THE LIFE AND TIMES OF AUSTIN CREGAN

Compiled by Mary Gallagher and Tommy Hourigan

Introduction by Carmel, Marella and John Cregan

We were delighted when we learned that Grange Book Committee interviewed our parents in order to include their memoirs in this book.

We love them dearly, as do their grandchildren, and we appreciate the great efforts that they made to rear and educate us. We never wanted for anything. Our parents nurtured us during our growing up years, supported us while being educated and encouraged us as we chose and pursued our individual careers and as we settled to rear our own families. Still today, we value their advice and support that is always available to us.

They are both great believers in the community and their involvement in so many community organisations is a testament to this. In no small way, their great example has instilled these values in us.

We are proud of our parents in every way, of the kind and loving couple they are and of all that they have achieved in their lives, with much more to come.

Austin and Maureen

On a December 2014 afternoon, we had the privilege and pleasure of meeting with Maureen and Austin Cregan at their home in Holycross. Before a blazing open fire, in a house steeped in history, the four of us carried on a conversation over tea and biscuits well into evening time. The sprightly octogenarian couple regaled us with colourful and captivating accounts of their lives and times, and as proud parents and grandparents, they spoke affectionately about their family. What follows is an account of some of the information and opinion imparted to us during those memorable few hours. We were struck by the range and depth of instant recall by them both: of events, dates and people – going back over the entirety of their lives, almost. We are grateful to Maureen and Austin for their openness and great humour while sharing their lives with us.

Growing Up

Austin Cregan was born on 22nd November 1934, one of a family of ten comprising eight boys and two girls. His father was Stephen Cregan, who also came from a family of ten. Stephen came from the Athlacca area, and he was baptised in the church there, in 1895. In 1932, Stephen married Essie Quain, a native of Manister. They moved to Manister where they bought a farm. They were dairy farmers and milked cows. They made butter, which they took to the local market in Limerick. Austin's father "was a devil for buying land" and he built up a large farm over the years. Austin surmised "When he saw ten of us coming along, he felt it necessary to add to his holding". Austin's brother, JJ, now lives in the house and on the farm where Austin and his siblings were reared. Austin was the second in the family and his oldest brother, Tony, died in 1990 at the age of 57. His youngest brother, Mossie, died in 1994 at the age of 41 years.

Austin attended national school in Ballymartin, where there is a new school now known as Manister National School. Ballymartin School was built in the 1830s or 1840s. The school was built between Manister and Fedamore, a single parish at the time. Some of the pupils who attended school with Austin had to travel three to four miles every day, walking the full distance. After leaving school at Ballymartin in 1947, Austin received his secondary education at the Christian Brothers School in Charleville. He attended there until 1953 when he obtained his Leaving Certificate. Armed with his certificate, Austin attended Pallaskenry Agricultural College for a year, where he took an examination that entitled him to go on to study dairy science at university. He then undertook a two-year diploma course in dairy science at University College Cork, between 1954 and 1956, qualifying as a creamery manager.

Before Austin was due to attend national school, pupil numbers were dwindling at the two-teacher school. Consequently, the local parish priest asked his parents if Austin could commence school on the same day as his older brother, Tony, in September 1938. Their parents agreed, and Tony and Austin commenced school on the same day. Tony was some year-and-a-half older than Austin, who was only three years and nine months when he commenced school. Austin recalled a big step up to the door of the school house. As he wasn't tall enough to walk up the step, he had to manoeuvre up on his knees. After a year or so, the boys' father bought a bicycle for going to school and Tony, being the older and stronger, rode the bicycle while Austin was carried sitting on the bar. Austin also recalled having been taken to school, in the earliest days, on the carrier of a bicycle owned by a neighbouring child by the name of Hedderman. During all his time at national school, his teachers were female – he never had a male teacher. He recalled that all through the years of his education, "I was never abused or slapped, I doubt if I

Presentation by Limerick County Council to Austin Cregan in recognition of his forty years voluntary service to the Group Water Scheme.

was slapped half a dozen times, during all that time". Maureen offered a witty explanation, "That's because you were so good!" Maureen, speaking about her time in national school had a similar recollection, but she had 'one up' on Austin as she totally avoided being slapped.

Secondary School

During his years at Charleville CBS (second level school), Austin cycled to Croom each morning, which took ten to fifteen minutes. He then boarded a school bus at around 8.30 am and the bus departed for Charleville. The bus picked up students along the route, including those going to the national school at Rockhill. The bus went via Hynes's Cross and through Bruree on its way to Charleville. The principal teacher at Rockhill was also collected by the bus on the way. This teacher, the surname of Maher, was related to the de Valera family. The bus arrived in Charleville at around 9.20 am. In the afternoon, Austin and other students had to leave school about half an hour before classes finished, so as to be ready to board the bus at 3.15 pm for the journey home. Classes didn't finish until 3.45 pm. Class time was lost to the students, but they were able to make up for this.

