# A MILLSTREET MISCELLANY (9)

**Aubane Historical Society**

# A MILLSTREET MISCELLANY (9)

**edited by**

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# MORE VISITORS AND PASSERS-BY

**“From an English Officer to his mother”**

“ALTHOUGH it is no more than probable that I may be with you before this letter reaches you, by the way of Dublin, yet having a leisure moment to spare, as the Neptune collier is not yet ready to sail for Minehead, I have employed that moment in writing what will I hope at once amuse my dearest mother and convince her of my filial affection. This letter contains a few observations on the celebrated Lake of Killarney; a subject travellers have exerted their utmost descriptive powers in treating of; but which I shall handle with impartiality, neither creating beauties which have no existence in nature; nor on the contrary, endeavouring to cast a shade over some of her most pleasing scenes.

Killarney is situated in the county of Kerry, 38 English miles from Cork. Having hired horses for ourselves and a servant, we left Cork at nine in the morning, dined at Millstreet, and lay that evening in Killarney. The country between Cork and Millstreet for twenty miles in length, is one of the most disagreeable I have at any time passed through. It consists chiefly of heaths; what little is cultivated is pasture land enclosed by stone walls, and scarce a tree to be seen. Although few countries are better peopled than this, yet it wears the face of desolation. The inhabitants herd together in hovels, if possible more miserable than those, I have in a former letter described to you. These being built of loose rubble stone, covered with sedges, and consisting only of a ground floor, at some distance can scarcely be disguished: and when approached, only serve to distress your mind by presenting the most striking images of want and wretchedness.

Descending Muskerry hill (Mushera, no doubt, J. Lane) we came to Millstreet, a little place consisting of a few decent cottages, a tolerable Irish inn, and a barrack. The road from this place to Killarney runs in a straight line, almost entirely over a morass, terminated in front by the mountains round the lake, and having the Kerry hills on the south, the latter hills did not appear to us of any considerable height, but the mountains in front presented a most awful scene; for the evening beginning to glow dusky, every summit was covered with a dark rolling cloud.”

**“Observations on the celebrated Lakes of Killarney in Ireland” (In a letter from an English officer at Cork to his mother) published in *The London magazine, or, Gentleman's monthly intelligencer,* Volume 51, 1782, page 268-9.**

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**“Journey from Cork to Tralee, &c.”**

Mr. EDITOR,

HAVING frequently occasion to travel in different directions through this kingdom, and having much leisure during my journies, it occurred to me that I may, through your entertaining magazine, amuse myself, and inform some individuals into whose hands it may fall, that my story is to be ‘homespun truth’ without decorations. If it meets your approbation insert it—if not, I shall feel no disappointment.

I lately journied from Cork to Tralee, via Castle-island, and returned again via Killarney. It was at Mill-street the thought of penning my excursion occurred; there I shall begin and give you a topographical statement of my journey from thence to Cork in the track above mentioned.

Owing to the sickness of one the carriage horses, I was obliged to remain one day at Ellis's comfortable inn in Millstreet, and that day was Sunday, 'which makes a bustle in every village.' The improvements here since my last visit (some years back) are

very conspicuous, and was proper encouragement given, it would, from its situation, be a place of note. The barracks are in good repair, and generally contain two companies of foot. A neat church has been built some time, and is the only one in a union with five parishes, which were several years without a church at all, (we often fee instances of this carelessness in the established church but not in other sects.)

A very large Roman catholic chapel has been lately built here, and assisted by liberal minded protestants. The inn here has always been a good situation, and is extremely well attended to. The little town is picturesquely situated in a romantic country, and has some good seats in its neighbourhood.

The plantations of Mountleader south of the town, are very thriving; and the improvements are laid down with taste. Mr. Denis M'Carthy has lately built a house adjoining the town which has a respectable appearance, and is, I am well informed, well contrived and spacious within, but it is situated close by a high road, and has no lawn in front, which I concave a capital error.

The castle of Drishane, now called Westwood, surrounded with lofty plantations, has a venerable appearance from all the adjacent parts of the country. Mr. Wallis has built a large but not modern house close to the castle; it is I am informed, roomy and convenient, and lies very low. The deer-park is very large and beautifully wooded – the soil of the demesne is of a rich limestone, (the only quarry of that kind for many miles around, being here, makes it very valuable.)

The river Blackwater and another small river are the boundaries of the demesne on the north side. The castle is very ancient, and was formerly the residence of a branch of the MacCarthy family (now extinct.) It is still kept in good repair, and has been during and since the rebellion, a barrack for the yeomen corps, which is well disciplined and regularly attended by its captain (Wallis) who was himself a regular an officer in the regulars and militia.

Near Westwood lies Flintfield, the family residence of the Chinnerys, beautifully situated on the northern bank of the Blackwater, and having a well laid down lawn, and Mr. Wallis's demesne in front, and also the glebe-house in very bad repair, owing to the non-residence of the rector.

West of Flintfield lies Rathroe, a fine house lately built by Mr. M'Carthy, but it has a bleak appearance through want of trees. The owner, I was informed, built this expensive house on a three lives lease, on Mr. Broderick Chinnery's estate.

