



Peace and Tranquillity

Brendan Harvey

■ Dromod, winner of the county's tidiest town award for 36 years in a row

ONE OF Oscar Wilde's famous quotes was "There is one thing in life worse than being talked about and that is not being talked about". No doubt that was inspired by his time in London where he moved in fashionable and social circles for a time at the end of the 19th century.

Nowadays, when almost all news-worthy talk is of a negative nature we in Leitrim can celebrate that we rarely make the headlines. In fact during a break in the 9pm news on RTE in September 2013 it was brought to Bryan Dobson's attention that Leitrim had not been in the news for the previous 3 years. In the later news bulletin that night Leitrim's absence from the news was reported.

"No news is good news" certainly applies in Leitrim when it comes to serious crime. Between the years of 2012 and 2015 three hundred and twenty six people went before the Central Criminal Court charged with rape or attempted rape, with one hundred and eighty four people appearing in the Court charged with murder or attempted murder. Leitrim

didn't produce a single rape or murder suspect in the three years up to March 2015 with no one from the county appearing before the Central Criminal Court charged with violent crime.

When they can't get us on the bad news stories they try to make a joke of us. It created much amusement for the rest of the country when Leitrim got its first set of traffic lights in 2003. Carrick-on-Shannon has proved that it's not traffic lights that make a thriving town.

In research carried out by myhome.ie in 2014, compiling the responses of 1,700 people, Leitrim was voted the least appealing county for a holiday. We weren't told if this was based on experience or perception.

However, in 2015 the Irish Times ran a "Best Day Out in Ireland" competition asking their readers to help by nominating their favourites. They received more than 1,900 entries. "Big Day out in Leitrim", a one-day experience provided by three outdoor-activity operators, offering guided walks, canoeing on the

Shannon-Blueway and electric-bike cycling, was one of the five finalists chosen among such luminaries as: The Antrim coast; The Barrow Way, Co Carlow; Clare Island Adventures; and Killarney National Park, Co Kerry.

The Irish Times verdict was: "Leitrim is a timeless, undiscovered world waiting to be discovered."

Those who have holidayed in Leitrim have noted the friendliness of the people; the award winning restaurants; the festivals with something for everybody; Arts Centres in The Dock, Carrick-on-Shannon and Glens Manorbhamilton to rival any city arts centre. They have described Leitrim as home to some of the most breathtaking scenery in the world and home to many artists, actors and musicians who gain inspiration from their surroundings. Australian Booker Prize winner, DBC Pierre, could have chosen to live anywhere in the world but he was looking for the "real Ireland" and he found it in my native Aughnasheelin, County Leitrim.

Even if others try to claim some of our most beautiful lakes like Glencar, which is two thirds in Leitrim, and Lough Gill, whose shore-line we share, we still have more than 140 lakes making Leitrim an anglers' paradise. Our coastline, rightly described as the shortest in Ireland, but often put across in a way that people who wouldn't know the geography of Ireland would think that all the other 31 counties had long sandy beaches. We're all about quality, not quantity, in Leitrim, and Tullaghan Strand and the views from there across Donegal Bay are spectacular.

Anyone approaching Leitrim from the southern tip will be met by the beautiful spectacle of Dromod Village – winner of the county's tidiest town now for thirty six years in a row.

We may have had a population decline and high emigration over the years but we celebrate this with a Roots festival and many annual homecoming festivals in towns throughout the county. An Tóstal was established nationwide in the early 1950s by Bord Fáilte to encourage emigrants home. By the 1960s, only a handful of towns celebrated it. When Buttevant, Co. Cork, gave up in 1965 Drumshanbo was left to fly the flag alone. That the Tóstal flag still flies in Drumshanbo into the 21st century is thanks to the dedication of Joe and Eva Mooney, helped by a small, enthusiastic band of local volunteers.

Following Joe's death in 1988 the 'Joe Mooney Summer School' was set up in his honour. This, too, has been enjoying huge success annually since 1989. They come from all over the world to avail of the music and dancing classes. The range of nationalities sitting side by side, tapping their feet to the sounds of the full family of traditional instruments is a sight to behold.

Due to the dedication of many hard-working committees around the county we enjoy many long surviving annual events. Among these are the Ballinamore Family Festival; the Manorhamilton WildRose/Emigrants' Festival; Drama Festivals in Ballinamore and Kiltyclogher; Carrick-on-Shannon Regatta – the oldest institution in the county – it was in existence before the formation of the GAA (founded 1884).

The tradition of drama in the county goes back to the 1800s in Carrigallen. This has gone from strength to strength resulting in the establishment of the Corn Mill Theatre in 1989 and the huge success of the Corn Mill Theatre Drama Company at All-Ireland level.

