

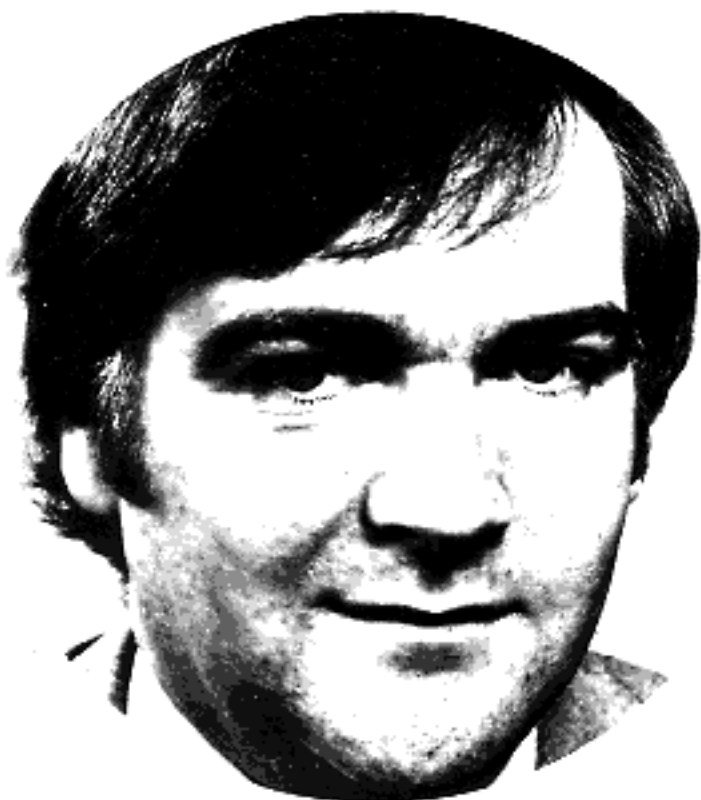
Memories

of

Killargue

by

Michael Feeney



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MY EARLIEST memories of my native Killargue go back to about 1952. This was the so-called 'hungry fifties' era and economic prosperity did not abound in the area. Emigration from the parish was rife. In my own family, we soon learned of our close links with New York and Cleveland where so many of our uncles, aunts and cousins lived. It was poignant to realise that my father's sister, Margaret, had emigrated to Cleveland before he was born — to this day they have never met.

School

Despite the difficulties of the time, my brothers, sisters and I enjoyed life with all the zeal and vigour that is the hallmark of youth. Going to the old school-house in Killargue where Master Gallagher was Headmaster was my first real venture into the outside world. Within a year, it was time to transfer to the new school one mile from the village on the Manorhamilton road. The school boasted 70 pupils on enrolment day, but was subsequently closed due to a fall in numbers. Our first teachers were Anselm Reynolds (Fenagh) and Miss Sweeney. The plight of poor Miss Sweeney — a late driver — in trying to turn her little Austin car at the school gate was often the source of harmless amusement to us.

The 'Down the Roads' included the Flanagans, Feeneys, Sheridans, Harkins, Kellys, plus the Sox Line contingent of the Kellys and McKeons including later football stalwarts, Paddy and Seamus, New York, and Vinnie, Dromahair and Leitrim.

My own clan, together with the McGowans, McTiernans, Cullens and McKennas, from the Currytavy Road, all qualified for the 'Up the Road' status. This distinction was important as there was keen rivalry between the two sections which manifested itself in various ways including snowball fights and other forms of devilment.

Sunday Mass was the big occasion of the week. I was one of the altar boys. This meant taking a turn at serving week-day Masses. Occasionally, we were lucky enough to serve at a wedding which usually brought a five shilling bonanza. At Christmas time Fr. Donohue, P.P., would give us our material reward, a box of chocolates which we always managed to eat before we left the sacristy.

