



Railway Gates . . .

*"Doran's Ass is in the stable
He's a Neddy without a tail
He could land above at Pottore
With fifteen stone of Indian Male"*

Ballinamore Revisited

By
Tommy Moran

'Twas one of our Ceannabo nursery rhymes. I recalled it now as I stood in Pottore gazing at the giant Sacred Heart lamp, after waking from my slumber on the slopes of Gubnaveigh. I had become a modern Rip Van Winkle.

The Sacred Heart lamp was not a Sacred Heart lamp, but a warning light for aeroplanes. Douglas Drew, the man who introduced the bidet,—yes the bidet—to Pottore, had the light put on top of his hundred foot television aerial. These gadgets were but part of the new world I was entering as I trudged homewards to Ballinamore.

Drumbibe School was strangely quiet; no laughter from the playground, no sign of Tom Sharpley. Creamer's of Castleroggy had retained its old world charm with the cobble stone yard. But where was Thomas McCaffrey's churn? Where was Jim Sharpley's milk trap? Where was the bloody railway?

"Ballinamore Golf Club" read the sign at the edge of the railway. Only it wasn't a railway, it was a road. No line, no sleepers, no carriages trundling towards Arigna. The Narrow Gauge gone? Surely Ballinamore would be dead? Todd Andrews may have killed the railway, but he hadn't killed Ballinamore.

The town was mad alive, and half of it seemed to be playing golf. Car after car passed—Josie Cryan, Noel Sweeney, Tommy McCormack, Dermot Gannon, golf clubs, golf tees, golf bags and golf shoes, all on the track of eagles, birdies, or a hole in one. They told me they went golfing elsewhere too—Belturbet, Blacklion, Carrick, Rosses Point and Ballyunion. They even said that Dermot Cribbin and Michael Martin had gone golfing in Spain! Spain? Not long ago the only ones travelling that far would have been the priests going on the Foreign Missions. Ballinamore had grown, but the world had shrunk. So too had women's swimsuits, according to the brochures in Dessie Kieran's telling us that Majorca, Miami, New York or Naples were but a few hours away. The American Wake was gone for good.

I headed for the lower town gates. The gates were gone. So too, was John Joe McGirl's field. Snowballs, Christmas crackers, children's clothes, cow-traps and steel girders were now being manufactured where we had once played football. The Industrial Revolution had hit Ballinamore. So too, had the rush hour. Five o'clock sharp and hundreds of blue coated women swarmed from Ballinamore Textiles, to be whisked away by Patsy Wrynn, Patsy Doherty, Mrs. Moloney and Martin Brothers. They were exporting children's clothes from the factory—a reversal of the time they came in parcels from America!

John Hughes cornered me at the Rehab factory with a "Voting Card" for "The High King of Connacht". He was trying to be High King, and John Milton and Michael Martin wanted to be "Lord Leitrim". Votes at a pound a time—even raffles had changed. God be good to Sister Brigid and her penny tickets for the Christmas Hamper for the Black Babies.

I was soon to find a penny wouldn't be much good to a Black Babe anymore—he'd want 50p before he'd nod his head on the box. Children were now paying more for an ice cream than their grandmothers had spent on groceries in a week. People were blaming the high prices on the Common Market, the new money and two fellows called Vat and Charlie Haughey. But still, money appeared plentiful—there were more in the town on Saturday night than there used to be for the close to the Mission. And the women were in town too, sitting on high stools standing their round. The modern 'ms' won't be rushed into the snug to sip port wine and nibble Mariettas!

It was all go, like the March fair day, at Ballinamore Construction. "Seddie, where did you leave the Banner for the Festival?"; "Seddie, Johnny Kellett's stuck with a lorry at the new road in Carrick"; "Seddie, will you do the lights for the concert tonight?"; "Seddie, you're wanted on the 'phone"; "Seddie, Andy Ralph wants Philip up with the low loader to the quarry in Kesh";

"Seddie, did you ring Guinness about sponsoring the Bard of Breifne?"; "Seddie, Patrick Prior wants a twenty foot joice at Trathnona"; "Seddie, will you do the Credit Union Saturday night?"; "Seddie, will you send out Christy Creamer with that load of sand this evening?"; "How do you stick it?", I asked Seddie McGovern—a businessman, community worker and entrepreneur. "No problem", he says, "but sure you can't be winning all the time". I was beginning to understand the meaning of the word 'pressure'.