While emigration is still a feature of Irish life, those leaving from Leitrim are very well equipped to make their way successfully anywhere in the world. Leitrim has the highest amount of school-leavers attending 3rd level education, with 60% of the county's post leaving cert students going to college.

Leitrim has been long associated with "boxty". One of a number of origins given for the name "Boxty" is that it's from the Irish arán bocht tí meaning "poor-house bread". No wonder a song was composed about "The man who ordered boxty in the Gresham". Well, thanks to the entrepreneurship and good marketing of a number of Leitrim natives, like the Gallaghers of Mohill, Dromod Boxtý and the McNiffes of Aughnasheelin, one can now order boxty almost everywhere including in the Shelbourne Hotel where it is served as a delicacy.

We are a resilient people in Leitrim with an attitude of "never give up".

Our commitment to, and love of, the GAA is just as strong as in the counties which feature at the very highest level.

What we miss out on the field we make up for on stage through the many successes in Scór over the years.

Our most recent taste of a major football success was winning the Connacht Senior Football Championship in 1994. That same year Drumshanbo's Charlie McGettigan, brought honour to Leitrim and to Ireland by winning the Eurovision Song Contest.

World Champions are rare but in 2015 alone Leitrim added at least four to the roll of honour when Conor Hession, Carrigallen, and Tommy McCormack, Ballinamore, both won World Power-lifting titles; Breifne Earley, Leitrim Village became the World Cycle Race Champion and Ciaran Mitchell, originally from Cloone, became a World Champion at the Karate World Cup in Australia.

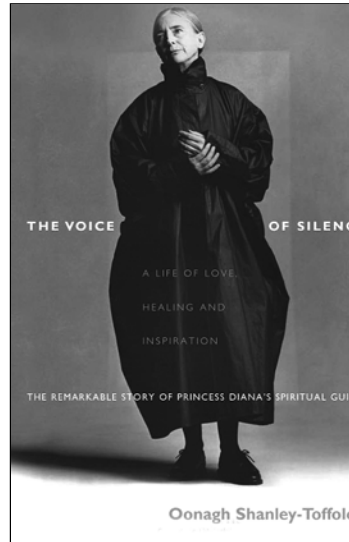
When the last cinema in Leitrim closed in 2004 the county was the first to introduce a mobile cinema. This was due to the innovation and efforts of Seán KIELTY and his life-long dedication to the cinema, from serving his time as a young projectionist in the Roxy Cinema, Drumshanbo to the luxury we can now enjoy in the Cineplex, Carrick-on-Shannon.

The Leitrim Guardian has been published annually since 1968. It is Ireland's only county magazine. With a committee of volunteers drawn from all parts of the county it keeps Leitrim people at home and abroad abreast of all that is happening within the county. Through its inclusion of young writers and the encouragement it offers them we may produce another John McGahern in the future. McGahern who grew up at Knockanroe, just outside Ballinamore, was considered the most important Irish novelist in the latter part of the 20th century.

ACCLAMATION

The serenity of Leitrim as well as the caring and generous nature of its people was carried around the world by Leitrim Missionaries to many in their hour of need. One of the numerous examples of this is the work done by Mohill born Oonagh Shanley-Toffolo. Originally a nun, who left the convent on health grounds, she worked with Mother Teresa in Calcutta, she nursed the dying Duke of Windsor and she was a valued counsellor and friend of Princess Diana. Oonagh died, at the age of 86, in August 2015.

It has been said that as one of the last bastions of solitude Leitrim is a place to get away from it all. "Through the maze of waterways and lakes it is possible to lose



yourself in the rivers of the county or in the forests and mountains that provide such wonderful scenery." Judging by the popularity of the

eight hour footage of the River Bonet, shot by visual artist Johnnie Lawson and viewed by millions of people the world over, there are very many people who do want to get away from it all.

This video has been counted an absolute blessing by people suffering from insomnia. The picturesque footage has garnered such acclaim that it now forms part of medical research used in several London hospitals as part of a clinical trial.

One New Yorker commented on Johnnie's video: "I am in the middle of Manhattan. I didn't even know such serenity existed".

How lucky are we in Leitrim to enjoy such peace and tranquillity

CLOONE /AUGHAVAS ACTIVE AGE



CLOONE/AUGHAVAS/MOHILL ACTIVE AGE

Members & friends of Cloone/Aughavas/Mohill Active Age Group pictured recently outside the John F Kennedy Ancestral Home near New Ross Co Wexford.

CLOONE/AUGHAVAS ACTIVE AGE

Garden Party At Áras an Uachtaráin

Members from the Aughavas/Cloone Active Age Group were among 500 people who attended at a Garden party hosted by our President Michael D Higgins and his wife Sabina at Arus an Uachtarain recently.

*Marian & Brendan Shanley, Pat & Anne McIntrye
Mary Ellen Heeran, Dolores McIntrye
Mary Donohoe & Teresa Slevin*

