FOLKLORE COLLECTION 1988-1989

Introduction by Book Committee

The Lough Gur & District Historical Society Journal, *No 7 (1991)* was a "*Special Folklore Edition*". As Michael J Quinlan, Editor, Lough Gur & District Historical Society, explained in his Editorial to the *Special Edition* (appears immediately following this introduction), the *Edition* contains extracts from the work of thirty-two contributors, taken from taped material from ninety-eight contributors which the 1988 folklore project yielded. Many Grange people were among the ninety-eight contributors. The stories of those Grange people which were published in the *Special Edition* are reproduced below, amongst others.

Journal Editorial by Michael J Quinlan (1991)

"Go Out And Gather Up The Fragments Lest They Perish"

The above is the motto of the Irish Folklore Commission which was set up in 1935 and incorporated in the Department of Irish Folklore in University College Dublin in 1971. Dr Dáithí Ó hÓgáin *[deceased]*, of Bruff, is a member of the faculty and forges a strong link with this area. His encouragement was invaluable in collecting the folklore of which this compilation is the partial result. His references and notes give it an academic status which otherwise would be missing. Eventually the tapes and transcripts will be handed over to Dáithí and be placed in the National Archive.

The Folklore Collection was made during the Autumn of 1988 as part of the FÁS/Lough Gur Development Association Folklore Project. The young trainees went about, interviewing and recording. They were repeating a process which was last done fifty years previously. They very likely met some people who contributed to the Schools Collection which was taken up during the school-year 1937-1938 by the pupils who were then in fifth class. That collection can be viewed on microfilm in the Limerick County Library, O'Connell Street, Limerick.

The Lough Gur project unfortunately ended before the results could be published. The plan was, and still is, to produce selections of the material gathered, in three publications. This is the first and the selection was made

by Francis Rush, Project Leader. We express our gratitude to him on a job very well done. He has used extracts from the work of 32 contributors. It really only represents a fraction of the 150 hours of taped material from 98 contributors which the project yielded. Hence the need for further publications. We acknowledge all our contributors and assure them of our gratitude and that of the Department of Folklore.

We, in Lough Gur and District Historical Society, are very glad that someone has gone out and gathered "… up the fragments lest they perish", and also glad that the honour of publishing has fallen to us. While it is a departure from our annual journal, we decided that it is a worthwhile one as it involved so many people in the broader locality. We trust that you, our readers, will enjoy the contents of this special edition of the Journal. May it stir memories from the older readers and allow the younger ones to glimpse into a life that is all but gone.

Rath Dé orabh go leir,

Michael J Quinlan
Editor, Lough Gur & District Historical Society.

By Annie O'Keeffe (23/8/1988)

Oh, I remember the wakes, all in houses. There were no things such as parlours then. And the person died, and the priest came in the morning and he said Mass in the house and he had his breakfast. And then the remains would go out that evening to the church. The house would be crowded day and night. You just brought a ham and a leg of mutton and cooked it, and everyone got something – and plenty – to drink. But there was no moving anywhere else, you see. They would drink mostly whiskey; there was hardly any other dished out at wakes, mostly whiskey. No poteen around our area, no all whiskey and…I remember they having clay pipes that night and they supplying tobacco and giving it to the people, to the men around at O'Loughlin's wake.

No one went home: they stayed till morning daylight, and they went home to do their work. But always some neighbour stayed on, four or five of 'em women as well. No one was left alone. They would be talking, and you'd hardly hear them talking above their voices: whispering they used to be. I was at one, one night, and we played cards. Yera, there was this man: he was an uncle of my cousins, and he came home from America. And we didn't know him at all: we were born here, and

he was over in America always and I suppose he had no money or anything. But he happened to die there anyway. And 'twas the time of the depression here: '33. During the depression, people weren't paying their rent and rates, and they were seizing your cattle you see. So we were in the house and this man was dead inside the room. And they came in to seize the cattle from my aunt for not paying the rates and the two cousins ran out and they said "Our uncle is dead; he is dead inside in the bed, you can't take the cattle!" So they came in, and I remember them putting a mirror in front of his mouth to see if he was breathing. And he was dead of course, but they didn't believe us; we didn't know him at all, only as a man home from America. But we were roaring laughing: he was someone that you didn't know that much. But they were all sad wakes mind you, and very respectful to the dead. We didn't play any other games besides cards.

