

War Correspondents in the Crimea

SIR WILLIAM HOWARD RUSSELL (1821-1907)

William Russell was born at Lilyvale, near Tallaght, in the county of Dublin, on the 28th of March 1821, being one of the Russell's of Limerick, whose settlement in Ireland dates from the time of Richard II.

Raised by a Protestant father and Catholic mother in Ireland, Russell's family moved to Liverpool, England while he was still a child. He entered Trinity College, Dublin, in 1838. Three years later a relative, Mr R. W. Russell, who had been sent to Ireland by the *Times*, deputed him to report the Irish elections at Longford, and his success turned William Russell's attention to journalism.

Coming to London in 1842, Russell went to Cambridge, but left before taking a degree. In the following year he was sent by the *Times* to Ireland to report the O'Connell meetings, and became their special correspondent in Denmark in the war of 1849-50. He was called to the bar at the Middle Temple in 1851.

The Crimean War was carried on chiefly in the Crimea, on the part of Turkey aided by Britain and France, in which Sardinia eventually joined them, against the encroachments of Russia in the east and which was proclaimed against Russia on March 24, 1854.

Initially sent by John Delane, the editor of the *Times*, to Malta to cover English support for Russia in 1854, Russell despised the term "war correspondent" though his coverage of the conflict brought him international renown.

He was described by one of the soldiers on the frontlines thus, "a vulgar low Irishman, who sings a good song, drinks anyone's brandy and water and smokes as many cigars as a Jolly Good Fellow. He is just the sort of chap to get information, particularly out of youngsters."

This reputation however, led to Russell being blacklisted some circles, including British commander Lord Raglan, who advised his officers to refuse to speak with the reporter. On the outbreak of the war Russell went out as special correspondent, and, accompanying the light division to Gallipoli, proceeded with the first detachment to Varna. On the embarkation for the Crimea he was attached to the second division, and landed with it on the 14th of September.

On September 20, 1854, Russell covered the battle above the Alma River - writing his missive the

Brigadier-General **Robert Garrett** (sitting at the right side of the table) and officers of the **46th (South Devonshire) Regiment of Foot** during the Crimean War. Sitting at the left is **William Russell**, a famous Times correspondent. The figure on the right seems to be a civilian servant.

Basildon Borough Heritage Society
Updated December 2024.