

DRUMKEERAN

A PROJECT BY THE SENIOR STUDENTS OF THE VOCATIONAL SCHOOL UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF

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No other part of County Leitrim has been so richly endowed with the beauties of nature than Drumkeerin and the surrounding districts. Situated between Belhavel and Lough Allen, Drumkeerin acts as the focal point for Tarmon, Creevelea and Newbridge, the former two are part of the parish, the latter once part of the parish, but now joined with Ballinagleara.

Like other areas in North Leitrim emigration has dealt a cruel blow. Population has dwindled. Many old homesteads have disappeared, and the cancerous growth of Forestry has been alarming. However, the people of the area are a proud and resolute people. Proud they are and rightly so, because history and nature has given to the area a mystical beauty and charm, which lifts the hearts of its emigrants in their darker hours in foreign lands, instills a sense of calm, peace and contentment in those fortunate to remain at home, while the visitor is at once captivated by its beauties, its enchanting ancient ruins, and above all by the heart warming friendliness of its people.

Stranger, if you are not in a hurry, come and see for yourself. Take a trip from Drumkeerin across the Mountain Road, which leads through Liskellew and Barragh to Arigna. Such breathtaking scenery awaits you: One visitor tried to capture the scene in verse:

*There stretched out beneath you is
Lough Allen so fair.*

*There is no scene in Ireland with it to
compare,*

*With its shimmering waters, islands
and strands.*

*Its ancient churches and enchanting
woodlands.*

Words cannot do justice to the scene. They cannot captivate the extraordinary beauty and mystique. Lying at the foothills of Munterkenny mountain and stretching down to the shores of Lough Allen is the parish of Tarmon, which derives its name from "Tearmann" meaning church or Sanctuary land, or land around a Church building. What could be a more apt name because churches there are, and four of them. Standing in the middle of the parish is its newly reconstructed Church — a truly magnificent tribute to the small population of 220, and to their priests Fr. E. Lynch, P.P. and Fr. O. Kelly C.C. Nestling close to the lake are the ruins of three churches, the most notable structure remaining being the ivy mantled ruins in the townland of Curraghs.



DID YOU KNOW ?

That the iron for Dublin's 'Ha'penny Bridge' came from the Creevelea Iron Foundry.

(Photo: M. Fox)

Almost hidden away from the unsuspecting traveller is Belhavel Lough shrouded amongst Drumlin hills, clad with multiple coloured foliage in spring-time and summer, and in the autumn gilted by gold and russet sylvan surroundings, illuminated by the peaceful setting sun, whose waning beams gently kiss the waters of this quiet, peaceful, unmolested jewel that the ancient friars and Saints of Creevelea have hidden away — A joy forever for the lonely and depressed. Belhavel Lough and its surroundings is mute to the troubles, toils, and frustrations brought about by our so-called beneficial, scientific and technological developments. "Man is doomed to extinction is often the catch cry, but that will never be so as long as man can come to Belhavel to bathe in her celestial waves of tranquility, her healing streams of rejuvenation, and above all to meditate, inhale and grasp the sublime workmanship that mirrors the sublimity of its Creator".

If the forerunner to the day is the

dawn, so also the forerunner to hope must surely be the "Dawn of Hope". Where is the "Dawn of Hope"? This is no ancient Biblical name. It is a place name to be found in the distant heights overlooking Creevelea and Belhavel, Newbridge with its beautiful Church of St. Columcille, and Lough Allen. Whence the name? It can only be surmised or suggested, that for some far distant traveller, who, having reached this isolated and exalted point, this was the dawn of a new life as he gazed down at the mystifying beauties of Lough Allen and Belhavel, whose beauties were a real and satisfying reminder of the hope and truth that is in salvation.

The fountains or Eternal Springs, which issue forth to the hollow sanctuaries of the lakes Belhavel and Lough Allen, sometimes in torrents as if portraying the angel of the Almighty, more often as a gentle transfusion giving eternal life to the eternal jewels below, and invariably as murmurous babbling trickles, which like those striving

owards Truth, as in the words of John Donne, the famous Metaphysical poet.

"About must, about must go" round the meanders, leaving behind the many dark and shrouded pools which will forever provide absorbing fishing for the angler in search of that elusive trout in haunting and mysterious waters.

The name of County Leitrim is synonymous with Lough Allen. The very short coastline with the Atlantic leaves County Leitrim with no sand beach where deserving holiday makers can wash away the cares of toils and troubles beneath the soothing and refreshing sunshine. How many people in County Leitrim are aware that on the shores of Lough Allen are beautiful, clean and unpolluted beaches?

Apparently very few people realise that they exist, something that can hardly be credible when one considers the vastness of Corry Strand, surely one of the largest inland strands in Ireland, almost a mile in length and varying in width from fifty to a hundred yards. Mad Salhill, Bundoran, Bray or many another resort such celebrated strands, they would then be among the most famous seaside resorts in the world. But alas: It is difficult to get into the strand. To do so, one must cross over fields. However, Leitrim Co. Co. a few years back purchased a field leading from the road to the strand, and perhaps in the near future we may see major developments. Meanwhile, Corry Strand remains as lonely as "Lonely Anna Strand".

