

DRIMMIEN-MULLAGHBRACK School Reunion

Reunion committee members-

Mary Taylor, Aiden Kelleher, Eileen Boyle, Thecla Carleton, John P Heslin, Micheál Browne

DRIMMIEN and Mullaghbrack national schools were situated in a quiet country area in Gortletteragh parish that doesn't often hit the headlines. But on the weekend of August 19th – 21st they took centre stage as large



crowds gathered to join in their Reunion celebrations, and what a wonderful occasion it turned out to be. Many past pupils, their families as well as teachers connected with the schools enjoyed a celebration that will live long in their memory.

For the people who down through the years have migrated to other parts of Ireland, and to the many more who emigrated to the four corners of the globe, this Reunion was a pilgrimage back to their spiritual homes, to a place and a people that moulded their personalities and gave them their values in life all those years ago. It was a weekend that they will cherish and remember for the rest of their lives.

■ Past pupils who attended the reunion weekend

For the locals the Reunion was a once in a lifetime chance to show the world how we can celebrate here in Gortletteragh.

It was a great opportunity for past pupils to rekindle old friendships and relive the wonder and excitement of their school days.

From 1856 to 1971 Drimmien and Mullaghbrack national schools drew pupils to their classrooms from North Gortletteragh and the Southern end of Cloone parish.

It was appropriate that the Reunion celebrations should start off in Creegan's of Cloone on the Friday night. This was a

marvellous night of music, song and dance, a night of chat and reminiscing and it set the tone for the remainder of the weekend.

On Saturday people were given a chance to drop into Gortletteragh Community Centre for a cup of tea, and to browse through materials and memorabilia connected to the schools and meet up with long lost friends. The old photos that adorned the walls of the community centre were of particular interest to the past pupils.

That night the Centre hosted the launch of the Commemorative Book by Drimmien past pupil Thomas Mulherin. Thomas is the son of Master James Mul-

herin who taught in Drimmien from 1938 to 1971.

On arrival the people were greeted by the sound of some fine traditional music by Mary Heslin from Drumgownagh. Mary is a former All Ireland Winner with Ceolus, a Gortletteragh based Céilí band.

The Community Centre was buzzing on the night and the capacity crowd couldn't wait to get their hands on this new exciting publication.

The book, which is edited by Mary Taylor and Aiden Kelleher, runs to nearly 400 pages and is a real gem. Within its covers you will find something to suit every reader's taste.

It is really a mixed grill of articles, some of precious memories of life at Drimmien school, more that touch on the history and heritage of the area, some emigrant stories and much more. There are some hilariously funny pieces included as well as a photo gallery containing pictures of almost every family in the school catchment area, and many more pictures that detail various aspects of life in the district over the last hundred years. Already this book is becoming a collector's item.

Leitrim Observer photographer, Willie Donnellan was at the book

launch to record for posterity this historic gathering. Willie has been a real institution in every parish hall in Leitrim for many decades and his presence on the night added greatly to the occasion.

Because the school system played such an important role in handing on the faith, it was little wonder that the church services on the Sunday proved to be the highlight of the Reunion weekend. Farnaught Church of Ireland held a Service of Celebration and Remembrance on Sunday morning. Rev. Linda Frost, who officiated at the service, invited the Reunion committee to light a candle in remembrance of those who are no longer with us and to pray the Prayers of the People.

This was a very fitting service because when Mullaghbrack opened its doors in 1859 it was an interdenominational project, the school drawing pupils from both the Protestant and Catholic faith systems.

It came about quite naturally that the Catholic and Church of Ireland children should share the same classrooms, because as a people they lived in peace and harmony, helping each other out in times of crisis and celebrating together in times of joy. After the service some of the congregation explored the site of the ancient oratory which is adjacent to the church.

■ **Cutting the reunion cake—The oldest past pupil, Frances Browne Geddes with Peadar Cunningham & Mairead Mulherin**



The Reunion mass in St Mary's Church, Gortletteragh was celebrated by Drimmien past pupil Rev. Gerard Brady from Keeldra assisted by Rev John Quinn. This was a lovely service with full participation by many Drimmien past pupils. It commenced with the carrying to the altar of symbols connected to Drimmien/Mullaghbrack schools, including the Roll of Pupils, the List of Teachers, a Slate and Chalk, an Atlas, a Catechism, a Copybook, a Tin Whistle and a Turf. The beautiful singing by the church choir, who were

accompanied by Laura McManus on the organ, brought a sense of serenity to the Reunion mass. Dervla McManus, on the fiddle, played the beautiful tune, Planxty Irwin which was composed by Turlough O'Carolan, who lived with his wife and family at Lakefield which in times past was a feeder townland for Drimmien and Mullaghbrack schools. Fr. Gerard preached a lovely homily that touched on many aspects of life from our school days. As the congregation left the church they were treated to an exhibition of tin whistle playing by a group of children from Gortletteragh National school.

Lough Rynn Castle Hotel was the perfect setting for the



Reunion Sunday lunch that brought the celebrations to a close. Here again the McManus sisters entertained the crowd as they gathered for their meal with some nice soothing music. It was a lovely relaxing occasion. After the meal Peadar Cunningham, Mairéad Mulherin-O'Reilly and Frances Browne-Geddes, who was the oldest past pupil present on the evening, proceeded to cut the beautiful Reunion cake.

The whole weekend of events was recorded on video by John McGrath while photographer Declan Gaffney captured many great moments, which can be seen on the Drimmien/Mullaghbrack school Facebook page.

As the past pupils began to

■ Back Row: Aiden Kelleher, John Patrick Heslin, Eileen Mahon Boyle, Micheál Browne & Thomas Mulherin who launched the book
Front Row: Thecla Carleton McLoughlin, Mary Mahon Taylor, Gertie Browne Geoghegan & Maura Browne

drift back to their homes on Sunday evening, they were left with many lasting memories of a fabulous Reunion celebration.

For the organising committee, the Drimmien/Mullaghbrack Reunion Project was, from start to finish, a labour of love and it was very pleasurable for them to witness the level of joy, friendship and happiness that the celebrations brought to peoples' lives.