

An Unbidden Visitor



The ideas for many of the stories I write come from snippets I hear or read about past events in County Fermanagh. I first heard the tale of the Cooneen or Coonian Ghost not long after my husband and I moved to near Brookeborough, more than a decade ago. Local lore says that a poltergeist drove a widow, Bridget Murphy, and her six children from their home and across the sea to America. It happened at the beginning of the last century, a couple miles from where I live. One Sunday my husband and I went to see the cottage at Mullaghfad. At the time, it was in the middle of a forestry plantation and could barely be glimpsed from the road, but recently the forest was felled this year, leaving it starkly visible.

We jumped over a small ditch or sheugh beside the road and picked our way through the trees until we came to a greying, run-down, rather forbidding building in a small clearing. Although we saw nothing otherworldly that day, the house had an eerie atmosphere and I wouldn't have volunteered to remain there after dark.

After that visit, the story intrigued me even more. It's not difficult to find articles online, but they can be confusing. Details conflict and the tale seems to have grown as it was re-told over the years. I went back to earlier sources. I read contemporary local newspaper articles (published in 1913) and Shane Leslie's Ghost Book (first published in 1955) to get the story more or less as it was originally told.

As I delved into accounts of the events at the farmhouse, I could see the scenes and the Murphy family in my mind. I couldn't help wondering about the family and what must it have been like to live in their house, and how it felt to have their friends and neighbours withdraw from them in fear.

This imagining was the starting point for my fictional short story, *An Unbidden Visitor*. Although I have used some artistic licence in my telling of the story, I have stayed as true to the real account as I could. I wouldn't want to displease the Coonian ghost.

An Unbidden Visitor was officially launched at the Fermanagh Authors' Association/Fermanagh Writers stall during the Fermanagh County Show this month. It is available directly from the author at a special launch price (£2.50 + postage) or in print or Kindle versions on Amazon.

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