In those times, some students had to cycle long distances to attend school at Charleville. They cycled from Kilmallock, Ballyagran, and Ballyhea and other surrounding districts. One family, the Lees of Lee's Cross had to cycle to Rourke's Cross, a distance of several miles, to connect with the Charleville bus. Austin

pointed out, "You could ride your bike and throw it up against the wall, and it would be there when you came back". In those times, the bicycle was essential for getting to school, and students were prepared to cycle long distances for the opportunity of an education. For example, all of the family of a creamery manager *(Hartnett)* in Manister cycled to Adare to obtain a second level education. Mary Gallagher identified with the importance of the bicycle as she recalled times when she and neighbouring students cycled from Rahin to secondary school at Hospital, a journey of several miles in all types of weather.

Speaking about the secondary school curriculum, Austin pointed out that a wide array of subjects were taught, including Irish which was compulsory, English, mathematics, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, history, geography, Latin, physics/chemistry and drawing. Home economics, biology and French were taught in some schools, as well. He recalled that the Leaving Certificate examination included the drawing of an object. The object in his case was a closed suitcase placed on a table. Twelve students surrounded the table – three in each of four positions – they were required to draw the suitcase from the presenting angles. Examinees were marked as they drew the suitcase. Students undertook other types of drawing as well, including mechanical drawing. Houses and aspects of houses, for example, had to be drawn. At that stage of our conversation, Austin's wife, Maureen, who was listening intently up to that point, piped up and mischievously said, "I knew when we moved into our home that you knew a lot about houses and hanging doors!" There were a lot of chucklings.

University

Referring to his time in Cork, while attending UCC, Austin informed us that he had digs on the Infirmary Road and he commuted to and from the university by bicycle, a journey of ten to fifteen minutes. He was in digs with Phil Jones from Croom, whose parents were teachers there. Austin took the two-year diploma course in dairy science; the university also ran a degree course in dairy science over four years. Austin and his pals usually remained in Cork over weekends. They attended hurling and football matches, "did a bit of backing of horses", went to 'point to point' horse racing and drank a few pints. Austin said, "I was a good customer in Mooney's". He pointed out that when you went to university, you had an opportunity to further your education, and it was wise to take that chance. However, a good time could still be had, and it was possible to attend dances and go to the cinema. He remembers the Arcade as being the main dancing venue, which was located in Tivoli, out the Cobh Road. There were several big cinemas or "picture houses" in the city, and some of them showed good films. He remembered The Savoy, The Pavilion, The Carlton and others.

He took his bicycle to town when going to the cinema, leaving it in Patrick

Street, parked against a wall or a lamp post. More often than not, upon returning to retrieve his bicycle, he found it missing. This was not unusual as the Gardai were in the habit of removing bicycles from Patrick Street after a late hour, on the presumption that they had been left behind by their owners. The bicycles were taken to Bridewell Garda Station, where they could be reclaimed the following day. When Austin went to recover his bicycle, there was a choice from amongst about seventy machines of varying makes and condition. Apparently, many were never reclaimed.

Austin played hurling at UCC and could have made the Fitzgibbon Cup team, "But I didn't train hard enough", he explained. Prior to his UCC days, Austin hurled for Banogue and Bruff during his playing years. Manister didn't have sufficient players to have a parish team. Many of his cousins were very good hurlers, playing club hurling with Croom; they also played with the county team for Limerick. Members of Austin's own family, while they played club hurling, did not reach the county standard, although his brother, Patsy, was very good. Rugby was not the main sport played at UCC; nevertheless, the college had a good rugby team. Austin recalled that Lar McGrath from Herbertstown had a son at UCC. Tim McGrath was one year ahead of Austin. He was a dairy science student also. Tim was a superb rugby player and he played internationally for Ireland in the number eight position – he played in the 1950s and early 1960s. Tim attended Rockwell College prior to his university days, where he was well grounded and coached in rugby skills.

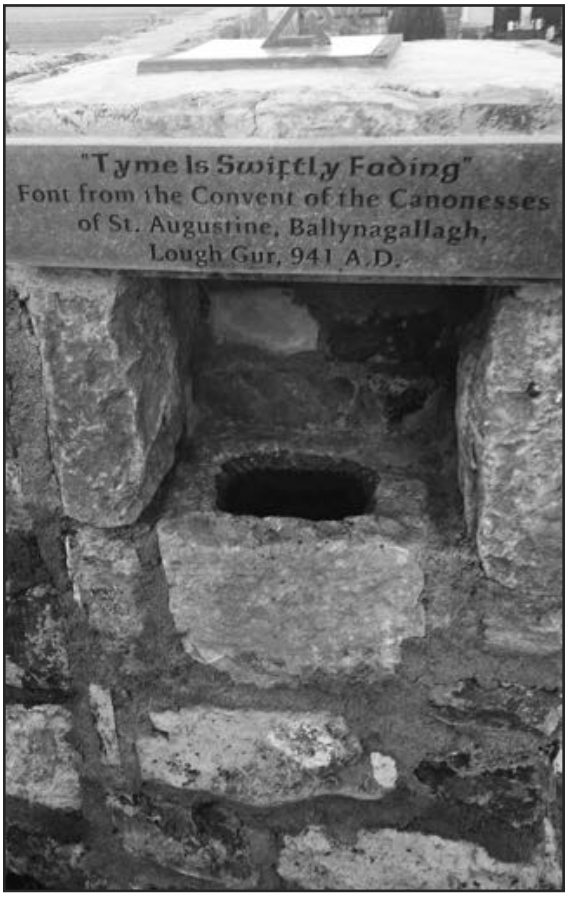
Off to Scarriff

Austin left UCC in 1956 armed with a diploma in dairy science – a qualified creamery manager. He took up his first job in Scarriff, County Clare, where he worked on the travelling creameries.