By Michael Madden 19/8/1988

There was a yarn about the Coiste Bodhar: they were all afraid to look out to see what 'twas like. 'Twas a six-horse coach: the driver and the horses were headless. And this fella said he'd have to see it, this night, so he'd look out the keyhole and see. So he was at the keyhole when the coach came along and the driver – the coachman – cut the eye out of him with the whip in through the keyhole, ha! Ha! So he didn't bother with it anymore then.

By Father Brown 5/12/1988

Of course, there is a certain amount of myth mixed in with religion. Even the very myth of a funeral: that the people who bring the corpse into the church would bring it out. There is a graveyard in County Limerick where the coffin is laid down on the ground before you enter into the graveyard. Why? Because in times past you had to get the permission of the landlords to enter a graveyard, and they still do this, even though the landlord is gone. I remember when I was a little boy in Abbeyfeale, nobody was ever buried in the graveyard unless the corpse had been taken three times around it to disorientate it; the same as you have in Africa. Take it to the cross-roads; twist it around; that he wouldn't know which way the spirits were going.

By Michael Lombard 1/11/1988

Well, the majority of the marriages were made so that your parents, your relatives or your relations, if you were of marriageable age and that way inclined, started looking out for a suitable husband: somebody that was sober and sensible, had

land or else a good job, or else they would make sure that the husband would provide for the wife and of course, if he was well off, with a house and money, that was great: he'd be considered a great catch. But still, there were a lot of love matches, that time as well as now and the courting, of course, was entirely different: now you have cars; that time you had to go out on the side of the road with bicycles or up again a ditch, railway tracks were great places; they were very quiet. Bridges; all sorts of places, like that so it's completely different.

The priests were grand men, but some of them were very strict: they'd get very excited on the altar, and they had a great habit of going around every night with blackthorn walking sticks and they walked the roads. If they'd come on a haunt at all they'd hunt them out of it, if they caught you courting a girl, they'd chase you away, across the road. In fact, a lot of their sermons were about the lonely roads, the lonely nights, and all that sort of thing. In due course that all changed; all for the best I think.

By Annie O'Keeffe 23/8/1988

Oh, my God, in my time a workman with a wife and family would earn only about thirty pounds a year but he'd get milk and a bag of potatoes and bacon if he killed pigs like, and always at Christmas there'd be a goose given. They were very poor; they were treated badly. The wife would be coming to the house milking cows, and she'd get ten shillings a week for milking eight cows a night and morning maybe. But my mother would cut the giblets off the goose: you know, the wings and the neck and the gizzard. You'd have it aside, and she'd put a bit of bacon with it and give it to the women for their dinner on Sunday and they used to be delighted to get it, and she give 'em dripping and things like that and a few eggs at a time. But they were badly off and treated badly: there was no doubt about it. The way they had to live, and nothing thought of 'em either.

They wouldn't be let sit at the one table with you or anything. No, in some houses they wouldn't, they had to sit in an outside kitchen and the family in the inside kitchen, that wasn't right. No, I never approved of that. We had one man too for twenty-five years, Patsy Dunne. I remember him well. Then another man was there after that: I suppose he was ten or eleven years here, and we had younger people. There was always a girl in the house like a maid. The first thing she'd do: she'd look for a bag to make a bag-apron. She'd her own room and all of that, and she'd go in there to make the bag-apron to start work the next morning. She'd have to be washing potatoes outside I'd washed 'em myself in a boiler, for the pigs with cold water and ice in the winter time. You'd a big, big pot of potatoes in and boiled them and on Saturday you'd boil two pots because you wouldn't dream of doing any work on Sunday.

