

# RICHARD HAYWARD—A LOVER OF LEITRIM

*Paul Clements*

*Fifty years after his death, the legacy of the neglected Irish actor, singer and travel writer Richard Hayward is being retrieved. Paul Clements explores Hayward's connection to Leitrim and in particular his love of Carrick-on-Shannon.*

Just as the world was sliding into war at the end of the summer of 1939, the travel writer Richard Hayward set off on a journey down the Shannon with a photographer and movie cameraman. The trip produced an engaging travel book and film chronicling their adventures following the course of the river from the Shannon Pot to Ballybunnion in Co Kerry. It was just twenty-one years since the end of the Great War, and on the eve again of momentous world events, Hayward presents a startling pastoral contrast in the preface about their departure:

“A warm sun in the sky, a genuine thrill of expectancy and joy in our hearts, and many and many a song in our mouths as we sped past the sweet fields of Ireland.”

Their objective was to gather material as they followed the banks of the Shannon from the source in the Cavan hills to the Atlantic seaboard. The journey



■ **Hayward in characteristic pose in Devil's Rock**

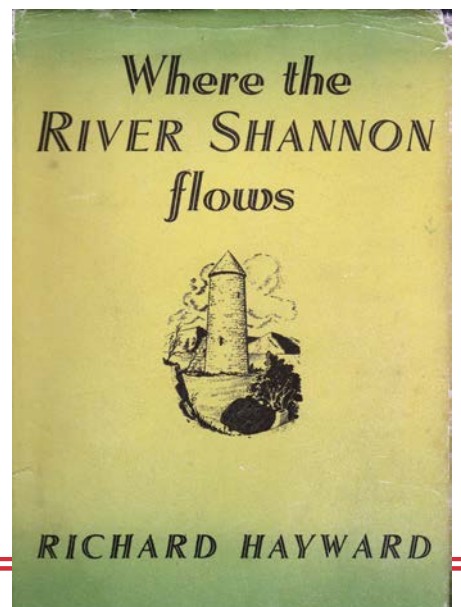
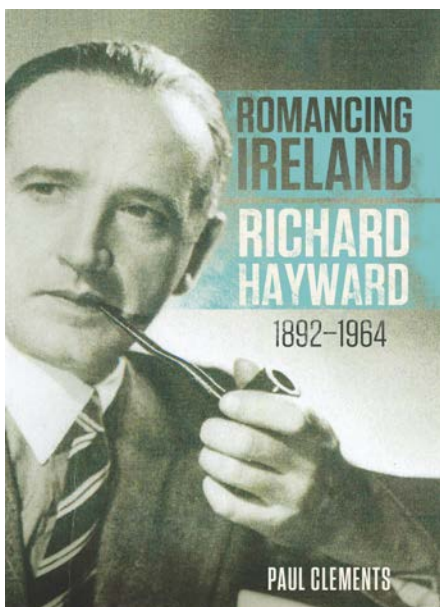
of 214 miles, encompassing eleven counties, would take three weeks. Accompanying the book, a travelogue would be filmed by Germain Burger, while a photographer, Louis Morrison, provided atmospheric black-and-white photographs. They enjoyed themselves meeting all sorts of people in towns, villages and on islands. Three men in a caravan with their cameras, gear and supplies were a novelty and sometimes locals trailed along behind them for a stretch.

Hayward had already written an Ulster travel book and a novel, and was known throughout Ireland as a film star featuring in some of the first black and white 'talkies' made in Ireland. These included *Luck of the Irish* (1935) and *Irish and Proud of It* (1936). Born in Southport, Lancashire in 1892, Hayward was brought up in Larne, Co Antrim and tried to disguise his English background. As a boy he had been taken by his parents on trips along many of Ireland's inland waterways and his father was a well known yachtsman

who also worked for the Congested Districts Board in the west of Ireland from 1906-1909 helping fishermen modernize their boats. All this had an impact on the young Richard Hayward and he decided to spend his life promoting Ireland through his filmmaking, songs and above all, his eleven travel books about the country.

He was well read on the history of the Shannon as well as the legends and songs inspired by it. His gift for talking to strangers and using his guile drew stories from people. In the 1930s Carrick-on-Shannon had 31 bars, three bakery shops and three grocery, hardware and timber stores. One of his haunts, John Lowe's pub which is mentioned several times in the book, is now gone. Hayward was friendly with Lowe who also owned the Abbey Cinema in Boyle and, along with Dunne's bar, it was one of the two main pubs where he drank and met people.

Nowadays Lowe's grandson, John, sells flowers from a shop in an alleyway in Bridge Street beside where the old premises used to be. He remembers hearing



## Leitrim sketches from Hayward's 1955 Travel Book



■ 'The tale goes round' – Raymond Piper's sketch of Dunne's Bar, Carrick-on-Shannon, County Leitrim which appeared in Hayward's book. He is seated third from left.



