Leitrim Guardian Person of the Year 2011: Brendan Harvey

BRENDAN HARVEY is a native of Aghlin, Aghnasheelin, born 1946, the eldest of three sons to Bernadette and Tommy Harvey. He attended Aghacashel primary school, went on to St Patrick's college, Cavan and then to third level in St John's college, Waterford. He is married to Nuala for 37 years and they live in Clontarf, Dublin and have three adult children, Kenneth, Julie and Evan.

Brendan's working background was in advertising and public relations but primarily in the marketing side of things. He started in 1967 with North West Tourism but most of his working life was spent in the music business where, for 20 years, he was Managing Director with K-Tel International. The great success of K-Tel in Ireland, according to their marketing manager, Jack McNiece, was due to Brendan's unflinching dedication to his work and the fact that he was a great motivator. He created the harmony which existed within the company with everyone pulling together as a team. When he took over the company in 1976 there was a tiny staff in a small office but within five years he turned the Irish side of the Canadian record company into a formidable force on the music scene. There was a huge increase in staff, a move to a larger office in Ballsbridge and a multimillion turnover in 1981.

Brendan was responsible for a number of very creative and innovative projects in the music business of which he would claim that the most satisfying was the Phil Coulter 'Tranquility' series. Regarding this

John Dardis, proprietor and managing director of Trend Studios, had the following to say "It was the most meticulously planned and brilliantly executed project he had come upon in his time in the music business. Phil Coulter himself made this observation, "Brendan Harvey applies himself with singularity of purpose and absolute attention to detail with all his projects, to work with him is a breath of fresh air".

Brendan subsequently set up his own music business—Harmac Music, marketing mainly Irish artists at home and abroad. His sojourn in the music business involved running mass media merchandising campaigns, principally on TV and radio, with much input in the creative side.

Brendan is a keen sportsman having captained St Patrick's College, Cavan in the McRory Cup campaign and representing Aughnasheelin and Leitrim in his youth. Fr Benny Maguire, manager of Cavan county team in the 70's and former coach and gamesmaster at the Cavan college commented as follows, " Brendan was an outstanding talent and played on several McRory Cup teams in the 1960's, captaining the 1964/65 team. In my opinion, he was the most outstanding footballer to go through the college in that era. He was also a wonderful athlete and represented the college with distinction in the 1964 Tailteann games".

He was an active member of Leitrim football management from 1984-1988 having acted as Dublin based selector under Declan McCabe's management. Brendan was put forward as Leitrim manager at one stage but due to his work commitments did not take up the offer. He was, however, more than a selector according to Declan, through sponsorship and his own generosity the team never wanted for anything and this was all done quietly. Brendan never wanted any publicity or notoriety. As a selector he never showed any favouritism and always suggested the best player for the position regardless of where he was from.

He was involved again in the 1993-1996 years as a member of John O'Mahony's back room team. John has described Brendan as Leitrim to the core in every sense and says "Brendan was one of the big movers in the 80's in getting Leitrim football ahead of its time. As a result of his professional fundraising ability, teams could be trained to the highest possible level. He was very generous with his time, very perceptive in his analysis, and was the sixteenth invaluable member of the team". John also describes Brendan as epitomising what we need in this country at the moment.

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Brendan Harvey & Leitrim football captain Dan Meehan—GAA centenary year 1984 at a fundraising function.

Brendan as captain of the St Pat's Cavan team 1965

Brendan has given long and generous service to the GAA in his home parish and county. Indeed his availability for help and support of all Leitrim causes down the years is legendary.

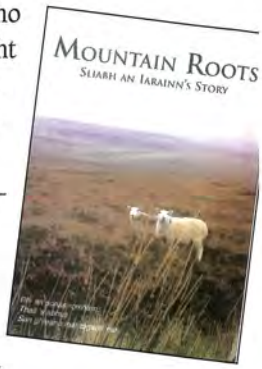
Success can often make one forget where they come from but where Brendan is concerned this is certainly not the case. Right throughout his busy working life he always found time to return regularly to Aughnasheelin with his family where, as children, they enjoyed the freedom of the countryside. He himself liked nothing better than meeting and chatting with the neighbours. Indeed if friends or neighbours needed to be brought to or from hospital, or any other business in Dublin, Brendan was always at hand to drive them and never failed to visit while they were there. His hospitality, and that of his wife Nuala's, at their home in Clontarf is also well known.

In a feature in the *Leitrim Observer* in 1985 on 'Leitrim Achievers', written by former *Leitrim Person of the Year* Paul Williams, Brendan was said to have come "from a small farm on the windswept slopes of Sliabh-an-Iarainn to the hurly burly and jet setting of the music industry". Having reached great heights of success in that business it was his love of these same windswept slopes, his passionate interest in his home county, and particularly his beloved Aughnasheelin, that in his semi-retirement in the last five years, he conceived and directed the Sliabh-an-Iarainn project. From conception to delivery he carried it out with super efficiency and total professionalism.

