

# A CENTURY OF MANORHAMILTON BUSINESS LIFE 1916-2016

*Margaret Connolly*

2016 WAS INDEED a year of commemoration and remembering. It brought to our minds not only the Easter Rising with its consequences and aftermath, but also the horrors and tragedies of WW1. Ceremonies at the Thiepval Memorial and the Island of Ireland Peace Park at Messines Ridge, to name but two sites, vividly told their tragic story of the monumental mindless slaughter of the Great War. 20,000 died on July 1st, the first day of the Battle of the Somme, a battle that lasted until November 18th, leaving a total of one million dead in its wake. Of that million about sixty were from Leitrim.



■ New Line c. 1916



■ New Line 2016

## Grocers in Plenty

A century brought enormous changes to both the urban and rural districts of Ireland, Leitrim being no exception. How different was the town of Manorhamilton back then? A trawl through McDonald's Business Directory of Ireland for

1916 tells us that at that time one could shop for groceries at twenty outlets, none of which exist today and only one, McGovern & Co., is still in the family ownership. Lest they disappear into the mists of time, the names of the 1916 providers are important. They and the present occupiers (in brackets)

are as follows:

Hugh Dolan (Manor Expert Hardware), Francis Fox (Herraghty's), Patrick Fox (Gaelscoil Chluainín), J Golden (An Café Bia Sláinte), Michael Higgins (The Veterinary Clinic), Joseph Keaney (Ballybookies), James Lynott (The Market Bar), T McGloin (DM Auctions), McGovern & Co (in family ownership), McManus & Co (The Granary Bar & Restaurant), F E Meehan (Biddy's Bar), James Nixon

(Mc Kenna's), E O' Farrell (Keenan's Butchers), Bernard L Rooney (Vacant), B M Rooney (Premises demolished), J D Rooney (Lock up Alarms and Kelly & Ryan, Solicitors), John Templeton (Costcutter), Denis Walsh (Sweeney's), M McKeown and J Munday. The location of the last two is, as yet, unknown.



■ Sligo Road c.1916 and Sligo Road 2016

Many businesses of yesterday offered a combination of services. Of the twenty Manorhamilton grocers, eleven fell into this category, some combined grocery with hardware, others had a wine and spirit licence and one offered drapery. Five of the larger grocery providers have already been written about in a previous

*Leitrim Guardian* article. (See 'On the Street where You Live', *Leitrim Guardian* 2012)

### Landlords and Licensees

Ten publicans plied their trade in Manorhamilton in 1916 – Francie Fox, Mary Crown, Mathew Gilbride, Joseph Keaney, McGovern & Co, Mc

Manus & Co., John Mc Morrow, John Mc Govern, J O'Reilly and Caroline Rutledge. Of these, four are still in the ownership of descendants of the family -- McMorrrows, where Sean and Mary have a butchers, McGovern's, where Jacqueline McGovern and her husband Seamus reside, Gilbrides and McGovern & Co both closed. It is interesting to note that two of the licensees in 1916 were female, Caroline Rutledge and Mary Crown and both were in Castle Street. Caroline Rutledge was proprietor, of what later became the Castle Bar, from 1908 to 1927, but the pub itself predated her tenure. Slater's Directory of 1856 shows Lawrence Meehan as owner.

Michael Gilligan, from Rossinver, succeeded Caroline Rutledge and sold his business to Hughie Rooney in the early 1940's. Mick and Madeline O'Dell became landlords in 1978 and traded there for twenty years. James Molloy's ownership was for a much shorter period, about three years. When Raymond O'Hagan purchased the business in 2001, he demolished the old building and had it replaced with a modern structure which unfortunately became a victim of the Celtic Tiger.

Joe and Ita Connolly are now hosts at Castle Street's remaining pub. Dating back to c. 1868 this premises was established by John Crown and named The Crown Bar which caused a local



■ **Main St c. 1916 and Main St 2016**  
 wit to quip that Castle Street was ‘a great street with a castle at the top and a crown at the bottom’. According to the 1870 directory, John Crown was also a grocer and a baker. On his death in 1885, the business passed to his wife, Mary, who continued as a publican up to 1928 when her son, Jack, took over. These two Castle Street licensees, Caroline Rutledge and Mary Crown, brought their businesses through turbulent historic times – the famous 1908 election, the First World War, the 1916 Rising, the War of Independence and the Civil War. Jack Crown continued the family business through the Economic War and the Emergency up to the end of WW2 in 1945 when

it was taken over by John Crown’s grand-daughter, Mary Ellen Connolly and run by her for the next quarter of a century.

Pat and Linda Slevin have, this year, carried out a tasteful restoration of their Granary Bar and Restaurant. Its beautiful stone façade and original name, Mac Magnuis, recall another era when the Mc Manus family traded here as publicans, grocers and exporters of butter and eggs. The business dates back to 1900 and remained in the family up to 1978. In 1916 the licensee was Mary Mc Manus and her husband, Patrick, is recorded as a Commission Agent. Their son, Paddy, was a talented musician, playing piano

and violin, and his skills were employed to play for the silent films in Manorhamilton. His car, IT 724, was probably the envy of many in the days when car ownership was still the domain of the minority.

