

Some Notable People

CHAPTER 15

Anne McLoughlin, Coolbeg.

Anne McLoughlin, daughter of Bernard and Kathleen McLoughlin of Coolbeg, made international headlines in 1984 when she was taken hostage in Ethiopia. Anne was a past-pupil of Clontuskert N.S. before going on to the Convent of Mercy Secondary School in Ballinasloe. There she became aware of the work of *Concern*. When she had completed her studies in University College Galway and graduated with a degree in Commerce, she went to work for *Concern* as an administrator. At this time, *Concern* had decided to re-open its operations in Ethiopia, especially among the Somali-speaking victims of the wars in that region. So it came about that in November 1983, Anne found herself doing relief work in Korem, 400 miles from Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia.



Anne, with Nurse Terina Kelly, from Dundalk, ran emergency clinics in this remote area where thousands of people were starving and disease-ridden. Indeed Anne's own words best describe the situation:

The people are absolutely starving. I find it hard to describe the

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poverty in Korem and Ethiopia. There are people lying in their own diarrhoea with all sorts of diseases like malaria, dysentery, typhoid, relapsing fever and the babies suffer from hypothermia because of the extreme night and day temperatures. Complete families are suffering from the drought here.

Just north of the town lay the area known as Tigreg which was controlled by the Tigreg People's Liberation Front. On Wednesday, April 21st 1984, the rebels attacked the town of Korem and in the early hours of the morning two heavily armed guerrillas appeared at the window of the room where Anne was sheltering with the other volunteers. For the next forty-nine days, the ten volunteers were held hostage. Frightened and worried, they were taken into the mountains, being forced to walk or sometimes to ride on mules over dangerous mountain paths until they reached the guerrilla camp. Here they were held captive in primitive conditions and survived on a diet of tea, bread and milk. However, they were soon to discover that their captors had no intention of harming them, only wanting the outside world to know how the drought was affecting the people of the area.

Meanwhile, at home in Clontuskert, family, friends and neighbours were hoping and praying for the successful release of the hostages. News was difficult to come by and only slowly did people realise that though they were still being held against their will, they were as safe as could be expected under the circumstances. However, being completely safe meant being 'home safe' and everybody rallied around the McLoughlin family at this time.

On the 1st of May, the hostages began their long trek to freedom from the mountains in Tigreg. They again travelled on foot or by mule over the rough terrain. They crossed rivers,

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endured scorching heat and were constantly in fear of attack. Eventually they had the luxury of travelling by truck over mud roads and across swollen rivers until finally they reached Sudan and freedom. They made the last leg of the journey to Khartoum in a jeep where *Concern's* field director in Ethiopia was waiting to meet them. They were safe at last.

Anne and Terina arrived back in Dublin on June 12th 1984. Their flight was the only one which landed in Dublin that day because of the Air Traffic Controller's strike. After being taken to Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, for assessment, Anne returned to Coolbeg to a very warm welcome.

Her ordeal did not deter her from returning to Africa. After a peaceful rest at home, Anne decided to continue her work with *Concern* and set off to take up a teaching post in Tanzania. There she met another volunteer, James O'Loughlin from Ballinrobe, and they soon wed. They now live in County Clare, far away from the turmoil of those years a quarter of a century ago.

Annette Kirwan of Kirwan's Lodge, Tristaun.

Annette Kirwan was the daughter of Mr. H. Persse Kirwan who lived at Tristaun Lodge in Clontuskert, a place that later came to be known as 'Kirwan's Lodge'. The Lodge was situated in the fields a few hundred yards to the rear of Hurney's forge. Very little of the house now remains standing. It was here that Sarah Annette Foster Kirwan spent her youthful years before her father, a retired County Inspector in the Royal Irish Constabulary, moved the family to Dublin.

One summer evening, as she was strolling by the beach at a Dublin seaside resort, she was spotted by a young man who was coming ashore in a small boat. He was immediately smitten by the beauty of the slim, fair-haired girl before him and lost little time in

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discovering her name. In a short time they became acquainted and their romance blossomed. The young man's name was Edward Carson, the son of a Dublin engineer and a Galway mother who hailed from Castle Ellen near Athenry. Little could Annette have foreseen that her future husband would one day achieve fame as the leader of the Ulster Unionist cause, or that his statue would stand outside the headquarters of a separate Ulster Parliament at Stormont.

The young couple married in 1879, while Carson was a hardworking and upcoming lawyer. His earnings were at this stage low and they were forced to live in her father's house for a time. Two boys and two girls arrived in quick succession. After a few years, Carson had established himself as a barrister and he decided that his career would advance further if they were to move to London. The move put serious strains on their marriage. Annette had been happy in the low-key social scene to which she had been accustomed in Dublin and she was unable to cope with the frenetic social life that came with her husband's efforts to make his way at the English Bar and in Parliamentary circles.

