

ANTHONY BOURKE

By Marion Dawson

It was the anniversary of my father's death on 22nd February 2015, when I was asked to write a piece for the *Grange Book*. My father was Anthony Bourke, and his family were all from Grange. He was the youngest child of Mick Bourke and Brigid Doran, and Anthony was the only child of theirs not born in The Village, but in Rahin.

His mother, Brigid, was from the Old Road. Her father had a shop in what is now the home of Pa and Betty O'Connell. Mrs Doran was a dressmaker. In fact, my mother, Breda, remembers crossing the fields and jumping the trench on the Weekes's farm to collect a dress that Mrs Doran had made for her. There was a large Doran family: Lizzy, Brigid, Patrick, John, Dan, Frank, Sam, Ellen and Jim.

The Bourke family was living in the cottage below Paddy Carmody's hill, at the top of the 'Barrack' field, a house occupied by Uncle Sam in much later years. John Bourke lived with his wife, Margaret, and family comprising Jim, Mick, Margaret and Paddy. Jim married in the village to Minnie Guare (McGuire). Margaret married a Mulcahy from Bruff, but she died young. Paddy, a bachelor, was known to everyone as "Louis" Bourke or Paddy "Louis", and for a man who had so many names himself, he called everyone either "Mary-Jo" or "Mikey-Joe", or if you happened to be in right trouble with him, it was "Mary-Jo-Pa".

When Mick married Brigid, they were gifted a house by Count de Salis, who resided at Lough Gur House. All that remains of the Bourke home is adjacent to where Seirse and Helen Clancy now live.

Their children Kally, Donal, Eileen, Jamie, Sean, Gussie, Sam, Francis (twins) and Noelle were all born in this little house. I remember Mrs Carey, Sacristan of the church and neighbour of the Bourkes, observing what a lovely family they were and what a great neighbour Mrs Bourke was. Brigid was a woman who could turn her hand to anything – knitting, dressmaking, gardening, rearing pigs and milking cows. If help was needed by anybody, one of the Bourke lads could be called upon with certainty.

Tragedy struck the family when their son, Sean, died in 1937. By all accounts, he had been a lovely boy who was a great favourite in the village. I recall Mrs Carey



Bridget Bourke, mother of Anthony (baby Joan Gallagher in pram).

saying that Mick Bourke, a reserved man, was devastated by the death of his child and took it very badly. Strange it is that both Sean and my dad died on the same day, 37 years apart.

Austerity reigned in the towns and villages of Ireland. Kally Bourke, the eldest, was the first to leave for England and brothers and a sister soon

followed her. They had worked long and hard at home as children. Mick and Bridgid kept cows in Caherguillamore and tilled extensive gardens in Rahin and Grange. Mick carried stone by horse and cart from the quarry in Cahernorry, which was used to lay the roads of the locality. At the time, my mother's father, Ned Slattery, was quarry blasting at Cahernorry. As teenagers, the Bourke family worked on the local farms in the area and made firm friends with their employers. Times were hard, pay was low, and the Bourkes had ambitions that could not be fulfilled in their own country.

Only two, Anthony and Eileen (Hogan), of their big family remained in the family home in Rahin. The other brothers and sisters returned home with their wives and husbands and children on holiday, but their homes were now Oxford, Essex and London.

My father was a very happy and funny character and sometimes when the stories are told about things he said or things he did or the friends he made, it is hard to believe that his life was so short.



Above: Anthony Bourke and his daughter, Marion with his 'Tug-of-War' team colleagues.

I don't know too much about his life before he married; however, from what I could gather, he was a typical young man who went to dances, had lots of friends and worked at home. He had a job with George Shinnors – helping the veterinary surgeon with the heavy work. He played hurling with Camogue Rovers, and he pulled tug-of-war at field evenings around the locality. He was the anchorman, of course!

My mother says that when they married, she marvelled at the industry that went on in the house – baking, dressmaking and gardening. She recalls that Brigid would come in from tilling the garden for a rest, and she would pick up knitting to complete a jumper, or she would turn a collar on a shirt. There was rarely an idle hand. Sam told me that during one childhood illness of his, he knitted a pair of socks and was proud that he could “turn a heel”. In fact, Uncle Donal handmade a coat for his wife (Mary Reynolds, Rathcannon). Now, as anyone who remembers Sam Bourke will know, he could tell ‘tall ones,’ but Auntie Eileen said that it was true.

My parents eventually settled in the present house in Grange, and we, their three children, were brought into the world to a happy home surrounded by good neighbours and family friends. A lot of work was done by Mom and Dad to make the house a home



Anthony Bourke with his daughters, Marion and Valerie, visiting Santa.

– Dad could turn his hand to anything. He was very content with his life and increasingly was involved in farming for himself. He worked for the Shannon Foundry in Limerick, and he cut silage with John McAuliffe and Tom Casey. He delivered eggs for Eddie Drew, who ran a shop in Grange in the 1970s.

Some of my memories are going with Dad to the store in Herbertstown for cement and calling to The Hamlet on the way home for lemonade. I also remember Dad and Willie Madden rounding up pigs at the pump across the road from our house, and while they leant against the ditch for a chat, the pigs broke out and another chase began. I recall going to the creamery and sitting on his shoulders while he talked with acquaintances or helped others to lift milk tankards onto the platform, where Austin Cregan managed the deliveries. I have a clear memory of him hanging over Ali Ryan's gate in Holycross, the two of them talking and sending smoke heavenward while Johnny tended his garden.

Going for a drive on a Sunday to see where he had been planting maize or cutting silage was a great treat. He loved the chat and spent many nights at The

Hamlet or in Joe Ahern's garage having the craic with the Shinnors boys.

I also remember going to school and leaving my sister, Val, and my brother, Michael, at home, knowing that they would be with Dad and Mom all day, doing the things that I liked to do.

He was in the middle of building the hay barn in February 1974 when our tragedy struck; his soft heart failed. Dr Cleary was called, and Jack Clancy spirited us children away to Jim and Joan O'Donoghue's home. The shock was felt throughout the parish and beyond.

It is such a pity to lose someone so young – the birthdays missed and the family weddings not attended. Dad loved children, and it was tragic that he was denied the joy of seeing his own children growing up and going on to build their lives. A family photograph taken on the day of my first Holy Communion shows Val in the car with him. Another shows him at the front door with six-month-old Michael. Looking at those and many other photographs reminds me that Dad was a young man with his life before him – alas, it was not to be. I can only imagine the delight he would have taken in his grandchildren.

My father had gone, but he had made an excellent choice in Breda, his wife, and his young family was secure in her capable hands. Friends and neighbours rallied around, but our mother was and still is exceptional.



Breda Bourke (*foreground*) with Phyllis Keating (*nee Moloney*).



Anthony Bourke with Mrs Carey, Mrs O'Donnell (Rahin) and Stella Fitzgerald (*child*).

[Back to top](#) ↑