

# "WIRES"

by Thomas Ryan

I remember this extraordinary person with a vividness his appearance deserves. He was quite exceptional. Anyone in contact with Mars, as he was reported to be, was outside the range of the conventional small town madman. Then his reputation as an 'educated man' gave him a further distinction — the place was full of mal-adjusted persons, all loose or nearly so, quite dotty in their respective forms, but all (satisfactorily) low-witted. An educated madman was, for us, a contradiction. Not so, nowadays, when the psychiatric wards are bulging with Ph.D s.

Anyhow, this man was distinctive in his dress. It wasn't that it was extravagant or archaic: it was largely original. He was a walking powerhouse. As clerks used to carry biros, pencils, and fountain pens to dazzle the bedazzled, so did he display a collection of batteries, lead aprons, and wires and wires galore.

He was held together — 'connected' as it were — with wires! They ran from the batteries he supported on his head under an enormous distended cap to a small electrical factory he wore on his chest, and from the bound bundles of 'Ever Readys' on the carriers — he had two, over front and rear wheels—and from another enormous one suspended from the bar of the frame to his person.

Very sensibly, he wheeled the bicycle—at least I never saw him mount the machine. Anyway, the tires were flat.

The poor man was as dark as a Hottentot. He was covered from head to toe with dirty, black grease. Whether this was to conduct the Martian rays with superior efficacy, or to protect himself from injurious leaks, I do not know; I only know that he looked abominably black and smelled like a dirty engine.

'Wires' was the spontaneous nickname given to him soon after his first appearance on the streets of Limerick. He was reputed to speak in an Oxford accent, a confirmation of the story that he was an Englishman, a gentleman, an officer and, we suspected, a Protestant. As I never actually heard him speak, I had to accept all this on heresay; one thing I was certain of was that he did not attend the Dominican Church. As this showed his 'non-Catholic' persuasion, the rest was easily believed.

The clothing of Wires deteriorated badly over the years until he was reduced to wearing a girdle or skirt of what appeared to be window blinds material. It gave him a Robinson Crusoe look which, with the wired-up bike, was



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'Wires'

most wonderful to behold.

Wires had a room in 'The Soldiers' Home' in Hartstonge Street. Boys boasted of having peeped in to see a veritable Ardnacrusha: wires, hawsers, bubbling cauldrons, "like Frankenstein had", and books all over the place. Truly an unusual person.

He was quite harmless: worse, he was unresponsive and gave no reaction, verbal or otherwise, to a 'rise'. Not so 'Mad Jim', who replied in a torrent of 'fs' (to our gratification) — Jim was an excellent and dependable 'riser'.

Wires was reputed to be well-to-do. It was said he had a British Army pension which he regularly collected. As he did not beg or seek alms at religious houses, his solvency was, no doubt, somewhat exaggerated, but the story of an educated man shell-shocked into lunacy seemed a likely one.

At some stage during the War years he was no longer about. Someone said he was dead.

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| 1944<br>November<br>Twenty Sixth<br>Hartstonge<br>Hall<br>Limerick<br>CB. | George<br>Turner.                     | Male   | Bachelor           | 65<br>years                                       | Annuitant   | Gangrene of<br>feet.<br><br>certified  | M. J. Egan<br>Present at<br>Death<br><br>certified   |  |

imse leis seo gur Fíor Chóip í seo de Thaifead Uimh. 259 i gClár-leabhar Básanna atá faoi mo chúram.

The death certificate of George Turner, 65 years, Annuitant. Cause of death: Gangrene of the feet.