In the Eason collection of photographs, some of which were taken in Manorhamilton between 1907 and 1912, the premises of Francie Fox, then a thatched house, is shown as a grocery and bar. Prior to Francie Fox another publican, Francis Lyons, was landlord there in the early 1900’s. The thatched house was rebuilt in 1928 and the Fox family traded there until the early 1970’s when the ownership changed to Pat and Joan Kelly. For well over one hundred

years customers have enjoyed a drink here and continue to do so under the present owners, Tommy and Bernie Heraghty. Of the two remaining pubs on the 1916 list one now offers a different service. Joseph Keaney's has become Ballybookies, the pitstop for those who like a flutter on the horses. J O'Reilly's is now Caz Cards well known for its professional range of personalised cards.

### Hoteliers of Old

At the present time Manorhamilton, unfortunately, has not got the benefit of a hotel but a century ago it boasted four – The Imperial, The Central, The Family and Commercial and Rooney's Private Hotel. James Cooney, a Cavan man, and proprietor of the Imperial Hotel, acquired the licensed premises from the Mc Dermott family. Terence Mc Dermott traded there in the second half of the 19th century up to his death in 1881/82. The business remained in the ownership of the Mc Dermotts for some time thereafter but by the turn of the century James Cooney and his sister, Bridget, were the owners. Bridget, it is thought, also owned the Grand Hotel in Sligo. Paddy Campbell, from Armagh, came to Cooneys

as a barman and later became its owner. Paddy had a keen interest and involvement in the GAA and his establishment hosted many a lively and, sometimes, heated football discussion and analysis. He sold his business to Michael Gurn in 1964 and his son, Felim, trades there now as The Milestone Bar.

John McGovern's Family and Commercial Hotel had a long history in the hospitality sector. Once known as The Commercial Hotel and Posting House, it was the first building on the newly built Sligo Road in the early 1840's. In 1846 its proprietor was Robert Robinson. It then passed to John Meehan and, in 1906, to a German family, the Jeiters, who subsequently established The Abbey Hotel in Dromahair. John Mc Govern, an experienced hotelier and owner of The Enniskillen Hotel in Bundoran, invested in Manorhamilton in 1911 and expanded the business to include a motor garage and cars for hire.

Mrs Gallagher's Central Hotel was located in the recently renamed Sean Mac Diarmada Street and now houses the Marian Higgins Accountancy firm. It wasn't just a hotel in 1916 but also had a glass and china store and a cycle agency. If the two Miss Rooneys, Ann and Ellen, were around today,

they would find the premises they called Rooney's Private Hotel between 1913 and 1929 a very changed place. Now it hums to the sounds of unfamiliar accents as a diversity of cultures come to study and work there under the direction and auspices of the Leitrim Sculpture Centre.

### Suited and Booted

The clothing needs of the North Leitrim residents were well catered for in 1916 by the seven drapery and footwear outlets in Manorhamilton. The Commercial House, the premises of John Mc Guinness, draper and milliner, was the biggest shop in the town at that time. John, and later his son, traded from 1844 to 1931. They were succeeded by John's grandsons, John Philip and Frank. When the shop closed in the mid 1940's, it was bought by the Gilligan family from Tullys Kearney and through the marriage of Patsy Gilligan and Dave Geaney, a chemist from Cork, became The Manor Chemists.

Although Ellen O'Farrell's shop was, most likely, the smallest of the draperies at the time, it holds a particular distinction in the history of the town. Established by her husband, Christopher, in 1897, it was run by Ellen after his death and then by their son, Richie,

up to 1927. It was in this house that Sean Mac Diarmada, set up his office in July 1907, when he came as election agent for the Sinn Féin candidate, Charles Dolan and it was from here that a weekly newspaper, the Leitrim Guardian, was published in the months leading up to the 1908 election. Charles Dolan was the son of John Dolan, grocer and publican from about 1880.

John's two sons entered politics – Charles as the North Leitrim MP for the Irish Parliamentary Party in 1906 and James N as elected member for Sinn Féin in 1918. The 1916 Directory lists James N as the owner of the Dolan family business but it would seem that he did not want to remain a draper as he sold his premises to the Munster and Leinster Bank which opened there on December 28th 1923. Banking is still carried on there by AIB.

William Mc Nasser's shop, The Reliable House, stood on the site of the old Market House which operated up to the building of the present Market House by Nathaniel Clements in 1834. William Mc Nasser ran his drapery business from 1881 to 1917. It then passes through the ownership of Tweedy Acheson, George Wilson and Hennie Mc Donagh, all three continuing in the drapery line. With the com-

ing of Tommy and Sarah Farrelly, a new business sprung up, The Steak House, supplying tasty takeaways to hungry workers and late night revellers. The present owners changed the name to The Mountain View and added another flavour to the menu – Chinese food.

