

Some Love Letters sent to Glanduff Castle

by Niamh Byrne

In May 1882, Hugh Gourlay Allardice must have stood and surveyed his new home with admiration. Allardice, a 25-year-old Scotsman, left his widowed mother behind in his hometown of Edinburgh, to embark on this new chapter in his life.

The story of Glanduff Castle

Glanduff Castle, the new place of employment and residence for H. G. Allardice, was an impressive castellated building, west of Broadford, in County Limerick, dates back to the early nineteenth century, and today stands a roofless ruin, hidden behind a blanket of ivy. Some of its outhouses and grounds are currently used as farmyard storage, but trees and foliage dominate the remnants of the main structure. Glanduff today, despite being unlivable in for almost 100 years, is a protected structure.

James Butler Ievers of Mount Ievers, County Clare, leased the castle from the Staveley family in the late nineteenth century¹, and it is believed that Hugh Allardice travelled to work for J. B. Ievers as an agent of the castle. James was a Justice of the Peace for County Limerick. His son Eyre Herbert Ievers, who was a Major in the Royal Munster Fusiliers, moved into the castle with his wife, Frances Hetty Webb Gillman, in 1902. Shortly after Eyre Herbert died,

in 1922, the castle was burnt down by 'Irregulars' during the Civil War. National troops occupied Glanduff, upon receiving intelligence that Irregulars intended to seize it. Commandant O'Sullivan wrote to the castle's tenant, Frances Ievers, apologising for the Free State Army's abrupt occupation of the castle.¹ He assured her that her furniture would be cared for and that no damage would come to her estate. However, just weeks later, on 29 June 1922, the castle was seized by 200 republicans, who set it on fire after raiding its contents.²

This arson attack was one of many during the course of the Civil War in Limerick, Tipperary and Waterford. Many Anglo-Irish and British owned 'big houses' were destroyed, as a British revival was feared. As a result of the destruction, and scant Free State compensation, these big houses, such as Glanduff Castle, remained unoccupied, falling into further ruin. Glanduff was once a tremendous mansion, and its restoration to its previous extensive status would have involved re-establishing a wine cellar, a gunroom, and tower. Not only would this have been challenging, it would also have been inappropriate as the Free State government's intention was to break up the large estates, a process which had already begun before the Civil War. Greed for land was apparent at this time, and before Glanduff was destroyed, a neighbour of Ievers told a steward that

the "old bitch" had the place long enough, and that it was time it got divided up!⁴ After the burning, the castle's owner, Mr. Stavelley, sued the state for £20,000. In 1924, he was awarded just £4,000, while Frances Ievers received £142 for damages to her furniture and property⁴.

A Secret Love Affair

When Allardice arrived; a letter awaited him stamped from London, on which his name had been written with the utmost care. This was the first of many that would arrive at Glanduff Castle each week like clockwork, letters from his fiancé, each one signed 'Ever your loving Mary'.



Envelope posted 12 May 1882

A hundred years later, a secret compartment of a walnut antique writing box was discovered, concealing 22 handwritten love letters from Mary Cannon in London, to a H. G. Allardice



Glanduff Castle (date unknown)



Glanduff Castle, June 2016.

of Glanduff Castle. The letters recount the story of their secret love affair, which began when they met on a journey to Rome she undertook with her family, just weeks before Allardice came to Ireland. She enthuses over her 'little lad in Ireland' and makes no secret of her unfaltering love and admiration for the young man. She recalls humorous moments spent together and anticipates their bright future ahead. Her letters are filled with the humdrum news of her life, her family, her precarious health, and her travels. However, it is her incessant scolding and persistent nagging of Hugh through playful tones that makes Mary both lovable and endearing, and although the letters tell a one-sided story, with each letter the reader cannot help but fall deeper in love with their young affection.

I pray of you, and if I was with you I would go down on my knees to enforce my request, that you will, if not hurting their feelings too much, abstain as much as possible from potatoes and milk, the two most fattening things in the world. I don't want to see you in the Autumn looking the counterpart of Tichborne,¹ only you know if all trades fail it might be a profitable investment to hire a caravan and go about the country exhibiting The Fat Boy, I think it would be a delightful life, don't you, let us think about it seriously.

