

# Faughary

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I GOT INVOLVED in the General Election campaign at the start of 2016, and so I spent a great deal of time walking and travelling the footpaths, streets, avenues, highways and byways of Sligo town and county.

One evening around 7pm early in February as our team were canvassing in a particular estate in Sligo city, myself and fellow canvasser Phil, crossed the street towards our next house. As we approached, the dim street lights partially illuminated the name of the house, on the wall to the right of the front door, I was immediately taken by the name, Faughary (approximate pronunciation FAW – HARY). We chatted to the man who came to the door and asked for his support for our candidate Tony McLoughlin, but before I left I was determined to find out more about the house name. He said that it was in memory of his mother who was born and reared in the townland of Faughary, and that she came to Sligo town to work in the late 1930's, in due course she married a local man.

This small event has remained

in my mind and given rise to much reflection upon Faughary, you see I am quite familiar with the area, since I was reared in Corthoon the next townland. Faughary is about 2 miles due north of Manorhamilton as you travel the Rossinver road, veering right at Skreeney, taking the L6180 to be exact, it is bounded by a number of townlands, including, in a clockwise direction- Curraghfore, Brackary Beg, Corthoon, Shasmore, Killea and Boleyboy.

A more immediate connection I have with Faughary is the fact that my dad, John, had the good fortune to be able to buy 19 acres of land there in the 1950's from Dan Hennessey. Therefore, much of my youthful memories incorporate the variety of our farming activities involved in Faughary, such as the minding of cattle, foddering in winter, saving hay and turf, the regular repair of fences and stone walls, digging drains.

During long dry spells we had to drive the cattle down the long hill towards John Fox's. To the left, in a hollow, was a well. It was therefore a source of much satisfaction to my dad,

that in his time he managed to establish a reliable source of water on that land. After the hay was saved, lest we be bored, dad initiated a job creation scheme, the rooting out of buachallan's (aka Ragwort / Buachallan bui) which grew on the land in unwelcome profusion, to the benefit of none bar the caterpillars of the cinnabar moth and other insects, it is very poisonous to cattle. We had competitions to see who could pull the most plants out of the ground, oh what fun we had! I don't recall getting much money out of the job creation scheme.

Another connection our family had with Faughary was Uncle Charly, the uncle of our mother Mary. He lived his later years in upper Faughary, in a house rented from a Boylan family. He was an important part of our family life in the 1960's, helping out with farm work in exchange for money and provisions. We named the route to his house in relation to him, thus the big hill down to John Fox's was Charly's Hill, a quarter of the way down, sharp to the left was the road to Killea which we called Charly's Lane,

a quarter mile up this lane to the right and over five hundred yards of undulating landscape was Charly's house. A river, Charly's river of course, flowed past his house, traversed by a neat little bridge, it was a pleasant rustic scene.

On a few occasions we dammed the river in two places a few yards apart. Then systematically feeling and fishing under all the stones in the river, it was unnerving to know that an eel could also be under a stone ready to give you a bite. I recall on occasions bringing home a good kettle full of fish and eels,

Uncle Charly died in 1967, and as he and the remaining residents of the area passed on to their eternal rest, it was apparent that no new people were replacing them. In addition, the people were being supplanted by a silent evergreen host—forestry.

Joe Connolly of lower Faughary who died in 2015, RIP, was the last remaining resident of the townland, which at one time had a population of well over 250 people.

This depopulation of a once vibrant townland like Faughary, or any rural community, is a cause of much concern and angst to rural dwellers, policy makers and politicians. In fair-

ness, the policies of successive Irish governments and the European Union genuinely strove to support and sustain such communities, and yet this depopulation and drift from the land towards urban areas continues.

The causes are complex and multifactorial, but essentially the disruptive energy, efficiency and inventiveness of the industrial revolution are still at play, facilitating urban growth, while simultaneously undermining rural economies and communities.

The allure of urban life is also a factor, indeed I have often imagined some youth up in Faughary being enchanted on seeing the bright lights of Manorhamilton, those same lights being a metaphor for the bright lights of Manchester, Manhattan, Montreal, or any metropolis. The net result is a move from the quietude of the country to urban areas for work, money, independence, company and access to various support services.

Governments have a remit to spend public money efficiently, however, an undue focus on this remit can lead to the gradual withdrawal of vital areas of government cash flow in rural communities, e.g. closure of

Garda Stations, Post Offices, Schools. Clearly a sensible balance must be sought in this regard, in order to maintain a critical mass- population wise, to maintain rural communities.

Fothaire is the Irish version of the townland, meaning a wooded area, a dell, and I can imagine its undulating landscape being once richly endowed with native flora and fauna such as, hazel, holly, ash, alder, oak, sally and woodbine, squirrels, foxes, hares, badgers, birds, fish and eels, etc.

It is heartening to see that despite considerable afforestation, some traditional pastoral farming continues in the townland, and as result we can still see where many generations blessed the land with their toil and effort, such as their drains, ditches and stone walls, their fields, orchards and haggards, their houses and byres.

Of course global commercial realities will decide if such farming can continue in the long run, but I hope that while acknowledging the great value of forestry, we will strive in the future for a more sensitive environmental approach to afforestation, and simultaneously resolve to support one of our very oldest traditions — pastoral farming.