As he explained, an actual creamery was built on top of the truck, which was driven around the locality, collecting milk from the producers. The mechanised creamery on wheels was operated by the power shaft of the V8-engine truck. The travelling creamery had its own separator and weighing scales. Raw milk was taken into the creamery at one side of the truck and was separated within. The skimmed milk came out at the other side and was taken away by the farmers. Maureen was of the view that the travelling creamery "was well before its time". Austin informed us that the earliest travelling creameries arrived in the 1930s and 1940s, but it was around 1944 to 1945 before the technology came to Scarriff.

There were four travelling creameries in Scarriff and Austin was on the Clonlara run. He used to leave the base at around six-thirty to seven o'clock each morning, going to Oatfield, Clonlara, Killaloe and Ogonnelloe. In his round, between fifteen and twenty cans of cream were collected from 120 to 130 customers. The cream was brought back to the Scarriff Centre, where it was converted into butter, which

was sold back to the farmers and sold to the shops in Limerick City. He worked in Clare for about twelve months. He has fond memories of his time there and working on the travelling creameries. In fact, Austin wrote a detailed history of the travelling creamery, which was published in the ***Lough Gur & District Historical Society Journal***. Some of that history is to be found elsewhere in this book. Of course, he has a most important affinity with that part of the country as he met Maureen, his beloved wife, while working there.



Holy water font found outside Austin Cregan's house during renovations.

The Move to Tullybrackey

Lar Hogan, Tullybrackey Creamery Manager, died in July 1956, shortly after Austin took up his post at Scarriff. Donie Scanlan from West Limerick was interested in the Tullybrackey vacancy. He contacted Austin to ascertain if he intended to apply for the vacancy, but Austin decided to remain at Scarriff. Donie Scanlan secured the Tullybrackey post. In 1957, the creamery manager at Manister left the post leaving a vacancy for which Austin applied. However, the Manister people were touchy about the idea of Austin taking over – arguably, he knew them too well. Consequently, Donie Scanlan was asked if he would be prepared to transfer to Manister, which he did. The outcome of this manoeuvre was that Austin took up the Tullybrackey post in May 1957.

Within a couple of years, he had married Maureen, in 1959. Austin spent more than half of his working life at Tullybrackey Creamery – in fact, he devoted 21 years to the creamery until he transferred to Greybridge Creamery as manager in 1978. During his years at Tullybrackey, Austin assisted Joe Hastings, Greybridge Manager, working between the two creameries.

Austin went on to talk about his years at Tullybrackey. When he took up his new post, he had 127 suppliers, many of them from the Grange area. Willie Bourke

of Grange worked at the creamery; he participated in the Grange Ambush in 1920. Charlie Bourke was a son of Willie. Willie and the poet, John Bourke, were brothers. Timmy McAuliffe worked there as well, as did Tommy Kinnane of Crean, who died suddenly in 1958. The Kinnanes were related to Donie O'Dwyer of Rahin. Tommy Kinnane was the engine driver and Willie Bourke was "the skim-milk man". At one time, Tullybrackey Creamery had 157 milk suppliers, but by the time Austin left to take up the managerial post at Greybridge, there were only 50 to 60 suppliers. Austin explained that with the advent of pasteurisation and the upgrading of milk, a lot of smaller suppliers ceased to supply milk. Over the years, many suppliers had only two, three or four cows. Nearly every cottier had a couple of cows. Compulsory pasteurisation was introduced in the early 1960s.

House with History

The Cregans' house at Holycross was at one time the Tullybrackey Creamery Manager's home, and Lar Hogan was the first creamery manager to live there. Lar was in an unfortunate car accident in 1956 in which he died. His car collided with a stone pier at the entrance to Grange Stone Circle, opposite the now family home of Tim Casey.

The Cregan home is steeped in history and predates the 1840s. The house appears on the first ordnance survey maps of the 1840s. The first survey was carried out in 1840, and the house existed at that time. The house, whose stone walls are three to four feet in thickness, was constructed from the redundant stones of a convent previously located at Ballingirlough. Maureen informed us that years ago, when work was going on outside the walls of the house, an interesting stone was uncovered. There was a symmetry about the stone, which was square with a hollow in the centre. Maureen contacted Michael Quinlan, a local archaeologist who, since then, completed a Master's Degree in Archaeology and Heritage. Michael came around to the house and between himself and the Cregan family, they concluded that the stone was, in fact, a holy water font from the said convent. When the house was built, the stone was left aside as it was unsuitable for building purposes. It is most likely that the stone font remained where it was found for one hundred and fifty years or more. The Cregan family donated the font to the church, and it can now be seen, set in a wall, at the new Lough Gur graveyard. The font goes back to the 1820s or earlier when the convent existed. There is a very old cemetery to the rear of the house now owned by Austin Shinnors. The area of the cemetery was the site of the old convent.