You go to Mass, come home and sit down to the dinner. No matter what happened you wouldn't be allowed to do any laborious work, and we had a man working one time he lived in Lough Gur, Willie Condon, I don't know if there is anyone there belonging to him now. He lived over where Biddy Conway bought that house and he came one time looking for a job, to my father. He walked from Dromcollogher, and he just walked from Dromcollogher to Limerick looking for a job from door to door. He'd no way of going home; he hadn't a bicycle even. He stayed put all the time with us until he married…

By Michael Quinlan 20/6/1989

The Curse of Gearoid Iarla – Gearoid's father, Muiris, had a castle in Knockainey as well as in Lough Gur. It was on the banks of the Camogue River. One day he was walking along the river when he came across a young lady who was having a swim: this lady was Áine, the fairy queen. And as the lore says, "he had his way with her" by taking her cloak. She told him that she would bear him a son within the nine-month period. He didn't see her again until the nine-month period was over when she arrived at the castle and handed in the baby boy, who was Gearoid Iarla. She warned the father that no matter what this child ever did, he was never to show any surprise.

Gearoid grew up to be very able and talented: a great soldier and warrior. The father accepted him and was careful not to show surprise at anything that he did. One night there was a feast in the castle, and there was a very lovely girl there who was able to do all kinds of wonderful things: she could balance things and perform great tricks. She vaulted over the big long table and back over it again. The old Earl was getting worried that his son was not the most excellent person there, so he asked Gearoid if he could match the feats of the girl; so Gearoid leaped from where he was standing and went straight into a bottle, and he leaped straight out again.

The father was absolutely aghast and so showed the surprise that he was not supposed to show. And so his son began to change into a goose. He walked from the banqueting hall down into the Camogue and began to swim down the river. When he arrived in Lough Gur he stayed on the island: sometimes that island is called "Oilean an Ge". There is even a local curse, which used to be "Greadadh Oilean an Ghe chughat!" "May you be banished like the Island Goose" *(Gearoid Iarla).*

He used to fly back to Knockainey to visit Aine on occasion. He swam in the Camogue during a flood once and complained that the people would be in danger. Aine then is supposed to have collected stones into her apron and made that very famous old bridge which was removed in the 1930s: "Clochain Aine" or "The Stepping Stones" of Knockainey.

There is still an amount of doubt about which character Gearoid Iarla actually was. In the opinion of the older people he was the Gearoid Iarla of 1338-1398; not the man who was killed in Kerry in 1584.

By Danny O'Riordan 16/8/1988

I did hear the banshee: I could say that I heard it about four or five times, but there was always some old members of a family, or a member of an old family, I should say, dying at the time. I remember once, in 1931, I think it was: I worked at Jim Murnane's above on the hill; that's the present Danny Murnane's father, Lord have mercy on Jim.

Tom Hickey's grandfather; he was dying this night, and the banshee was around the whole place. As a matter of fact, I went from Hickey's back to Murnane's for Mick Hickey was there – that's Pat's father – and the banshee was with me along the fields as I was going back. Now I didn't see anything: I could only hear the sound. And as I said while ago, it was like the drone of bagpipes: that kind of sound, a nice sound. I liked it, but I was very anxious to know who was doing it because I could see nobody. And about four or five times in my life around here I did hear the banshee but, I'd say not for the last twenty-five years did I hear it. There was a pub there in the olden times, and I was working in Hayes in Rusheen that year: that was 1928 1929. I had to bring tobacco to the old man: that's the Hayes grandfather there now in the bog over, and I forgot about the tobacco. I was at the pub with the crowd, listening to the crack and the yarns, you see.

They used to be telling all those old stories, about banshees and deaths and everything. They were all old people, and the pint of stout was only ninepence that time. And I went up for the tobacco up past Son Hayes house: that was next door to Galligan's pub.