The machinery at Seddie's told its own story. The day of the horse and ass was gone. The children now talked of transport boxes, five forward gears and Massey Fergusons. The anvil, bellows, horse shoes, bellybands, creels, and the ass's collar were words in their history notes. They never smelled the burning hooves at Tom Roddy's nor heard the rhythmic beat from Joe Gormley's. The milk came by machine as well—bottles and cardboard cartons replaced the jugs left on the window sills for Jim and Sean Sharpley or Lewis Taylor. Farmers came no more from Altachullion with creels of turf for a shilling. It was all machine turf now, delivered by lorry by "Beirne Bros"—they even had turf from Germany!

Farmers came to town all right. Not to sell turf. They came to buy vegetables. All day Tuesday, Pius Flynn and Terry McConnell, with their lorries bumper to bumper, sold spuds, cabbage, turnips, carrots and parsnips to the farmers. In the old days that would have been like bringing coal to Arigna. Pius and Terry were the only remnants of the Market Day. The Fair was gone too—cattle were now weighed and sold at a sort of an auction—no one spat on their hands, made a deal and gave a luck penny anymore. The Market was gone, even the Market House and the clock. All that remained was the one gate beside Phelim McAvinia's. And the market house now echoed, not the cackling of hens, but the clang of steel as Harry Megahey's men forge Harry's Heatpak back boilers.

Was anything the same at all? Well, the Canal Basin was, and Mac's River; and the Girls' school; and Pat Mac's garage; and The Ark; and, and, and....nearly nothing else. The winds of change had come; reconstruction and development had transformed Ballinamore.

Even the Convent had changed. Well, the wall and the gates had. And the nuns. They didn't walk up the town in pairs on Sunday evenings anymore. They drove up in ones. The starched gamps were obsolete — now we could see the nuns' ears, and discovered they really had hair. (We often wondered at school if they were all bald). Less scapulars, medals, holy pictures and relics for the sick. But more community involvement—doing the laundry at Trathnona, running socials for Mental Health, making sandwiches—or dancing with Willie Beattie—at the Old Folks' Party.



Seddy McGovern, Gerry Mahon, Francis Duignan and Denis Breen in a happy mood at Ballinamore Show Week Festival.



Charlie McCormack pictured at the Goods Store, with the key of "Lower Town Gates".

But the old folk aren't old folk now — they're "senior citizens". And in the aptly named "Trathnóna" Housing Scheme in Lahard they're enjoying a new lease of life. Characters are there in abundance; Owen McBrien with his words of wisdom for giddy young fellows like John Harte or P. J. McLoughlin; Bernie Mahon who takes the best out of Owen; Tom Sweeney unofficial caretaker and guardian who ensures everything is "copisetic"; Willie Beattie who claims he could always dance the legs off Bernie Mahon. In Trathnóna you have to be witty to survive. On Thursday nights they shed their years and do the Stack of Barley to the music of Eamonn Canning, Ben Curran, Packie Moran, Willie Conway, Cormac McGill and Peter Kelly. Full marks to the innovator of the scheme, Fr. John Young — it will be a permanent memorial to him. And full marks too to the local Vincent de Paul Society and Community Care Committees.

Trathnóna overlooks the railway station. Fr. Keogan is in the Station Master's office and the only porter around is Jimmy Clyne (Jimmy says Fr. Keogan won't let him have any porter around either); they're playing basket ball on the platform; going to school in the workshed, and playing football on the Belturbet line. The last C.I.E. link there is the Goods Store. But Yallie Clyne isn't there with the dray, or Peter McGlynn with the "Out" book. Only Jimmy Cullen with the bus. And the only engine about the place is the one Des Braiden painted on Dolan's gable. Below the gates, where they let off the fog signals, Joey, Jim and Cyril Smith sandblast, stencil, carve and polish our final memorial in granite, marble or limestone. Their work is

good — at least Joey says no one ever came back from Oughteragh to complain.

The New Line Road had retained only its shape. Maggie Mac's was now James and Madge Murphy's 'Park Stores'; Brendan Brennan's 'Brennan Expressway' has its headquarters in Patrick Flood's; Patsy Cassell's 'Scorpio Boutique' is in Owen Reilly's and the new Barracks and new houses are in McTague's field. Lahard had changed even in shape with Trathnóna on one side and the NBA houses stretching into the side of Bob's Hill. Willowfield—like so many areas around the town—was replacing its greenery with concrete. No more thatched or galvanised roofs to be seen. Modern homes, bungalows, split level, two storey, tarmacadamed driveways, lawns and shrubs, electric doorbells, carpets, washing machines, electric radios, central heating and inside toilets. And rolls of toilet paper—the slices of Observer and paper bags no longer hang on the nail. More houses, less people.