The house has a more recent history dating back to the time when it was owned by the Conway family, prior to being acquired by Tullybrackey Creamery. It was "a hot-bed house" when it was the home of Volunteer, Martin Conway, during the 1920s and earlier when Ireland was fighting for her freedom. Martin was one

of five Irish Volunteers, four of whom were from the locality, who were murdered by Crown forces including the infamous Black-and-Tans at Caherguillamore in December 1920. During those times, Martin was in hiding from Crown forces, and he seldom lived at the house, especially at night time. It was usual for the Black-and-Tans when passing the house, to spray the windows with gunfire in the hope that Martin was inside. In fact, on many of those occasions, Martin was in the field opposite the house, behind a wall, having been alerted to the oncoming enemy. Apparently, it was customary for Martin to have two revolvers in his possession. When Maureen and Austin were carrying out renovations to their home in the 1970s, they found evidence of the gunfire behind window shutters and on walls, where bullet marks were clearly visible.

But the house had not yet offered up all its secrets. The Conway family lived in the house until around the mid-1940s, when they bought the farmhouse and land, on the other side of the road, from the Bennett family. Joe Conway, the brother of Martin, told the Cregan family that a number of incendiary devices were probably buried in their back garden, perhaps adjacent to a horse chestnut tree. Austin said, "I never tried to find them".

Referring to a particular day, about twenty-five to thirty years ago, Austin said, "I had been out golfing that evening". Maureen took up the story, "I was out gardening and after a while digging, I came across something, with 'silvery-things' on it – I thought I had dahlia bulbs at first, but then I knew from watching TV that it was some kind of a bomb, so I dropped it. I telephoned the Ryans and Madge's sister was there; she expressed the view that it was probably a hand grenade. Anyway, I rang Bruff Garda Barracks, and Sergeant Pat O'Connor came down with two other members of the force, which I thought was amusing at the time. Sergeant O'Connor said, 'Maureen where is it?' I showed him out the back, the two other members of the force remained inside, they just looked out. The next thing that Sergeant O'Connor said to me was, 'Maureen, have you a bucket?' I gave him a bucket, and he put it on top of the bomb and he said, 'I have to call the army'. I didn't think there was a need to bring the army out, but the sergeant assured me that only one person would come. A quarter of an hour later, there were about eight soldiers across the road and about eight more at our side. They took the grenade out and removed it to Reardon's field, where they placed a blanket over it. The grenade was about six to eight inches long and four to five inches wide; it was a fully primed grenade that Martin Conway would have been carrying around with him. It was oval shaped, the shape of a rugby ball." The grenade was detonated by the Army in a controlled explosion.

Place Names

The discussion about the convent at Ballingirlough and the origin of the holy water font brought about a wider discussion regarding the nuns of the area. The place

name "Holycross" is attributed to the contention that this was a meeting place for the nuns of the Ballingirlough Convent and the nuns from the convent in Grange, which was located where Grange Church now stands. There was a monastery, known as "Friarstown Beg", located on the river bank opposite Garvey's house in Lower Grange, which was a house of the Cistercian Abbey in Manister. We learned from Austin that a makeshift bridge in Lower Grange, which spanned the Camogue River at the time, was known as "Sixmilebridge" – the village also went by that name. Austin advised that the bridge got its name from the fact that the monastery in Lower Grange was six miles from the Cistercian Abbey in Manister, walking the route along the banks of the Camogue River. There was a mill in Grange, owned by the Garvey family. "Ned Garvey's place was always known as Garvey's of the Mill." During Cromwellian times, abbeys, monasteries and convents throughout the country were destroyed on the orders of Mr Oliver Cromwell.

The Three Hail Mary Stones

Mary Gallagher asked about the story of "The Three Hail Mary Stones" and Austin advised that there is a good story about the stones contained in a poem. He informed us that the story was about three stones in Manister, which remain *in situ* to this day, respected by the local authority and local people alike. The stones are fairly large and random in shape, located about half a mile at the Meanus side of Manister Village. Austin's nephew is farming in that area at present. The story is best understood from a reading of "The Three Hail Mary Stones" poem that follows. The poem was published in T***he Dawn*** in February 1979, acknowledging that it was supplied by Anna Toomey, Ballyresode (author unknown). Austin said that a copy of the poem carries the following at the end: "MA Nister", probably a *nom de plume* derived from the place name, "Manister".

Three ancient stones near Manister an ancient tale can tell,
Of a saintly Parish Priest and a Saxon infidel,
In racking days in Ireland, the priest was saying Mass,
When a Cromwellian Captain by his church door happened to pass,
No heed paid Father Toomey when the Captain to him spoke,
But the grace of three Hail Marys on his soul he did invoke.