There was a very tall woman dressed in black with a white lace: I could see her quite plainly, with a white lace thing around her neck and hanging down this way: a lovely white lace thing, and she was standing in the very centre of the road. And I being a young fella, hadn't even shoes on, I was barefoot at the time. I suppose I came up a bit quickly. She frightened me, and she stayed standing there: she never moved. She frightened me so much that I almost ran against her, and I said "Good night Ma'am", and I got no answer and I scampered off to the shop, to Son Brien's shop at the Cross of Lough for the tobacco: two ounces of "Garryowen". I remember it well. And when I was coming back, there was nobody, and I was only a few minutes gone. I didn't meet her nor see her, and I was often wondering to myself, "Where did she go, or where did she come from?" She had vanished off the road. But that man died that night: Son Hayes was his name. He was married to a sister of Mikie Connell, who owned the place before the Mulcahys bought it.

About the banshee now, I followed it from the black gate down there near Thomas Ryan's, opposite the pub now, and I followed the banshee around the rocks there in Hynes to know if I could see her. And John Dineen, the Lord have mercy on him, he was a brother to Tim there in Knockderk: he died there about four years ago down in Crecora: he was with me, and John got a bit frightened and he scampered off as I kept after the noise. I couldn't see anything: I'm a sceptic I suppose: I couldn't believe it, but I did hear it.

By John Farrell 2/5/1989

I was coming down from a dance in Kilfinane the night the Maple Ballroom was opened, back in 1959 or 1960, and I was walking along the road with my bike. A ball of fire arose out of a field on my right-hand side. It rose over my head in the form of a bow and lodged at the other side. The same man owns the two fields: there was a field on each side of the road. This bow had all the colours of the rainbow: I thought that it was a flash of lightning, but I saw no move. Anyhow, I said nothing, I got on my bike, went home and went up to bed. The morning after, when I got up out of my bed, I heard that Willie Wallace was dead. The ball of fire had risen from Willie Wallace's field.

By Mr and Mrs Danny O'Riordan 16/8/1988

When there were funerals long ago you'd have a priest riding on a horse, and he would put on a higher hat than an ordinary one and he'd have this white linen thing tied around his hat with a kind of rosette here in the front. And he'd have a white sash on him: they used to call it a "surplice", but it was made of white linen. Father McGrath in Herbertstown, when I was a young fellow; he used to wear surplice, and they all used to have to wear them. They were provided by, I suppose, the undertaker, I remember a funeral coming from somewhere in Tipperary to Ballinard; that's just beyond Herbertstown, a small bit on the Hospital side; the people in the funeral were riding on horses after the hearse and horses and trap-cars and side-cars after that. I remember that well. But you'd never see any of that now. They shouldered the coffin if they had to travel over a shorter distance. They used to be mad for the job you know: fellows would be shouldering fellows out of the way to get at it. You'd have two in front of the coffin and two behind: if you had two in the centre they wouldn't have room to walk, and they'd only be kicking their neighbours' heels, you know. The funerals then were a spectacle along with everything else. The evening funerals, when they'd come to the church, the priest would say the full rosary and the litany. The Mass then was much the same as the Mass today except that it was in Latin.

By John Farrell 2/5/1989

One night my father was coming out from the town of Kilmallock, and he fell off his bicycle in front of the graveyard in Kilbreedy. He got up, and he stood out on the road and there was a woman leaning out over the stile and she said nothing to him. He came down the hill, and down below at the wall of the graveyard there was a timber gate. A priest walked out and leaned up against the gate, and he said "Goodnight, Sean" to my father. They walked down the road then, and they sat up on their bikes and they came to the cross. My father was going to the right, and the priest was going to the left. The priest asked my father in what direction he was going. "I'm going this way", said my father, "Good night, I'll see you again." And when my father looked around there was no priest: the priest had vanished.