Mary Cannon met Hugh Allardice on a trip to Rome in 1882, but apparently kept their meeting and mutual attraction secret from their families. Her aunt Ann learned of their relationship, and, for reasons unknown, was much disapproving of their affair. (Perhaps Mary was Protestant, and Hugh a Catholic?) Slowly but surely the rest of Mary's family found out about their engagement. Her mother, Jane, was deeply saddened by the pair, while her father, Alexander, told her that had he known what would happen he would have forbidden her to go to Rome. However, kindness and acceptance were among the Cannon family qualities, and they recognised that Mary and Hugh's love for each other ran deeply, so promised not to interfere. Alexander warned his daughter not to rush into anything, and advised Hugh to continue in his job in the castle 'for some time' before he would allow

them to marry. Alexander placed much emphasis on work, telling his daughter that '[al]though the occupation [Hugh] had chosen [was] a very suitable one... he dwelt long and very decidedly on work... he said he thought every man ought to work hard till he is 55, and you know he has'.

Back in Glanduff, Allardice struck up a bond with Elizabeth Ievers in the castle, relaying to Mary some of the things Elizabeth had confided in him. Mary described herself as being 'tickled by the peculiarities' of J. B. Ievers' wife. However, she wisely cautioned him not to disclose to her any of his own secrets: 'don't favour her with your confidence in return, as I generally find that those good souls who are most open and confiding as to their own affairs, are frightfully taken up with their neighbours as well'.

Even while travelling in Switzerland, in August 1882, Mary managed to continue her weekly correspondence with her 'dearest Hughie' in Ireland. She provided him with the dates and addresses of the hotels in which she would be staying, and each week recounted the details of her trip, depicting picturesque scenes and snowy landscapes, as well as the numerous expeditions that she and her family embarked on.

However, although having the time of her life, Mary never once stopped missing Hugh, and it is clear that wherever she travelled he was always on her mind. In her final letter to him, on 29 August 1882, Mary wrote:

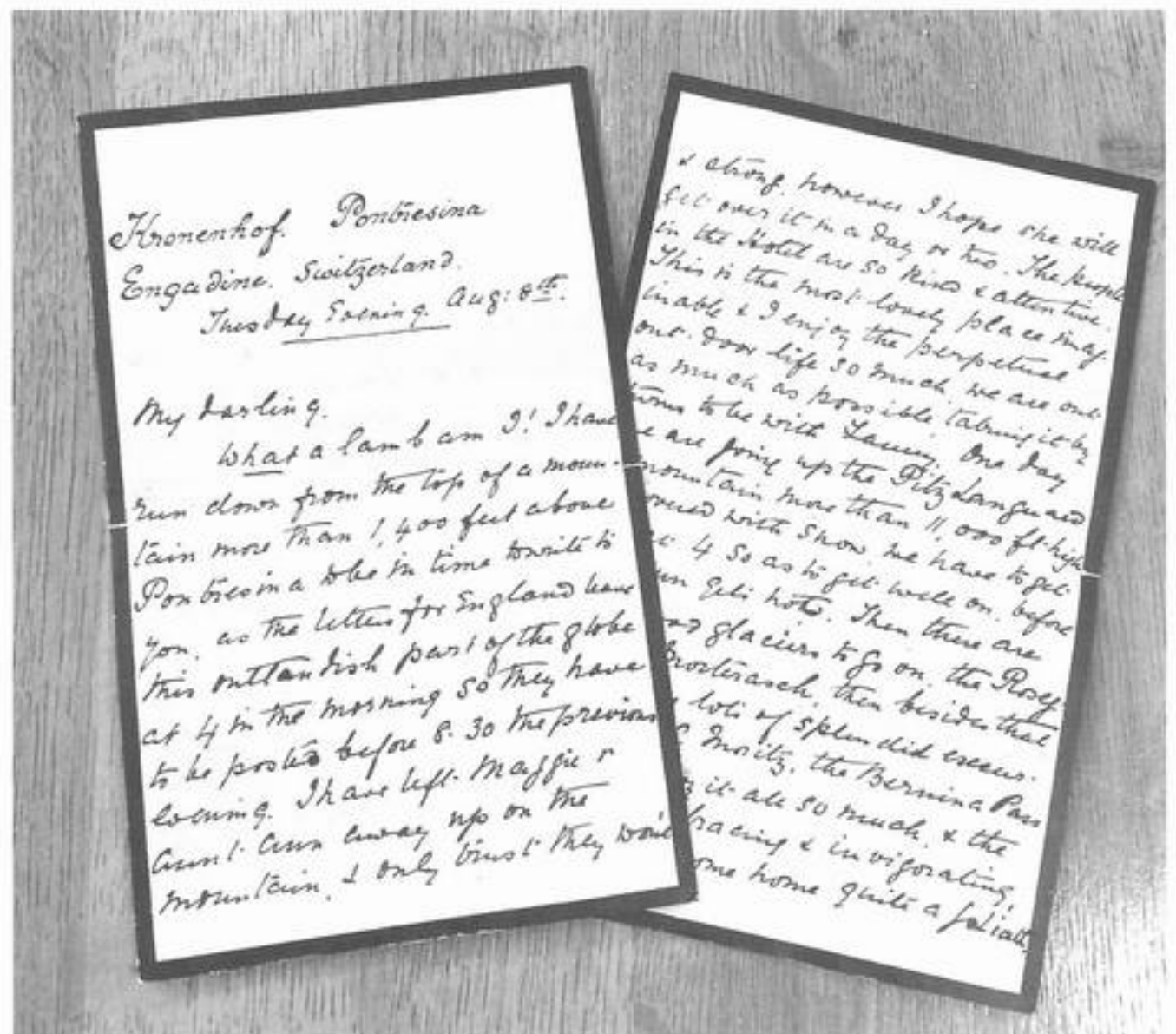
There is so much to do in the way of expeditions [here], short and long, difficult and easy, that one need never feel dull or find the time hang heavy, and then for people who don't care to walk it is quite sufficient pleasure to sit in the garden with a nice book and look at the beautiful snowy mountains, and bright blue sky. When all else fails we will come and live here, and you will hunt, and we will be perfectly happy.

