

A Leitrim Townland

Ursula Foran

“I SAW ETERNITY the other night” is the first line of ‘The World’, a poem published by the Welsh poet Henry Vaughan around 1650. I thought of this line as I looked out the window of my home in the townland of Drumkeelanmore a few nights before I wrote this piece. There was a waxing moon shining and a fog was curling up from the marshy area surrounding James’s Lake and the boggy meadows we called ‘the bottoms’ when I was a child. As then, the moon now shone on the slate roofs of the old school and of the teachers’ residence where I was born and reared. It lit the dark face of James’s Rock where, as children, we rolled down into the hollow beside the spring well from which we carried our drinking water and close to the bank that, every spring, produced a wondrous array of bluebells. On opposite sides of the white thread of road, and divided by Kane’s Lane, lay the meadows of the townland: McCranns, McKiernans, Triangular, Swamp, Spring and School Meadows, measuring in all a scant fifty acres or so.

Were it not for the presence over from my window of ‘Judy’s Famine Grave’, it would be hard to imagine this small corner of Co. Leitrim being touched by the Great Famine of 1845 and that, before the ravaging of their potato crop, upwards of seventy people lived here. It is also hard to imagine that, even further back, these



■ Ursula Foran at Drumkeelanmore National School

fields and rocks echoed to the tones of the Irish language for far longer than to the English we now speak here. One of my earliest memories of my townland is of the stony road crowded with people, all on foot, on the day Old Mrs Gunning from Knocknasowna was buried. And of James Flynn from Mohercieve and his gentle wife, Mary, passing our gate in their donkey and trap, she with a white enamel bucketful of eggs to be sold to McManus’s shop in the town, and of their neighbour, tall, kind Mrs Connors, in her black hat and long black coat, walking home with her shopping from Peter Earley’s country shop and bemoaning the plight of the Korean peoples in their 1950’s war with her, ‘God help the poor Koriocants’, as she offered us Silvermints. Nearer to my window is the laneway where, as a child of six, I last saw my father, he in his heavy winter coat, though it was

the Portiuncla days of August in the Franciscan Convent in Drumshanbo, being escorted, at speed, out our gate by Dr. Deasy, with my mother running behind to catch up.

Early on the day of my watching, I had been thrilled to see a hare chasing madly at the top of our field. It was the first such sighting I’d had for several years. Once a normal occurrence, it had now become exceptional, as had that of the timid, red squirrel I’d seen venture onto the grass near the house a few summers before. I opened the window onto the fog-bound, still night no longer harassed by the incessant calling of a corncrake or the high pitch of a curlew. Nor was I any longer afraid that the big white horse from a neighbouring field would come to attack our potato pit as it frequently did on the winter nights of my childhood. Instead all was silent except for the murmur

of the sitka spruce trees at the back of the house or the occasional whoosh of a bat passing by.

The following morning when the moon and the fog had gone, leaving little trace, I walked around our freshly cut meadow sensing the presence of the people who had worked this land: the centuries old Gaelic speakers, the Famine people, the many emigrants forced to leave and the people who stayed behind, all moving along in 'the still, sad music of humanity' as William Wordsworth described in his 'Tintern Abbey' poem of 1798. "Take it in your hands, boys," Seamus Heaney tells his sons as they pull a kite together, "and feel

the strumming, rooted, long-tailed pull of grief. You were born fit for it."

That same evening, back inside the window and watching a fuller moon and a newly forming fog, I wanted to hope that all the people who ever lived in Drumkeelanmore were born fit for their life ahead. That the high, young voices I imagined hearing coming from the school yard and those of the children tumbling out its gate singing their 'goodbyes, goodbyes' and the goodbye, goodbye at the gates along the road as those same young people headed for England and America, both carrying away and leaving behind that 'long-tailed pull of grief', were

born fit for it.

The moon and the fog return time and again and the fields lie more or less the same. "They have all gone into the World of Light", wrote Henry Vaughan, and as I close the curtains on another moonlit, eternal night in Drumkeelanmore I allow that line to wrap itself comfortingly around me and around the people, past and present, of my townland.

Ursula Foran is a native of Drumkeelanmore, Drumshanbo. In The Leitrim Guardian 2013, she was the Literary Award Winner with her story 'Daffodils for Bela'. She is married to John F Deane, renowned poet, author and founder of Poetry Ireland.

SNIPPET

ST ANGELA'S COLLEGE'S 'SEW COOL' COMPETITION

On Saturday, 14th of October, Clara Hewston from Manorhamilton travelled to the ATHE conference in the Athlone Springs Hotel to collect her first prize in the Junior Category of St. Angela's College's Sew Cool Competition. Clara beat off stiff competition from over 250 students.

This was a huge achievement for Clara who is an extremely talented student in Home Economics and Art, showing great creativity especially with baking and sewing.

The winning project was submitted as Clara's art project for her Junior Certificate Exam. She completed this talented piece while in St. Clare's Comprehensive under the proud watchful eyes of her Home Economics teachers Ms Danielle Conaty, Ms Evelyn Maguire and her art teacher Ms. Edel White.

The project contained an array of stitches and manipulation of metal to create an unique textile piece.

Clara was presented with a cash prize and a school prize of a voucher to Hickeys Textiles.