Another night a few years later at the same place there was a man coming out from Kilmallock. He was after carrying a load of Sutton's coal, and he had a big chestnut horse – Suttons owned him in Kilmallock. He was coming down the road, bringing his horse home for the morning, and it was dark. When he was coming down the hill at the graveyard, the horse stopped, and Tom Cronin, who was driving him, said "Go on!" The horse wouldn't go: he started setting back, Tom said again "Go on, go on!" and no way would the horse go. He pulled out the stick and started to beat the horse, but no to no avail. Next thing the horse started putting his legs out high, lifting them up in the air as if he was going over a jump, then Tom Cronin heard all the barrels rolling, and as they were going down the hill the horse was trying to put his legs out over them. That happened in the late forties or early fifties behind in Kilbreedy.

By Tom McNamara 15/12/1988

Cahercorney over: there are vaults in it of some of the Crokers in Ballinagarde. There's one particular vault, and there's a fine inscription written up in marble. The pity of it now is that the vault door is thrown open. 'Twas a steel door, a big thick steel door, and there are several prints of bullet holes in it. They thought at one stage during the fight for freedom that there were some of the Irish rebels hiding there and they placed several bullets in it and 'tis riddled. You could still see the bullet holes in it. But some of the slates are gone off it, and there's ivy growing up through it now, and the grand inscription is inside all right. You can see the vaults at the side where some of the old Crokers were buried; they're big stone slabs, you know. It doesn't commemorate a great era because the Crokers weren't reputed to be great people in their time, but at the same time the vault looks so impressive. It was dealing with a historic period, and so it should have been restored in some way or other at the same time.

But the Crokers dominated Ballinagarde and that area around there for years. And they were tough tyrants of people, you know. And at another stage they built grand gates you see going into the estate in Ballinagarde, massive gates, and there was a circular arrangement over on it and written on it as a class of motto, "The Power of what Men and Money can do". And you see, Old Croker was reputed to have a terrible big funny nose, and one of the local wags that night wrote under it; "All the money of the human race couldn't put a new nose on Old Croker's face!"

But of course if it was nowadays they could because he could probably have plastic surgery; that would nearly do the job for him alright. So that was relating to the Crokers and the connection with the graveyard in Cahercorney. But those people: they'd have massive vaults and places to be buried; not that it made any difference, I'd say: when you'd go to the other side it didn't matter what kind of a vault you were buried in!

By Phil Russell 17/8/1988

I have an old story about Gearoid Iarla, which my father got from his father. There was an old man by the name of Fitzgerald from Kildromin near Kilteely and he was going back to friends of his in Holycross (near Lough Gur). He used to go back to where the Great Stone Circle is. He was going back by the side of the lake, by Lough Gur House. It wasn't de Salis who was there at the time: a man by the name of Vandalour owned it. This goes back maybe a hundred and twenty years, or maybe further. There was a grass patch there around the lake, towards Grange Chapel, and he was going across it. And this little steward was there: he was a man from the North by the name of Foley, and he came out to stop your man.

Your man was a big strong man; he was a Fitzgerald. And he wouldn't stop and they had some few words – hot words – over it. So the steward went away in a bit of a rage and said that he'd go to Bruff for the police. He put a saddle on a pony inside in the stables and hopped up on the pony. And this man who was crossing the path said, shouting it into the lake, "Gearoid! Gearoid! Gearoid! Have this man removed!" So Foley came out on the pony. 'Twas the month of March – kind of cold. He came out flying through the trees. If you know Lough Gur House now: there are a lot of trees around it. And your man hit his head against a tree and was thrown off the pony and killed. He's buried behind in Grange, in the old churchyard and under the stone is written:

Here lie the bones of Daniel Foley
He lived a tyrant and died a Tory
His bones were bashed agin the trees
And now he's in hell for eternity.

Coincidentally or otherwise, the survey of Grange Graveyard conducted by Michael Quinlan and Tony Clancy in 1989 and which was published in the ***Lough Gur & District Historical Society Journal*** of the same year recorded an inscription for Plot No 83, which read "Sacred to the memory of Daniel Foley who departed this life on 19th May …8 aged 52 years. *[Possibly 1838]*.