Further west lays Keale, the residence of Mr. Leader, an old house surrounded with plantations of trees chiefly fir. Near Keale lies Minehill, a long irregular house, lately erected by doctor Wallis. After an excursion of a few hours ride to view these places, I returned to Millstreet, and was surprised to see a bridewell built lately, a quarter of a mile outside the town. Surely great dependence must be placed on the integrity of the inhabitants of these wilds, when a prison is left unguarded in this retired spot.

On my arrival at the inn, I found the horse (already mentioned) dead, and was obliged to propose riding the rest of my journey, no carriages being hired here. The innkeeper supplied me with a saddle-horse and advised me to take the new road to Castleisland as better as and shorter than the old one, which is the case.

I accordingly set out next morning, having first visited the Esculapius (Greek god of medicine, J. Lane) of the village, whose shop was one of the most wretched I ever saw, notwithstanding which, the owner, Doctor Stapleton, has a printed list of all the wonderful cures he has performed hung up in the most conspicuous part of his shop; one hundred certificates graces his list; and surely his name must be immortalized if only half of them tell the truth. The morning was fine and I

pushed on my Rosinante (Don Quixote's horse, J. Lane) at a good pace till my eyes met a beautiful ruin on the banks of the Blackwater, which meanders under its walls. This place I learned is Drumsicane, and was in days of yore a princely residence of M'Carthy, (Donough) who built the walls of Kanturk castle, but was prevented from finishing it by injurious reports made of him to queen Elizabeth, stating his building a fortification to annoy the government.

Drumsicane is erroneously stated in Smith's History of Cork to have belonged to the O'Keeffes. The castle does not at present stand, but the wall which surrounded it is all entire, and flanked with round towers. The land surrounding it is of very good quality, and the remains of the plantations and other appendages of former grandeur still appear, and remind us of the 'the times that have passed by,' and show it must have been a handsome residence. The farm is now rented by a Mr. Rearden from Sir Broderick Chinnery, whose ancestor got this estate by forfeiture, and who lived here formerly. Mr. Rearden's house is a neat cottage and commands a charming prospect of the surrounding country. This man has a singular idea of his being king George the 3rd, and he calls his sons prince of Wales, duke of York, &c. &c. – in other respects he shews no folly.

Opposite to Drumsicane, my course took a western direction along the Blackwater, from which to Duaragel bridge was formerly a thick wood; but now, through want of preservation, is destroyed.

The river winds beautifully near the road, and so much was I engaged in the scene close to me, that until my arrival at the bridge I did not perceive the castle of Duaragel lately rebuilt and rescued from ruin by a Mr. Justice, of Mallow, and formerly an officer in the North Cork militia. I alighted on this bridge, also lately built and walked to the castle, (about 200 perches) – here I met an old man who informed me that he never expected to see this work complete, as formerly it could not be accomplished, and was often tried without success; every stone put up by day was thrown down by fairies at night; and that it was always the abode of supernatural things.

Mr. Smith states this castle to belong to the O'Keeffes, but it was not the case; it was built on the territory of McDonough already mentioned – tradition says either by his wife, lady Sarah M'Donnell, as a place of retirement to indulge some secret sorrows, or by Mr. M'Donough himself to guard his frontier which extended no farther west; and for a prison, the latter seems the most certain, as it is set on a great precipice over the river, and though elevated, it is still surrounded by higher ground to the back; besides this whole country was formerly wood and morass without roads or bridges.

M'Donough was an arbitrary tyrant; and that this place was not used for good purposes is very evident, from Mr. Justice having at the clearing of it lately discovered adjoining the castle, a dungeon roofed with stone, without any entrance but through the roof, a square hole covered by a huge flag, with an air-hole 3 inches diameter to let the victims breathe. In this dungeon was found a number of bones; it is now a comfortable residence, singular in its appearance, commanding a picturesque view of the river and valley through which it runs in a serpentine direction, and farther off mountains rising over mountains, like an amphitheatre, to the clouds; the high road and bridge at a pleasing distance – the precipice and ground about it is planted with judgement – and the *fairy castle* will in a few years be embosomed in a wood, and even now it is a beautiful object in this retired spot.

On my return to the bridge I perceived a neat white-washed cottage about one mile to the west, situated on a peninsula hanging over the river. I found this residence of the representative of the O'Keeffe family, which secure and possessed some territory in this country in the following singular manner. This family was in the time of anarchy and

confusion ejected from its territory of Fermoy by the potent clan of the Roches; the head of the sept, with his followers, arrived at Droumagh castle in his way westward to seek a new settlement; here he demanded entrance, but as his visit was not deemed friendly he was refused. He then attacked the castle, forced admission, butchered the owner and his adherents, forcibly married the widow of the lord, and retained the castle and territory till the civil times. The O'Keeffes are a numerous clan here, and the head of the sept has in his possession a patent from James the 2nd confirming his right to this illegal property, and conveying a further tract which never was in his possession at all. Such, in a great measure, were all the possessions of former Irish chiefs; anarchy and debility gave power to the strongest, and provided he could hold his plunder, no matter how he got it.

One conqueror (commencing with the Milesians who were themselves only conquerors) followed another, and each kept possession as long as he was able; but, thank God, those days are gone, and every man's right is now secure.

Having mounted my horse, I soon the nest and comfortable thatched cottage of Mr. M'Carthy, of Churchill, but a large slate office in its rere bears no proportion to the dwelling house. About half a mile further on has been lately built a neat modern house by a Mr. Denis M'Carthy; it is in the middle of an uncultivated mountain, but has a pleasing view of a river running near it, which river I soon passed where a bridge is much wanting.

