

★ Jennifer O'Connell

★ Seán Moncrieff

★ Marian Keyes

★ Ross O'Carroll-Kelly

THE IRISH TIMES **MAGAZINE**

Saturday, October 13, 2018

# Inside the dark web

The Irish people fighting crime on the internet, and what you can do to protect yourself

## Mid-term breaks

20 fun family getaways for Halloween

## Blazing a political trail

The women who broke into the male world of Irish politics

**7-day TV & Radio**

# Inside the dark web

The 'dark web' is a fertile hunting ground for the world's criminals. **Conor Pope** meets some Irish people fighting crime on the internet, and learns what you can do to protect yourself

A “regular” murder can be arranged for \$45,000, while making a victim disappear without a trace costs \$60,000. A straightforward crippling is \$12,000 but if the aim is to “uglify” a person – or have acid thrown in their face – the price rises to \$18,000. A beating costs \$3,000. A rape is \$8,000.

This menu of murder and mayhem is among the more distressing things cyber-security expert Paul Dwyer summons from the dark web from his darkened office outside Malahide, but it's by no means the only indication of just how vile people can be.

Millions of images of children being abused constantly change hands in this murky marketplace, and websites aimed at encouraging vulnerable teenage girls to starve themselves before committing suicide are easy to find.

Dwyer veers away from the most distressing content – “the petri dish of hate and evil”, as he calls it – and returns to the drug bazaars and the pages selling counterfeit cash, email addresses, credit card numbers and Tesco vouchers.

The drug market's design is clunky and its pages load slowly – because re-routing web traffic in such a way as to hide who's who takes time – but apart from that it could be any online retail space and even includes reviews of all the virtual dealers.

“Old and dry, and nothing like the pictures. If you want decent weed you need to find another source,” says one assessment of a dealer who gets a solitary star. Just under that he has a five-star rating from a happy customer blown away by “the quality and the stealth and the speed of delivery”.

All the drugs come priced in the crypto currency Bitcoin. The virtual money is entirely legal and is easily bought on the regular web (or “surface web”) and uses a system called tumbling to ensure purchases cannot be connected to purchasers. There are many legitimate reasons someone might wish to trade in Bitcoin. And almost as many illicit ones.

A handful of cannabis-infused gummy bears costs 0.003097 BC – or €18 in real money – while a gram of “quality MDMA” is €12 and half a gram of cocaine is 0.010026 BC or €55.

Dwyer is a cyber-security expert whose job it is to ensure companies have measures in place to protect themselves from hacks and attacks. He also helps pick up the pieces when things go wrong.

Separately – but not entirely unconnected – he is behind the Cyber Summit taking place in the Helix Centre on October 24th. As part of it he will conduct a public interview – over the internet – with Edward Snowden, the former CIA analyst who exposed the scale of US online surveillance in 2013 and was forced into exile in Moscow for his troubles.

Dwyer clicks on the counterfeiting section where someone is selling a thousand

€50 notes for €10,000 with the promise that they're watermarked and will pass all sorts of tests. He says the claims are likely to be right on the money. “If a guy has a good rating, he's not going to risk it by selling dodgy merchandise. The rating is just too important to him.”

He admits that trawling the dark web can be “madly entertaining” but cautions against it, saying people can get detached from reality very easily in the online space, “as if they are watching the television or playing a computer game”. But, as he repeatedly stresses, it is all too real. “I could make you physically sick in minutes by showing you stuff now, but the second or the third or fourth time you see it you can get desensitised to it all. It happens to a lot of people.”

He suggests that the dark web “has normalised the abhorrent” and sees people get “detached from what they do and what they see. There's a total lack of empathy because what happens is happening in the online space”.

But where did this dark web come from? Who has the dubious honour of creative

“  
The drug market's design is clunky and its pages load slowly – because re-routing web traffic in such a way as to hide who's who takes time

this citadel of cybercrime? We have the US navy to thank for it. It runs cyber command in the US and had thousands of analysts spying on people online. But it was easy for criminals to track it so it created The Onion Router (Tor), which anonymised where it was coming from.

Tor bounces users' communications around a global network of relays, making it almost impossible to work out who a person is, where they are or what they are doing. The US Naval Research Laboratory knew it couldn't be the only one using such a network or it would be easily identifiable so it released the open-source software into the online space.

Tor serves many useful purposes and allows people who wish to remain anonymous for totally legitimate reasons – journalists working on unearthing dark secrets, political dissidents living in fear of their lives – to exchange information without fear of retribution.

But clued-in criminals can use it too, and the world's paedophiles "rubbed their hands with glee once they saw it as they quickly recognised it was something they could use to shield themselves," Dwyer says.

While the exchange of abusive images of children and the buying and selling of illegal drugs attract the most attention – from the authorities and the public – Dwyer points out that the big sellers are a lot more mundane.

"The most popular thing sold on the Dark Web last year in the UK was Tesco discount vouchers," he says. There was also big demand for Netflix codes, passwords for other content services and counterfeit money. This is a \$1 trillion economy and if you were getting into crime, why would you risk getting your head blown off in the real world when you can do it all safely of your own bedroom?"

While the authorities – in Ireland and elsewhere – police the dark web as best they can, Dwyer describes criminality online as being like whack-a-mole and says cyber police are typically starved of resources.

That is not to say there have been no successes.

Just over five years ago, a team of federal agents descended on a San Francisco library and arrested an innocuous-looking 29-year-old man who had spent the morning staring into his laptop.

He was Ross William Ulbricht but the online world knew him as Dread Pirate Roberts, the man behind dark web marketplace The Silk Road. According to the FBI, his Silk Road had recorded over a million drug



■ Paul Dwyer, CEO of Cyber Risk International, and organiser of the European Cyber Threat Summit 2018 in The Helix, Co Dublin on October 24th. PHOTOGRAPH: DARA MAC DÓNAILL

deals in 2½ years and had earned him \$80 million worth of bitcoin in commission. In 2015 he was sentenced to life in prison.

Earlier this month Irishman Gary Davis (30) pleaded guilty in a New York court to a narcotics conspiracy connected to the Silk Road just months after he was extradited to the United States from Ireland. Davis, from Wicklow went by the name "Libertas" on the Dark Web and worked as a Silk Road administrator until his arrest in 2013.

He fought a lengthy battle against his extradition saying he suffered from Asperger Syndrome, depression and anxiety and arguing that incarceration in the US could hurt his mental health and endanger his life. The Supreme Court rejected his arguments. He is likely to spend at least 10 years in prison following his guilty plea.

