

Home to Mohill

It was always a great day. Even in early childhood it had a magic and an appeal which still flickers beacon-like in the sea of memory. Away back then it was held on a Wednesday—the last one in August. The excitement quickened in our pulses on the previous Friday, when the late Canon Masterson, P.P., V.F. (later to become a Monsignor), and the late George O'Malley, and T. J. Gannon, with suitcase in hand, called to my grandfather's pub in Glebe Street. "Hello, Tom. We're taking up the usual collection for the Show." That was the sign—the Show Day was at hand.

Some of the horses came in on the Narrow-Gauge on the Tuesday afternoon train—the "half past two." (Remember Johnnie Carroll "Giv' me a loan of your 'half past two,' Maggie's comin' home on the whitewash brush!"). A gang of us cheered at the sight of the horses and followed them excitedly to their over-night stables in McGarry's yard. Later in the evening Bornóg Gannon emerged with an armful of "Catalogues of the Show—get an early edition for only sixpence." Also competing with him, in pre-show sales, was Mickey Colreavy. They were responsible for creating an atmosphere on the evening before, as some exiled townies returned—home for the show!

The morning of the show never came too soon. My grandfather was sure to be up early, looking for hot water. "Haven't I to shave," he would say. "Amn't I on the Cattle Gate." This was it—the Show day had arrived. Quickly I dressed and ran up the town to serve the 8 o'clock Mass. This I did, whether it was my "week on the altar" or not. Usually there would be an extra Mass or two because of visiting priests "staying in the Canon's." This carried a bonus of a half-crown with tea, a boiled egg and currant soda cake from Miss Masterson in the Canon's kitchen.

Then off to the Show . . . the hustle and bustle at the corner, the horses and the cattle, the bulls and the donkeys, the gabbling geese and cackling hens, the onions and potatoes, the cakes and pots of jam, the jars of wild flowers and vases of sweet pea . . . Frank Flynn and M. J. Kenny, now at happier shows in eternity, were busily engaged with the numbers for each exhibitor. I can still see Frank Flynn, who was my school teacher then, standing pillar-like behind the creamery wall sorting out the horse and cattle numbers.

The Show for many years was held in Higgins's Field. Jim Agnew swears that the present day Show could never compare with those held in Higgins's Field. Somehow they had an atmosphere and colour all their own, with the tall trees on the Canon's Hill standing guard over the amphitheatre below. Then, too, there was great excitement with the arrival of the Artane Boys Band. For children especially this was the main attraction of Show Day.

The shows of my youth were extended like a major feast over an octave. For

days afterwards we made our own jumps on the Green—jumps made of stones, sods, boxes, sticks and twine. We wore numbers on our arms like the show jumpers on the great day. Cathal Cumiskey (now a Redemptorist Father), his brother Meehal, Michael Crossan and myself re-enacted with some vigour the antics of competitors during the Jumping Programme. Some wanted to emulate "Little Dolly" ridden by the Gormleys of Pulladoey while others imitated Pat and George O'Malley. It was during such a mock Show that Mrs. Francie Clyne called out to a passer-by "War has been declared"—'twas September 3rd, 1939—we couldn't care less and continued in our efforts to clear our own Champion Stone Wall.

MISTER ED ?

This year I returned to Mohill for the big day. Like the heroes of old I arrived in town on the night before the Show. First man I met was Patsy McManus and off we went to Jack's (from Mohill to anywhere!) for a jar. Then I met Miko—"How's it goin', how's the form, how's life?" "Great," says I. "Miko, how's death?" Miko is a well-known prosperous undertaker and the "last man to let you down" in more ways than one. Robert then came and in we go to Pascal's for some of his pints of high reputation. Pascal was in great form and told about the stranger coming in the Dromod Road who had car trouble. Out he got to see what was wrong . . . looked under the bonnet, saw nothing, then heard a voice from a field saying "Tighten the fourth plug." The man looked over the hedge but saw no one. Back again to the engine, couldn't find the fault. Again a voice said "Tighten the fourth plug". When the man looked over the hedge again all he could see was an old grey horse—no one else in

sight. Amazed, he decided to do as directed. He tightened the fourth plug, got into the car and off she went. Seeing the "Cead Mile Failte" sign on Pascal's gable, in he went for something to settle his nerves. "A brandy, quick," says he. Noting the man's nervous state, Pascal asked him if he had been in an accident. "No," says he, between gulps of Hennessy, so he told Pascal what had happened. Says Pascal to him "You were lucky you weren't coming in the Cloone Road." "Why?" says yer man. "Because there's a black horse in a field out there belonging to Packy Joe Wryne," says Pascal, "and he knows nothing about cars . . ." We had a great laugh, some more yarns, a few jars then off to bed in Jack's.

Unlike the days of my youth, the Show morning came too soon. I heard Jack call out to Paddy Conboy, who was busily sweeping the streets, "Has the bus gone yet, Paddy?" With that I jump up, usual ablutions, dress hastily and then down to a hearty breakfast. Off to the Park . . . Johnnie Duignan meets me at the corner. "You're welcome. Down for the Show? Good. Ah, you can't beat the old townies—never forget the auld sod. Gloke yer gillies on the near helm, he's ear-wiggling, probably some sham looking for a sprassie." Johnnie, large as life in his usual good humour—what a great character.

