

THE HOTELS



HOYFM.WAG.3232 CUSHENDUN, CO. ANTRIM W. A. Green © National Museums NI
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By the 1920s, a summer holiday had become the norm, at least for the middle classes. For many it was a chance to escape the noise and pollution of city life and enjoy the healthy benefits of 'the great outdoors'. Mind you, for plenty of country children the summer was far from a holiday as they were expected to help with the harvest, turf cutting and, in resorts such as Cushendun, to help out in the hotels and B&Bs.

The new holiday makers wanted something a little more modern and glamorous than a traditional inn or rooms in a house, they wanted a hotel. The first hotel in Cushendun was The Anchorage established by Maurice Findlay early in the 20th century, but it was the Cushendun Hotel, opened on the 15th November 1925 that caught the spirit of the times.

Mrs McBride bought and converted the old scutch mill and rope works on the south side of the harbour to provide modern accommodation, initially comprising 16 bedrooms, two toilets, one bathroom, and private and public sitting rooms. In 1927 the Anchorage was bought by the Elliots and renamed The Glendun Hotel. By the mid-1930s both hotels were booming, the Cushendun Hotel had expanded with 30 rooms and visitor numbers were impressive. Here, in 1936, the Elliots established the very modern and stylish Bay Cafe (later the Bay Hotel).

Hotels offered their guests an affordable version of the country house lifestyle enjoyed by the upper classes. Both the hotels had tennis courts, and swimming, fishing and picnics were popular pastimes for that precious fortnight of leisure. All meals were taken in the hotel, usually at one sitting. Randal McDonnell recounts that the Glendun Hotel, run by the Elliots was considered slightly 'posher' serving breakfast, lunch and 'dinner' rather than high-tea. A gong would be rung at mealtimes to bring the guests in from the beach.

The driving force behind The Cushendun Hotel was undoubtedly Mrs Elizabeth McBride whose entrepreneurial mind and limitless energy powered the business. She invested to provide all the latest requirements of a modern hotel including hot and cold water in every room, sprung mattresses and electric light. In 1935, she bought at auction in Glasgow, the fixtures and fittings from a Harland and Wolf luxury liner, the *Minnewaska* which she used to furnish the rooms.



Courtesy of R McDonnell

The Guests

Among the hundreds of summer guests were many people of interest. Perhaps the most famous in her day was Mercedes Gleitz, the first woman to swim the English Channel, who stayed at the Cushendun Hotel before attempting to swim the North Channel to Kintyre circa 1927.



Devil's Rock (1937) by Richard Hayward
Courtesy of Northern Ireland Screen Digital Film Archive, © Richard Hayward Estate and National Museums NI. This 35mm film was digitised as part of the BFI's Unlocking Film Heritage awarding funds from The National Lottery.



Mercedes Gleitze by Underwood & Underwood vintage print, 26 June 1928
NPG x136729 © National Portrait Gallery, London

The Staff

Looking after all the holiday makers was hard work, especially in the days before reliable electricity. Food had to be freshly prepared, fires lit, bars kept and all the laundry.

The hotels were a big part of the local economy and the list of some-time employees includes many local names as well as the proprietors' families, who were roped in to help from an early age. To name but a few, Kathleen McNeill, Annie McGee, Brenda O'Hara, Marie Mort, Sean Scullion and, running the bar across the bridge, the eponymous Mary McBride.



Cushendun Hotel lounge, courtesy of R. McDonnell



Courtesy of R. McDonnell



Courtesy of P. Grieve McKeegan

"The wee village of Cushendun, the Foot of the Dun River is perfectly placed at the side of a lovely bay, with a grand strand for bathing and lazing. There are two good hotels here, very good indeed, and fine fishing up the Glendun River".

Richard Hayward • In Praise of Ulster 1938.