Just over a year ago a 26-year-old Canadian man called Alexandre Cazes was found dead in a Thai prison cell. He had hanged himself hours after being arrested in connection with a dark web marketplace called Alphabay. It was more than twice the size of the Silk Road was at its very peak and had revenue of almost \$1 million every day. The day Cazes died, it disappeared. But it too was soon replaced.

Cyber crimes are frequently detected much closer to home too. Dissident republicans have been caught using the dark web to try and buy explosives, and cannabis is now routinely discovered at Irish sorting centres, with more than a dozen such packages being found each week.

The packages are detected by sniffer dogs, the gatekeepers of the postal network but they can only do so much, and while detection rates rise, a huge volume of contraband is most likely reaching destinations across the country undetected.

In 2015 Eric Eoin Marques, an Irish-American man described in court as

the "largest facilitator of child porn on the planet" by the FBI, was arrested in Dublin where he ran a web-server company called Host Ultra Limited.

He was accused of operating Freedom Hosting, a "hidden services" provider that

by some estimates hosted nearly half of the content on the Tor network, including the Silk Road and numerous sites containing child abuse images. Marques, with an address at Mountjoy Square, Dublin 1, remains in custody in Ireland and is fighting his extradition to the US.

Dwyer has moved away from the drug dealers and on to to other troubling material. His face darkens when he starts talking about pro-anorexia sites aimed directly at teenage girls. These sites encourage children to eat less and less and "when they get down to 500 calories a day they are driven towards suicide websites on the dark web", he says.

"Starving yourself is so bad' is the most annoying thing anyone wants to hear. This blog is to encourage you to starve yourself beautiful," starts one such site he points to. It goes on to list 70 reasons why someone should not eat, including "you'll be perfect" and "bones are beautiful" and "guys want you" and "you don't need food" and "people will remember you as the beautiful girl".

When asked why anyone would put such material in the public domain – or any domain – Dwyer shakes his head. "I don't know what drives people to do it. It's just pure evil. Why does someone want to boil a puppy alive and film it? Why does someone want to watch that. The uncomfortable truth is there is a lot of evil out there. Tim Berners Lee [the inventor of the internet] said his worldwide web was humanity con-



The most popular thing sold on the Dark Web last year in the UK was Tesco discount vouchers. There was also big demand for Netflix codes

BALLET AND OPERA IRELAND PRESENTS  
THE INTERNATIONAL PREMIER OF  
THE TCHAIKOVSKY PERM STATE BALLET'S  
SPECTACULAR NEW  
**SWAN LAKE**  
THE RTÉ NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA  
14 – 17 NOV 2018

For full details see [www.balletandoperaireland.com](http://www.balletandoperaireland.com)  
Tickets from €35 to €99.50 through Ticketmaster outlets  
or [www.ticketmaster.ie](http://www.ticketmaster.ie) Tel: 01 677 7770 Groups Tel: 01 677 7770  
Telephone & Internet bookings are subject to a maximum s/c of €6.80  
per ticket/Agents €3.30

BORD GÁIS ENERGY THEATRE  
THE IRISH TIMES  
International Leisure & Arts  
RTÉ NATIONAL Love your Orchestras  
RTÉ  
Find Ballet & Opera Ireland on Facebook

restaurant as do all the co-workers on duty.

Every morning they gather for a huddle where store news is shared and departmental responsibilities are doled out.

Today, Scott leads the huddle.

“Yesterday’s sales were on target so well done,” he says. There’s a round of applause and some whoops. I can’t escape the feeling the whoops are for my benefit.

Then I’m sent into “recovery” – but not before an awkward encounter. As I walk to the part of the store near the checkouts where less than perfect products are saved from the scrapheap and the best of bargains are to be found, a woman intercepts me. She is wearing the same uniform as I am and we chat amicably for a few minutes. I ask who she is.

“I am the manager,” says Claudia Marshall with a hint of surprised hurt in her voice.

I’d expected to meet her later in my day and had all sorts of interesting questions ready. But my mind has gone blank. So we talk about Brexit and how Ireland loves Ikea – her words – for a couple of minutes before she makes her excuses and leaves.

Hours later she announces that she is moving on from her manager’s role. Was it something I said?

Kreisimir Koevacevic is Ikea’s head of recovery. He started working for the shop in Zagreb before transferring here two years ago. His job is “to make sure the stock is in good condition on the shop floor. If it’s not, then it comes to us and we’ll see what we can do. If we can’t repackage a product or if it’s slightly scuffed, then we assemble it and it goes to the bargain corner. If it can’t be assembled, we use it for spare parts.”

He points at a big machine in the corner. It’s the Tornado, a sort of vending machine out of which thousands of spare parts can be summoned. There is a big sign on the vending machine which says “do not enter tornado”. It seems like solid advice.

I ask Kreisimir what kind of discounts are available in the bargain corner and he shuffles awkwardly, concerned he might be revealing commercially sensitive information. To help him out I point to price labels showing discounts of 20 and 30 per cent. He looks relieved. I ask when is the best time for shoppers to visit the bargain corner. “Friday morning because we like to have the bargain corner well-stocked ahead of the weekend rush.”

Good to know.

Ali Sheridan is the store’s sustainability leader and as I and Kreisimir chat about cheap rugs, she hovers. Then she tells me that sustainability is in Ikea’s DNA “and one of our core beliefs”.

While it would be easy to arch a sceptical eyebrow given that for more than 70 years, the retailer has been selling products which many view as disposable, that would be unfair. Ikea is doing a huge amount of work on reducing the footprint it leaves on the planet. It sells only LED light, pushes



“  
By 2030 we want to be a fully circular retailer. We want to be in a position to sell products and take them back when they come to the end of their life so that we can reuse them

water-saving taps and induction hobs and harvests rainwater on its roof. The freezer bags it sells by the truckload are made of sugar cane and there are rugs made from recycled plastic bottles.

“By 2030 we want to be a fully circular retailer,” Ali says. “We want to be in a position to sell products and take them back when they come to the end of their life so that we can reuse them and ensure there is absolutely no waste.”

As she talks, Carrie Kihinan is nearby at a machine to cut boxes to size for Ikea products. She’s about to unpack what looks like a perfectly fine box only to repack it in a new one.

What’s that about? I wonder.

