

Kiltyclogher Looks to the Future!

For the people of Kiltyclogher this has been a year of despair but also, surprisingly, one of hope.

Because in spite of the bombing of their school and their hall, the uncertainty of their day to day lives and their close proximity (100 yards) to the border, a new Community Council has been started in the town with people from all walks of life involving themselves in the resurrection of a new Kiltyclogher out of the ashes of the old.

Now the question remains to be answered, will the people of Kiltyclogher crawl into a cocoon of cynicism or apathy because of the reverses suffered by the town or will they shift their energies to a new vital area of operation, the local scene? Because now more than ever Kiltyclogher needs ideas and idealism to build up its town, and by joining the newly formed Community Council they can, at grass roots, make themselves felt immediately and can present an acceptable and contemporary viewpoint. They can work towards having a Council they can respect and trust, they can speak on all local issues and problems, and can make their Council so strong that its voice will be heard in places of power.

Above all, the people of Kiltyclogher must remember that the entire country followed the plight of their town with sympathy and compassion, and the forming of the Community Council out of the depths of despair is too splendid and courageous and act to end in a whimper. Now is not the time to turn away from it, but to turn, united, towards a new direction of future victories. I say united because the future of Kiltyclogher is too important to be decided by only a few.

In this area, perhaps more than anywhere else, the opinion of all who are intimately concerned is needed. The expertise of the experts and the wisdom of inspired leaders are urgently required. But just as urgently needed is the interest and effort of the ordinary citizen.

Kiltyclogher, birthplace of 1916 leader, Sean McDermott, lies on the border of County Fermanagh, eight miles from Manorhamilton. In many respects it is a typical rural Irish town but just now the air of peace and quiet belies the presence of real problems. Because for the past few years the people of Kiltyclogher have faced the uneasiness of its closeness to the border and all the unrest of the present situation.

Why did all the bombings take place in Kiltyclogher? To find an answer I called on Father Donal Hannon, C.C. Chairman of the newly-formed Community Council. He told me the area has been under attack for some time with the blow-

ing up of roads which were filled in again by Republican groups. Because of its location, Kiltyclogher has been a natural target as there is access to it from the North by four roads.

Father Hannon spoke to me of the loss to Kiltyclogher of the bombed Vocational School.

"We did not just lose a school. We lost everything. The school was the social and recreational centre of the town. This has all been wiped out.

"Many of our talented youngsters did not go to Manorhamilton. They went to boarding school and so are lost to the area except during the holidays. The loss of the school has not only deprived us of 145 students but also of 12 teachers who lived in the area. Now only one lives here."

When I asked Father Hannon what was the reaction of the people of the area to the loss of their school he felt it was one of disbelief.

"Our T.Ds. promised us it would be rebuilt and then the Department said otherwise. The Department must have been expecting a violent reaction because the pupils were not informed until September.

er although they were supposed to be concerned.

"When they were asked to lend their weight to the restoring of the school they did not, because to them the North Leitrim Development Federation begins and ends at Manorhamilton."

Miss Olive Gallagher, a vice-chairman of the Community Council and Principal of the local National School feels strongly that Kiltyclogher is in great need of an approved road. If this was remedied the future of Kiltyclogher would lie in tourism and in developing the town as a residential area.

"With the growth of Sligo and Manorhamilton people would work there and live here. In peace time this a very pleasant place to live, among warm-hearted gentle people. For the tourist we have fishing, walk up shoots, lakes, mountain climbing and an entire area of unspoiled beauty.

"The loss of the school meant the ending of a thriving branch of Ceoltais Ceolteoiri Eireann and the four night classes every week which

Special LEITRIM GUARDIAN Report by Mary Gaffney.

"But the people of this area are used to being neglected and so do not react violently. They are too afraid of losing the benefits they are getting from the Government who have treated them very badly, buying up their land for a song, planting forests and never giving employment. It is employment, not benefits, that restore a man's self respect.

"Our Community Council is established to boost morale and one of our first projects is organizing a Festival in 1974. It will be a social, educational and cultural Festival, completely different to Festivals held in other parts of Ireland.

"There had been seven or eight organizations in Kiltyclogher, some of them overlapping each other. Now we have all joined together to speak with one voice without any of us losing our identity.

"We are working together for the good of the community and our hope is that we get recognition from the Government which would entitle us to status and to grants. There may be a certain number of people who would not see any point in joining us. But those among us with leadership qualities do not think in this way".

Father Hannon feels that the North Leitrim Development Federation did nothing to help Kiltyclogh-

were a great boom to the town. I have tried to restore the music loss by starting two bands in my school."

Four years ago Gordon Gurney and his wife, Ellen, moved from London to Kiltyclogher with their young family. He is a shop keeper and another vice-chairman of the Community Council. The closing of the Vocational School means a loss of £80 per week to his business.

Mrs. Gurney told me: "Not only does it mean this great financial loss but also a very personal one as the 145 students spent their break periods in the town, and the town is lonely now without them.

"But if the troubles in the North came to an end Kiltyclogher would be a wonderful place to live and if we were given some small industry it would bring back the life to the town."

Mr. Michael Shanley was the Headmaster of the bombed school. He was shattered by the loss of his life's work. But he is an optimist.

