

CALLED TO THE BAR

Battie White

THE YEAR was nineteen sixty nine. I was at home in Kinlough on holidays from UCD. Next door to us was Terry McGloin's pub, the Angler's Rest, where I sometimes worked to earn a few bob. One evening a man 'worse for wear' came into the bar and demanded a double Powers. As he was already 'three sheets in the wind' I refused to serve him. He was not impressed. He staggered towards the door, stopped, and turned back.

'It's just as well you stayed at school,' he retorted, 'for you'd be good for nothing else.'

I had occasionally worked in Terry's bar since the age of about fifteen. This was indeed a real education. In the words of Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*, this was where 'village statesmen talked with looks profound, and news much older than their ale went round.'

The busiest day of the month was the Fair Day, which accounted for much of the month's turnover. Cattle dealers with wads of fifty pound notes, and even big dark green hundred pound notes, swaggered in and bought drinks all round for the small farmers. For the men it would be pints of Guinness, bottles of Harp, Smithwicks and Double Diamond. Sometimes a man might ask for a Black & Tan, a mixture of Guinness and beer. Women, of course, didn't come into the bar. They sipped sherry or a mineral in the snug.



■ McGloin's Kinlough

In the Sixties the tourism industry around Kinlough took off in a big way. Anglers from Ireland and abroad came to Lough Melvin, hoping to catch some of the famed Gillaroo or Sonaghan trout. Many of the visitors were from Germany, and at the end of a busy day fishing, or travelling around the countryside in the brightly painted horse-drawn caravans, they'd be well ready for a few pints of lager and a singsong. The usual practice of payment for drink when served had to be abandoned for the German drinkers. They preferred to use the German system, whereby the bill for the night's drinking was paid all together at the end of the night. I got to like the German system; it usually involved a generous tip for the barman!

Sometimes the late night revelries were brought to a temporary halt by a loud knocking on the window or front door, and the

dreaded words—'Gardaí on duty, open up.' The very diligent Garda, and his less than enthusiastic partner, would take down the names and addresses of all present. Rudolf, Axel, Stefan, Magda, Heidi; with addresses in Munich, Dortmund and Düsseldorf. I doubt if the summonses were ever successfully served.

As is the case now, the price of drink was always a topic of debate. I remember when the pint of Guinness was two shillings and a penny (approximately thirteen cents in the 'new money'), and the medium (a half pint glass) was one and a penny. Customers regularly complained that this was overcharging; the medium should only have been a shilling and a halfpenny.

The pub was a great place for yarns about the old days, and about various local characters. There was a story told about a man called Pat, who used to do

painting and other jobs around Kinlough. He was taken on by the Parish Priest to paint the front railings of the church. The job seemed to be going on forever. Pat was only half way through after a week. Two local wags were passing by one day.

'Pat,' says one, 'are you working on a time and materials contract?'

'No,' Pat shot back, 'I'm working on style and appearance!'

Another story concerned a man who had spent the day doing some serious drinking in all the local pubs and was walking home that night, a bit under the weather. Unfortunately he strayed off the road at some point and found himself struggling to avoid falling into a bog hole. It being a fine summer night, he wisely decided to lie down and sleep it off until the morning. The next day he was telling about his adventures. One of the lads at the bar counter asked him did he know where he was when he woke up in the morning.

'I did surely,' he answered, 'when I opened my eyes and looked around me, I knew well I was in Eddie Ned's heather!'

Terry always did his best to look after customers who might have had a drink too many, and most nights he'd give people a lift home to ensure their safety. Nevertheless, back in the Sixties attitudes to driving with a few drinks could be rather careless. I remember two men having a few pints after work.

'We'll have one for the road,' said one. They drank the 'one for the road.'

His companion called for another round.

'Now, we'll have one for the ditch!' he said.

Then there were the lads thinking of heading into Bundoran for a few more drinks, and to sample the nightlife. They were discussing whether to drive the car or not.

'I think we should get a taxi,' said one.

'No,' said one of the men, 'I think we probably need an ambulance at this stage!'

There was no breathalyser back then, but it could happen that a man might lose his licence for 'driving while under the influence of alcohol.' This was no problem to one man. He simply drove to the pubs on his tractor. And of course there was always the option of cycling to the pub, or travelling by ass and cart. Nobody was ever summonsed for driving an ass while 'under the influence'.

Sometimes a man might inherit a small farm of land, or if he was lucky enough to have bachelor uncles, two or more farms. Hence you would often hear of someone 'drinking a farm of land,' which you could do in the space of a year if you were a dedicated drinker. The term 'alcoholic' was seldom used. Instead, a man might be described as 'fond of a drink,' or 'inclined to have one too many.'

Nineteen eighty was a great year for Kinlough tourism. 'Bed & Breakfast' signs sprouted up all over the place. Emigrants home from England mingled with locals, anglers and passing tourists. That year the visitors included David Soul, a big TV star of the time

(Starsky and Hutch). He was in Kinlough on holidays, and was having a quiet pint in a local bar. Johnny (not his real name!), home from England and with a few drinks on board, noticed the stranger at the bar. Up he goes and introduces himself, and they start chatting.

'Well,' said Johnny, 'are you home from England yourself?'

Some time in the late Sixties there was a big change in the pub business. Women were no longer happy to sip sherry in the snug. They wanted to be in the bar, drinking glasses of Harp, or even vodkas and orange. Some of them were brazen enough to sit up at the bar counter. High stools, high heels and short skirts, a deadly combination. Men couldn't concentrate on their drinking; there were too many distractions. But on the other hand they didn't need to go to a dance anymore to meet a woman. All they had to do was put on the good suit and go to the pub.

After a few drinks, they could all relax and enjoy themselves.

Men with no future could chat up women with a past. It was a whole new ball game. Terry's, and Ireland would never be the same again.

I was back in Kinlough recently. Terry and his wife Doreen have now retired from the business, and the pub is owned by their son Pauric. I happened to meet Terry.

'Tell me,' he said, 'are you down for a few days holidays, or have you the wife with you?'

There's no answer to that.