“People won’t buy something if the box is slightly broken like this is,” she tells me. “Sometimes customers don’t trust the labels on our boxes so they open them to make sure what is inside is the same colour as the label says it is. Then, even if it is the right colour, they still take a new box. I

don’t really know why,” she says.

The splendidly named Helly Kelly works as “an internal communication specialist” and seems well suited to the role with her boundless enthusiasm for all things Ikea. As we talk I decide – for my own amusement – to count the number of times she says the word co-workers. After less than a minute, I give up; I can’t keep track.

“Sometimes when co-workers are talking to other co-workers about co-workers, the co-workers say their co-workers are sharing news about co-workers,” she doesn’t say. But she may as well have.

She brings me to the co-worker restaurant. Each day there is a free healthy meal option. The fruit and salad bowls are free too. And the food that is not free is very cheap. A cooked breakfast costs about €1, while a hot lunch is €1.50.

Outside the restaurant there is a large notice board on which details of the best co-workers are found. The idea is that co-workers nominate other co-workers for the title of co-worker of the month. People can be nominated for being super helpful or for working efficiently.

“I was nominated once,” Helly says brightly. “I didn’t win though.”

If she had, she’d have been the star turn at a monthly ceremony and then at the end of the year she would have been in the running to win the Irish co-worker of the year award and a holiday to Sweden where she could have hung out with other co-workers of the year from other Ikea branches. “That’s very exciting,” she says.

There is another notice board which hails staff for their vigilance. It sounds more exciting. One co-worker is cheered for spotting a shopper swapping €10 labels on to products that cost considerably more than that. The notice says she saved the company €350 “and remained calm throughout. The shopper left with nothing.” Be warned, label swappers, Ikea is on to you.

I’m walked through the rugs and soft furnishings. “Since Game of Thrones, these have been very popular,” Eleanor Murphy says, holding up a sheepskin rug. Why so, I wonder. “They’re the capes worn by the people of the north,” she says. I nod like I know who the people of the north are.

Cassandra McManus is deputy Comm-In manager and her job is to make the store look swish. She assembles the rooms which greet shoppers at the start of their long, long shopping journey. The rooms are known as the First Five and “are a real point of difference for us”, she says.

The First Five are there to show people like me what Ikea products can look like in their natural habitat and how cool our homes and our lives could be if we owned them. I’ve long marvelled at these rooms where everything is perfectly assembled and beautifully hung. It never looks as good when it gets to my house.

We walk through the house of an imaginary couple with a young baby. It is infuriatingly tidy and free of baby wipes and puke and discarded plastic toys.

We step into a dimly lit room full of black

★ Jennifer O'Connell

★ Seán Moncrieff

★ Jess Murphy

★ Ross O'Carroll-Kelly

THE IRISH TIMES

# MAGAZINE

Saturday, March 23, 2019



7-day TV  
& Radio

**'Anything  
is possible'**

Chef Michael Caines  
on overcoming the  
loss of his arm

## Inside Ikea

**Conor Pope goes  
behind the scenes at  
the flatpack king**

# Some assembly required

Secret shortcuts, strange code words and morning huddles . . .  
Conor Pope spends a day working in Ikea's labyrinthine store in Dublin

**W**ell, what the f\*\*k are you doing in all that yellow then?" snarls the angriest man in Ikea after I tell him I don't know where the returns department is because I don't actually work for Ikea.

He is carrying a broken light fixture and had approached me as I lounged at the top of the steps leading into the store. I try to explain what I'm doing in the luridly yellow get-up but he's having none of it and as I talk his face turns alarmingly red. "F\*\*king smart arse," he shouts before being led away by a soft-spoken person who actually does work for Ikea and actually does know where the returns section is.

"What the f\*\*k are you doing in all that yellow then?" I repeat quietly to myself. To be fair to shouty man, it's a good question.

Ahead of my day working behind the scenes with the flatpack kings of the world, I was asked for my measurements and the minute I arrived at the store in Dublin's Ballymun on a viciously cold, damp March morning I was handed a bag containing a clingy yellow bowling shirt, a heavy yellow V-neck jumper and a pair of unforgiving blue trousers.

The get-up was to help me better blend in with my co-workers, a word I hear a lot over the course of my day. I change with a heavy heart. A co-worker joins me in the locker room. He's all deep sighs and dark

gloom and we dress side by side in grim silence. I make my way to the co-worker area, the small office space where Ikea's admin staff and management are beavering away, although it's not yet 8am.

It's like any open-plan office – with a hot-desk area and dedicated workstations allocated to various teams who manage the operation. The only thing distinguishing it from a normal workplace is the fact that everyone is dressed just like me.

Across the hall from the office space is the relaxation space. It's fitted out like one of the fake rooms found on the shop floor and it's where staff – sorry, co-workers – go for breaks. There are leather loungers, comfy chairs and a big telly in the dimly lit space. There are also three or four co-workers. One looks suspiciously like he's asleep.

He IS asleep.

I'm about to give him an urgent nudge while hissing "sketch" when the retail giant's head of public relations, Eleanor Murphy, appears at my shoulder. "Co-workers work long shifts so it's good to have a place to relax," she says in a soft voice before telling me we're starting our day "with Scott at Comm-In before a visit to logs for replen".

I stare blankly at her. I know she's using words but I've absolutely no idea what those words mean.

Maybe she's speaking Swedish, I think. There are, after all, loads of meaningless (to me) Swedish phrases and words dotted about the place and I could do a passable impression of the Muppet Show's chef simply

by reading aloud the names attached to the bathroom cabinets.

Sensing my confusion, she translates her sentence into English. It turns out we're going to meet a man called Scott who is in charge of logistics near the communications and interiors department after which we will oversee the replenishment of the stock before the store opens.

Scott Fairbairn is Ikea's deputy logistics manager – or DepLogMan maybe – and if he's not an Ikea lifer then he certainly has had his life assembled by Ikea. As a younger man he started work in its Edinburgh store where he met his wife. They moved to

Australia to work for Ikea. They had a child there and moved to Dublin to work for Ikea. They have had a second child here.

Scott's job is to manage the stock flow from Ikea factories across Europe into Dublin port and then on to the Ballymun shop floor. He is an Ikea Goldilocks and has to make sure Dublin always has exactly the right amount of stuff. If he orders too little, shoppers may be left disappointed. If he orders too much, freight containers full of Ribba frames and Billy bookcases will spend too long in the port.

"When it's sitting at the docks it's costing us money, so what we have to do is bring in everything in an even flow," he tells me. "That helps drive down costs and pass on savings to our shoppers."

