

# LITERARY REVIEW

## THE STORY OF IRELAND'S ONLY STEEPLEJILL ANGELA COLLINS O'MAHONY

If someone asked you what kind of book *Steeplejill* is, it would be quickly described it as an autobiography. And while you would be right, it's so much more than that. Now in her 70s, Angela brings us on a journey from her earliest memory as a child growing up on a farm in Kilkishen, Co. Clare, to setting up her own steeplejack company as a young woman, up until her retirement after a long successful career.

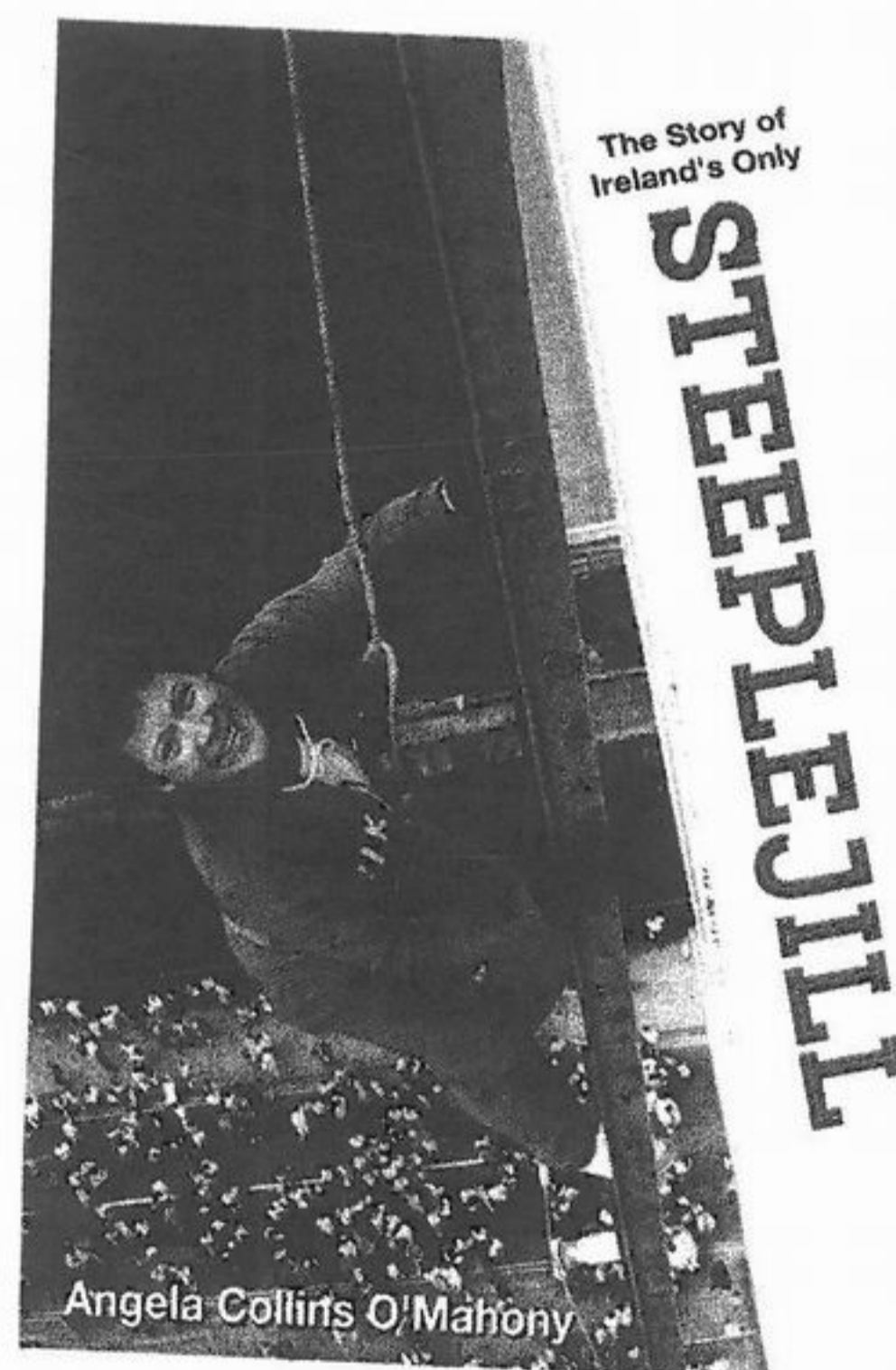
A steeplejack is a person who climbs tall structures, such as churches, in order to carry out repairs. It saves time and money as they just use ladders and no scaffolding. The job is named Jack as it was solely a man's job, before Angela came along that is. It was so unknown for a woman to be running a company back then, let alone, working as a steeplejack, that Angela was featured on the *Late Late Show* with Gay Byrne. Angela and her business also featured in numerous newspapers, radio shows and magazines over her career. Her sheer determination to do anything she set her mind to shines out of the pages and inspires her readers that you can do anything, even as a woman in the 21st century.

Angela's goal for her book is to motivate people to become entrepreneurs. She tells us the story of how she started off working as a secretary for a steeplejack company and upon leaving the company decided to set up her own as she had learned so much. As well as being a fantastic account of her life it is also a wonderfully inspiring tale, one of overcoming obstacles and breaking down barriers. Angela's voice is a strong, powerful one that resonates with us because of how honest she is.

Although everyone loves hearing an account of a successful person's life, as if it will unlock the secret to success, it's nearly better when we realise that this person has had to work extremely hard. It gives us inspiration. The thing that sets most people apart is how they react to setbacks in their lives, do they give up or do they persevere? Angela certainly perseveres and doesn't let anything get stop her, in fact she was still working while heavily pregnant her work ethic is simply amazing.

As well as being extremely motivating, the book is funny and also beautifully details life in Ireland from 1930s to 2016. Angela writes about her life in so much detail that it is like stepping back in time. Angela did so much travelling around Ireland and the world with her business and it's lovely being able to picture the streets you know today with the same ones she walked down 50 years ago. You get a real feel for how different life was back then, for example Angela went from growing up in a home with no electricity to being a woman in her 70s who is addicted to IT, even volunteering to teach hospice patients how to use email.

*Steeplejill* is also a good study of how women were expected to behave in the 20th century. Although they were business partners, her husband never did any cooking or cleaning. But Angela states that she didn't mind because that was her role in the home and she liked to see him resting watching TV. Even though Angela conformed to one aspect of a woman's role back then, she also greatly challenged it by heading her own business.



One question seemed to arise a lot when the media interviewed the steeplejacks who worked for Angela: what is it like having a woman for a boss? Today that question would be met with outrage from men and women alike but back then it was an honest question, people really wanted to know. It's funny to think how much a woman's role in society has changed in Angela's lifetime. After reading this book I have the impression that Angela herself, although she would be too modest to admit it, had a part to play in Ireland and in fact the world's changing views of women in business.

Article by: Sarah Talty