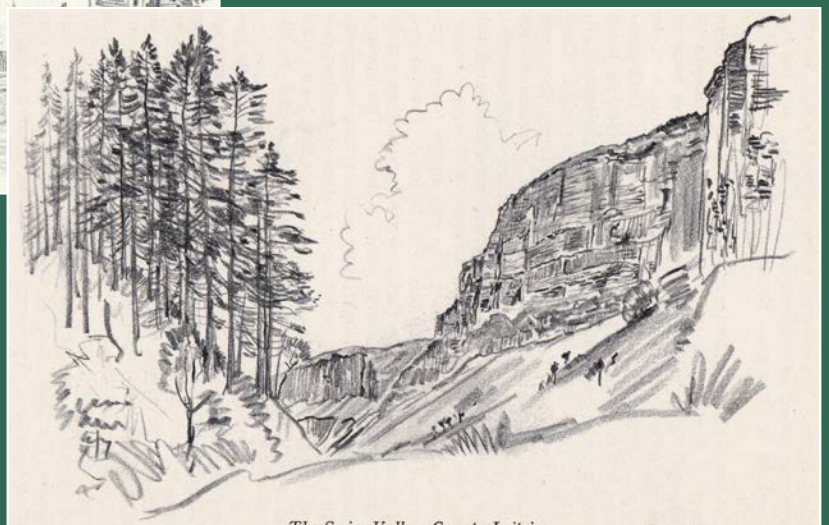
■ Owen McCann memorial clock, Carrick, from Hayward's 1955 travel book



■ Cavan and Leitrim Light Railway sketched by Piper for Hayward's 1955 travel book



■ Carrick Main Street for Hayward's 1955 travel book.



■ Swiss Valley, Leitrim, from Hayward's 1955 travel book

stories about the bar. "Solicitors and barristers used to drink in it along with a judge and a small room at the back was known as the Court of Appeal where they would dissect the court proceedings and go through the day's hearings," he said.

Amidst the bustle of a workday lunchtime in Carrick's busy shopping streets one of the enduring landmarks, the town clock, erected to Owen McCann still presides at the junction of Bridge and Main streets. In Hayward's time it stood on the road but in the 1970s was moved back on to the pavement. Although the rhythm of the streetscape has not changed, he would not recognize much of modern day Cora Droma Rúisc ('the stony ford of the ridge in the marsh').

Many shop fronts have been restyled. Paddy Dillon's chemist's shop that stood here in the 1930s is now the Chic Hair Studio and Exclusive Nail Bar. Hayward's passion for church architecture was well sated at the Costello Memorial Chapel on Bridge Street, built in 1879. It is the smallest in Ireland and reputedly the second smallest in the world. Practically dwarfed by two pubs, it is still held in warm affection by the townspeople and is largely unchanged since Hayward wrote about it. In 2009 it was renovated to prevent the fabric of the building deteriorating.

Across the road at the Post Office in St George's Terrace he had an encounter on his first visit to Carrick with J J Sheerin. Hayward was in search of letters and telegrams that had been sent to him. Sheerin told him he recognized him from his appearances in the cinema and heard him singing on Radio Éireann. 'Jay Jay', as Hayward calls him in the book, was the author of a guidebook Picturesque Carrick-on-Shannon (now a collector's item) and he presented a copy to him as a gift.

On his summer Shannon journey



■ Hayward from 'The Luck of the Irish'

Hayward started each day with an early morning swim. For breakfast he and his traveling companions often ate the leftovers from dinner the night before. His book contains topographical details, historical meanderings, and occasionally outspoken comments on the built heritage but he wrote affectionately of Carrick:

*"Carrick is one of the great ancient crossing-places of the Shannon, and while it is a small place it has always been important from this very circumstance of its situation. It is neat and clean, and one of the pleasantest little towns I have ever been in, and it is in the centre of a district which cannot fail to delight the heart of any holiday-maker who has the good sense to make it his headquarters"*

On his travels around Hayward bemoaned the lack of decent meals in hotels. He did though enjoy staying at the Bush Hotel on his visits to Carrick—just twenty years beforehand Michael Collins had spent a night in the hotel. In the 1930s it was owned by Mrs MacDermott, grandmother of the late Tom Maher who ran the Holywell B&B in Carrick. After an excellent meal in the Bush, Hayward goes on to describe what happened next:

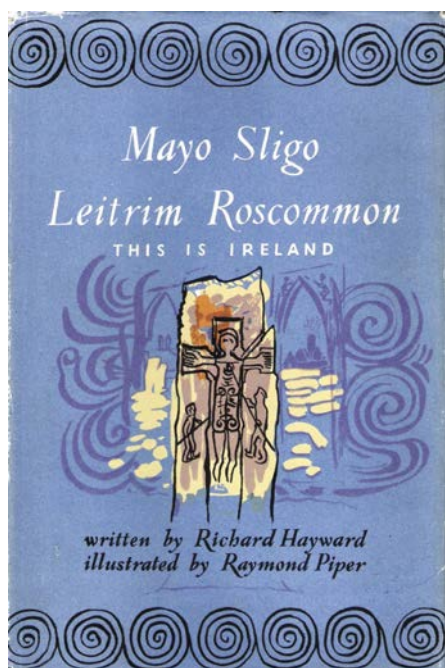
*"We talked and we sang and we caroused, and we had what we call in Ireland a regular wee hooley, and during the night we met so many people I can't remember a quarter of them."*