This was done in a most unique but practical manner, by the re-enactment of the arrival of the Ultachs; the erection of a memorial on the site in a very moving ceremony; the revival of many customs long forgotten; lectures and discussions on the people of Sliabh-an-Iarainn; prayer services and memorial Masses; joining in the blessing of the graves at the cemeteries in the locality; and music and folklore evenings.

The largest part of the project has been the recording and publication of stories, poems and local history in four volumes "Mountain Echoes", "Mountain Shadows", "Mountain Roots" and latterly "The Head Sheaf". The launch of each volume formed the culmination of a weekend of events and was celebrated at a Gala Dinner in the Bush Hotel, Carrick-on-Shannon, attended by hundreds of people.

The books have sold in record numbers with many going to relatives abroad who have been enraptured by the idea behind the project. What has made the books so special is that they contain real life stories from a large number of people, across several parishes. People who built roads and planted our hills, people who mined in our coal pits, fought in our battles, carried milk to our creameries or entertained us with music and song, have all been remembered in these stories. The books also contain material of national historical interest, set within our local context to which we can relate more easily. Brendan has written many fine articles both under his own name and the pseudonym 'Ben Croy'.

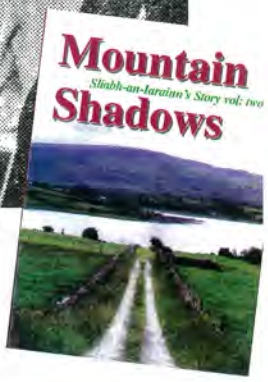


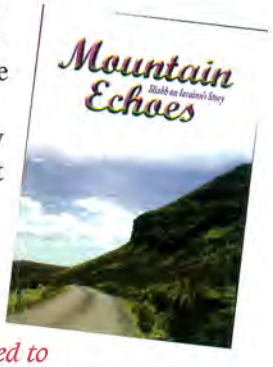
At the launch of the first volume Brendan announced that it was his aim to involve as many people as possible from as many different localities, ages, and

Brendan &Nuala with, at back: Evan, Julie & Kenneth

■ *Brendan with wife Nuala and sister-in-law Geena*

■ *John Hume, Phil Coulter & Brendan Harvey at the launch of a Phil Coulter album*





experiences as possible, both male and female, at home and abroad. This aim has been achieved in ways beyond expectation. It has meant a lot to many people to know that their family histories, stories, and customs of our ancestors and relatives are preserved. The launch weekends were an opportunity for celebration and nostalgia that brought much joy and revived many memories for people at home and abroad.

Protecting our history is of key importance and equally significant is maintaining a connection with our emigrants. A large number of emigrants returned to the mountain areas, from the Cavan to the Roscommon borders, for all the book launches and spent time visiting, socialising and re-connecting with their Leitrim roots.

The quality of the publications themselves has been widely acknowledged and led to personalities like Bryan Dobson of RTE and journalist John Waters being very honoured to do official launches.

In 2008 Bryan Dobson said "The success of this project is what happens when you have a person with vision and the determination to carry things through...it's all too easy to forget how the past has shaped us, these books present us with most unique and valuable records and have captured the essence of what life was like in this corner of Leitrim and should be treasured, not just by Leitrim people, but by all who care about the past". These books would, he said, serve as reference books for generations to come.

At the launch of "The Head Sheaf" this year John Waters said "What a well kept secret the beauty of Leitrim is, with its landscape as close to creation as you can get" He compared these books as a match for that landscape in their quality and depth and said all four books were as good as he had seen anywhere.

Marie Keegan, chairperson of the Sliabh-an-Iarainn project committee, said it was a joy to work with Brendan over the last four years while his co-editor on the books, Seán Kennedy, on hearing of his election as Leitrim Person of the Year said "it was richly deserved—only he could have done it"

A common sentiment expressed by all the people who spoke about Brendan was of his great sense of humour and mischief, and of very enjoyable times spent in his company.

Brendan has given long service to his home parish and county. He never failed to avail of every opportunity nationally, to promote and mention Leitrim in a favourable light. His commitment to Leitrim people and Leitrim causes has been consistent and substantial over many years. He is a very worthy recipient of the Leitrim Person of the Year award.

■ *Launching at K-Tel Christmas 1977 Brendan & Maura Geoghegan-Quinn*

■ *Peadar Pearse RTE, Geraldine Brannigan, Brendan Harvey & Ray McSharry at a K-Tel function*