Annette died at the early age of thirty-four. However, their marriage had lost its early sheen, a victim of his all-absorbing ambition. A year later, he married Ruby Frewen, a woman many years his junior.

It is perhaps ironic, considering Edward Carson's later involvement with the Ulster Unionists, that Annette's old home is on a piece of ground over which William of Orange's cavalry had galloped more than two hundred years previously. In view of the subsequent development of his career, there is also an irony in the fact that Carson played hurling in Trinity College as a young man and also in the Athenry area while he was holidaying with his relations in County Galway.

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Bernard Naughton, Abbeypark

Bernard (Barney) Naughton was born at Loughill, Creagh, Ballinasloe in 1902. The son of a farming family, he was the second youngest of a family of eleven.

A well-known farmer, livestock dealer, bookmaker, horse owner, he purchased his farm at Abbeypark, Clontuskert in 1943 from his winnings on one of his first horses, Mr. Wilts. He was an astute judge of livestock and horses. From the 1940s until his death in 1977, he owned thoroughbred horses that won almost eighty-five races.

In 1960, his horse Solfen made racing history at the three-day Cheltenham Racing Festival. The horse won a three mile chase on day two and a three mile hurdle on day three. Solfen's first race, the Broadway Novices Chase - now the Royal & Sun Alliance chase - proved unexciting, when the eight year old gelding romped home by twenty-five lengths. Solfen was ridden by Pat Taaffe and twenty-one horses ran.

As Solfen was not the easiest horse to keep right and ready to race, (he suffered from leg trouble) the owner and trainer, Willie O'Grady, seeing that he was fresh and well after the first race, decided to run him again. Within twenty-two hours, he ran in the Spa Hurdle - now the Ladbroke World Hurdle - and with H.R. (Bobby) Beasley in the saddle, he won by one length and six lengths in a field of twenty-one runners. Irish horses won six races at the festival that year and Solfen won two of these. No horse either before or since has equalled Solfen's record-breaking achievement.

Fifty years on, Jim McGrath of Channel Four Racing, included Solfen's record in his top twenty of racing greats at the Cheltenham Festival. Solfen later won the Grand National Trial at



Bernard
Naughton,
Abbeypark

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Haydock Park before finishing eighth in the Grand National at Aintree. Afterwards, he was retired to Barney's farm in Clontuskert.

Barney Naughton returned to the Cheltenham Festival in 1974 with his horse, Mr. Midland, which he had bred himself. The sire, Midlander, stood in County Sligo and his stallion fee was £35. Mr. Midland won the National Hunt Chase over four miles – the Amateurs' Grand National. Mr. Midland was retired after winning the Ulster National in 1977. He was trained by Willie O'Grady's son, Eddie. Michael "Mouse" Morris was the jockey.

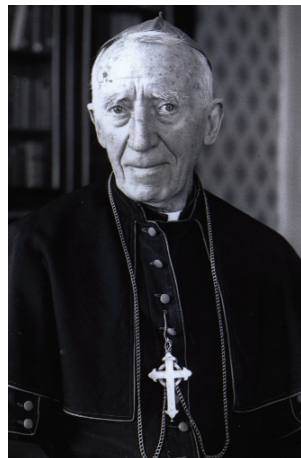


Bernard Naughton with 'Solferino', Chase and Hurdle Winner Cheltenham 1960

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Bishop Patrick Joseph Kelly

Records show that his grandfather Loughlan Kelly, rented land on the Seymour estate in Somerset in 1835. By 1865 he had moved to Attycoffey, renting thirty acres from Patrick Blake. From there Loughlan's son Malachy moved to Barnacraugh near Ballinasloe where his wife Kate gave birth on August 31st 1894 to their eldest son, Patrick Joseph. The Kellys returned to Clontuskert in 1912 when the Clancarty lands in Tristane were divided. Pat attended National School in Aughrim and later completed his secondary education at 'The Pines' in Ballinasloe.



Bishop Patrick Joseph at 90

Pat had a strong desire to become a missionary priest and joined the Society for African Missions, the S.M.A., at Blackrock Road in Cork. He had an aptitude for sport and played on the Seminary hurling and football teams while he was a student for the priesthood. He was ordained an S.M.A. priest at Blackrock on June 29th 1921.

Almost all of Pat's religious life was spent on the missions in Nigeria. Many of his classmates died young men. One of them, Francis McGovern, died five months after arriving in Liberia. Pat was consecrated Bishop in St Michael's church, Ballinasloe, on June 2nd 1940. A week later he ordained three priests for the diocese of Clonfert: Peter Dunne, John Higgins and Thomas Keyes. The war prevented him from returning to Africa until 1941.

