

JOHN BOURKE—POET AND STORYTELLER

By Pa (Patrick) O'Connell

John Bourke was a highly regarded poet and storyteller who lived on the New Line in Lower Grange for many years. John lived in the house that is now occupied by Denis O'Brien-May and family.

Many years ago, the celebrated author, play writer and columnist, John B Keane wrote about John Bourke in his much-loved weekly column "Out In The Open" in the *Limerick Leader* edition of July 10th, 1971. This particular John B column reappeared in the *Limerick Leader* edition of July 11th, 2015. The following is an extract from the column.

I am indebted to John Burke, the Grange Poet, for many fine verses and many fine stories down the years. John was at the Regional Hospital in Limerick recently where he went under a successful operation. When I last met him, he told me the following true story.

Some years ago there was an old man called Jackie Kiely in an East Limerick village. He had a small shop and in this shop, amongst other things, he sold crubeens. He did a thriving crubeens business, and he would buy sacks of these from Limerick City van men.

Living a few miles away from Jackie's shop was a mother and two sons. The sons were a bit on the backward side, but backward as they were, they had a great meas in crubeens. One evening the mother sent the older of the two, whose name was Tom, to the shop of Jackie Kiely for a stone of crubeens.

When Tom arrived at Jackie Kiely's, the shop was locked, and there was a notice on the window to say that he had gone to a hurling game and would not be back until late. Tom was undecided as to whether he would wait for Jackie's return or not. If the shop was stocked with crubeens all would be fine but if not it would be a wasted journey. Sitting on a low wall near the house was an old man smoking a pipe. Tom approached and bade him the time of day which the old man returned as soon as he could take the pipe from his mouth.

"Tell me, sir", said Tom, "do you know if Jackie Kiely has pigs' feet?"

"That I couldn't tell you", said the old man. "I never saw him with his boots off in my whole life."

Poetry

The two poems by John Bourke that follow were published in *The Dawn*, the first in 1974, the other in 1975.

The Travelling Show — a Nostalgic Memory

*We are coming we are coming
Now we are in your midst
Come and see the greatest show
That ever did exist.
Come and do support us
Now we are here at last
Come and get your money's worth
From a star studded cast.
Pack up all your worries
Keep the Doc away
Use that trouble vanishing cream
With invincible Chic Kay.
Hollywood may boast its stars
Whose names we can't resist
But we hail thee our Vic Loving
Entertainment's great Princess.*

*The audience are treated
To variety at its best
As Colette, Joan, and Nancy
Appear all gaily dressed.
With talent, grace and dignity
They joyfully fulfil
With kilted dresses flowing
Great feats of daring skill.
A little corner in my heart,
Will always claim its own
When Joan gets singing "Doonaree"
Queen of the microphone.*

*Macare Seymour and Miss Downes
Characters of esteem
Come and see them playing
They will realise your dream.
Again that humorous wizard
With many a carefree joke
Treats with enchanting music
Upon his favourite "Yoke".
The yarns and the wisecracks
Of peerless Jimmy Stone
Did hold the crowd, Encore!
As they enjoyed them one by one
And craved for just one more.*

*The verbal power of drama
Inspired by poetry
As I sat and watched with a throbbing heart,
"Her Mother's Rosary".
Then "Little Nellie Kelly"
My heart has not yet seen
Such dignified achievement
On any stage and screen.
One week too short alas has passed
One week of sheer delight
Now envy I, another throng
At another opening night.
Sweet visions ever haunt me
O'er hill and dale and glade
Fond memories of Vic Loving's show
The famous Flash Parade.*

By John Bourke, Grange

Bruff Sportsfield

*The twenty-eight of April,
a day of memories proclaim,
The opening of Bruff Sportsfield
and great tournament game,
Between two old rival hurling teams
from the Shannon and Lee,
Whose names in glory wreathed in
hurling history.*

*Eight thousand eager hurling fans
answering the trumpet's call
Saw Canon Punch then bless the field
and next throw in the ball.
In his oration, Frank Sheehy did relate
How the men who built such hurling
fields
in the future had great faith;
He spoke of generations of hurlers yet
unborn,
The offspring of those gallant men
now playing here today.
Their feet will tread this now blessed sod
And our native pastime play.*

*There – the hero of a thousand games
To treasured laurels cling.
The medals that adorn his breast,
The matchless Christy Ring.
His greatness may have passed away
Still he is part of history.
His name, it will forever live
In Cork, beside the Lee.*

*The clash of ash resounded,
Across the Morning Star,
For the first score of the game
As Cork sent o'er the bar.*



Bruff Sports Field.

*They score yet another and still
another came.
It looked as if the Rebel team
Would surely win this game.*

*But the spirit of Mick Mackey,
In McGarry, Cobbe and Shea,
Like panthers of a Southern sphere
Now poaching on their prey.
How they shook the opposition
Will ever live in memory.
They were the masters now of Cork.
And swept to victory.*

*The cradle-game is played and won
Our hearts are thrilled with pride
The first game at this venue
Won by a Limerick side.
Those men who victory achieved,
In spirit have appealed
To the coming youth of Limerick,
Remember Bruff Sportsfield.*

By John Bourke, Grange – 1956

[Back to top](#) ↑