His *Shannon* book, which offered readers escapism, was a wartime bestseller and is still in demand today by holidaymakers touring the region or boating. A Canadian bookseller, Nick Kaszuk, who runs Trinity Rare Books, a secondhand and antiquarian shop in Carrick, is frequently asked for copies. He attributes this demand to Hayward's writing style and his popular technique combining research and people:

*"Where the River Shannon flows is a standard local classic and Hayward's books are always sought after,"* he said. *"I search for them on the internet and find them in Australia, America and all over the UK. His books are listed on ebay and they just seem to keep on selling. He was an informative traveller, a very good writer, and he always seems to form an attachment to the areas he visits. The way he describes places makes them come alive. People come from all over and they want to find out about the river's history and its literature and the book is one of my top ten standards."*

In his many trips to Carrick, Dunne's bar was his usual haunt. When Hayward visited the town as part of his journey through Connacht in the early 1950s Dunne's was one of his first ports of call. Pubs were a tremendous source of knowledge for him. He describes them in *Where the River Shannon flows* as 'a natural clearing-house for information.' And after 'two wild nights' he renamed Carrick-on-Shannon 'Cirrhosis-of-the-Liver.'

During his 1950s' journey Hayward was accompanied by the Belfast artist Raymond Piper who illustrated five books in the series 'This is Ireland.' In 1952 Hayward and Piper were on a research tour for his second Connacht volume Mayo Sligo Leitrim & Roscommon. A sketch, which appeared in the book three years later, shows Hayward with a group



■ The distinctive blue dust jacket of Hayward's second book on Connacht Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim & Roscommon. Published in 1955

of local man in Dunne's bar. It was presented by Gregory Dunne to Paul and Anne-Marie Maye, the owner of Dunne's renovated bar on their first anniversary, 12 March 2002.

Today the sketch, entitled *'The tale goes round'*, still hangs in Dunne's, a tangible reminder of Hayward's visits. It features six well-dressed Carrick businessmen in a cosy group, some on high stools with glasses in hand, shooting the breeze. Seated in the centre, a relaxed and puckish Hayward wears an open-neck shirt with a sports jacket. As ever, holding court, he plays the role expected of him with his finely-honed oratorical skills. Hayward's friends are Paddy Dillon the chemist, Jack Cassidy, dentist, Patrick Dunne, editor of the *Leitrim Observer*, Paddy Hyland, the paper's manager, John Dunne, jeweller and former owner of Dunne's bar, and Tommy Flynn, the former owner of P Flynn and Company.

The sketch is a reminder of the esteem

in which Hayward was held in a place that had a strong emotional pull for him and which he frequently revisited. He never forgot the camaraderie he found in 'the little town of my heart'. For him it exemplified the commonplace soul of Ireland. In 1945 he was made a 'freeman' of Carrick for his services to the *Inland Waterways Association of Ireland*. Although the honour had no official status it was in recognition of his work promoting the Shannon region in his writing and filmmaking.

Richard Hayward was a man of boundless energy, fierce ambition, and infectious enthusiasm. Through his books and writing, his tour guiding and films, he opened up the country to thousands of people. His regional travel books capture an Ireland long gone. They are a remarkable record of a country going through dramatic social and political change before the modern era and represent thoughtful meditations on each place.

Fifty years after his death, his presence still roams Carrick and you can channel his spirit by the banks of the Shannon. His name endures in art, music, journalistic history and in literature; his memory remains imprinted in the minds

of local people—even if it is a distant, far-flung one. Perhaps he may even be enjoying a laugh at how this small but vibrant town has been remarkably transformed, reinventing itself beyond recognition from the quiet unpretentious place he knew so well.

*Romancing Ireland, Richard Hayward 1892-1964* by Paul Clements is published by the Lilliput Press and available from Trinity Books and the Reading Room in Carrick-on-Shannon at €25.00.

## DOON HILL

Willie Keane

*He saw the land lie fallow  
and felt he'd failed somehow.  
There was a certain strangeness  
to the scene he gazed on now.*

*No longer did the milch cows  
roam and graze at will  
Lowing to call their sucklings  
Their udders quick to fill.*

*No sheep grazed on low hills,  
or lambs climb higher still.  
Scenes of mixed emotion  
To him, who loved Doon Hill.*

*He climbed a familiar headland.  
Where he ran a boy  
Rabbits had their burrows  
Courting couples relaxed in joy.*

*Home is where the heart is,  
And so it will ever be,  
Wholesome memories all,  
that now come back to me.*