The old village of Cullin shortly came in my view – it has the remains of an old abbey; by whom founded is quite uncertain. There is here a good Roman catholic chapel, a few houses, an holy well, and a patron day held annually in July, in memory of St. Latheirin.

This country is emerging from its rude state very rapidly; it was a most forlorn and deserted place, but now bids fair for a place on improvement. If this description finds a place in your magazine, you shall have my continuation for your entertaining miscellany, in the mean time you may rely on its correctness.

VIATOR

**Walker's Hibernian Magazine**
**June 1807**

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**Ireland—Highwayman taken.**

"Millstreet, June 1.

It was known that Mushera mountain and the roads adjoining Mill-street, has been for some time past infested with a highway robber. This being the fair day of this town, the fellow took his usual position near the heights **of** Mushera**, a**nd robbed several men and women of the various sums which they intended laying out at the fair. One man in particular, of the name of Daniel Carroll, was seized by him, at whom he presented a pistol, with the usual threat, 'Deliver your money.' The poor man immediately gave him all he possessed, which was 1/.5s.

The fellow had scarcely time to pocket it when he perceived three or four men approaching, upon which he made off; however, the countrymen were not to be intimidated; they all joined and pursued him a distance of three miles across the country, to the foot of the Boggra mountains, where, finding himself too closely pursued, he immediately took to a high rock, and taking out his pistols, three in number, swore vehemently that he would shoot the first man that dared to approach him.

Nevertheless they advanced, pouring stones on him like grape shot, when fortunately one of the stones hit him and cut him so severely that he fell, after snapping the pistols repeatedly, but in consequence of the extreme wetness of the day, the priming was too damp to go off. The men then rushed on him, and deprived him of the pistols, and a considerable quantity of powder and balls,

with the money of which he had a little time before robbed Carroll. They immediately brought him back to the Mountain-house, with his hands tied behind his back. While informations were taking, he was recognised by some of the soldiers of the 49th regiment as Simon Browne, who deserted from that regiment 12 months ago; he is a smart active looking man."

**The Annual Register, June 1820**

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**German visitors**

The following two accounts are taken from "*Poor Green Erin: German Travel Writers' Narratives on Ireland from Before the 1798 Rising to After the Great Famine Texts Edited, Translated and Annotated by Eoin Bourke*" published in 2012.

**Casper Voight**

The first account is by Caspar Voight who made a visit in the autumn of 1794 and after making the obligatory visit to see the lakes of Killarney he came back via Millstreet where he stopped to chat and no doubt to dine at the inn. He commented:

"But dissatisfaction is so great that the people would gladly unite with the French. The landowners or their stewards pay their poor temporary cabin dwellers no more than sixpence daily for their work, but on the other hand charge so terribly much for their little potato patch that the poor wretches live six months in the year from potatoes, herrings and water. Their condition is on a par with that of slaves, because once a cottier leaves his landlord, he will not be taken on by any other.

They also work like slaves, i.e., under miserable conditions. We saw a man who had to pick stones from a field and carried it out in a crouched position. These people are the ones that emigrate, by which the country loses nothing and the man is better off. It would be unwise to prevent emigration even if it is a most appalling injustice.

A funeral came through the village. The coffin was on a cart, and beside it sat two women who constantly beat the coffin and their breast while keening loudly. A large number of men and women followed. When one of them got tired of the dreadful howling, she climbed into a trap or onto a horse in the rear. Wherever the funeral passes through, the people join the procession, ask only if it is a woman or a man and then join in the loud wailing, a kind of paean for the unknown deceased, for which they only have to know the one fact that he or she has lived and is now dead. In every next village those from the previous one return home."

**A German visitor in 1832**

The identity of this German traveller cannot be verified with certainty but it is a most informative account. He set out from Cork to visit Killarney and went via Macroom and then via Moulnahorna and Mauma through Aubane, of which he gave a very vivid description, and on to Millstreet and Killarney:

"Already at daybreak on the next morning a pair of sturdy post horses trotted along with us in a light trap over the hills on the north side of the river Lee to Macroom, a miserable dump where we did not bide longer than was necessary to feed our bay horses. As this route is hardly used by travellers, it is not only lacking in decent inns but also in coach-houses. We therefore had no choice but to cover the whole journey with the same horses. From Macroom our routes went northwards over the relatively high mountain range that is aligned in the east with the Magerton and Macgillicuddy Mountain, but in the West divides up and runs along the two peninsulas to the north and south of Kenmare Bay and ends in the Atlantic above the bay near Valencia and below it at Cape Crow.

Here nothing is to be seen far and wide except barren mountains on which hardly a

tree or shrub is to be found from the summit to the floor of the valley. The area is unquestionably one of the most desolate and wildest of Ireland. The isolated cabin that one becomes aware of here and there appears to be just occasional dwellings for shepherd. From time to time on the slope of the distant hills one can make out a lot of moving points in the heather, herds of a peculiarly small type of sheep with black heads and feet that clamber half wild like goats over the rocks and boulders and yield bad wool but a very palatable meat that, particularly if roasted, reminds one more of a saddle of venison than a leg of mutton.