Or make more money for Ikea, maybe.

And make no mistake Ikea is good at making money. Its 424 stores in 56 countries generated an operating profit of €2.25 billion in the year to the end of last August. Irish sales reached €181.5 million over the same period.

It makes all these mountains of money despite its deserved reputation for being exceptionally low cost and its equally deserved reputation for causing many of the blazing rows among Irish couples as they struggle to get big cardboard boxes into small cars before trying to assemble what's in those boxes while staring at incomprehensible instructions and a heart-stopping amount of fiddly screws.

It's not just consumers who have to con-



“

It makes money despite its deserved reputation for being low cost and its equally deserved reputation for causing many blazing rows among Irish couples



■ **Conor Pope, working for a day in Ikea in Ballymun, Dublin. Its 424 stores in 56 countries generated an operating profit of €2.25 billion in the year to the end of last August.** PHOTOGRAPH: DARA MAC DONAILL

tend with baffling diagrams. So do Ikea co-workers. As we walk into the giant self-service warehouse where the flatpack products live, Scott points to a complex looking map. It's the forklift traffic plan. "You have to memorise this so you know what's happening," he says. "But you don't if you stick with me."

I stick with him. Forklifts whirr across the warehouse piling cardboard boxes high. "If I think I'm going to sell 10 units a day, then I want 50 on the shelves so that the very last customer of the day has the same experience as the first customer," Scott explains. "I don't want that last customer to have to bend down to pick up the last unit on the shelves. And we have to get everything in place before the store opens. Once 10am comes, all the forklifts are off the floor."

I ask him what Irish people buy most? "The biggest sellers are the Kalax and the Malm," he says. One is a shelving unit, the other a set of drawers. I have both in my house. "And the Ribba frames are massive," he says. "Irish people buy more frames than any other country."

I have them too, I think, saddened by my sheep-like shopping habits.

Ribba. Malm. Kalax. Brimnes. Karlsö. By any measure, Ikea's product names are mystifying. But they're not illogical. Ingvar Kamprad, the Ikea founder who died last year aged 91, was dyslexic and found it easier to get his head around names rather than product codes. He devised a system which saw product lines given names he was familiar with. Garden furniture is called after Swedish islands while desks are Swedish men's names. Beds are commonly called after places in Norway.

And while we're on beds, it's worth noting that – by some estimates – one in 10 babies in Europe are conceived on Ikea beds. That is little short of miraculous given how hard it is to make those beds. I ask Scott if he's any good at assembling flatpack furniture. "I'm terrible," he confesses. "My wife does it all. Something that takes me 20 minutes will take her two."

We move into the "Market Hall" where smaller products sell. More than two dozen staff have worked through the night to ensure that when the shop opens everything is in order. "If you saw this place at 2am you'd have said there was no chance it could be ready in time for opening," Fairbairn says. "There was cardboard everywhere. But we're always ready."

The public address system comes to life. "Good morning, this is a co-worker announcement. The morning huddle will take place in the customer restaurant at 9am." It is 8.55am so I race to the

restaurant as do all the co-workers on duty.

Every morning they gather for a huddle where store news is shared and departmental responsibilities are doled out.

Today, Scott leads the huddle.

"Yesterday's sales were on target so well done," he says. There's a round of applause and some whoops. I can't escape the feeling the whoops are for my benefit.

Then I'm sent into "recovery" – but not before an awkward encounter. As I walk to the part of the store near the checkouts where less than perfect products are saved from the scrapheap and the best of bargains are to be found, a woman intercepts me. She is wearing the same uniform as I am and we chat amicably for a few minutes. I ask who she is.

"I am the manager," says Claudia Marshall with a hint of surprised hurt in her voice.

I'd expected to meet her later in my day and had all sorts of interesting questions ready. But my mind has gone blank. So we talk about Brexit and how Ireland loves Ikea – her words – for a couple of minutes before she makes her excuses and leaves.

Hours later she announces that she is moving on from her manager's role. Was it something I said?

Kreisimir Koevacevic is Ikea's head of recovery. He started working for the shop in Zagreb before transferring here two years ago. His job is "to make sure the stock is in good condition on the shop floor. If it's not, then it comes to us and we'll see what we can do. If we can't repackage a product or if it's slightly scuffed, then we assemble it and it goes to the bargain corner. If it can't be assembled, we use it for spare parts."

He points at a big machine in the corner. It's the Tornado, a sort of vending machine out of which thousands of spare parts can be summoned. There is a big sign on the vending machine which says "do not enter tornado". It seems like solid advice.

I ask Kreisimir what kind of discounts are available in the bargain corner and he shuffles awkwardly, concerned he might be revealing commercially sensitive information. To help him out I point to price labels showing discounts of 20 and 30 per cent. He looks relieved. I ask when is the best time for shoppers to visit the bargain corner. "Friday morning because we like to have the bargain corner well-stocked ahead of the weekend rush."

Good to know.

Ali Sheridan is the store's sustainability leader and as I and Kreisimir chat about cheap rugs, she hovers. Then she tells me that sustainability is in Ikea's DNA "and one of our core beliefs".

While it would be easy to arch a sceptical eyebrow given that for more than 70 years, the retailer has been selling products which many view as disposable, that would be unfair. Ikea is doing a huge amount of work on reducing the footprint it leaves on the planet. It sells only LED light, pushes



“By 2030 we want to be a fully circular retailer. We want to be in a position to sell products and take them back when they come to the end of their life so that we can reuse them

water-saving taps and induction hobs and harvests rainwater on its roof. The freezer bags it sells by the truckload are made of sugar cane and there are rugs made from recycled plastic bottles.

"By 2030 we want to be a fully circular retailer," Ali says. "We want to be in a position to sell products and take them back when they come to the end of their life so that we can reuse them and ensure there is absolutely no waste."

As she talks, Carrie Kinihan is nearby at a machine to cut boxes to size for Ikea products. She's about to unpack what looks like a perfectly fine box only to repack it in a new one.

What's that about? I wonder.

"People won't buy something if the box is slightly broken like this is," she tells me. "Sometimes customers don't trust the labels on our boxes so they open them to make sure what is inside is the same colour as the label says it is. Then, even if it is the right colour, they still take a new box. I

don't really know why," she says.

The splendidly named Helly Kelly works as "an internal communication specialist" and seems well suited to the role with her boundless enthusiasm for all things Ikea. As we talk I decide – for my own amusement – to count the number of times she says the word co-workers. After less than a minute, I give up; I can't keep track.