By Thomas McNamara 23/8/1988

Well, of course, there was a lot of matchmaking: there was nearly a matchmaker in every district. He was a recognised man that was good at bringing people together. And they'd approach the owner; it was usually small farmers, you know, that the matchmaking went on between. But they'd go to this man, and he'd have someone in his eye that would be suitable maybe, and he'd approach the other people and they'd be brought together: usually in the snug of a public house. The first meeting might take place, and the last people to meet would be the people concerned; the boy and girl that were to be married. All the arrangements would be made about money and all the rest of it, you see! It was called the "dowry" then. The woman would have to bring in one if she was coming into the place; she'd have to bring in a few hundred pounds anyway, and that might be handed over to a sister of the boy. So often the few same hundred pounds did a lot of business around the country: it solved a lot of trouble.

But the matches: as a general rule they proved successful but before the wedding took place there would have what was known as 'atin' the gander.

'Atin' the gander was a part of getting the people concerned acquainted with one another. The people: the girl's father and mother and brothers; they'd go over, you see and "walk the land" as the saying goes and examine the stock to see what they were getting, you see and how good the place was. Then the hospitality of the house was displayed with roast goose being the main dish. It was during this festivity that the boy and girl met for the first time. Often a trick was done; that the people brought in a few cows maybe from a neighbour to swell up their own number, to make a good impression when they'd come to see and there was another man one time you see, who heard this: – he had two grand gardens, and there was one of the gardens very near the end of the house, you see and it was a great boast: two gardens you see, meaning that he was a strong farmer. So they got married anyway. When the spring came, he tilled one of the gardens very near the end of the house, but he wasn't inclined to do anything with the other one. The wife asked him one day what he was going to set. "Ah", he said, "we'll set carraway seeds". You see, the garden didn't belong to him at all, it was a neighbouring man's garden. So she got a bit of a drop in that line.

So there was a lot of tricks that way, but as a general rule the marriage turned out to be successful. And as I said, the people wouldn't have met: the boy and girl concerned. They wouldn't mind at all: this matchmaking was the done-thing of the day. But you see, the matchmaker would be a clever man enough, so that he'd nearly match 'em suitably, you see to one another like, and he'd know what was really wanted, so that's the way. They'd have to go to the solicitors then for the bindings and all the rest of it, and there was often a rule that the old man and woman of the house would have their livelihood, there you see. And maybe a room, was allotted to them, and they'd have to get their supply of provisions such as tea, milk and sugar and all the rest of that. And they'd drive to Mass in the pony and trap: that would be all put into the bargain in the handing over of the place. They'd have to get a drive to Mass in the pony and trap, or maybe to town now and then if they wanted to check up on the bit of money or a thing that way.

Oh, there'd be a big dance. The wedding'd take place in the house, you see, then. And there'd be big dance that night and all the neighbours would be invited in and a fella playing a melodeon or two: great dancing and great drinking and everything 'twould be very good. There used what they would call "Straw Men" arrive in the night; we'd say that they'd be uninvited guests, but they would dress up as Straw Men – sheaves of straw around them, and they'd come in and take over for a while. And of course, they'd get drunk and all the rest of it too, you see. But they would be a class of uninvited: they wouldn't be invited, but they would come as Straw Men. They would come in singing and jigging and take over the dance for a while. They'd be accepted, like; you know. It was generally accepted that Straw Men would arrive in those times. So that's the way things went. They'd [newly-weds] stay at home after the wedding and fall in milking cows the next morning, and it was no more about it. Oh, back to normal. There was no great scene in the way of honeymoons at all. Not then.

Back to top ⇧

Full list of interviewees attributed to the Grange area

Paddy Baggot
Nora Barron
Tom Brouder
Breda Bulfin
George Bulfin
Ellen Burke
Simon Casey
Egan Clancy
Austin Cregan
Maureen Cregan
Jackie Daly
May Harty
James Higgins
Michael Lombard
Donal Madden
Michael Madden
Nellie Madden
Michael O'Donnell
Annie O'Keeffe
Mary O'Loughlin