Also the cattle that one encountered in these mountains are extremely small, hardly the size of the one-year-old calves of German cows; but the quality of both meat and milk compensate for the diminutive bulk.

Only after several hours of journeying through these wilds did we reach a great valley (Aubane, J. Lane) that like our path ran along the foot of the mountain range we had just crossed and at the same time broadened out in rolling landscape towards the north as far as the eye could see.

At this point the area is quite densely strewn with farmers' dwellings, which I would call cabins if this word did not conjure up the image of houses that, compared to these holes in the ground, would have to be styled palaces. The majority of them are literally hollowed out of the remaining walls or terraces of turf cuts and covered over from above with a roof of only grass or reeds. Only in very few cases did I notice a door or window, or even an aperture for smoke; in short, everything that I saw could be described at the very most as the first stage of a dwelling culture.

In one of these boggy dugouts, whose interior was at the most ten feet long and about half as wide, there lived a family of no less than seven persons whose appearance, as can only be expected , corresponded in misery to that of their habituation. The earth roundabout is probably cultivable in part, but completely neglected, barren and wild.

One would tend to call the area the *Vale of Tears* if the inhabitants were not so unconscious of, or indifferent to, their poverty, indeed blither and wittier than their fellow-countrymen in more prosperous districts. It is hard to imagine that only a few miles from this populated wasteland there lie the world-famous lakes whose beauty lures hundreds of travellers every year from far and near."

He returned about a week later to Millstreet from Killarney and took the route from there towards Dromagh:

"As far as the forlorn market town of Millstreet, a stretch of 21 English miles, our way led once more through the wretched countryside that I had become acquainted with eight days previously. As often as we halted to water our horse we were surrounded by whole swarms of unfortunates whose baleful appearance gave one an almost heart-rending impression. Also beyond Millstreet for some time the district the same melancholy look until we turned northwards and approached the fertile valley of the Blackwater (.....) We noticed the first sign of better conditions among the inhabitants of the estates of recently deceased Mr. (Nicholas) Leader, who was a Member of Parliament for Kilkenny but, despite his Whig principles, was later rejected by the voters because he did not want to join in O'Connell's call for Repeal.

Near his demesne stands a pleasant-looking Protestant church which, as usual, was built largely from the legally enforced contributions of the Catholic population living in the area, surely not to remedy the actual problems of the existing community but rather to cement the Protestant supremacy, which has started to crumble somewhat in recent times, for here, too the phenomenon of "dearly beloved Roger" is probably not that infrequent (In another place on the island , when the preacher mounted the pulpit one Sunday, the entire community consisted of – the sexton

Roger. He therefore quickly changed the words "Dearly beloved parishioners" into "Dearly beloved Roger", which has since become proverbial and in the newspapers often stands in for other arguments.)

The extent to which the Anglican ministers have indulged in these unfortunately legally sanctioned extortions in the last thirty years is beyond the limits of one's comprehension, and it is hardly surprising that since Emancipation the people try everything in their power to emancipate their *pockets,* too, from the demands of the Anglican clergy. Not only in the more Protestant North but throughout the entire South of the island magnificent churches are to be found in all parishes. In most cases these were not erected until the last five or six decades and, judging by their dimensions, they would seem to be calculated on the basis of such large parishes that one would easily conclude that there was hardly a single Catholic in the community.

But if one wants to make sure by visiting the service on Sundays, then one finds more than enough empty pews, and the entire parish, in a building that could accommodate far more than two thousand souls, often consists of less than a dozen people, including the minister, the sexton and both their families. As it is well-known that the Anglicans, particularly in Ireland, are very good churchgoers, then this tiny attendance cannot be ascribed to the half-heartedness of other parishioners but rather to the non-existence of a larger community. In the next diocese the Archbishop's daughter herself told me that the minister M.... was recently asked by a neighbouring colleague to take over his sermon. But as the first minister did not want to have the bother of giving his sermon twice, he went with his family to his own church and took the entire parish with him on his one-horse carriage to hold the service in the next parish. But one is expected to believe that this one-horse-carriage-parish has a church that is adequate for the needs of several thousand parishioners, while on top of everything the utterly insignificant official duties are in false proportion to their remuneration, the legally binding tithe!

On our entire journey we found even then that the people were very aggrieved about this tax and the bloody incidents that were yet to happen in the village of Rathcormac only a 2 hour journey to one side of our route would not surprise anyone who had the opportunity to become even slightly acquainted with the atmosphere of agitation among the people of the region."

**From "Sketches from Ireland" published in 1832 and as quoted in "Poor Green Erin"**

**by Eoin Bourke, 2012**

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# THE BARRACK

The Barrack has been a central feature of the town from its very beginning. The British War Office carried out surveys of its property and ordnance in Ireland in 1830 and 1851 that included the Millstreet Barrack. In 1830 it consisted of two Captains, three Subalterns, one hundred and twelve NCOs and Privates, eight horses and twelve patients in its hospital. The buildings also included a stable, a cleansing shed, Privates' quarters, Officers' quarters, a Blackhole (Dungeon), a Guard House, Privies and a Manure pit as illustrated below. (TNA/WO55/2630).

In 1851 it had six captains and subalterns and eighty one Privates and the buildings are illustrated and listed overleaf. (TNA/WO/55/2891).