"Sometimes when co-workers are talking to other co-workers about co-workers, the co-workers say their co-workers are sharing news about co-workers," she doesn't say. But she may as well have.

She brings me to the co-worker restaurant. Each day there is a free healthy meal option. The fruit and salad bowls are free too. And the food that is not free is very cheap. A cooked breakfast costs about €1, while a hot lunch is €1.50.

Outside the restaurant there is a large notice board on which details of the best co-workers are found. The idea is that co-workers nominate other co-workers for the title of co-worker of the month. People can be nominated for being super helpful or for working efficiently.

"I was nominated once," Helly says brightly. "I didn't win though."

If she had, she'd have been the star turn at a monthly ceremony and then at the end of the year she would have been in the running to win the Irish co-worker of the year award and a holiday to Sweden where she could have hung out with other co-workers of the year from other Ikea branches. "That's very exciting," she says.

There is another notice board which hails staff for their vigilance. It sounds more exciting. One co-worker is cheered for spotting a shopper swapping €10 labels on to products that cost considerably more than that. The notice says she saved the company €350 "and remained calm throughout. The shopper left with nothing." Be warned, label swappers, Ikea is on to you.

I'm walked through the rugs and soft furnishings. "Since Game of Thrones, these have been very popular," Eleanor Murphy says, holding up a sheepskin rug. Why so, I wonder. "They're the capes worn by the people of the north," she says. I nod like I know who the people of the north are.

Cassandra McManus is deputy Comm-In manager and her job is to make the store look swish. She assembles the rooms which greet shoppers at the start of their long, long shopping journey. The rooms are known as the First Five and "are a real point of difference for us", she says.

The First Five are there to show people like me what Ikea products can look like in their natural habitat and how cool our homes and our lives could be if we owned them. I've long marvelled at these rooms where everything is perfectly assembled and beautifully hung. It never looks as good when it gets to my house.

We walk through the house of an imaginary couple with a young baby. It is infuriatingly tidy and free of baby wipes and puke and discarded plastic toys.

We step into a dimly lit room full of black



■ **Conor Pope, working for a day in Ikea in Ballymun, Dublin. "The First Five [showrooms] are there to show people like me what Ikea products can look like in their natural habitat ... it never looks as good when it gets to my house."**

PHOTOGRAPH: DARA MAC DONAILL

leather and dark soft furnishings. "This looks like a 1970s porn star's flat," I say. Cassandra frowns. "It's actually really popular with Millennials."

Finally it's time to go to the public restaurant, the biggest in Ireland. It seats more than 500 people and on a quiet day the tills ring up 1,000 different transactions and more than double that on a busy day. If each transaction covers two people, it means about 4,000 people eat here on a typical Saturday or Sunday. That is a whole lot of meatballs.

And then my time is up and as I return to the locker room to purge myself of yellowness, I resolve to remember the shortcuts I've glimpsed over the course of my day – there are a whole lot more of them than you know.

But I know that even if I do remember them, which is unlikely, I'll never use them. I'm too much of an Ikea sheep to take any of the paths less travelled on my routine pilgrimages through this cathedral of consumption. I might miss something if I did.

**B O D Y**

JUNE 21-23 2019 • BALLINLOUGH CASTLE • CO. WESTMEATH



**MODESELEKTOR (LIVE)**

**THE BLAZE**

**SANTIGOLD**

**KRUDER & DORFMEISTER**

**PRINCESS NOKIA ♣ KATE TEMPEST**

**MANO LE TOUGH ♦ TALOS**

**DREAM WIFE ♣ SOAK**

**WYVERN LINGO ♣ BAIKAL**

**KIDDY SMILE (LIVE) ♣ MONOLINK (LIVE)**

**THE DRIFTER ♦ OSHUN » COELY ♣ LAOISE**

**WHENYOUNG » THE MURDER CAPITAL**

**MELTYBRAINS? ♦ THUMPER**

**NIAMH REGAN ♦ THE CLOCKWORKS**

**RTÉ 2FM RISING  
JUST ANNOUNCED**

**PILLOW QUEENS**

**ROE ♣ TEBI REX**

**TRUE TIDES ♦ FLYNN**

**JYELLOWL » RUSHES**

**FIA MOON**

**MORE MUSIC, CULTURE, COMEDY AND  
WELLNESS TO BE ANNOUNCED SOON**

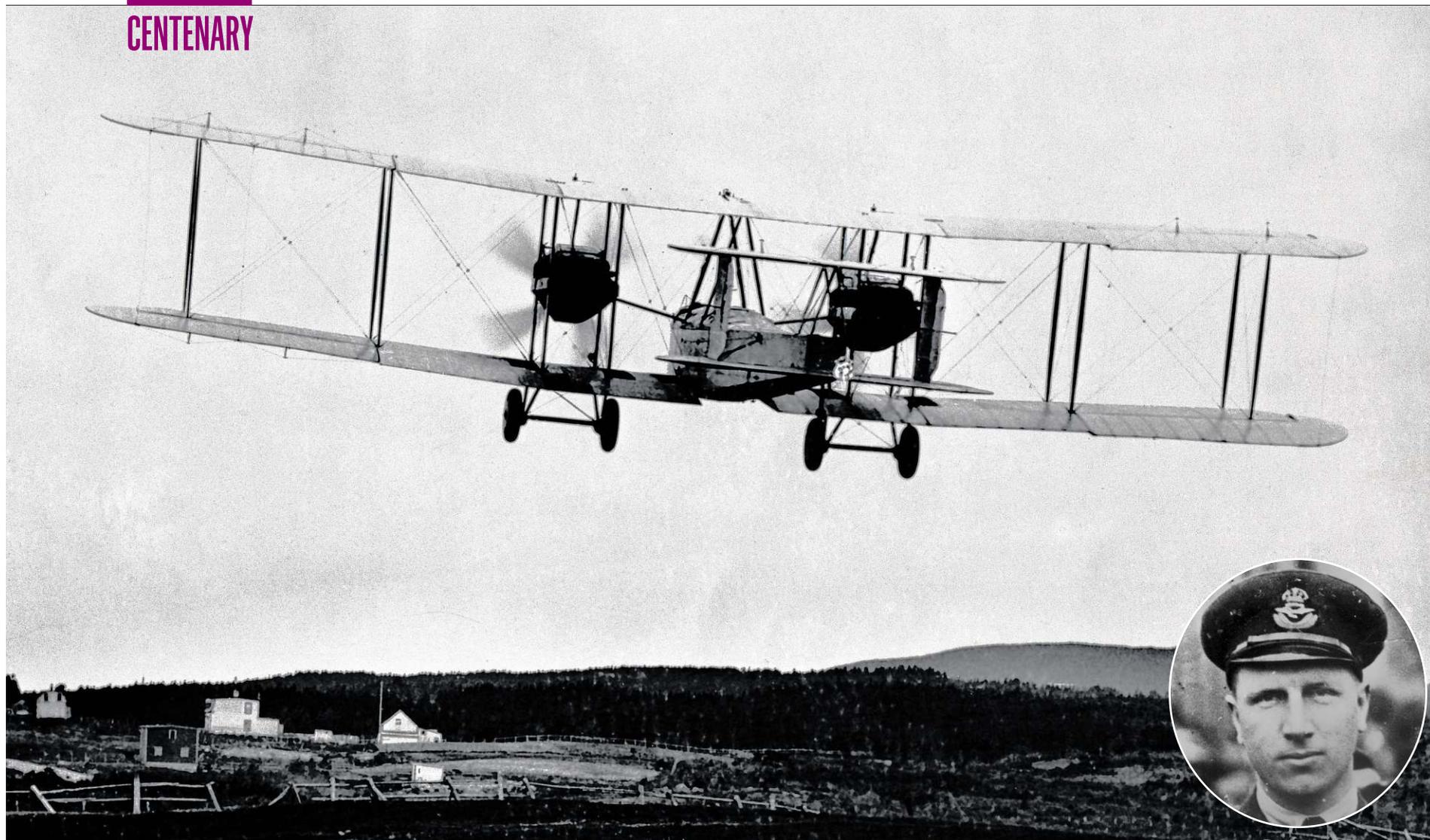
Tickets: €189.50 - €209.50 +Booking fee | Subject to license.

