

Wit and Wisdom....

Pat Doherty sat on the window sill of The Railway Bar in Drumshanbo. The warm September day showed that Summer's lease was not yet up. It was the late Forties. Pat had returned from America in 1944 and bought 'The Railway Bar' and 'Mooney's Hall. Twenty five years of American life had left its influence — the bright suits, two tone shoes, large hats, cigars, expressions and a sense of humour. Around the Station Road corner came Tom Joe McGrath driving a donkey and cart. The donkey's easy going stride seemed awfully slow to a man like Pat who had been so accustomed to a more frantic pace of life.

"By God, McGrath", said Pat, "someday you and I must take a ride with that donkey and I'll show you how to use the gears".

"Ah, the harness wouldn't fit you" said Tom Joe.

Pat did not answer. It was one of those rare occasions when his wit had been trumped.

One night in The Fifties a local bank official came to a dance in Doherty's Hall. This man rarely drank whiskey without water or water without whiskey. On this occasion he had drank well beyond his measure and was at the stage of wondering why he got a different answer whenever he asked the time. Feeling disordered he left the dance floor and went downstairs where he locked himself in the toilet. The toilet being the seat of the soul offered its own contentment. He began to sing. Soon, a few similarly waterlogged but less vocal men were pacing anxiously outside; yet the singing went on. One of them complained to Pat. Pat came down the stairs, gave the door a thump with his shoe and shouted, "Come out of there, you shithouse tenor".

On June 30, 1960, The Mayflower Ballroom opened with Mick Delahunty and his Orchestra. Doherty's Hall, for long the entertainment centre of the town, was no longer the only attraction. On the night The Mayflower opened there was also a dance in Doherty's Hall — two hundred yards up the road. Pat Doherty stood at the doorway of his hall; business was not looking too good. The unconquerable curiosity of a first occasion meant that most people were passing by on their way to The Mayflower. A drunk, having his own dispute with the forces of gravity, swayed towards Pat.

"Is this The Mayflower?" said the drunk.

"No", said Pat, "It's The Wallflower".



Pat Doherty

....Drumshanbo style

By

Eamonn Daly

Bernie Flanagan was proprietor of a hotel — guesthouse now owned by the Meehan family. He ran the first motor-taxi (a Model T. Ford) in Drumshanbo, although C. S. Laird owned the first car. Bernie's favourite expression in any conversation was "Now, take for instance the average man", and so he was called "The Average Man". Occasionally, while talking, he would discretely lift his cap and rub the palm of his hand across a scalp which had been almost plundered of hair. Bernie did not tolerate swearing in his pub even if some of his customers considered swearing to be a fair compromise between running and fighting. He did, however, like a chat; he liked the calm quiet interchange of news and opinions. But on the night of the first fire in Lairds, there was little chance of having a quiet chat with his customers. It was 1936 and a town fire-brigade was as real a prospect as a town airport is nowadays. The only medicine for an outbreak of fire was a brave but straggling chain of people hurling buckets of water at the soaring flames.

It was thirsty work and as Bernie's was one of the nearest pubs, the more hard-pressed fire-fighters frequently dashed over there for a quick drink; they always rushed out again calling back to Bernie "We'll pay for it later". This pattern continued for a while and Bernie — knowing that there was little chance of ever being paid — was heard to say, "Lairds is on fire and Bernie is getting burnt".



Willie Reilly, on right, stands to attention as the narrow gauge train leaves Drumshanbo for the last time (1959). Among those included are Guard Noonan, Pauline and Marie Daly, Hughie Prior, Michael Price, Mrs. Allen, John Duignan, Marianne McGowan, Mrs. Ned McGowan, Jeanette McGowan, Mrs. McIlroy, Sean Nolan, John Fitzgerald and Declan Moran (in short trousers, extreme right).

Willie Reilly — known as 'Hoots' Reilly — played in goals for Drumshanbo in the Thirties. His catchment area was not confined to the "square". Any ball lobbed towards his third of the field was met with the shout from Willie, "Leave it to Reilly". It was a battle cry intended to inspire confidence in the backs defending him, because they were sometimes so out of touch that they must have been tempted to look around for a telephone box.

Willie trained the town band; he taught them tunes that anyone could whistle. He believed that music existed only in motion, so his band was a marching band; anyway, the economics of the day meant that they had to march to their engagements. On one of those occasions, the band marched to Mount Allen to play at the sports there. The two mile journey was inflicting its toll on Willie. Someone had

given him a present of a pair of shoes which were a few sizes too big for him, but Willie was never one to look into a gift horse's mouth with a magnifying glass, so he wore them. Greatly discomfited, he hobbled beside the band.

"What's wrong, Willie?" said one of the band-lads.

"Ah, son", replied Willie, "Sure I have to take three steps before these shoes will move".

At Keadue Sports one year, the band marched from the sportsfield to the village. Willie called a halt outside Peter Tim Lynch's pub and told the band to march-time. He ran into Peter Tim's quicker than a child out of school. A few minutes later the foot-weary band were glad to see him reappear. "Right lads", said Willie, "Let's have 'Maggie'; give her the holly", and away they marched.

the door. When he answers, say, 'I'm the boy, my Lord' and bring him in the basin".

Jim carried the basin up the stairs and knocked politely on the Bishop's door. There was no reply. The discomfort in holding the hot basin sapped Jim's patience, so he gave the door a kick.

The startled Bishop shouted "Who's there?". An equally surprised Jim blurted, "I'm the Lord ye boy ye". Luckily for Jim he had already received Confirmation, otherwise the Bishop might have exacted his own retribution when it came to giving the symbolic slap on the cheek at Confirmation.



TOM JOE....summons us to pray

With the exception of Tom Joe McGrath, all the characters recalled in this article are now dead. Tom Joe was and is the sexton in the Catholic Church. He can still produce the odd nugget of wit. His humour levels all distinctions. Some years ago, a rather untidy stranger came to the town. A relic of the Hippy Age, he had obviously unpacked in the open air the night before. He asked Tom Joe for directions to the graveyard.

"What's wrong with the one you left?" quipped Tom Joe.

The stranger enjoyed the joke and Tom Joe offered him all the help and advice at his disposal. Like all our characters he knew that it was not enough to possess wit. One must have enough of it to avoid having too much.

Forces

*Tessera patterns on a
peasant dress; terra cotta
coloured another shade
of your pink cheeks.
I remember
picking out your footprints
in the snow
on St. Valentines Day
the sway of your hips
and your mothers eyes
— a legend swearing: "love
is a tryst with a ghost".
Cuchulainn so heated within
that the snow melted.....
— a myth maybe but what
of love itself, what of
one person defining absence
singing
will you dance
will you dance
the lines of a song
the beats of a heart
hardened by the soft floodwaters
of an isthmus becoming an island.*

Aisling

*In an empire of
dreams and broken dreams
the dreamer is still king.*

Eugene McGloin