

The Crossroads

Peggy Lynch

The local crossroads no longer has the significance it once enjoyed. In fact it might now be referred to as an intersection or dangerous junction. But in the days when stop signs and yield signs were almost unknown it was a popular place for the local men to socialise.

Anyone who passed through Glenfarne knows that the Rainbow Ballroom stands at the spot where four roads meet. The main road runs from Enniskillen to Sligo. Another road branches to Kiltyclogher and the fourth, a bye road, leads past the Rainbow to the town lands nearer the mountain. To those of us who grew up in Glenfarne it was indeed the crossroads of our world. From there we made our way to school, to mass, to town, and to the Rainbow.

There was always a gathering at our crossroads. The size of the group depended on the time of day or indeed the day of the week. The biggest crowd was there on Sundays after mass—mostly men and boys—it seems the women walked on about their business. The chat that started outside the chapel gates continued at the crossroads, before they all went their respective ways. Some of them would be back again that evening and indeed most evenings during the week. A neighbour of mine, John Joe Cullen, who immigrated to England in 1962, told me he never missed a night at the crossroads for fourteen years. Why? I wondered. Well, as he said it was their only social outing. Having worked alone in the fields all day, going to the main road was like going to town. You were sure of company, a chat, and a chance to see and hear the goings on in the locality.

Even in the early days Glenfarne cross had a variety of side shows. McGivern's

Hall opened in 1934 and for the princely sum of twelve old pence you could dance the night away to the music of a three man band. Films were shown weekly in this hall during the 1940s, by a man named Sam Thompson and local people have fond memories of the excitement these generated. It was only in the fifties that the name was changed to the Rainbow Ballroom. But that is another story.

On the left ditch near the hall was a tin shed which housed Phil Gilgun's shop. During the war years when rationing was at its worst, it did a roaring trade. Tea, sugar, tobacco and soap were all available. Phil would make a paper cone from wallpaper, fill it with tea or sugar and send his customer home contented. He was known to have the first radio in Glenfarne and his premises were not unlike the widescreen of today—attracting crowds to follow the fate of their football heroes. Someone also likened it to a modern day gambling casino—cards were played, as was bagatelle, and ring throwing. You could test your skill at throwing coins into a big tin can. The can was rigged in such a way that if your money came out you lost—somehow the coins always came out. It was a popular meeting place as it was known that Phil could turn his hand to anything, and as new and novel ideas came to him he put them to good use to attract customers.

He was a dab hand at fixing bicycles—the only mode of transport, so he had a steady flow of business. Later he was the proud owner of the first motor car in the area. He had his own unique way of fixing a puncture—pour in skimmed milk and let the curd solidify in the hole. And it worked. A neighbour from up the road spent an evening or two a week in Phil's shop fixing shoes. He was said to be a

great man with the awl and specialised in a bubble patch for anyone suffering from bunions.

When Phil retired from business the crowd drifted up to Paddy the Barbers—the nearest shelter on a wet evening. This was a sturdy structure of corrugated iron and only a short walk up the road. Paddy did a brisk trade in hair cutting and sold such essentials as Brilcream, soap, Plug tobacco, bread, rum and butter sweets, three penny bars of chocolate, and the Observer. He wielded his hair clippers with skill and could tell a good yarn as he worked. The man in the chair was certain of a large audience as he got his locks trimmed. The conversation might range from the state of the country, to the best spuds and how to grow them—'dung and more dung'.

It was all happening at the crossroads too whenever there was a parade or local festival. The fife and drum band of the forties and fifties was trained by Mick Matthew John, himself a scholar of music. He was a friend of O'Carolan, the famous harper, and was an excellent flute player who could read and write music. John J Cullen remembers him reciting a poem in Irish at the crossroads and he was known to boast that there wasn't a word in the English language he didn't know.