10 YEARS OF JOY

BODYANDSOUL.IE

**S O U L**

Hennessy Veuve Clicquot BULMERS SAMSUNG RTÉ 2™ THE IRISH TIMES



# Flying into history

Next Saturday marks the 100th anniversary of Alcock and Brown's non-stop biplane journey across the Atlantic, writes **Conor Pope**

**W**hen Tom "Cork" Kenny got a tip-off from a police contact in Clifden early on a Sunday morning to say two men had just landed a plane in a bog near the town, and were claiming to have flown across the Atlantic, he didn't waste a second.

The dashing young editor of the *Connacht Tribune* raced to his Model T Ford, and pointed it west. It was June 15th, 1919 – exactly 100 years ago next Saturday – and traffic in Galway was light. He covered the 49 miles (79km) from the city centre at a fair clip, pushing his car close to its top speed of 45mph (about 72km/h) all the way.

Less than two hours later he was rewarded with the scoop of a lifetime, beating a press pack from the biggest news organisations in the world to a story that would change everything.

Seven-year-old Harry O'Sullivan should have been on his way to Mass with his family that same morning, but a case of measles and his mother's fear that the illness might make him more vulnerable to the Spanish Flu – which was, at the time, killing millions of people across the world – saw him confined to his house in Clifden, while his family went out to pray.

He was lying in bed feeling sick and sorry for himself when he heard a deafening roar directly over his head. Terrified but excited, he raced onto the street and, by chance, claimed a very small place in history as one

of the first people to watch a plane fly in off the Atlantic straight from America.

An Australian soldier on his honeymoon looking out a hotel window in the town and a farmer's boy tending cattle nearby were also staring slack-jawed as the plane came spluttering through the mist.

John Alcock and Arthur Whitten-Brown were at its controls. They guided the open cockpit plane onto what they thought was a lush green field near the Marconi Wireless transmission station, some 7km from Clifden, and were less than pleased when it immediately sank nose first into the bog.

They took the mishap in their stride, and once they had clambered out of the Vickers Vimy Atlantic under the wary gaze of Marconi station staff, they could scarcely have been more laid back. "That is the way to fly the Atlantic," Brown the navigator said matter-of-factly. Dusting himself down, Alcock told the onlookers that "if we had a shave and a bath, we should be alright."

Just under 16 hours earlier, the young aviators had flown down a bumpy makeshift runway built on the remote Canadian outcrop of St John's in Newfoundland, and into the unknown.

By any measure, their arrival in Ireland was miraculous. After take-off, they climbed to 11,000 feet (3,353m) in an attempt to get above the clouds so they could navigate by the stars, but no matter how high they climbed, they couldn't shake off the shroud of grey that enveloped them.

Within minutes of reaching the bitterly



cold altitude, their plane's heating system broke. Then its basic communications tools failed, so they couldn't even talk to each other over the drone of the engines.

They flew through hail and snow, and temperatures fell so low that parts of their engine froze. Half way across the Atlantic, Brown had to stand in the cockpit and scrape ice off key components to keep the motor running.

On at least two other occasions, the plane came within feet of crashing into the ocean. At one point, it was just 65 feet above the waves before Alcock regained control, but several hours later, they found themselves flying headlong into the water again. By the time Alcock righted the plane, he could taste salt on his lips from the waves below.

For another spell, completely disoriented by cloud, they turned upside down but on they flew, eating sandwiches and chocolate and drinking lukewarm coffee as they travelled at just over 100 miles an hour (about 161 km/h).

Exactly 15 hours and 57 minutes after take-off, Alcock and Brown landed in Derrigimlagh Bog outside Clifden. They were brought to a house on the sprawling Marconi complex, built in the west of Ireland years earlier because of Connemara's clear line of sight to the America.

Tom "Cork" Kenny met them there. Writing in *The Irish Times* days later, the journalist said of Alcock that he "looked as spruce, attired in a navy lounge suit, and

cheerfully smoking a cigarette as any city man enjoying an hour's content".

The pilot was happy to talk. "Most of the time we were compelled to fly between clouds and very thick banks of fog. Indeed, the conditions were anything but pleasant," he told Kenny. "Sleet fell and our radiator shutters got frozen up, while all our petrol gauges were covered over with ice... The weather was very rough and very bumpy and the wind was blowing hard right down to the water... We never saw the sky even for more than half an hour after the first hour out."

When asked about his overall impressions of the journey, Alcock said there was "no sense of remoteness, curious to say - we were too keen on our work, we wanted to get the job done and were jolly pleased, I tell you, to see the coast."

