

Downey, Edmund

by John Rouse

Downey, Edmund (1856–1937) publisher, editor, and author, was born 24 July 1856 in Waterford, the son of William Downey, a ship owner and broker, and his wife Margaret (née Hayes). He was educated in Waterford at the Catholic University School, and St. John's College, where he excelled, and on finishing school he decided to go to London to seek his fortune. His cousin, the novelist Richard Dowling (qv), who was then working in London as an editor for Tinsley's Magazine, got him work in the publishing company, and he succeeded Dowling as editor of the magazine. After the death of Tinsley in 1884 he started a publishing company with a partner, but left in 1890 to start his own company. During this time he contributed articles to magazines, but it was not until he started his own company that he began to publish his own novels under the pseudonym F. M. Allen. His publishing company also concentrated on publishing Irish authors and producing cheap versions of Irish classics. He himself wrote a series of nautical tales, but is best known for his comic histories told in colourful Hiberno-English by 'Dan Banim', such as *Through green glasses* (1887) and *Green as grass* (1892). Among his other works are *Merchant of Killoogue* (1894) and *Clashmere* (1903), which show some potential as a serious novelist.

In 1906 he returned to Waterford and bought the *Waterford News* from a school friend, Banquo Redmond. His most notable writing at this stage was *The story of Waterford* (1914), a history of the city, and *The illustrated guide to Waterford*, a portrait gallery of the city's worthies with biographical notes.

After the rising of 1916 he became an ardent member of Sinn Féin, addressing several election meetings and was appointed honorary treasurer of the Sinn Féin fund during the war of independence. In his paper he championed the Sinn Féin movement, which incurred the wrath of the authorities and forced him to go on the run for a period. A friend of Éamon de Valera (qv), he opposed the Anglo–Irish treaty and strongly supported Fianna Fáil from its foundation in 1926.

He died 11 February 1937 in Waterford. He married twice: in 1880 to Frances Margaret Allen (d. 1918) and in 1928 to J. Quinlan, daughter of a former mayor of Waterford. He had six children.

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