

revolution



the freedom to discuss and plot together.

Another notable prisoner in Frongoch was Arthur Shields, who would go on to become a popular Hollywood actor starring in films such as 'The Quiet Man'.

The prison guards at Frongoch, soldiers who were deemed too old or infirm to fight on the front during World War I, were helpless to prevent political discussion.

A recreation field which the inmates used was named 'Croke Park' and here Collins, then aged 26, and others would play Gaelic football matches – often a team from the North Camp facing a team from the South Camp. Hurling was banned in the camp, as prison officers feared the men might turn the hurls on them. Wrestling too was popular amongst the prisoners.

But though they did their best to keep fit and stay upbeat, the damp and cramped conditions proved difficult, especially during the winter months of 1916.

The South Camp became rat-infested and some believe the Irish word for rat – 'franchach' – may have derived from here.

First-hand accounts and diary entries

by inmates tell how some found breathing difficult while others struggled within the confined living spaces. Collins wrote in a letter home that 30 men had to sleep in each wooden hut.

By the end of 1916 it became clear that the British used the mass exodus of Irish prisoners to Frongoch as nothing more than a PR exercise. As a military ploy, it would dramatically back-fire within just two years.

Indeed, David Lloyd George, having succeeded Asquith as British prime minister, closed the camp just before Christmas 1916, as it had clearly become a source of national embarrassment to the British government.

Today the camp sits idle with the old distillery totally demolished and sheep grazing in the field that separated South Camp from North Camp. The old train platform stands at the rear of a private home out of public view and only a small plaque attached to a rock by the roadside marks the spot of the former camp – the University of Revolution.

WB Yeats tops readers' poll

READERS of the 1916 Collection have voted WB Yeats' Easter 1916 as their favourite of the ten 'Rising Poems' featured in the magazine series. Conducted in conjunction

with Independent.ie, Yeats' poem claimed more than a quarter of the preferences of almost 1,000 readers who voted.

The voting went as follows:



POEM	POET	%
Easter, 1916	WB Yeats	25.7
The Foggy Dew	Canon Charles O'Neill	17.3
The Mother	Patrick Pearse	13.4
I See His Blood Upon the Rose	Joseph Plunkett	11.3
Connolly	Liam Mac Gabhann	9.4
The Wayfarer	Patrick Pearse	7.8
Imperial Measure	Vona Groarke	5.5
Comrades	Eva Gore-Booth	3.6
Wishes for my Son	Thomas MacDonagh	3.5
Sixteen Dead Men	WB Yeats	2.5

'Imperial Measure'

By Vona Groarke

The kitchens of the Metropole and Imperial hotels yielded up to the Irish Republic their armory of fillet, brisket, flank. Though destined for more palatable tongues, it was pressed to service in an Irish stew and served on fine bone china with bread that turned to powder in their mouths. Brioche, artichokes, tomatoes tasted for the first time: staunch and sweet on Monday, but by Thursday, they had overstretched to spill their livid plenitude on the fires of Sackville Street.

A cow and her two calves were commandeered. One calf was killed, its harnessed blood clotting the morning like news that wasn't welcome when, eventually, it came. The women managed the blood into black puddings washed down with milk from the cow in the yard who smelt smoke on the wind and fire on the skin of her calf. Whose fear they took for loss and fretted with her until daylight crept between crossfire and the sights of Marrowbone Lane.

Brownies, Simmel cake, biscuits slumped under royal icing. Éclairs with their cream already turned. Crackers, tonnes of them: the floor of Jacobs' studded with crumbs, so every footfall was a recoil from a gunshot across town, and the flakes a constant needling in mouths already seared by the one drink – a gross or two of cooking chocolate, stewed and taken without sweetener or milk. Its skin was riven every time the ladle dipped but, just as quickly, it seized up again.

Nellie Gifford magicked oatmeal and a half-crowned loaf to make porridge in a grate in the College of Surgeons where drawings of field surgery had spilled from Ypres to drench in wounds the whitewashed walls of the lecture hall. When the porridge gave out, there was rice: a biscuit-tin of it for fourteen men, a ladleful each that scarcely knocked the corners off their undiminished appetites; their vast, undaunted thirst.

The sacks of flour ballasting the garrison gave up their downy protest under fire. It might have been a fall of Easter snow sent to muffle the rifles or to deaden the aim.

Every blow was a flurry that thickened the air of Boland's Mill, so breath was ghosted by its own white consequence. The men's clothes were talced with it, as though they were newborns, palmed and swathed, their foreheads kissed, their grip unclenched, their fists and arms first blessed and, then, made much of.

The cellars of the Four Courts were intact at the surrender, but the hock had been agitated, the Reisling set astir. For years, the wines were sullied with a leaden aftertaste, although the champagne had as full a throat as ever, and the spirits kept their heady confidence, for all the stockpiled bottles had chimed with every hit, and the calculating scales above it all had had the measure of nothing, or nothing if not smoke, and then wildfire.

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AN ASSESSMENT DR LUCY COLLINS

In this poem, published in 2001, Groarke creates a new narrative of the events of 1916 – one in which the domestic background to the Rising becomes its foreground. In this poem of long lines and vivid images, the practical, yet sensory, power of food gives expression to complex social and political interactions.

The title of the poem plays on Ireland's position within the British Empire, indicating the significant, yet unpredictable, consequences of rebellion against this power. Idealism must soon yield to traumatic action, just as the choice cuts of meat and exotic vegetables commandeered at the start of the rebellion turn to waste.

The brutal killing of a calf suggests that the folk representation of Ireland as a cow must now be sacrificed to more practical ends. With the sweetness of daring comes bitterness: luxurious foods

become unpalatable when taken to excess, as the highest aims are compromised by reality.

Contingency also shapes the survival strategies dramatised here: when one opportunity is exhausted, another is tried; yet the hunger that first motivated the rebels cannot be satisfied. Even after the surrender, the full measure of Rising's effects can only be imagined.

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