The Captain much offended by the inattentive priest,
Sought an explanation after Ite, missa est,
"By rule", said Father Toomey, "I cannot ever break
The continuity of my Mass no matter what's at stake,
But I offered three Hail Marys to my Maker for your soul,
They're all-powerful and may yet your barren soul console".

More angry grew the Captain; he cursed the priest and prayer,
"But yet, if you can prove their worth, your popish neck I'll spare",
"O Blessed Mary, help me", said the priest within his heart,
"Implore your Son to guide me and I will do my part".
Then turning to the Captain – still uttering a curse,
He vowed the three Hail Marys would weigh him and his horse.
Scales were there erected and three Aves on a sheet
Outweighed the burly soldier mounted on his steed.

By the road that leads to Manister, by workmen every year
Three massive stones embedded in the margin are kept clear.
Used in the erection of Father Toomey's scales
They're revered in the parish and known around for miles.
And often in the morning a traveller may be seen –
His prayers at home forgotten, kneeling at the scene,
With a Pater and an Ave his omission he atones,
While wings are softly beating above the three Hail Mary Stones.

A Couple of Stories

Asked if he came across many characters or had stories about his many years at creameries, Austin acknowledged that that there were some great characters, but that many of the stories could not be published – "I couldn't tell the stories", said Austin, while Maureen observed, "That's all for another book". However, he went on to tell a humorous story. When he came to Tullybrackey, there were only three or four tractors coming to the creamery. Mostly, the milk was brought in churns by horse and cart. There was a man from Bruff, out the GAA grounds road, who had a new five-hundredweight van. The van was his pride and joy, and he looked after it with great care and attention – "He was fierce careful".

He came to the creamery with milk cans in the back of the van. He parked the vehicle with great care and was most anxious to ensure that man or beast didn't scratch it. One day, his van was in the queue at the creamery, and he was second in line to deliver his milk. The customer behind him had a horse and cart, and he was anxious to move about and converse with other suppliers. He tied the reins of the horse to the back door of the pristine van. He went off about his business, chatting with acquaintances. In the meantime it became the turn of the 'van-man' to transfer his milk cans onto the platform – in which case – he sat in his van, started the engine, put the vehicle into gear and released the clutch while pressing the accelerator. Suddenly, the back doors of the van opened wide, with the reins and horse's winkers attached. The winkers had been pulled completely from the horse's head, so well were the reins tied to the van door. What ensued was great

excitement and pandemonium, as the van owner sought out the horse's charge. Said Austin, "He got out, and he was looking for your man".

Austin recalled another event which he dubbed Young Horses and Stubborn Asses which took place at Tullybrackey Creamery.

Said Austin, "The creamery and the platform area, in particular, were scary places for nervous young horses. Asses were a law unto themselves. As one could imagine, a lot of noise, what with cans and can covers falling and often getting under young horses' legs, these 'green' animals were liable to shy and take off unattended in a dangerous manner. In my time in the creamery, I saw a lot of accidents involving young horses."

"On a few occasions I saw them running out onto the main road, the cart turning over and knocking the horse. This was a frightening experience for the man, and more often, a young farmer's boy who could be in charge. When the experienced men saw this happening, one or two of them would sit on the horse's head whilst another took off the tackling and removed the cart while they got the horse gently up on his feet."

"One particular morning I will never forget, when a young horse belonging to Jim O'Donoghue of Caherguillamore took off in the direction of Bruff, running wild and out-of-control. Jim came running into me on the platform, and we took off after him in my Morris Minor. He was entering the town when we got up to him. I pulled as close as I could, and Jim jumped from my car onto the horse's back, 'Wild West' style and got him under control as he was facing the Garda Barrack."

"Luckily, nobody was injured, but a few people had a narrow shave. Asses, though, were horses of a different colour. You have often heard the saying 'as stubborn or as thick as an ass' – well nothing could be truer. If an ass got it into his head that he did not want to deliver his owner's milk, then God or man would not make him."

"All sorts of tricks were designed to fool them, most of them unsuccessful. Bags were put over their heads; they were backed into the intake point, and their ears were plugged, often successfully but mainly in failure. Now thankfully, all asses were not like that; otherwise we would never get finished. The ass was a very kind and gentle animal, a great servant to a lot of smaller farmers, and you might say – he did horse's work. He has now almost completely disappeared from the scene."

Move to Greybridge

In 1978, Austin secured the creamery manager post in Greybridge Co-Operative, and he remained there for almost twenty years, up to his retirement in 1996. "I retired a bit early, about five years before I was due to." There was always a store in Greybridge, but a new store was built in 1955. Paddy Hannon from Fedamore was the first manager of the new store. "We sold a lot of feeding, fertiliser and other products at the store then."

"In Greybridge, prior to my retirement, we had a lot of work to do. I was working on my own with just one man. When the creamery closed, we had the store to operate, and Golden Vale were always pressing for increased sales. Selling products was easy enough but collecting money was a different problem altogether."