The hustle and bustle of the Show morning has changed somewhat. Most competitors now arrive by car, lorry, van or tractor. Still there is an atmosphere not associated with any other day in the town. Chris Reynolds, "Son" Barden and Walter Beattie are busy on the cattle gate (Lord have mercy on my grandfather). Jack Boddy and John McKiernan are hard at work on the "numbers." Fr. Eugene Cox

Mohill girls, with exhibits of flowers, at this year's Mohill Show.

—"L.G." Photo. John Keaney.



— fop the Show

By Aiden J. McGovern

framed within the wooden stand sells tickets for cash. Bertie Bradshaw and Joe League stand guard at the admission gate. Into the Park . . . no more can one see the energetic Tom Devine. What great work he did for the show in years gone by. But here comes the ever popular, quick-witted, efficient Secretary of the Show—Harry himself. "You're welcome. Down for the musical chairs no doubt? Give Aidan a badge. Will you have a drink? Here's Frank McGarry from Sligo—see you later."

The exhibitors are busily arranging their display. Mrs. Cox, Mrs. Bradshaw, Mrs. Clyne, Mrs. Reilly, Seamus Wynne, M. J. Reynolds, Sr. Marie Celine, Sr. Ignatius and many, many more are putting the finishing touches to their exhibits. They are supervised under the watchful eye of Major Domo himself Eamonn Duignan, faithful as ever, and his band of beautiful stewardesses. It is clear to see that many of Mohill's citizens are to the fore, giving a helping hand, making sure that the Show will be a success and that all arrangements work smoothly. I saw John F. O'Sullivan, Jim Marsden, Paddy Keating, Gerry McGee, Willie Higgins, Dr. Cadden, Pat O'Malley Bradshaw, Josie Nicholson, Walter Dugdale, Johnnie Rowley, Jim Gannon and Jim Flynn loyal as ever at their usual posts. But each occasion of joy always seems to have a tinge of sorrow—I missed Master Kelly, Jim O'Callaghan, Mike Cox and Joe Dorr. May they all be enjoying the Show of Shows in a far far better place. They could form a committee of their own up there with others such as Joe Rogers, Frank Burbage, Frank Flynn, M. J. Kenny, T. J. Gannon, Archie Bradshaw and many other friends of the Show who are now deceased. We may think we have the "greatest Show on earth"—but surely their's must be the "Greatest Show off earth".

It's time to go over the town for lunch. People are coming and going. Proud farmers lead their prize-winning animals, decorated with rosettes, on the homeward bound. Many country women, dressed in their summer finery, are coming in to town for the Jumping. They lead little groups

of shiny-faced children—out for the day—wearing best clothes and well-polished shoes, sucking lollypops, eating Taytos, chewing sweets, drinking Coke (it used to be lemonade but the addicts of T.V. live it up now with Coke)—funny, in my youth coke was some form of anthracite. Over they go to the Park mixing with the swelling crowds from Cloone, Aughavas, Gortletteragh, Eslin, Gorvagh, Corracaboon and even Gubbs.

On my way over the town I met our well-known D.J.—Dermott S. Dunleavy—who, among others, was making Mohill Show the focal point of his holidays. As always he was in fine singing voice and when joined by his brother Gerry, Alf Rowley and myself, there was only John F. missing to re-create the men's choir of yore. We gave them more than "one verse"!

Meals on Show Day were always special—cold meats, salad, mashed potato, beetroot, tomato sauce, trifle and even coffee. But now, not only have we Jack's and the Sportsman's, but also micro-wave meals in Pat and Anne's and chips in Moran's and McGovern's—a far cry from the days of cold meat, bread, butter and tea.

The afternoon programme was great. Jumps were built up to be knocked down. The Champion Stone Wall did not seem as formidable as long ago. The Musical Chairs were a howl, while the Donkey Derby was easily the most popular event of the day. The spectators basked in glorious sunshine, while the hawkers did a marvellous trade selling "chocolates, ices and cigarettes." Everyone was happy and gay.

Too quickly, though, the programme ends. The light begins to fail, there is a nip in the air, there is a mist closing in. Weary mothers, fathers and children trek from the showgrounds leaving behind sweet papers, empty ice-cream cartons, orange peel and butts of apples. Pakie Foley says "That's it, Master, for another year."

Yet not quite. The Show Night still has to come. The hotels, restaurants and pubs are doing a roaring business. Mrs. Meehan has her shop thronged with customers. Sean O'Beirne is packed to the door while

his partner Mr. McThrifty gives away tokens in the great Treasure Trail. The boys are all on parade. One can hear "Fr. Murphy" in the air, closely to be followed by "The Holy City." Alf is busy giving a helping hand, having interrupted his holidays to be in town on this day. Luke has "Harp(s)" on sale—very apt for a publican/undertaker. John Dolan and his Wren Boys (not Joe and Tom!) are making merry. Val and Master P. have a great crowd in the Ceili House. Chris and Dolly are resplendent in their new American Lounge. Jack has a host in, no doubt organising a pilgrimage to Lourdes, while Kevin has his old faithfuls only going to Knock. The crowds are streaming to the Show Dance. The Guards are maintaining a watchful but kindly patrol. The pubs are now closing . . . there's a great demand on the chips.

Next day, tired, weary and somewhat out of sorts we realise it's all over. The council men are out once more on a mopping-up operation. The publicans clear away the empty bottles and wash the dirty glasses. Pat McHugh is out early to replenish the stocks of bread in the shops. Harry stands at his gate contentedly smoking his pipe in the knowledge of a job well done. For me, only one pattern similar to the days of my youth remains—it's back to school.

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