Football

On most Sunday afternoons we played marathon football matches. Interestingly, this was at a time of decline for organized football in the Parish following the departure of Fr. J. A. Young from Creevelea to Ballinamore. It was Fr. Young who with John McGourty had a successful local team which played in Seamus McMorrow's 'football field', otherwise known as 'McGourty's Stadium'. The home setting for our football specials was our 'Acre Field'. There, Danny O'Hagan, Jim Harkin — sometimes accompanied by his brother Sean — Jimmy Forde and Michael McTiernan who later became a star Leitrim goalie, played their hearts out. The sessions frequently lasted up to six hours, with only a short break for tea. Great 'All-Ireland' battles were decided at the foot of that quiet hillside, and at the finish there was always next Sunday's game at one of the away venues.

The alternative was perhaps a trip to see Leitrim footballers in action. The Park in Sligo, in 1956, was the venue for my first inter-county match; Leitrim easily defeated Donegal to reach the All-Ireland Minor Final. Several local supporters travelled to the final by bus, including my father, Jim McMorrow, Packie Cullen, John Kilkenny and John McNulty. At home, I anxiously waited for the result on the radio only to be disappointed when Michael O'Hehir broadcast that Leitrim had suffered a heavy defeat. Afterwards I recall Packie Cullen relating experiences of the trip including a visit to a pub in Dublin's Inner City where he was astounded to see big women drinking pints of Guinness.

In the following years, I was fortunate enough to be taken by my father to many of Leitrim's matches at venues such as Carrick-on-Shannon, Ballinamore, Roscommon and Sligo. The company was always the same, Packie and Padraig Cullen and Jim McMorrow with Jim McTiernan driving. In retrospect, these were the great years of Leitrim football involving five Connacht final appearances. Although they never made that important breakthrough, we always kept hoping and waiting.

The Sweat of the Brow

The local economy in those days was dependent on farming and the considerable employment generated by the local quarry operations, McKenna's, Bird's and McMorrow's, Mullaghmore. Most of the local families dabbled in dairying and it was not uncommon for us to milk a few cows before going to school. Springtime was ploughing time; the arrival of Jack Harkin with his horses and plough was eagerly awaited as Jack's sense of humour and gentle teasing always livened the strenuous task in hand.



A Killargue team of the mid fifties; Included are Pat Feeney, Lughnasheehan, Father John A. Young now P.P. of Carrigallen and members of the Feeney, Dolan, Donohue, Harte, Banks and other families.

Summer days brought a great flurry as we headed for our bog on O'Donnell's Rock. I have pleasant memories of the morning mist lifting off the mountain, boiling eggs on the open fire, drinking fresh ice cold water from the pure spring well and in the evening the whistle of the train in Manorhamilton Station indicating it was time to go home.

On the way home, there was always the exchange of pleasantries with Dora McGoey, and a roadhouse chat with Thady and Frank Sexton. Frank was the local tailor who was known for his quick tongue. One Sunday, during Mass, a group of lightly built young lads in uniform arrived at the back of the Church. "Who are they?" enquired Frank. "They are FCA men" he was informed. "God save Ireland" retorted Frank "because those fellows never will".

A close neighbour of the Sextons was Mary Slevin who was also never short of words. On one occasion, the discussion in John McNulty's shop centred on the abolition of two church holydays by Pope John XXIII. Mary was opposed to the changes. "Is the Pope too old?", someone enquired. "What age is he?" asked Mary. "Over seventy", she was advised. Mary thought for a few seconds and then pronounced: "Speaking from personal experience, any person over the age of 70 years is incapable of looking after his own affairs not alone the affairs of the whole world".

The 'Characters'

Killargue had many other marvellous 'characters' at that time. Sonnie Gallagher was a great favourite of mine. A man of many talents, he was a poet, songwriter, singer, historian and football enthusiast. Patrick McLoughlin, the shoemaker, and his sister Mary Ann had a special christian uniqueness. Joe Loughlin from Curryville is well remembered whenever that era is discussed in Killargue.

Remembrances of those days would not be complete without reference to the parties in O'Hagan's Gortnatresk. Babby, now resident in Manorhamilton and her husband Johnnie, were excellent hosts. Continuous dancing was the order of the night as Mike McKenna on the fiddle accompanied by John Hamilton provided the music, Bernie Joe McTiernan the songs and, for the rest, it was a case of around the kitchen and mind the dresser! It is always nice to meet Katie Sheridan, who in her time also hosted marvellous musical sessions, and Terence Kelly, the kind neighbour, whose eye for a good animal is as keen as ever.