During his time in Africa, he was the inspiration behind the building of a large number of churches and schools. The time he spent as a youngster helping his uncle with the building-work at St.

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Bishop Kelly on his Consecration Day, with his family.
 L. to R. Kathleen, sister; Kate, mother; Bishop Kelly; May, sister; Ellie, sister.
 At the rear, John and William, brothers.

Matthew's Protestant church in Glan, undoubtedly stood him in good stead in the course of his many building schemes in Nigeria. In the Vicariate of Western Nigeria, there were a hundred and fifty-seven Elementary Schools and twenty High Schools in 1939. When he retired as bishop of Benin City in 1973, the number had grown to seven hundred Elementary and eighty-six High Schools respectively. His niece, Mary Cunnane, worked as a nurse in Africa with him for a number of years and when she married another volunteer there, Ambrose Lavin, he performed the wedding ceremony.

Two of his nephews are priests, Fr Stephen Kelly who ministered in New York and Fr. Anthony Kelly, now serving in Zambia. Anthony was ordained by his uncle in Clontuskert parish church on 12th June 1977.

Holidays were spent in Tristane, with his brothers William,

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John and his family. He helped with the saving of the hay and other farm work. For the bishop's young nieces and nephews, home during these times was the centre of the universe. The celebration of Mass became a daily neighbourhood gathering. He regularly visited friends, neighbours and relatives to say Mass at their houses. Strangers frequently called and they had their first glance of a foreigner when Nigerian priests called to see where their boss spent his holidays. If the visitors arrived in the forenoon, the bishop would take them for a walk through the farm with the youngsters in tow, while his sister-in-law prepared lunch. Neighbour Paddy Quinn often recalled the occasion when he was helping the Kellys on the farm during the era when Friday was a fast day. The bishop arrived home from a meeting of bishops in Maynooth and Ellen enquired as to the type of fish they had for dinner. The Bishop replied, 'We got a dispensation, we had meat'. Having struggled to feed four adults and five children during the Lenten fast, she was not impressed and told him in blunt language what she thought of the Hierarchy and their 'dispensation'.

The Bishop retired to the S.M.A. house in Wilton, Cork in 1973. He visited Tristane each summer for a few weeks and spent time with his sister Kathleen Cunnane in Perssepark. He had the reputation for being a 'saintly man', both in Africa and in Ireland. He went to extraordinary lengths to seek out and console the dying. In Wilton, he said his own Mass at 8 a.m. and attended all the other priests' Masses as well. He attended daily Mass in Clontuskert or Aughtrim, as well as doing a holy hour. Car journeys would be spent praying the Rosary and no church would be passed without stopping for a visit.

A retreat resolution that he wrote in April 1979 perhaps summed up his philosophy. 'To have confidence that God will get me through all my problems; to leave my past to his mercy, my

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present to his love and my future to his providence' He died in Cork on August 18th 1991 just short of his 97th birthday. His burial in the S.M.A. cemetery in Wilton was attended by a large number of parishioners from Clontuskert and the surrounding parishes.

Margaret Mannion Hopkins

The journey that took Margaret Mannion to Clontuskert could be described as anything but plain sailing. She had boarded the ill-fated *Titanic* in Queenstown harbour with the ticket she had bought in the town of Ballygar. Born in Loughanboy, Ahascragh on November 5th 1883, she was leaving for America at the age of twenty-two with her fiancé Martin Callaghan, her best friend Ellie Mockler and Martin's two friends, Thomas Kilgannon and Thomas Smyth.

She travelled on the *Titanic* as a third-class passenger and could not believe the luxury of the ship. Margaret and her friend shared a cabin and her fiancé shared another down the hall with his two friends. Two peaceful days passed without any trouble until around 7.00 p.m. on the third night, when the temperature began to drop noticeably. Other ships warned of ice in the vicinity. Margaret and her friend went up on deck to get a breath of fresh air. They saw chunks of ice and small icebergs floating on the surface. However, the two girls did not worry because they had full confidence in the captain and the crows-nest lookouts, to guide them safely through the icebergs.



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Having returned to their cabins, they were just getting dressed when the ship took a very sharp turn which threw both of them to the floor. Almost immediately, the captain made an announcement for everyone to keep calm; they were 'only steering clear of an iceberg'. At 11.40 p.m. as Margaret was just dropping off to sleep, there was a sudden jerk that sent passengers reeling across their cabins. This was followed by sudden silence. The engine had stopped. Margaret jumped up and rushed out into the corridor to see what was going on. So did many of the other passengers. Suddenly, an ear-splitting siren went off and people began to panic. Just then a very loud crashing sound shook the vessel. The two girls were in a terrible state because neither they nor any of the third class passengers knew what was going on.