His calmness after the flight was the measure of the man, his nephew, Tony Alcock, says over the phone from his home

“The following day, Cork's story was on the front of every newspaper in the world. This was the equivalent of Neil Armstrong walking on the moon

near Ipswich.

Born in Manchester in 1892, Sir John - as Tony calls him - was interested in flying from a young age, building kites and hot air balloons. But getting into the air himself seemed like an impossible dream.

"Most of people flying planes before the first World War were wealthy entrepreneurs, but my uncle was basically a working class boy who had left school at 16," the younger Alcock explains.

From school, he joined the Empress engineering firm in Manchester and within two years was promoted to head mechanic. The Empress owner, Charles Fletcher, was a keen flier and he and Alcock became trusted allies.

The young engineer was charged with delivering a motor to Brookland's near London, where British aviation was centred. While there he met early flight pioneer Maurice Ducrocq, who offered him a job. Ducrocq also knew Brown but the pair did not meet - not yet.

"When he arrived at Brookland's there was a real buzz, and the sky above was full of aircraft," Tony Alcock says. "Many of the crews flying there would eventually end up competing in the race across the Atlantic, so they knew each other and there was a healthy rivalry and a great respect. They all shared the aim of going further and going faster."

"Sir John" was just 20 when he got his pilot's license in 1912.

Then war came, and he joined the embry-

■ **Left: The Vickers Vimy biplane flown by John Alcock (left inset) and Arthur Whitten-Brown (right inset) taking off from Newfoundland, Canada, for their historic Atlantic crossing on June 14th, 1919.**

**Above: the aircraft after it had crash-landed on a bog in Clifden, Co Galway.**

PHOTOGRAPH: SCIENCE & SOCIETY PICTURE LIBRARY/SSPL/GETTY IMAGES

onic Royal Air Force (RAF). He flew long range bombing raids over the Turkish front, and was shot down over Suvla Bay and sent to a POW camp, where he spent months kicking his heels and dreaming of flying again.

Scottish-born Arthur Whitten-Brown grew up in Manchester, and like Alcock, he enlisted in 1914. He fought in the land war - in Ypres and the Somme - before joining the RAF. He too was shot down - over Germany - and spent time in a POW camp before being repatriated to England with serious leg injuries.

Immediately after the war, the Vickers aircraft manufacturers set about converting one of their bomber planes into something that could fly an ocean. Alcock had been working as a test pilot with the firm, and was paired with Brown in the spring of 1919. Together they sailed across the Atlantic to Canada, to join an amazing race.

In 1913, the Chapelizod-born owner of the *Daily Mail*, Alfred Harmsworth, the

First Viscount Northcliffe, had offered £10,000 to anyone who could fly non-stop across the ocean. It was just one of many cash prizes he had put on the table for flying challenges.

In some quarters, the Viscount was hailed as a hero for pouring so much cash into flying, while others believed that by dangling a prize of £10,000 for something so dangerous, he was being reckless, and would be responsible for sending people to their deaths.

The reality was that when the Daily Mail first announced the prize in 1913, flying the Atlantic was a fanciful notion. Then war came and the competition was paused. But after the Armistice, the newspaper announced that the cash was up for grabs again. By then the notion was less fanciful, as four years of war had vastly improved aviation technology.

Alcock and Brown were one of four serious crews in the race to cross the Atlantic, and over several extraordinary weeks in the early summer of 1919, all the teams had assembled in Newfoundland – a location chosen because it was the nearest land on the North American continent to Europe.

One plane, flown by Australian aviator Harry Hawker, had taken off already. On May 18th, 1919, Hawker and his navigator Kenneth Mackenzie Grieve took to the air from close to Alcock and Brown's landing strip. But after more than 14 gruelling hours, Hawker's engine died. He and his navigator should have died too, but they made it to a shipping lane where they ditched their plane into the water near a Danish steam ship called Mary.

They were pulled alive from the sea by the crew on the Mary, which was bound for Scotland. It had no radio, so the world didn't realise for almost a week that Hawker and Grieve had survived. They got a rapturous welcome when they reached land, and the Daily Mail gave them a cheque for £5,000 for their bravery.

"Sir John was very pleased that Hawker had been saved but a little disappointed at how the whole of the country gave them a heroes' welcome," his nephew Tony says now.

"Their hands are so blistered from clapping Harry Hawker that we'll be lucky to get even a languid hand," was what Alcock said then, when he heard of his rival's safe but slow return to Scotland.

Less than three weeks later, news came over the wires that he and Brown had won the big prize. That news was broken by Tom "Cork" Kenny. His grandson, also called Tom Kenny – of Kenny's bookshop in Galway – heard some details of how the story unfolded in a Connemara pub in the 1970s.

"I was in a pub in Roundstone 40 years ago," he says "when someone called out to me and said: 'Was your father a journalist?' I said: 'No, but my grandfather was.' And he said 'I'm the sergeant's son'. I'd no idea what he was talking about. The man's father was the RIC sergeant in Clifden, and one of the first people to get to the site of



■ Above: Connacht Tribune editor Tom 'Cork' Kenny who was rewarded with the scoop of a lifetime, beating a press pack from the biggest news organisations in the world.

Left: The front page of The Weekly Irish Times on June 21st, 1919.

Facing page: Alcock and Brown receiving their £10,000 prize from Winston Churchill.

PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES

other contact who let him in. "He was allowed use the radio station to get the news out," his grandson says. Kenny then drove the fliers to Galway, and put them up in the Great Southern Hotel on Eyre Square.

The Daily Mail had a journalist in the hotel, waiting for news of the crossing, but the first he heard of it was when Kenny's telegram landed. He immediately set off for Clifden, unaware the men he was waiting for were heading straight for him.

"The following day, Cork's story was on the front of every newspaper in the world," Kenny says. "This was the equivalent of Neil Armstrong walking on the moon."

He says: "The Great Southern Hotel had a direct link with the station, so you could walk directly from the hotel onto the station platform. According to our family story, the next morning the Dublin train

pulled in and all these reporters, photographers and cameramen came rushing off it.

"They commandeered every mode of transport they could get their hands on, and raced to Clifden. Then my grandfather calmly walked out onto the empty platform from the hotel, with the two boys, and they took the train to Dublin."

Kenny's report for The Irish Times paints a vivid picture of what happened next. The two fliers were feted at every train station along the route, and given the "most enthusiastic reception" when they arrived at Dublin's Broadstone.