Retirement

Speaking of his retirement, Austin said he did a lot of shooting, played golf and he kept greyhounds and gundogs. He started to keep greyhounds shortly after getting married. He shared greyhounds with his brothers. "We bred a few good ones over the years. I had a dog in the quarter-final of the English Derby back in the 1980s, Tully Prancer was his name. I used the prefix 'Tully' for all my greyhounds." A tragedy unfolded at the Derby race held at White City when Tully Prancer was killed on the track. The greyhound was prone to running close to the rails, and he was so close on the night of the race that he hit the railing, and a loose board went right through him. Austin had sold the greyhound before the Derby.


Greyhound racing.

In fact, he sold two dogs that he bred in 1982 or 1983 for a sum that was an awful lot of money at the time. Austin recalled that they bought the house in Holycross and renovated it with the proceeds of the sale, almost. He kept his greyhounds in kennels at the back of the house, and he exercised them up and down the road. He schooled them at various tracks: Knocklong, Buttevant and Mitchelstown. According to Austin, "A good greyhound should have lots of heart and pace as well as strong bones, knuckles and legs. A bit of weight and a bit of size was good too." The typical weight of a dog would be about 75-85 pounds, bitches would weigh in at about 55-65 pounds. He emphasised the importance of breeding, saying that he had a couple of very good brood bitches over the years and bred very good litters from them. The breeding ran out eventually, and the litters were not so good. He gave up greyhounds in the late 1980s. "I used to go to the greyhound track in Limerick frequently, but I don't go there anymore."

Austin, his brothers and a few friends formed a syndicate that bought a number of horses. They owned about five or six horses in all, mostly point-to-pointers. The syndicate won a good number of races. They won five races with a horse called Ballyvalogue, but he subsequently 'broke down'. He withdrew from a syndicate that owned a "top-class horse" called Rathmore Castle, who won five or six races. After Austin's withdrawal, the syndicate was offered a significant amount of money for the horse. Unfortunately, the sale fell through as the horse didn't pass the veterinary tests.

Austin did a lot of shooting – clay pigeon shooting and duck shooting, in particular. "I won a few trophies at clay pigeon shooting; I won a Munster actually." He recalls that clay pigeon shooting was expensive then. On Sundays he would fire six to eight boxes of cartridges, and if he didn't fire that many cartridges in a week, he could not compete seriously – it was necessary to 'keep the eye in' all the time, through practice. He was involved in starting up a clay pigeon club, which eventually finished up as the "Golden Vale Club". However, the sport became too expensive for many people, including Austin, who with Maureen, was trying to educate their family. Austin was also involved in the formation of the Bruff Gun Club back in the 1960s. He recalled that the club reared a lot of pheasants for release. Francis O'Loughlin was very much involved. Francis was club treasurer and John Gallagher was club secretary at a time when Austin was club chairman. Austin recalled "a lot of heated meetings".

He still keeps a shotgun but uses it very infrequently now. At one time, he had a shotgun, previously owned by his father. He has a small revolver with a six-shot revolving mechanism, probably a 'Colt', that was in the possession of his father during 'troubled times'. The Colt is no longer in working condition, the hammer being broken, but it is of great sentimental value to the family.

"Francis O'Loughlin and I used to shoot a lot of ducks; we could bring home fifteen or twenty ducks after an outing. We formed a game sanctuary in Lough Gur in the 1970s, so we shot the ducks in the outlying bogs. We shot in Ballycullane a few nights, and we shot a few geese there." Austin used to shoot with Tom and Willie Carroll, as well. He kept retriever dogs mostly, the Labrador breed, and he kept a pointer dog at one stage. "The men who accompanied us shooting usually had their own dogs as well, so there was never a lack of a retriever, pointer or setter, whatever the occasion demanded."

Talking about his love of the game of golf, Austin said, "I played off a handicap of seven at one stage. I joined the Charleville Club in 1963; that's not today or yesterday. That was the year that President John F Kennedy was assassinated. I won a lot, I won four dairy science outings, playing off eight to ten handicap. We had a dairy science outing every year at Thurles, an all-Ireland event." He plays only infrequently now. "To tell the truth, I am gone a bit careless about it, my handicap is out to twenty because I am not playing enough golf".

Austin was involved in setting up and managing the local water scheme in 1969. He has been for many years and continues to be a member of the Lough Gur & District Historical Society, and he has written a number of articles on the subject matter. He was involved in the Holycross entry to the national "Tidy Towns" competition in 2012 but feels that the locality is too scattered and lacks a good-sized village for the purposes of the competition. He partakes in the local poetry

reading group, and six to eight people regularly convene at Reardon's Public House. The group is interested in a mix of modern and classical poetry.

