

Witnesses to a local tragedy

As the 60th anniversary approaches, John Bradley talks about his new book on the Carmody's Hotel disaster

AS a young man, John Bradley was at the scene of one of the greatest tragedies to ever occur in Ennis, when eight people died after a hotel floor collapsed during a busy auction. Now, 60 years after the Carmody's Hotel disaster, John will launch a new book, remembering those who lost their lives and also those affected by the incident, which sent shockwaves across the country and the world.

Next Sunday, January 14, as part of Carmody's Hotel commemoration ceremony, Clare Roots Society will be launching their first book of 2018, *Carmody's Hotel, Ennis*. Mayor of Ennis, Paul Murphy will formally launch the book at 12.30pm at the parish centre at the rear of Ennis Cathedral. The launch will be preceded by a mass of remembrance for the eight people who lost their lives on January 15, 1958.

In this book, John has captured details of the Carmody tragedy, using newspaper reports and also through interviews with survivors and people associated with the event. Researched and edited by John, the book recounts the owners, the guests and the history of what was, for a century and a half, an iconic landmark in the town of Ennis.

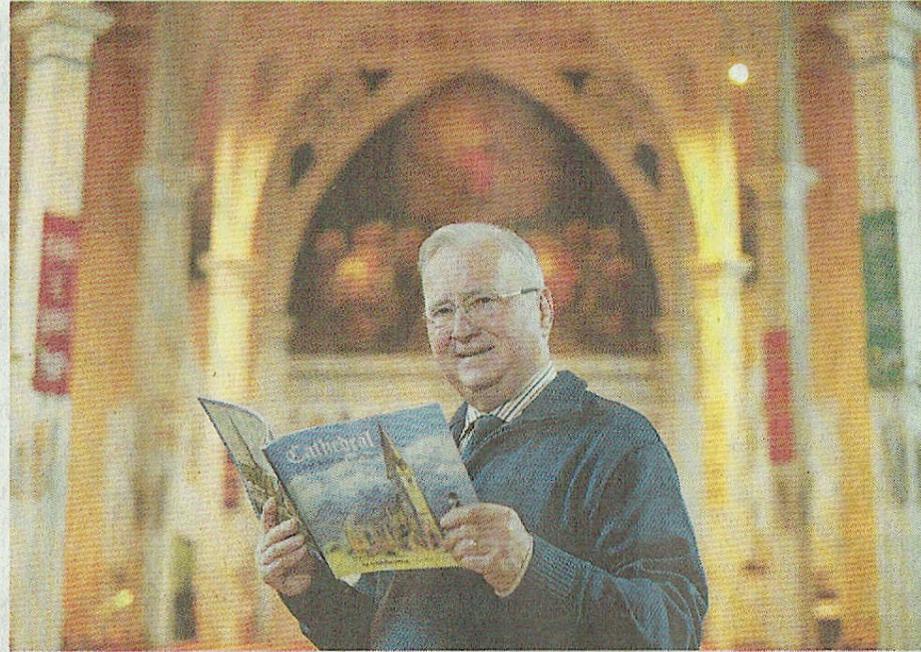
John recalled, "It was a special day, a day that began with great excitement, expectation and

promise. The street was busy, busier than usual. On one side, the Queen's Hotel was catering for a double family wedding. On the other side of the street, people were gathering at Carmody's Hotel, with a certain amount of nostalgia with the sale of artifacts associated with the hotel's long history.

"The auction began at 2.30pm. Shortly afterward, tragedy struck, when the floor of the Sarsfield Room, where the auction was being held, gave way under the weight of people, furniture and other items to be offered for sale. After the dust settled, eight were found dead and 25 injured, 14 of whom were removed to the county hospital. News spread, with local, national, and international media descending on Ennis," he said.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, the then 17-year-old John stood on the gate pillar, overlooking the devastation. "Looking down on the catastrophe from my elevated position on the gate pillar, observing the pandemonium and consternation unfolding in front of me, I was powerless and bewildered as to the seriousness of the tragedy – eight dead and many others injured. The bodies of the dead and injured were taken by ambulance."

Those who lost their lives in the tragedy were Mrs Bridie Byrne of



Author and historian John Bradley has written several books on the history of Ennis.

Kilrush; Mrs Josephine Carmody, Barefield; Mrs Margaret Coffey, Clarecastle; Mrs Nora Considine, Corofin, Professor Ernest De Regge, 1 Bindon Street, Ennis; Tomás Donlon, Bindon Street, Ennis; Mr James Fitzgibbon, Marian Avenue, Ennis and Mrs Ellen McNamara, Crusheen.

But that was not all. A light aircraft, piloted by Captain Arthur C Morgan, resulted in him also

losing his life. He was engaged to fly the pictures of the Ennis tragedy to Manchester. In a hurry, he failed to close one of the cockpit doors, resulting in the plane plunging into the Shannon Estuary.

Carmody's Hotel was composed of two buildings. The main building was demolished after the disaster and the other is now YOLO Bar and Restaurant.

On the 40th anniversary of the tragedy, Ennis Town Council unveiled a plaque on the gable wall of YOLO, listing the names of those who lost their lives in the tragedy.

In the book, we learn of the history of Carmody's Hotel, which dated back to 1804, under the ownership of the Carmody, Dillon, McKenna and Baily families. The hotel was frequented by

many political leaders over the years, including Parnell and de Valera. Indeed, it is rumoured that Parnell met Kitty O'Shea for the first time in the hotel. The Liberator, Daniel O'Connell, is reported to have stayed there on numerous occasions.

The book includes a collection of memories from those who survived. Michael Houlihan recalls "sliding down into the far corner of the room, with his entire body wedged, with his hands behind him and only his face above the debris and being unable to move in any direction". Frank Casey recalled grabbing his six-year-old daughter, Marion, and passing her to two men who were standing at the door. Other memories are from Detective Officer Thomas McCarrick, Michael Carr, Cyril de Courcy, Claire Higgins, Siney Honan, Nancy Murphy, Nora McNamara Healy, Martha Mathews, Michael Crimmins and Rita Flynn, John (Brudsy) O'Halloran, David Browne, Michael Tierney and Sean Spring.

The Daily Express reported on the double wedding taking place at the Queen's Hotel across the street. Brothers William Joseph Corbett and James Corbett married Elizabeth Kelly and Mary Mulvihill a few hours previously and were later assisting the injured. Nurse Elizabeth Kelly was described as 'The Angel of

County Clare'.

Journalist John Howard recalled how, as a young reporter working for *The Evening Herald*, he discovered that when a big story broke, a well-oiled machine went into top gear at lightning speed. Ghislaine De Regge, daughter of Ernest, describes her arrival from Belgium to Ennis and subsequent return on the death of her father.

Gerry Quinn recalls his radio documentary, *As If Night Fell*, produced in 1998 about the calamitous disaster.

Also included is an interview by Tara King with Garda Kieran Crowe, who, just three months after qualifying as a garda, was not expecting to encounter a plane crash at Shannon, a sudden death in Abbey Street in Ennis and the collapse of the first floor of Carmody's Hotel, all in the space of 24 hours.

John is not new to publication, having previously produced two other books in conjunction with Clare Roots Society – *The Cathedral*, which details the history of Ss Peter and Paul Cathedral, Ennis, and *Drumcliff* (Calvary Section), which contained a self-walking tour along with gravestone inscriptions.

An open invitation is extended to all to the mass of remembrance and the book launch and commemoration ceremony.