

Letters reveal story of 'friendly kidnap'

■ Councillor hopes to re-enact Shannon crossing from Limerick to Clare on 100th anniversary next year

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THE discovery of a collection of letters sent by a British army officer held captive by the IRA during the War of Independence has sparked interest in Kildimo Pallaskenry where the story of Brigadier General Lucas's capture and release had become a thing of legend.

Now, local councillor, Emmett O'Brien, is hoping to stage a re-enactment of the events next year to mark the 100th anniversary.

The letters re-emerged into the public domain

when the granddaughter of Brigadier General Cuthbert Lucas, Ruth Wheeler turned up with them on a recent edition of the BBC's Antiques Roadshow.

Brig Gen Lucas was captured by the IRA in Fermoy, where he was stationed in June 1920 and brought to Clare, crossing the Shannon from Mellon, near Kildimo. He was held for over a month in some 12 different locations and then released, but never revealed the identities of those he met nor of the locations he was held captive.

According to Tim Pat Coogan, author of The IRA

and Ireland in the 20th Century, the IRA "facilitated his escape because he was a good man for the whiskey." The British Army officer is reputed to have gone through a bottle a day during captivity.

In its report, the BBC also quotes Olive Carey, who conducted interviews with relatives of Lucas's captors for the Shannon Social History Project and who said: "There was a genuine feeling that he was well-liked by all of the guards," she said "He was a very affable sort of man who was easy to get on with. They played cards with

him. He was particularly good at poker," she said. "He also played bridge and they taught him to play forty-five (a trump card game)."

The letters written by Brig Gen Lucas to his wife also reveal he took part in tennis lessons, croquet matches and salmon poaching while captive and even went out saving hay with some of his captors.

Pallaskenry's Cllr Emmett O'Brien who was intrigued by the letters find, told the Limerick Leader: "I was raised on stories of the capture and transportation of the British Army's General Lucas across the

Shannon from Mellon, Kildimo. It was a real Kildimo Pallaskenry story that we could be all proud of. I say that, not least because of the involvement of the West Limerick (Old) IRA brigade which contained many local men and women but the manner in which General Lucas was treated by his captors."

"Both the IRA volunteers and General Lucas acted with mutual respect and honour in the midst of a vicious War of Independence," Cllr O'Brien continued. "What's more if any other IRA Brigade captured Lucas he may very

well have been executed. Equally General Lucas kept his word and did not reveal the 12 locations where he was hidden for army raids."

Ruth Wheeler, he noted, had spoken fondly of the people of Limerick and Clare. "I have been in contact with Cllr Cathal Crowe in Meelick, Clare, local historians and local boatmen with a view to recreating the Lucas crossing of the Shannon in June 2020 on the 100th anniversary of the capture and transport," Cllr O'Brien said.

For more, go to bbc.com website.



Brig General Cuthbert Lucas who was captured by the Old IRA in 1920 - is pictured with his wife Poppy who was able to write to her husband during his captivity