But these were the side attractions. The crossroads itself was what you would call a good stand. Straight across the road was the Garda barracks. Because there was often as many as ten guards there in the fifties there was lots of comings and goings—all in full view from the cross. Only a few steps further on was the railway station—a hive of activity. Railcars trundled into the station at regular

intervals dispensing passengers who had made the journey home from England or elsewhere. The last train of the day came up from Enniskillen at eight o'clock, so anyone getting off at Glenfarne was sure to be noted. Hosey's store near the station sent out deliveries of meal and flour on horse and cart to as far away as Kilty and Ballinaglera. As well as that the crossroads was always the regular bus-stop, even during the years of the big red and white Appleby's bus, which ran from Enniskillen to Sligo. So it was as if all life was to be seen from this vantage point.

But aside from the happenings nearby the regulars at the crossroads were known to make their own entertainment. They might play a few games of pitch and toss for haepennys or venture into the field in front of the barracks to play football. Mostly they were there to pass the time, for the company, and the

chat- easy chat of crops and cattle or the killing of a pig or a good yarn that they heard at the creamery that day. Leaning on their bicycles or sitting on the ditch in a cloud of Sweet Afton smoke they were the picture of contentment.

They drifted home in ones and twos sometimes as late as one o'clock on a summer's night, and the only sound was a corncrake, calling from every field.

But things were moving on. The rural scene was changing. Electricity came to Glenfarne in 1952. There were bright lights now and electric kettles. Everyone had a radio instead of the old wet-battery wireless. The railway station closed in 1957. It was now silent and deserted. The sixties had arrived and the Rainbow was moving into the big dance-hall scene. Plans were in place for a car park. The ditches around the crossroads were taken away. The big tree was gone.

The first fish and chips could be bought from a converted cattle trailer for two shillings. Snugs gave way to lounge bars. Cars began to replace the old High Nelly bicycle. Television was keeping people at home. The crowd at the crossroads dwindled. Some had heard of neighbours doing well in England and had taken the boat to join them. Those too young to go into the Rainbow came to watch. They lifted each other up to a window in turns to have a good look at what they were missing. But they didn't stand at the crossroads.

The Rainbow Ballroom, the original Ballroom of Romance may have given Glenfarne a famous landmark, but the men who gathered at the crossroads for decades shared a romance of their own—that sense of affinity and belonging. And maybe they shared too, what Fionn Mac Cool called the finest music of all—the music of what happens.

GLENFARNE ACTIVE AGE GROUP



Rinso Days and Rainbow Nights

Pictured at the recent launch of their book are members of the Glenfarne active age group.

Back Row: Anita Gallagher, Editor, Joan Kelly, Josie Clancy, Des Keaney (NWHB) who launched the book, Patricia McNulty, Annie Bredin, Katie Gilgun and Betty Duignan, Drumlin Publications,

Front row: Lucy Mawn, Margaret M Clancy, Susan Dolan, Annie Keaney, Sadie Gilgunn & Peg Rogan.

Missing from photo: Mary Fox, Mary McDermott, Nora McGourty, Philomena Cullen, Bridget McHugh & Sally McPartlin

Glenfarne Active Age group are in existence since 1995.

They have 17 very active members and meet every Monday from 11 am to 1 pm. Rural Lift provide the transport free of charge and Clancy's Restraunt provide the midday meal which the organisation pay for. The group do all kinds of exercise and have purchased a lot of equipment through the 'Go for Life' services. This year some of their activities included visits to Kiltyclogher Drama Festival, The Brendon Grace Show in Bundoran and The Beeznee Theatre Company Pduction in the Glens Centre in Manorhamilton and before each of these events the group enjoyed a meal out locally. One could say they are living a great life.

The group also hosted visits form other active age groups such as *Cavan Town Active Age Group, Kiltyclogher Active Age Group and Glencar Active Group.*

Two years age the group was involved in the production of a book called 'Rinso Days and Rainbow Nights', this book told stories of by-gone days from each member and was sold out over a short period of time.

Whats next on the agenda for this very active group?