Mare Nostrum* (1926). Frank Hitchcock’s diary is a testament to the reality of war and human brutality, where Rex Ingram’s films are a response to the indefinable horrors of human existence. *Stand To* is indisputably a product of its author’s identity as an Irish Protestant of his time and upbringing. Although Rex Ingram made no Irish films, it is surely the case that his childhood influences feed into the greatest of his works.