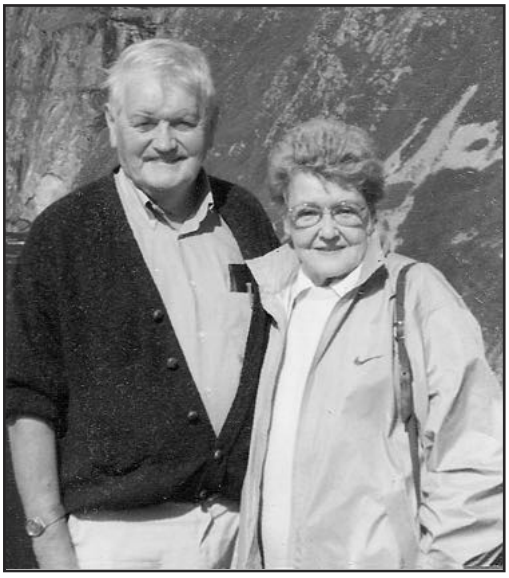
Maureen's Love of Theatre

Maureen has a great love of theatre and has been involved in acting since she was in primary school. She has six, or maybe seven, All-Ireland titles for acting while involved with the Scarriff Drama Group. Her individual awards were for best actress. She is clearly proud of her achievements and rightly so. The Scarriff Drama Group won the overall national award on a few occasions. The national competitions are usually held in Athlone each year. Winning a local drama competition can bring the nomination to All-Ireland competition. After marrying Austin, Maureen's acting career declined for logistical reasons. However, she went into drama production with a Macra na Feirme Group and the Lough Gur Drama Society. Maureen produced many successful plays over the years. She worked with several superb actors, a number of whom continue to appear on stage.

At this point, Maureen has handed over drama production to her daughter, Marella, who also acted in a number of productions over the years. In 2014, Marella had a very successful production of ***The Field,*** staged at the Honey Fitz Theatre in Patrickswell. Said Austin, "She made a great job of that". Maureen noted that there now are some good producers in the locality. She recalled the days before the advent of the Honey Fitz Theatre when plays were produced at the old schoolhouse in Patrickswell. During the hours of darkness, the moon could be seen out through the roof of the building. However, this did not deter people from being there late at night, gathered around a one-bar electric fire while being regaled by story-tellers. She recalled the storyteller "Small" Tom Carroll in particular and his habitual introduction of a new story: "I tell you now, Mrs Cregan and you know I wouldn't tell you a lie". Tom told stories about the ghosts that he saw and stories heard from his mother, amongst many other yarns.

Maureen attributes the foundations to her acting and production prowess to her time at school in County Clare, and to the many actors and actresses in Scarriff drama groups, from whom she learned so much. She mentioned a number of people including Padraig Vaughan, Headmaster at Scarriff National School. Austin was asked if he ever took up acting. "She would never let me", he replied. Maureen quipped, mischievously, that she tried to instruct Austin in acting, but it wasn't a success. Austin was quick to point out, "I had my lines well-rehearsed". To prove his point, he recalled a line from a play that Maureen had him rehearse years ago: "A grand sight for a tired man at the end of the day". He was correct! Drawing on her experience, Maureen's view is, "You have to be a bit nervous in order to perform, somebody going on the stage saying that they are not nervous, you might as well leave them outside". Their son, John, is involved now with the Manister

Drama Group and Austin is of the view that Carmel could act if she were interested. Clearly, though, Maureen was of the view that Carmel and Austin "couldn't act for nuts", but this was stated with a mixture of devilment and affection.



Austin and Maureen Cregan.

Cregan Family

Maureen and Austin spoke lovingly and affectionately about their family. They married in 1959 but their first child, Carmel, did not come along until September 1966 and Marella was born in 1969. Maureen picked the name Marella which means "Little Mary". John arrived in 1974. Proudly, Maureen pointed to a photograph on a wall – their grandchildren. There are seven grandchildren in all: Carmel has three children, Marella has two and John has two. Carmel's oldest son, Cathal, is attending university in Cork, and is soon to become a qualified lawyer. Her second son, Liam, is training at Mary Immaculate College in Limerick to become a teacher; and her daughter, Roisin, is at secondary school in Laurel Hill in Limerick. Marella's son, Padraig, is attending secondary school and her daughter, Anna, is in primary school. John's two children, Isabel and Ruth are still very young – both are attending primary school in Manister.

When asked, what was the best period of his life, Austin went into a contemplative mood for some seconds, while Maureen sat up attentively and gazed at him very expectantly. Eventually, Austin responded, "We had a very happy marriage, of course, we were married fifty-five years last September, that's not today or yesterday". This brought peals of laughter from Maureen and Austin.

Priests

Maureen worked with a priest in her younger days, Father Navin, a friend of the family, who was appointed CC for Scarriff in 1950. He was in poor health when he was ordained in 1943. He contracted tuberculosis and spent five years recovering in a sanatorium. Maureen remarked that "He was flying around in the car until he was ninety". He died at the age of ninety-three. Both Maureen and Austin spoke fondly of the man. According to Maureen, "You couldn't keep up with him, he was great". Austin recalled him as being "straight down the middle, there was no

movement in him". Austin and Father Navin did a lot of shooting together. They went to Tullamore together once, where they bought two new shotguns.

Speaking about the parish of his childhood, Manister, the smallest parish in the diocese, Austin paid tribute to James Canon Costello, PP of Bruff. He was attached to Manister Parish for over ten years, during which time, he led tremendous community work including the building of a new church, a new school and a new community hall. As well, he disposed of the then parochial hall and several acres of associated land and replaced the hall with a new bungalow for the parish priest. Father Costello worked tirelessly at fundraising, locally and overseas, when he visited his brother in America. Manister parishioners were always generous when it came to parish affairs. They supported fundraising events, including greyhound nights.