# TOM MEANEY'S SPEECH ON THE HISTORY OF THE MILLSTREET COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Chairman, Rev. Fathers, Sisters, Reverend Salter, I'm very privileged to be with you here to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the successful Millstreet Community School. The years roll by and Ken (Brennan) has gone over all the problems and all the ups and downs which he went through and finally succeeded with the school as it was being established. It is a hard act to follow but I want to take you back further.

Prior to the 60s there was talk of change in education in Ireland and it really took head in the middle of the 1960s when there were many people in favour of changing the system, especially secondary education. And then they were talking about community schools, comprehensive schools; others were saying that these schools were a shame, that they'd be this and they'd be that - as Ken explained.

And it finally came to a head in the late 60s when decisions had to be made. Attitudes were divided, politicians were divided, parishes were divided, and we had here in Millstreet, at that stage, three excellent schools: Coláiste Pádraig, which belonged to the Hickey Family, who were excellent, we had the Vocational School, Dan Murray was the principal there, the former great Cork footballer in the 1950s; and we had the Presentation Sisters' School right beside the church. They had given great service to us. So we listened attentively at the time. I was in the political business and you could hear the different views on all sides of all parties; on whether there should be this new idea or not. Anyway, it came to a head; the Department officials pressed on and on and finally the government of the day decided that we should have Community Schools, and Comprehensive Schools, and they carried out various surveys through the country. That was grand but where were they going to be; there will be trouble or there may not be trouble; there will be objections; there may not be objections.

Anyway, when they made out the list of designated areas to get schools, Millstreet was down at number 43. That sounded very much like we weren't going to get a school for a long time. We pondered over it locally, those of us who were involved in the town at that time in various things, and we came to the conclusion that there was a lot of opposition, and now was our time to strike for road because our chance may not come again, and we might never get a school. The issue was - could we get everyone who was involved in education to agree.

There were local people who came together - Donal O'Connor, Sarah Dineen, Vincent McSweeney - I think of them off the top of my head, and they all agreed that we would set out our stall. They made out a case why Millstreet should get it, and they went around here to the management of the three schools: the County Vocational Board were in favour, the Presentation Nuns were in favour, and fair play to the Hickey family, and we should give them credit here, they were in favour as well. That meant no opposition in the Millstreet area, if we went for our comprehensive school. We were now on the road headlong. They canvassed; Donal O'Connor had great contacts all over. He contacted

Department officials, and I was told to do it on the political side, "you're in the government side - do your business and get a school for us."

The minister of the day was Pádraig Faulkner, a Tipperary man and I canvassed him as well. I was putting it across to him very hard. But there is one person who is never mentioned, who played a great part in getting a Community School here and that was Sr. Assisi in the Presentation Convent, because it was her brother, Seán McGearailt ,who was the Secretary of the Department of Education, and she lobbied him too. Lobbying at that time didn't mean big money like you hear about now; it meant constantly contacting those people. Finally it was put to the Department and it took them some time to come back, and one morning I was asked to come into the Minister's office. "He wants to see you." Says I, "I'm in some trouble" because I was always in some trouble. Anyway I went in and Seán McGearailt and himself were sitting down inside, and he said: "Look, there are objections all over the place to Community and Comprehensive Schools, and in Millstreet everyone seems to agree 100%; we have moved you from 43rd to 6th position." That was a very big jump, that was such a jump because a Community working together, forgetting their differences, whatever they were, had fought a case and we were now in the top list. I recall that I immediately said to him - "You know Minister, you might as well sign it now as we're here" and I suppose he was willing enough and he there and then sanctioned the Community School for Millstreet. I announced it and conveyed the news and everybody locally was delighted.

History moved on and land was acquired and the school was built, and I think now Ken, there was different talk about you before you came to Millstreet. Interviews went on to decide who would be the principal. And then there was a nice man seen around the town; he was seen three or four times around the town; he was never seen before in Millstreet. One lady said to me "Tom, there's a new man and surely to God he'll be the principal" and says I "What is he like, is he tall", "yerrah, no" says she, "but he's lovely looking", and we were lucky enough that that man turned out to be Ken Brennan, and he was appointed the principal. He set about, as he explained to you, to establish the school here. It was the first school in Ireland where three other schools closed down, three schools that had given valuable service to the area, and had agreed to be closed down and be formed into one school, so we were on the road. The rest is the history of the forty years of Millstreet Community School. I would go further than regarding it just from the academic side alone. It has played a large part in the community here; the school is always available, and anyone that would go to Ken and later Pat who wanted it for a worthwhile business or whatever performance they would put on, it was made available for them.

The school helped in many ways on matters locally which went on the national airwaves, the television, both nationally and internationally, and thus it played its full part in the development of being a community school. Times were hard as Ken recalled in the '80s. They were so hard that the road here going up to the school which was not a public road at that time, and the road below where the buses go was not a public road, and we had to repair them, and I remember well at the parents' committee, Timmy Connors of Dooneen bringing up his tractor and trailer, and panning gravel and filling the potholes, but the community were willing to do it. We had a great parents organisation here down the years, and we had great caretakers as well, and they all contributed. We ran out of money, if you remember Ken, to pay a teacher that was about to be taken off the list in the '80s and we went around to the parents, and it was a lot of money that time – £25 a head and we could retain the teacher, and 100% paid up; that was a tribute to a community that was working together.