"When hope dies in me I will be dead," he told me. "I am hopeful for the future of Kiltyclogher because I can see the prosperity growing each year. When I first came to Kiltyclogher hardly any house had water or a bathroom. Now not only has every house a bathroom but they have at least one if not two cars.

"I built up Kiltyclogher Vocational

school from 16 students to 145 and this year we were getting 46 new pupils. The one thing I am pleased about is when we moved to Manorhamilton we were allowed to continue teaching our own students and so have held on to our identity."

But Mr. P.J. O'Rourke, who is 71 years old and has been a journalist attached to local papers for 50 years, is not as optimistic as Mr. Shanley.

"I can see no future in Kiltyclogher," he told me. "I remember the time in this town when it was necessary to push one's way through the streets on fairs days. Now the streets are empty. This is a ghost town."

Mrs. Philip McGowan whose hall was bombed some weeks ago is still shocked from the experience.

"The Hall was beside our house," she told me, "so it was the mercy of God we were not all killed. Every week during the winter months we had dances and gatherings in it. My husband and I gave it to every organization who wished to hold a function in it. It is a big loss to the town and my nerves are still badly shaken by it.

"I cannot understand why it

happened or who would have done this terrible thing."

Father Felim Kelly, C. C., Newtownmanor, County Leitrim, is chairman of the North Leitrim Development Federation. I called to his home to find out what was his standing with regard to Kiltyclogher.

He told me: "It is wrong to say that the North Leitrim Federation will do nothing to help Kiltyclogher. We have gone round to each area in Leitrim telling them we are working for every part of Leitrim, and we are behind Kiltyclogher in all their plans for the future. We saw no point in joining the protest over the school as the Minister had given a definite answer. But if and when they receive compensation for the loss of the school, we will be behind them in whatever plans they may have to use that money for the betterment of the area.

"It is also wrong to say that children are lost to an area once they go out of that area to school. I believe if children went to school in Tokyo they would return to their own district if there was enough incentive for them to do so. Here in my parish practically all the children

have returned to live after finishing their education and are working in neighbouring towns."

But during all the discussions many questions remained unanswered. Why did the school close? Only part of it was destroyed by the bomb. The pre-fabs and 75 per cent of the equipment was saved.

Why was the Hall bombed? No one would hazard a guess. "Mum is the word," I was told repeatedly.

But dialogue alone can illuminate the complex problems for which the views of all the townspeople are needed. The change may be slow in bringing the life back to the town. But when the slow process of decision making ends, when there have been reports and surveys, votes in committees and sub committees, the community should be so committed to the future prosperity of Kiltyclogher that no official should be able to reverse their decisions.

Who will save Kiltyclogher?

By electing the right leaders, by developing the right policies, and by working together, the people of Kiltyclogher will, if they so wish.

Kiltyclogher

PADRAIC J. O'ROURKE.

*I know a little quiet town
Ringed round by mountains
brave and bold,
At twilight fairy mists creep
down
With mantle grey its roofs to
fold.
And in the quiet evening hour
You'd hear the Angelus ringing
clear,
With golden voice of magic
power
Proclaiming loudly, "God is
here".
You'd hear the children shout at
play,
In fields that touch the river's
brim;
And envy not their joyous day,
Soon gone — a memory far and
dim.
You'll hear the river's gentle
croon,
The whisper of the wind
stirred grass,
And over all the blackbirds
tune
Is piped from every bush you
pass.
There's love to make the old feel
young,
And merriment to dry your
tears;
And sweetest songs of nature
sung,
To live within your heart for
years.
Over my little town of dreams
There broods a calm, unbroken
still,
From every open doorway
beams
The light of peace — "Peace
and goodwill".
Oh! quiet town my heart would
fly
Across a million words to
find
The peace mad striving would
deny,
Within your bosom, true and
kind.*

The Late FRANCIS J. GANNON Solicitor (An Appreciation)

THE DEATH of Francis J. Gannon, Solicitor, Mohill, occurred on the 22nd June 1973 at the Mater Hospital in Dublin. His death, occurring as it did, at the early age of 64 years shocked the great number of people who had known and respected him in his private life and as a man who had established himself as one of the foremost lawyers in his profession.

Born on the 2nd April 1909 at Mohill he was educated at the local schools there and subsequently received his secondary education at the Dominican College in Newbridge, Co. Kildare. He chose Law as a career and pursued his studies at University College Dublin and the Incorporated Law Society's Law School when, in the month of October 1930, he sat the final examination and qualified as the youngest solicitor in the country. At this examination he was awarded the Law Society's Gold Medal for "superior answering".

He commenced legal practice in his home town of Mohill and after a short time continued by moving into the office in which Joseph Delany, Solicitor, Mohill, had formerly practised. From then he practised until the date of his death under the firm name of J. Delany, Gannon & Co. In 1952 or thereabouts he was appointed solicitor to Leitrim Co. Council, a position he held until his death. He was also a member of the Costs Committee of the Incorporated Law Society.

During his life he pursued his chosen career with extraordinary dedication. He worked at all hours and at all times in the fulfilment of his life's work which he never tired of. His work continued right until his death. He died as he had lived—a man who was always prepared to learn even after years of experience.