Few places in Ireland have such magnificent Tourist potential — beautiful scenery, quiet mountain roads for walking or pony trekking, abundance of coarse fish and trout, beautiful strands, expansive waters for sailing, wild life, and shooting. Yet Drumkeerin's tourist industry is minimal. There are no hotels, no B.F. guest houses, few guest houses. There is a danger too, that if afforestation continues as it has been Drumkeerin's Natural beauties may be carried. Closer attention should be paid to landscape afforestation. Drumkeerin village itself looks the worse for years. Derelict sites mar its potential beauty, but thank God, Leitrim County Council has almost come to grips with this problem. Derelict houses spell out a tragic past and recall the heartbreak caused by emigration. The rugged countryside is anything but favourable for economic farming. In many ways Drumkeerin has a more favourable employment pattern than most villages in Leitrim. Arigna mines, the Power Station, Stonefacings, the dome of Leitrim's famous sandstone, and in Sligo and Sheena Furniture provide employment, but there is a grave need for an Industry to provide employment for women. There is an industrial



**New Secretary
Leitrim People's Association**
The new Secretary of the Association is Miss Maisie Bouchier, who hails from Creevelea and is now attached to the staff of Stewarts Hospital. Maisie, who has been active in the Association for the past number of years both as committee member and as Assistant Secretary, has the capacity for work which makes her the ideal choice for the position she now holds.

tradition. Few people, I suppose, are aware when crossing the Ha'penny Bridge in Dublin, that this majestic iron bridge came from the furnaces of the "Creevelea Iron Works" a once thriving Iron smelting industry. The ruins of the blast furnace and lime kiln remain. Standing high on the shores of Lough Allen is the towering Chimney Stack, the last remains of "Lough Allen Brick Works".

"Lovely Leitrim" has been famed in Song. Drumkeerin district must surely be the jewel of Leitrim. Its future lies in the development of those great natural resources. Though her population has diminished greatly, there seems to be a lull in the emigration storm. The local Vocational School has increased in enrolments from 82 in 1966 to 170 at present. Four new houses have been built by teachers within the last seven years.

Twelve new houses are under construction. These are being built by Leitrim County Council. A new National School is under construction. So when these are erected and the derelict sites are removed Drumkeerin will be a worthy focal point for her beautiful historical surroundings.

Extract from a project on Local History submitted by Manorhamilton I.C.A.

FLORA AND FAUNA Of My Local Area

At a very charming spot on the shores of Lough Gill Leitrim borders Sligo, and here in Newtown the lake sweeps in a magnificent expanse to the roadside. A large limestone rock jutting out on the roadway is a famous landmark called Sir Robert's Point — so called after Sir Robert Peel. Nearby is the lovely Parke's Castle, now being restored as a National Monument. The beautiful lake with its many lovely islands stretches for 5 miles into Co. Leitrim.

The smaller islands have a native woodland vegetation where oak is dominant with Yew, White Beam, Hazel and Holly as a second layer and Arbutus on the margins. This is exactly the same formation as Killarney. The undergrowth is remarkable and very rare woodland plants carpet it — i.e. Yellow Bird's Nest, and Bird's Nest Orchis.

On the Southern side in Slish Wood the abundance of Ferns and Mosses is most impressive. There is much natural forest, and very rare plants here — i.e. equisetus litorale, and scutellaria Minor. The Eastern edge of Lough Gill is especially picturesque and has been compared as equal to Westmoreland. Hills rise on every side and those on the North are of ancient gneiss and schist. Westwards is bare limestone rock and above tree level O'Rourke's Table is covered with shaggy russet, bracken, heather, and billberry. The area all around is serviced by a first class road with many well planned vantage points.

A journey of 4 miles takes you through ever changing scenery to 'Dromahair'. This is a neat and historic village which stands on the right bank of the river Bonet, and is spanned with a fine old stone bridge. On the left bank stand the remains of Creevelea Abbey with its fine cut stone work. Exceedingly well done is the Pillar of St. Francis, depicting a Friar in habit and cowl with cord and stigma holding a scroll with black letter inscription. Here many more impressive figures are wrought in stone.

The area is a favourite haunt of the Angler for both Lough Gill and the Bonet are famous for salmon and coarse fishing. You can row from Lough Gill to Dromahair. Here in Dromahair the Lough Gill Horse Drawn Caravan service offers a most acceptable mode of transport.

Seven miles Northwards is Manorhamilton. The views about Manorhamilton, and nearby Lurganboy are very pretty, and the road strays through old and new plantations as does the River Bonet that accompanies it. As we approach Manorhamilton we skirt Benbo mountain. The valleys and hedgrows here are a joy to behold. Very prevalent here is the Rowan or Mountain Ash Tree — an ancient species planted in olden times as protection against Witches. Masses of creamy coloured flowers are followed by clusters of coral Red Berries, and in Autumn the glorious tints vary from gold to scarlet. Here too the bramble is in abundance through hill and dale. When it sheds its pretty white blossoms it produces a crop of deep reddish purple berries called Blackberries, and they are much favoured for making jam and preserves. Rhododendron originally planted as undergrowth spreads in places over stony ground.

Whitethorn, Blackthorn and Holly thickets adorn the fields all around. Very fertile strips of land appear here. Many pretty woodlands exist with Hazel, Oak, Ash, Elm and Willow. The ever popular fuchsia puts up a lovely display of colour with its crimson bell-like flowers.

In Lisnabrack a very old wood remains and is covered with scrub of ancient trees and shrubs — i.e. Oak Coppice, Alder, Beech, Sycamore and Horsechestnut, dating back to 1700.