Up on top, the captain was planning to let all the first and second class passengers off without telling the third class passengers. The third class passengers became desperate when the water started to rise about their feet. The men stormed down the corridors, followed by the ladies in their light clothes. Having smashed a locked barrier, they were faced with armed sailors, but they brushed them aside in their frantic desire to get to the boat-deck. When they reached the deck, the second class passengers were already climbing into the lifeboats. The sailors had no choice but to let them follow.

Fortunately, Margaret managed to jump into the second last boat to be lowered. She had lost sight of her fiancé and the thought flashed through her mind that she might never see him again. Her friend Ellie Mockler was nowhere to be seen. As soon as they hit the water, the sailor in charge ordered everyone to start rowing as fast as they could. The last time Margaret saw her fiancé, he was kneeling with a group of his fellow passengers on the deck, saying the Rosary.

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With the help of a fur coat given to her by a well-to-do lady, she survived for twelve hours in the lifeboat until she was rescued by the *Carpathia* which took them to New York.

She spent seven years in New York with her sister before returning home. A year later she married Martin Hopkins and they raised their family in Chapelfinnerty, Ahascragh. On the 20th of March 1959, they moved to Ganaveen, Clontuskert.

She lived in her adopted parish until she died on the 15th of May 1970. She is buried in Chapelfinnerty parish cemetery beside her husband Martin, who had pre-deceased her by four years. Her descendents, the Hopkins family, are still living in the parish of Clontuskert.

Sean Kenny

Since Sean Kenny left Clontuskert in the early 1960s, he has contributed hugely to the political and social life of his adopted city of Dublin. He has become one of the most distinguished people ever to have been born in this parish. A native of the townland of Gortnahorna, he was born in the early 'forties to his parents, Gus and Bridie Kenny, and lived there until he left for Dublin upon completion of his secondary schooling in Garbally College. His father died at the early age of twenty-nine, leaving his mother to rear his sister Maura and himself.



Although he no longer has any immediate family remaining in the

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parish since his sister Maura died some years ago, he still has connections with Clontuskert and Kiltormer through his cousins, one of whom is Dawna Concannon of Atticoffey.

Sean attended the Old School in Clontuskert where he is remembered as a very bright student with a keen interest in history. Following his National School education, he once again acquitted himself with distinction during his time in Garbally College. He then set out for the bright lights of Dublin and has remained there ever since.

Very soon after his arrival in Raheny in 1969, he involved himself in Trade Union and local politics, especially through participation in the Residents' Associations and as a voluntary worker and director with the Raheny and District Credit Union. He has been a member of Dublin City Council, representing Labour in the Raheny area since 1979 when he won an extra seat for the party. Seán is currently a T.D. in Dáil Eireann.

As Lord Mayor of Dublin during 1991/1992 he played a leading role in Dublin's year as European City of Culture, the launch of Temple Bar as a tourist centre for Dublin and the celebration of the Trinity College Quatercentenary, when he received an Honorary Degree from that university.

He was elected as Labour TD to Dáil Eireann in 1992 and served for a five-year period. During this time, he was Chairperson of the Social Affairs Committee as well as being a member of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation which was engaged in the peace process in Northern Ireland. His wholehearted involvement with the Northern Ireland Peace Process almost certainly cost him his chance of re-election to the Dáil at that time.

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Rita Kelly

Rita Kelly, poet and writer, lived in Whitehall, Ballymanagh in her childhood and attended Clontuskert National School. She speaks of her school days in Clontuskert, and of her teachers with great regard and affection. She very much appreciated the foundation she received in Clontuskert National School. Rita was the oldest of the three children of Peter and Annie Kelly. They lived for some years in the old house close to the home of Margaret Dolan. The Kelly residence is now unoccupied.



Rita has published five poetry collections, the most recent being *Turas go Bun na Spéire* published by *Cló Iar-Chonnachta* in 2009. She writes in Irish and English. She has also published a short story collection entitled *The Whispering Arch* and other stories. With her late husband, the acclaimed writer, Eoghan Ó Tuairisc Rita published a poetry collection, *Dialann sa Diseart*.

Rita has won various prizes; her first was both adjudicated and awarded by John B. Keane. She has won the Merriman Poetry Award and the *Seán Ó Ríordáin Memorial Prize* for poetry. She was awarded an Arts Council Bursary for literature. Her work has been on literary courses in Yale University. Many of her reviews and articles have been published in journals such as *Comhar*, *Books Ireland*, *The Literary Review* and in newspapers such as the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Press*.

Rita now lives in Kildare. She received an M.A. in 2005 and is currently working on a Ph.D.