Now I will say that children from Millstreet School have gone all over the world, and no matter where they are, they can say that the years that they spent here, studying, learning, and being educated here has stood to them well, no matter where they are at the moment. Times will always move on but if communities don't work together, they will get nothing. Remember how the school came, there were arguments, and it was often said while others dithered, Millstreet prospered. We can go on about all these things, but tonight is a very joyous night for everybody, there is no doubt about that. And I would like as well to congratulate Pat and his staff, Derry and all, their students and their successes of this year. It was great and the community owe it to the school as well that it is at the very top.

It just came into my head - community again - we had a new development in 1979 when Noel C. was starting up the horse events here and was going to have a big equestrian centre. Everybody was low. He was involved very much in the school, each helping each other across. We remember 1979 when the great Eddie Macken came with Boomerang, that world known horse, and there was jumping in the local park. We turn the table around and here is Noel C's empire here and this beautiful place he made available for tonight's function. That is what is meant by working together for survival in rural Ireland. I thank the people who are involved and who organised this function tonight, and all I can say from everybody, success to Millstreet School and may the good Lord bless everybody that passes through its doors. Thank you.

**Tom Meaney, Dec. 10, 2013**

# BOOK REVIEW

**"D D Sheehan, BL, MP – His Life and Times" by John Dillon. Published by Foilsiúcháin Éireann Nua,Templemore, Co. Tipperary. (2013)**

**A biography of omission**

There are few biographies that are important because of what they do *not* say and the issues they do *not* deal with. Such is the case with this one. There has been a long standing myth about the most important decision of D D Sheehan's life: why he left Cork in 1918 after representing Mid-Cork in Parliament for 17 years, leading the Land and Labour League for even longer and establishing a great repudiation for himself in implementing the Land Acts and Labourers Cottages Act and allying with William O'Brien in routing the AOH Dominated Irish Parliamentary Party in Cork in 1910. He threw it all away in 1918 and though he lived for another 30 years he was almost a nonentity when he died. Any biography worthy of the name would seek to explain how and why this happened.

As this question was posed for the author when he published the first version of this biography in 2008 it was reasonable to except that some explanation would be presented in this fuller biography. He has not done so.

The story used to be that he left in 1918 because he and his family were forced to do so by threats and intimidation and that they came back in the mid twenties when these threats were lifted. This yarn was so prevalent that it got the imprimatur of an editor of the Dictionary of Irish Biography, Patrick Maume, wherein he states:"*Sheehan's position in Cork grew increasingly untenable. The Sheehan family faced intimidation and were obliged to leave their home on the Victoria Road for London…..Sheehan moved to Dublin in 1926 after learning that the threats against him had been lifted*." (Vol. 8, 877). There is no evidence to support any of this.

This biography confirms that this was indeed a yarn by not mentioning it! For what it is worth the biography is at least worthwhile by establishing this as a non-story, i.e., a myth.

But the author puts forward another yarn about his leaving. He says: "*With the political climate radically changed in Cork at the end of 1918, the Sheehans abandoned their city home, moving their school going family to London where Sheehan had unsuccessfully stood in the Limehouse- Stepney division.*" (p.36). He moved from Cork to London *after* he had lost an election there? This is chronologically wrong and if true would make D D a very silly man indeed. He moved house, logically enough, to fight an election he expected to win and to settle in his new constituency. He had every reason to expect to win. He was a well known Labour MP for 17 years with real achievements to his name, was in effect the Chief Whip of the existing Labour group at Westminster, was a well known journalist, had fought in the war and being a barrister was not backward in promoting himself.

However, Dillon goes on: *"Although hardly known in that constituency he still managed to poll 2,470 of the 7,585 votes cast."* (ibid.) Dillon might have mentioned that this was an increase of 2,470 votes from zero as Labour had not stood there previously. This constituency had three competing political tendencies contending for the Labour vote - Irish, Jewish and 'native.' The first two would not have one of the other as their MP and that is why D D lost. In the next election the Irish and the Jews finally agreed to support a 'native' rather than someone of the other tendency. The native chosen was a neat little nondescript Englishman who was acceptable to both as a stop gap. But he won the seat and retained it as long as he wished. He was Clem Attlee.

Then we are told that Sheehan published *'Ireland since Parnell'* and some paragraphs after the above we are told that: *"When it became opportune and possible following the end of the Irish Civil War he and his family returned to Ireland after eight years of privation in London, as his wife died."* (p.38). What is meant by this? Was it the 'Civil war' that kept him away? What made it inopportune or not possible for him to come back eelier? Why was such a well known person in privation in London? Mr. Dillon knows the reasons very well as they have been documented and pointed out to him by the AHS and others since he first started writing about D D a few years but they are all ignored.

D D was a casualty of the war in a variety of ways. Politically he kept recruiting right throughout the war and never recognised the duplicity involved regarding Ireland. This was his major mistake. He never reckoned on a vote for Irish political Independence. He thought he was made for soldiering but he was not and suffered accordingly at a personal level. He made catastrophic business decisions and went bankrupt and had his pension reduced. He resorted to being a conman. He tried to get money from the Loyalist Compensation Fund but was refused when they discovered the police were on to him for his activities. That is why he fled back to Ireland. He became an embarrassment to all who had previously supported him. But not a word is included about any of this in the biography though the documented evidence is there.

