

Andy Smith, a Thorn in the Side of the Black and Tans

It was 1921, the time the Black and tans were let loose in Ireland, charged with restoring law and order after the civil war. Lots of Irish people did not like the black and tans because they were agents of the English in Ireland. They also had a reputation of violence and creating a lot of distress for the Irish at the time. In response lots of Irish men joined the IRA {Irish Republican Army} so they could fight against this imperial force.

This included my great granddad Patrick Scahill and lots of the neighbours in his locality - Kilmurray, Castlerea, Co. Roscommon. As a border county there was a lot of activity. Men were afraid to sleep in their beds, and my great grandfather died very young, with health problems caused by years sleeping in the fields.

One neighbour in particular, Andy Smith, had a notorious reputation for plotting and creating mayhem for the Black and Tans. He was involved in a shooting in the local village of Castleplunkett where a number of Black and Tans were killed. The Tans realised he was involved and made a beeline for his house. In order to catch him they raided in the small hours of the morning when everyone was asleep, all except for his pet collie sheepdog. He heard the sound of the approaching truck and alerted Andy in the nick of time with his barking.

Andy escaped, and as revenge the Black and Tans burned the house to the ground. Andy ran across the fields and ambushed and killed the whole troop at the cross roads on their return journey. He eventually made his way to America.

The Smith family had nowhere to live for two years while their house was being rebuilt and my great granddad and great grandmother invited them to stay with them.

Relations between both families remain strong ever since, 97 years later.

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