They were brought to Trinity College, where "the whole hall rose to their feet and cheered vociferously. At the end of Commons, when the Latin grace had been said, the Provost and Captain Alcock headed the procession," Kenny wrote.

The fliers were taken to the main gate, and "with about 30 students hanging on to it, the motor car drove to the Automobile Club [on Dawson Street] where the students carried Captain Alcock up the steps, and delivered him over to those waiting to receive him. After partaking of tea, they were subsequently entertained to dinner in the St Stephen's Green Club, and spent the night as guests of the Chief Secretary for Ireland at his lodge in the Phoenix Park."

From there, Kenny went with Alcock and Brown to London, where they were greeted by thousands of cheering well-wishers well able to muster more than a "languid hand"; despite Alcock's earlier

the landing. Very quickly he realised the importance of what had happened."

The sergeant called Kenny's grandfather. "He would've been the most significant journalist in the west of Ireland at the time," Kenny says.

When the journalist got to the Marconi station, security was tight, but he met an-

fears. Winston Churchill presented them with their £10,000 prize, after which they were knighted by King George V. Other businesses gave them more prize money, which they shared with the Vickers crew that had built their plane.

At that moment, they were the most famous men on the planet, and could have been forgiven for thinking their epic journey had secured them a permanent place amongst the greatest adventurers in human history.

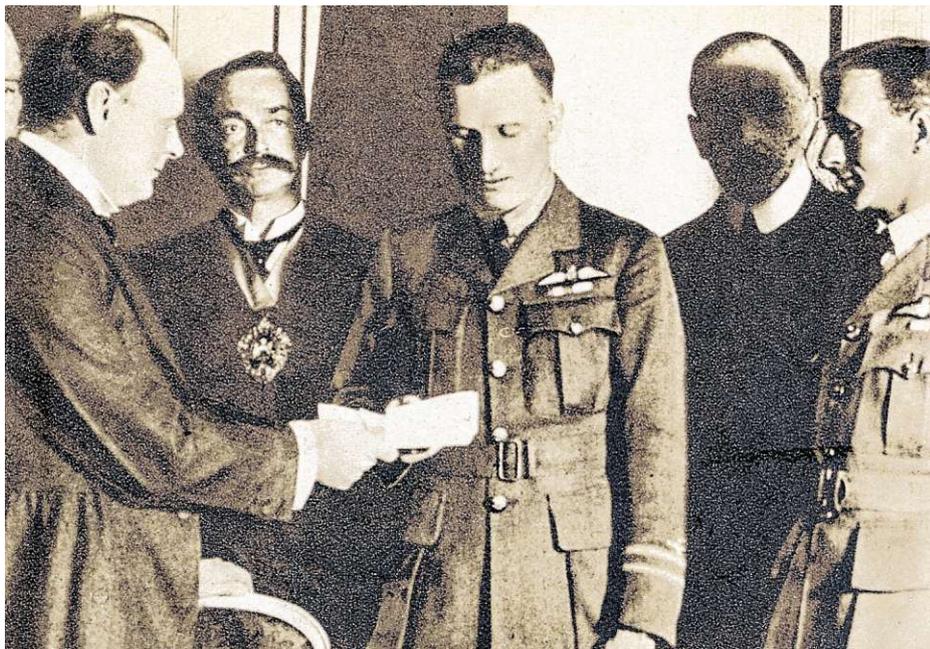
So it should have done. But, within a few years, a fickle world had turned its attention to other heroes and other stories, and the men's incredible bravery and determination quickly faded from memory.

Alcock was dead before the curtain came down on 1919. He was killed after another Vickers plane he was flying to an airshow in Paris ran into fog. He had flown low to get his bearings and hit a tree. He died en route to a French hospital.

"Alcock and Brown were both very different personalities, but they formed a real bond, and when Brown heard of Sir John's death, it shattered his life and he became a bit of a recluse," Tony Alcock says.

Years passed, and Brown's tragedy was compounded when his son died while flying reconnaissance over the D-Day beaches. In 1948, Brown himself died after what is said to have been an accidental overdose of prescribed medication.

Almost immediately, Alcock and Brown



became the forgotten fliers of the 20th century. There are still people who refuse to let their story die, however, and they are using the low-key centenary celebrations taking place this month in Ireland, Manchester and Canada to remind the world just how remarkable Alcock and Brown were.

"I am genuinely mystified as to how they were forgotten," says Brendan Lynch, author of the book *Yesterday We Were In America*, which tells the story of the flight in comprehensive detail.

It is a story Lynch first heard as a child in his home in Tipperary. When aviation record breaker Steve Fossett and his co-pilot Mark Rebholz successfully re-enacted the journey in 2005, Lynch was there to see the plane fly in over the Irish coast and land on a Connemara golf course. "To see that plane fluttering in off the Atlantic was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life," he says.

"What Alcock and Brown did was the biggest aviation achievement after the Wright

Brothers first hopped off the ground 16 years earlier. They opened up the Atlantic, and showed the world the possibilities aviation had.

"They are overlooked by history, I really don't know why. I suppose Lindbergh was the clean-cut American hero, while Alcock and Brown were just not that interested in fame, they were hard workers who wanted to get on with things, and that took Americans by surprise."

Alcock's nephew Tony is similarly mystified by how poorly history has treated them. "What Alcock and Brown did was probably more impressive, even, than what the Wright Brothers had achieved, because they opened up the Atlantic and crossed it in the most horrendous conditions right along their intended track with only the most basic of equipment. I don't know why they did not get the recognition they deserved."

Lynch believes this month's centenary celebrations, largely centred around St John's and Clifden, should mark the moment when that great historical wrong is righted. "I hope the centenary will help people to remember the most forgotten, most overlooked men in aviation history. What they endured on that flight was unbelievable, and it should always serve as a reminder of just how far we have all come."

For more information about the centenary celebrations, see [alcockandbrown100.com](http://alcockandbrown100.com)



## EXPLORE CYPRUS THIS SUMMER

Picturesque beaches, ancient forts and harbour-side nightspots. Fly Direct to Paphos from Dublin Airport.

[tuiholidays.ie](http://tuiholidays.ie) | App | TUI Store | Travel Agent



**FREE**  
CHILD PLACES  
AVAILABLE\*

\*Offer is subject to availability, terms and conditions apply. TUI is a trading name of TUI Ireland Limited and is fully licensed and bonded by CAR T.O.021.