He had a fantastic view of the war rehashed uncritically by his biographer: *"I threw in my lot whole-heartedly with the cause I concaved to be the cause of liberty and humanity"* (p.34 and 95). Yet he made a great issue of opposing conscription to fight for these great causes! He was blind to what the war was about as is his biographer. That is why he cannot see that it was the war and its outcome, decided on by Britain that was the cause of D D's personal and political ruin. That was the price he paid for supporting it - to the day he died.

The second half of D D's life was as tragic as the first half was brilliant. The old cliché of a Greek tragedy comes to mind. His full story deserves to be told fully and sympathetically. Avoiding doing so is an insult to the memory of a remarkable man.

**Jack Lane**

*

## Latest publication from the Society: "Irish Bulletin" Vol. 1 and 2

This was the official newspaper of the Irish Government during the War of Independence. Its aim was to provide those outside Ireland with the Government's case and the facts of the war that it had to wage. This information could not otherwise be obtained because of the suppression by the British authorities of all other outlets that put the Irish Government's case.

It was produced with minimal resources and under constant threat of suppression. It was therefore an underground publication despite being the paper of a legitimate Government. It was unadorned with any other content except straightforward factual and irrefutable information. This is what made its reputation and because of that it became one of the most powerful weapons in the war that eventually proved successful.

It deserves an honoured place in Irish history yet it has never been republished and it is hardly referred to by our contemporary historians—and when it is—it is almost inevitably in disparaging terms. These volumes of the paper reproduced as faithfully as possible to the original. Other volumes will follow.

# DOWN BY THE GROVES OF TULLIG

**"The Songs of Elizabeth Cronin, Irish Traditional Singer,"**
**by Dáibhi Ó Cróinín (Four Courts Press, 2000)**

# THE DEATH OF KING MAHON ON MUSHERA

King Mahon was the King of Munster and the elder brother of Brian Boru. He was killed on Mushera in 976. This event brought Brian Boru onto the scene; he avenged Mahon's death, became King of Munster and went on to become the first High King of Ireland until he was killed at the Battle of Clontarf on Good Friday 2014. This is an account of the killing of Mahon by Geoffrey Keating in his authoritative and much acclaimed book '*Foras Feasa Ar Éirinn.*'

# CORRESPONDENCE

Dorset

30 December 2013

Dear Mr. Lane

**WILLOWBROOK – A FLAWED EDEN**

I have just finished reading the above memoir by my first cousin, Jim O'Brien and published by you. As you state in your Foreword, it is indeed 'an unusual' and maybe 'a unique' memoir. Unusual it certainly is – unique – I can't say. It should be an intriguing and historical correct book drawing as it does on such a wealth of information. Sadly, it is not.

It is instead an unkind piece of writing and from my perspective, inaccurate in many ways. I shudder to think what the original manuscript was like and I am surprised your society accepted the memories of just one individual without some confirmation of these by other available sources within the Pomeroy Family.

The book portrays the writer as a sad and bitter man who has carried the unhappiness of a 'perceived' abandonment by his parents during World War Two with him throughout his life.

I have selected below just a few of the inaccuracies regarding my family. I gather from speaking to cousins there are others, but it is not for me to comment on these.

- Page 26 para 6 – my grandmother Julia died in 1937 and my eldest brother Richard was born in 1936. It is wrong to state 'he was born about a year after his grandmother's death'. **Incorrect**

- Page 27 para 1 – it is implied here that my brother Richard did something illegal in selling Willowbrook. He did not. **Incorrect**

- Page 38 para 5 – Uncle Bill (my father) – an inaccurate and unkind description of one of nature's gentlemen. The writer fails to make mention of his many visits while at university to his Uncle Bill (then living in Naas) where my parents watered and fed him, paid his return bus fare to Dublin and sent him, on his way with a pound or two to spend. My father was not the youngest member of the family, Angela was. **Unkind/Incorrect**

- Page 130 para 4 – my brother Jack, was born with cerebral palsy. The writer is a medical person aware of his condition and to describe him as he did is unforgivable. **Unkind**

- Page 131 para 1 – my brothers, sister and I had a very happy childhood growing up in Dunmanway and we have no recollection of ever being short of money as is implied. In fact, our father had a car at the time when there were less that 10 cars in the entire town**.** **Incorrect**

- Page 131 para 1 – the writer and his brothers visited us regularly in Dunmanway as well I recall and we visited them at Willowbrook also**.** **Incorrect**

In chapter 12 – Threshing – page 96 para 4, possibly the most entertaining of all but, the cruel comments the writer makes about one individual, ruin what otherwise is a reasonable piece of writing. I am surprised you allowed this as it cheapens the writing and the writer and does little to enhance the reputation of your society.

The writer may believe he has written an amusing and historically correct memoir. This is not the case and for one who was protected in Ireland from World War Two, he has shown no gratitude to his parents nor to those who looked after and befriended him during his time at Willowbrook. His opinions of my aunts are entirely his own and bear little resemblance to the ladies I knew.
Finally, let me put it on record that the Pomeroy Family to which you refer on the back cover of the book is not correct. We may not be living in Willowbrook now, but many of us are alive and well.

Yours truly,

Robert Pomeroy.