From 1916 to 1954 Patrick Rooney combined his grocery business with the sale of boots and shoes. The shop is remembered as dark, with the shutters permanently closed. This all changed when it was purchased and modernised as a supermarket by Christie Mc Cormack in 1955. It continued as such under the next owners, Noel and Rose Loughlin. It is no longer a food outlet but is now a modern hairdressing salon, trading as Tangles. The final two listed as drapers in 1916 are presently closed.

Hetherington's, which stood on the corner of Main Street and Church Lane was demolished in the rebuilding of that entire stretch of street and Robert Fletchers, later T A Goldens for many years, is a fine example of the excellent workmanship of builder, Patrick Gaffney.

### **Beneficial Rail Transport**

A vital contributor to the economic life of Manorhamilton was the Sligo Leitrim &

Northern Counties Railway. In its 78 years lifespan it serviced a swathe of countryside from Enniskillen to Sligo. When the first train puffed into Manorhamilton station on December 1st 1880, it breathed prosperity and energy into the town with guaranteed well paid employment and the facility for the carriage of goods and people. Personal modes of travel were, at that time, the domain of the minority. By 1916, the Leitrim Car Owners Register records six Manorhamilton owners and ten in the rest of the county. The six Manorhamilton names listed were F T Smyth V S (IT 62), Robert J W Hutchinson, Private Hotel (IT 67), Jeremiah O'Sullivan, Bantry Cottage (IT 105), Thomas Devine, Blackpark House (IT 106), Rev A R Burriss, Lurganboy Rectory (IT 136) and Thomas R, Armstrong, Saw Mills (IT 227).

All businesses benefited from the railway service. Topping the list of the outward goods was livestock. Five wagons of cattle, for export through the ports of Derry and Belfast, passed through Manorhamilton station on normal days but in October another six was added to cope with demand. Pigs made their way to Denny's of Sligo. Over the years other more unusual

goods were sent – coffins and brushes from Armstrongs, side stones from McMorrows of Dough. Butter and egg exporters, Denis McGuinness, McManus & Co, James Nixon, Bernard L Rooney and J D Rooney used the service frequently. The variety of inward goods is too great to cover totally but a sample is interesting—sugar from Tuam, flour from Pollexfens (Ballisodare), Jacob's biscuits, new Scotch herrings from Pettigrew's (Sligo), American bacon from Cook & Mc Neilly (Sligo) and Liverpool firm Stamfords, wallpaper was sent by Zerny Ltd. Belfast, ropes and twine came from Henry Logan & Son, Portadown. Barrells of Guinness were rolled out from incoming wagons and gone were the days when horse carts were sent to Derry to collect whiskey.

The main hardware suppliers in Manorhamilton a century ago, Hugh Dolan and McGovern & Co. brought in wagon loads of timber and cement. From the Mc Govern family papers we know that loads of timber were carted from the station at least once a week and that when the Tuckmill Park houses were being constructed in 1909/1910, every requirement for that scheme was supplied by McGovern & Co. With the constant carting of goods to and from the railway, it is no sur-

prise to find a saddler and harness maker, Francis Gaffney, listed on New Line in 1916.

### **Specialists in their Fields**

Looking again at the Directory, we see that in some sectors there were fewer listings. The baker was Joseph Bredin and the butcher Paddy Daly. T Gallen, tailor, New Line, looked after the more discerning gentleman who preferred a bespoke suit. Timepieces in those days were meant to stand the test of time and repairs, rather than replacements, were carried out by watchmaker P Dennison. Pills and potions were the business of Gilbert's Chemists and the mail came and went through C C Templeton's Post Office which was situated until 1917 where the Bank of Ireland is since then. Financial affairs were dealt with by the Ulster Bank and legal matters by solicitors Patrick O'Flynn and Robert Lonsdale.

Not everyone was fortunate enough to own a bicycle in 1916 and fewer still had the luxury of a motorcycle or car. Michael Connolly, Mrs Gallagher of the Central Hotel, James N Dolan, John Mc Govern and James Thompson were the retailers and repairers in this sector. Of these special mention must go to Thompsons. It has

the distinction of being the only establishment in town which has continued in the same line of business and which is still run by descendants of the founder for over a century. An advertisement in the Leitrim Guardian on Saturday October 19th 1907 tells us that James Thompson had set up his cycle business. By 1912 this was operating from the front room of his house on New Line with repairs being carried out in a shed at the rear. The first bicycles came in crates and had to be assembled. They were a luxury to those lucky enough to be able to afford one and the crate was a valuable commodity from which a wardrobe could easily be made. The Thompson business expanded into motorcycles and the provision of a hackney for hire. Jimmy's first sales of petrol were from 2-gallon cans but not many years after the first petrol pumps were installed in Dublin in 1923, Thompsons had two pumps. In the 1920's the present garage was built on a greenfield site. Jimmy's son, George, joined the business and was followed by his son, Harold, in 1964. A fourth generation of the family, David, is now on board.

*What changes will the next century bring to our town, our county and our country?*