Maureen told a story about another priest. She dubbed the story: "Confessions at the altar". After a funeral Mass, Maureen and Austin noticed that people were going up to the altar and conversing briefly on a one-to-one basis with the priest. She discovered that he was hearing confessions, so she elected to avail of the opportunity. When her turn came, Father said, "How are you Maureen, say a Hail Mary now for your sins". Maureen continued, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned". Father said a little more emphatically, "Maureen, say a Hail Mary for your sins". Maureen was a little confused about what was happening and replied, "Father, do you think that is enough?" Father replied, "That is fine now Maureen until the next time you are around".

Modern Technology

Asked about their adaptation to modern technology, Austin said, "I can scratch the surface". After retiring, he bought a computer. He has written several articles on a computer for various publications, and he continues to use this technology. They are both of the view that the mobile phone, while extremely useful, has a negative impact on the ability of people, especially younger people, to carry on conversation. Maureen was in the waiting room of a doctor's surgery recently, and it was noticeable that "All heads were bowed using mobile phones for texting or otherwise, like robots". Austin was in Bedford Row in Limerick City one evening, now a pedestrian area, and while sitting he observed a man walking up the street – the man had a mobile phone "stuck" to an ear as well as having an iPod in his hands, apparently working on it. He observed that if you are outside a secondary school these days as students emerge, it is noticeable that their first action is to remove mobile phones from school bags or pockets and commence texting. Maureen received a mobile phone sometime back, but she never used it. She put it away in a box. Some time later, her granddaughter, Anna, observed "Nana, you have a lovely new phone". The upshot was that Maureen gave the phone to her delighted granddaughter. "We were in town one day", said Maureen, "and we lost each other

in the shopping centre". Maureen knew a girl in one of the shops whom she approached and asked if she would make a phone call to Austin. "Austin was looking around for me, but I had no mobile phone to ring him."

Affection for Donie

Speaking of local characters, Maureen recalled a number of people, but she mentioned Donie O'Dwyer of Rahin with obvious affection. She frequently gave Donie a lift home from Holycross. Donie might have a drink or two taken. The four of us present in the room knew him well, and we recalled him for what he always was – one of nature's truest gentlemen. One would have travelled a long distance and for many a day to encounter another as inoffensive and kind as Donie O'Dwyer. Donie was reticent about taking a lift from Maureen, in fear of making a nuisance of himself. During a journey, the conversation would go like this: "Let me out here now Mrs". "No Donie, I will run you back." "Mrs, I would be afraid that you would have an accident going up the road." "I won't have an accident with the help of God, Donie." Outside his gate, Donie would have the last word, "I will wait here now until I see you turning up for home at the cross, Mrs Cregan".

Donie could easily draw a smile or laugh with his turn of phrase. One evening, he had reason to walk to Bruff with Mary Gallagher's mother. Donie's sister, Angela, accompanied by Mary Gallagher (nee O'Dwyer) and Madge Ryan (nee Russell) had gone to Bruff where Madge was due to have her hair permed at Joan Drake's establishment. The girls were well overdue home, hence the scouting party that headed for Bruff. Donie and Mary's mother arrived at the hairdressing premises to find the three girls safe and sound. Madge's hair was still being attended to, and a contraption almost hid her head. Donie, being a man of simple ways, was amazed at the sight before his eyes, and exclaimed, "I don't know what the world is coming to, all the way up here in Bruff, and her head plugged into Ardnacrusha".

Donie and Angela O'Dwyer of Rahin.

Back to the Beginning

Nearing the end of our conversation, Austin returned his thoughts to his childhood days in Manister and particularly to his days at Ballymartin School. He recalled, with a twinkle in the eye, the day when he sat the national school examination. There were only four or five of them taking the examination and teachers had to leave the school that day. The parish priest was supervising the event. The supervisor, the PP, left the classroom at some stage and went to visit a nearby farmer, following upon which, a female teacher came in the back window of the schoolroom in order to assist the children with the

examination. The choreography executed by the Reverend Father and the Mistress was perfect. The pupils were in the middle of the examination, and the kindly teacher was circulating, checking each pupil's examination papers, ensuring that the questions were being answered correctly. "It would be a feather in her cap if pupils were awarded top marks."

Suddenly, the school inspector pulled up outside, "And if he did, the Mistress went out the back window, and 'Arkle' never cleared a jump like she did!" She then went over the wall into her own backyard, which was adjacent to the school, "She hardly put a hand on a stone". The inspector walked around the classroom; he was obviously not impressed that the examination was going ahead, unsupervised. In the meantime, the PP was with the farmer, "most likely, drinking a glass of whiskey". However, the supervisor did arrive back promptly, tendering plausible excuses to the inspector for his absence.

Said Austin, nostalgically and with great feeling, "They were the times". There were three others in the room whose innermost thoughts at that moment were synchronised with Austin's!

At that point, we left the Cregan home, and two wonderful people were left in peace.

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Cregan House.