*

Nova Scotia

Jack,

**Concerning my cousin Robert's critical letter about my book**.

My first reaction was to let this letter go, but I changed my mind as it I think it merited a reply.

First, in reference to his thumb-nail psychodynamic sketch of me and maybe it is too close to the mark for comfort or maybe not but so what. Irrespective, given that I made myself a target by agreeing to have this book published and he it seems has read it, he is quite entitled to take pot shots at me and be critical of the book. At the same time, as the late former US President Harry Truman put it: *"if you can't stand the heat stay out of the kitchen*". He has now joined me in this particular kitchen and he too should be prepared to take a little heat.

In regards to his claim that I implied his brother Dick did something illegal by getting around the entailment provision. The very fact that the sale sailed through unchallenged shows it ***was*** legal. I have not now and never did have quarrel with that. However by doing so Dick did the opposite of what his benefactors/grandparents wanted their heir to do. They had made it all too clear their objective was to keep Willowbrook in Pomeroy hands. Instead he did the opposite as quickly as he legally could and he took it out of Pomeroy hands. I don't hold this against Dick. I just state the fact. If I had been the heir and circumstances demanded it I too would almost certainly have done the same.

In the chapter on Threshing of which he generally seems to like he disapproved of what he calls my ``cruel comments`` about one individual. Though he doesn`t say whom I presume he refers to my description of poor old, now long dead, Con Duggan. He does not seem to comprehend it would have been against the whole spirit of the book metaphorically to have airbrushed poor old Con out of a picture of which he was a living, working part. For better or for worse at least Con now gets a measure of post mortem recognition that will last as long as this book exists. For that duration he will not, to paraphrase the American, sardonic song writer singer Tom Lehrer have died and been forgotten with the rest.

Robert seems much exercised by my description of his father, my uncle Bill. No doubt he knew his father much better than I did and saw him in a different light, that his father was "one of the world`s gentleman" and indeed he may be right. However in the context of this book, Robert's view of his father is irrelevant. To me he was essentially a somewhat distant figure whom I remember the way I described him.

He seems even more exercised by my memory of his family being poor. The key point here is our different ages. He is the fourth child of five. His oldest brother Dick and I were born in the same year and that means Robert must be several years younger than us. This being the case he can have few if any memories that are not post WW2. This he more or less confirms when he states that from his earliest memories he recalls his father having a car. During the war virtually no one, other than doctors, vets, priests, a few taxis and the Gárdai were given a petrol ration and that a very limited one. Even if his father had owned a car then (which I doubt) he would not have got petrol to power it.

On the other hand, my memories go back at least to the early days of WW2 and I remember quite clearly my aunts discussing his family's, hardly surprising, financial difficulties. Banks did not then and, from what I know, still don't pay their lower level staff well. Then, in Ireland anyway, they did provide housing for some of their staff probably those married with children. Some of these must have been something akin to slums for one of those assigned to them was so overrun with rats, his parents were afraid they would attack their children at night. That left an impression as, being quite familiar with rats, the thought of being attacked by them at night was pretty horrifying.

I also, even if hazily, remember hearing at some point, bank staff went on strike, a strike that lasted a long time. Even if, in terms of the strike I am mixing times up here and I might be, being on strike with

7 mouths to feed, bodies to clothe etc. all on a junior bank clerk's salary, is it unlikely times were *not* tough, that is, to put it bluntly they were poor but so what if this was the case? There is nothing dishonourable in this. He/they had/have nothing of which to be ashamed. It was their employers the Bank that should have been ashamed of the way they treated their staff but Banks and shame then as now, are not words that have any close association.

He goes on about the visits we made to Dunmanway which I think is about 50Km. from Millstreet. Certainty during those petrol-scarce war years I sincerely doubt it ever happened for logistical reasons if for no other. In fact even post-war, when it gradually became easier to travel I have no memory of ever being in Dunmanway, ever. I do though remember their being in Willowbrook occasionally en famille and I think Uncle Bill on his own a couple of times but how they made the journey I don`t know; by train I suppose .

I did visit them in Naas a few times during my first and possibly second year at University but I am quite certain it was not as often as he implies. They then lived in Naas I think in yet another bank owned house. Bluntly it was not exactly an exciting place to visit. Nevertheless, no doubt when I was there they `fed and watered` me. Did his father pay my bus fare back to Dublin and give me a couple of pounds? I can`t recall this but if he did, it was indeed kind and generous of him to have done so.

Last but not least, my reference to his brother Jack. Once again here, though Robert seems to have read the book, unlike you and most, if not all the readers with whom I have discussed it, he seems to have missed the point of what I attempted to do so I will spell it out for him. It is not a family history per se, it is not a tract on farming, it is not a treatise on the central nervous system defects of children or anything else of that nature. It is a reasonably honest, ``*warts and all*`` (Oliver Cromwell) ``*cast a cold eye*`` (WB Yeats) attempt by a particular old man looking back, to describe a particular world and some of the people in it, at a particular time, in a particular place as he experienced it as child and to a lesser degree as a young man. Consequently in his brother Jack`s case I simply record him the way I saw him then and that we should remember, was some seventy years or so ago. As in the rest of the book, kindness or unkindness, tasteful or tasteless, nice or not nice had little to do with it. Whether in the literary sense I succeeded or failed is for my readers to judge, not me.

Regards,

Jim

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