Now dearest, be sure you tell me all you do, from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, and may God bless you and keep you from all harm.

Goodbye, don't forget to write on Sunday.

Ever your loving, Mary.

Hugh never got to read these words. Her simplistic idea of happiness and almost juvenile expectations of life make their love story even more tragic. Three days



Letter dated 8th August, 1882, written from Pontresina, Switzerland.

before Mary wrote this final letter, and despite their plans to meet in September, Hugh died tragically on 26 August 1882, after falling from his horse in Newcastle West, County Limerick. In his death notice he is described as 'the youngest son of the late William Patrick Allardice, Esq., West Morningside, Edinburgh, aged 25.'²

There is much evidence amongst the extant letters that Mary feared for the health of her fiancé, while also referring to her own heart condition. In a letter written shortly before his death, in June 1882, she both compliments him on acquiring a horse and warns him to take care,

You are now a very grand gentleman with your own horse. How nice it must be to ride about anywhere you like. My darling, I do trust nothing will happen to prevent your coming over this autumn. I have longed

so desperately to see you. You know when people have anything the matter with their heart life becomes uncertain.

I suppose you will be a good deal outdoors, only don't, I beseech of you, exert yourself too much. Remember what a frail and tender plant you are, and how dear the life of my darling boy is to me.

She also reminds him:

I have often begged you to take care when I have seen you running down stairs etc. etc. but now I feel called upon to caution you seriously against such violent exercise.

The deep affection and fondness that Mary expressed for Hugh must have further deepened her grief on learning of the accidental death of her beloved fiancé.

Endnotes

1. Turtlebunbury.com, accessed via http://www.turtlebunbury.com/history/history_family/hist_family_ievers/ievers_15.html on 25 June, 2016.
2. Gemma Clark, *Everyday Violence in the Irish Civil War*, (Cambridge, 2014).
3. Tichborne refers to a trial held in England in 1874 concerning a man who was claiming to be Roger Tichborne, an heir to the family inheritance, who was presumed to have been drowned in a shipwreck in 1854. The case was dismissed on a number of grounds one was that the claimant was much heavier than the heir.
4. *Limerick Chronicle* 29 August, 1882.



The walnut antique writing box in which 22 handwritten love letters were concealed.

Niamh Byrne is a 25 year old from Dublin. She is currently working in a school for children with autism, while studying a Masters in Applied Behavioural Analysis, in Queens University, Belfast. Niamh is greatly influenced and encouraged by her grandmother, Ursula O'Farrell, who is originally from Newcastle West, County Limerick.