But they must have bigger appetites for the town is full of atein' houses. I remember when people went for a feed to Mrs. McAllister, Mrs. Gormley, Mrs. McNiffe, Mrs. Cosgrove or Mrs. Martin in the Hotel, the dinner or the mate tay on the Fair Day. Now we can eat in Sonnie Nicholson's tailor's shop and in Mrs. Bannon's — The Singing Kettle and Woodford Cafeteria — burgers with onions, steak, breasts of chicken, chips and video games. Richardson's Hotel — and the little watchmaker's shop where we wondered how Mr. Richardson could keep the magnifying glass in his eye

— is now the Commercial and Tourist Hotel and Good Time Charlie's Night Club — Johnny Mulligan's public house is The Sliabh an Iarainn Hotel and McAllister's has swollen beyond recognition into the town's newest hotel. We have dinner dances and buffets — timed for nine they start at half eleven. I found the only things people go in time for are Bingo and Midnight Mass.

Mass? Do you know where they're going to Mass now? On the site of the Preaching House, Martha McPartland's and "Arizona"! Thoul Chapel has been taken over by Pat Joe Reynolds — chipboard in the nun's pew, wardrobes up the middle aisle, toilet bowls on the men's gallery and twenty ton of coal where they had buried Fr. John. But Fr. John sleeps peacefully, they buried him again behind the new Church. Fr. Brady's orchard was always a busy spot — especially in October — and it's still busy, with Jack Neill's staff turning out cable drums at the RHN factory, and keeping the town in firelighters. They're still queueing at the creamery, but it's all tractors, cars, lorries and stainless steel tanks, everyone in a hurry, time is money. Packie Duignan's little shed is gone — Sean Maxwell and the fork lift swing into action in the new store. But the slugging continues.

Church Lane isn't Church Lane, it's Church Street. And they're talking of making it 'one way'! But more than the name has changed. Jack Meehan's, Cosgrove's forge, McAvinia's power-house and the green fields are no more. The Church of Ireland, and the School, and McAvinia's houses retain a link with the past. Church Lane is industrial still—with Columba Cryan, Tommy Conlon and Mickey Dolan adding to Ballinamore's progress.

I tried Hughie Dooner for a haircut. But Hughie had passed on, and with him the red and white pole and a wealth of wit. There is a new breed of barber now — the Unisex Hairdresser. Men and women wait their turn together to be shampooed, body waved, tinted or blow dried. James Dooner in the home place, Rosemary Ellis in Mrs. Dwyer's, Sean Creamer in Hubie Reynolds's and Noreen Creamer in Stephen McTague's, all of them equipped like operating theatres. How did Hughie manage at all?, he could carry all his tools in the one pocket.

AYR Nurseries, The Coach and Horses, The Lakeland Bar, The Magpie, McGuire Insurances, Dr. Danaswanni, Deirdre's, KM Cleaners, McWeeney's, Kelleghers, Phil's, Milton's, Ursula's Cake Shop, Bridie's Lounge, Mackin's, Bank of Ireland, Frank O'Brien, Joe O'Brien, Kavanagh's, so many new names, so many changes, it was hard to figure who was who or what was what.

Like the country in general, Ballinamore had changed, had 'moved with the times'. So many everyday things were now considered part of our

Ballymacormack

(For Margaret)

You came to life in silence
a slow detonation, a fusion

of the elements, not as
harsh as blinding rain in December

falling coloured gunmetal grey
but a silent fighter with a

refusal almost to die, to
surrender when your call came.

Leaving this graveyard there
will be the indelible tracing

of that straight line stretched
towards infinity on the heart monitor

of you fighting so hard in
that oxygen tent; forever

the enveloping shadows of pain
scything even your last whispers.

Each new separation
reopens the cicatrix —

poetry for the pogrom —
of this hole in the ground where

lies what belonged under my heart
and remains forever within it.

Eugene McGloin (c) 1982.

heritage — thank God Sean Sullivan, the County Librarian, preserves them as Museum pieces. Only three buildings — Sean S. MacFhearghail, Sliabh an Iarainn and Labharlan Chondae Liatroma have a title in Irish!

Will Ballinamore keep changing? If I doze off again on Gubnaveigh will the tractor be a museum piece when I get back? Will Patsy Wrynn be doing helicopter runs? Will the women be saying Mass? Will Ballinamore have a public toilet? Will even one child be walking to school? Will there be potatoes? Will Ballinamore be Ballinamore at all?