

LEITRIM, THE GUARDIAN & ME

Padraic White

I GOT TO know Michael Fox founder of the Leitrim Guardian through the GAA. My father, Batt White was co-founder of the Melvin Gaels centred on Kinlough in 1954, which was inspired by the dream of a North Leitrim club having a senior football team and winning the Leitrim senior football championship. (History records that the new Melvin Gaels went on to win four successive Leitrim senior championships in 1959-1962).

Michael Fox lived in Manorhamilton, was passionate about the GAA and was friendly with my father through the GAA network. Indeed, the revitalisation of Gaelic Football in North Leitrim as exemplified by the success of the Melvin Gaels was intertwined with pride in our Leitrim heritage as exemplified by the founding of the *Leitrim Guardian* which reflected the strong feeling that Leitrim's voice should be heard.

I had a strong interest in encouraging Community Development so that the capability of individual communities to respond to their own needs was enhanced. In discussion with Michael Fox, he was enthusiastic about the *Guardian* providing a platform for an annual Community Awards. And so it was that my fellow adjudicators and myself visited and interviewed community leaders all over the county on behalf of the *Leitrim Guardian*, reported on our findings and selected the winner of the annual Community Award. There was universal interest in the *Guardian* and in being part of the awards.

I recall us sitting down with Joseph Mooney in his home in Drumshanbo and with Fr Young in Ballinamore to review the secrets of their successful community initiatives. The pages of the *Guardian* from those early years record our findings.

These experiences have greatly influenced

Padraic White is a native of Kinlough. He went to Dublin at the age of 17 to make his career and was Managing Director of IDA- Ireland for the decade to mid 1990. He was the first Chairman of the organisation responsible for the development and launch of the successful LUAS system in Dublin. Since mid 2013, he has been Chairman of the Leitrim Recreation Forum. He is a founding member of the High Level Economic Advisory Group to the Leitrim Chief Executive. He is Chairman of a number of companies with Leitrim connections: Collins McNicholas Recruitment and HR Services company; Arigna Fuels.



■ **White Family—Kinlough August 1945**

me, as has my Leitrim upbringing in Kinlough.

My mother was May Loughlin from Ballinaglera and as principal of Uragh National School devoted herself to advancing the prospects of every child in this very rural area. My father, Batt, who came from the Golden Vale near Milford in north Cork, was the Dept. of Agriculture Advisor in our area. From spending many summers on my mother's family farm in Ballinaglera, I understood the trials and tribulations of making a living in a rural area in south Leitrim. From joining my father on numerous visits as he journeyed to meet farmers in their homes in his district—and exchange yarns and banter—I learned of the practical and philosophic outlook of small famers.

My father as a proud Corkman, far from his native heath, brought a healthy questioning and scepticism to parish, county and national affairs—which definitely rubbed off on me.

When I went for two interviews for a job in IDA-Ireland in 1970—its first year as a new State agency—I was so passionate about the need to bring new industry to the regions and counties like Leitrim, that I was assigned a

position in a special team who were pioneering the very first Regional Industrial Plans for Ireland. Those plans led to sites being purchased, advance factories being built and new industries promoted for those locations: the industries in Manorhamilton, Sligo, Letterkenny and Westport are testimony to the results of that regional policy.

I was privileged to be the Managing Director of IDA-Ireland in the decade 1980-1990 and I remained a strong advocate of regional development during those years. My Leitrim upbringing and experience was a powerful influence on me—and remains so to this day.

For the past four years since mid 2013, as Chairman of the Leitrim Recreation Forum I have been able to encourage the development of Blueways, Greenways, Walkways, and "Rail to Trail" greenways and Angling in my native county in collaboration with a fantastic group of stakeholders

As an active member of the Dublin Leitrim GAA Supporters Club, I am delighted to join with other Leitrim loyalists in sustaining the ambition of revitalising Leitrim GAA.