

The Leyland Link

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How vital a good transport link is to an area, to a community. For us growing up in Kilternan in the 40's and 50's the green Leyland bus representing the C.I.E. 44 service from College St. to Enniskerry was a lifeline to visit and explore a village quaintly different to anywhere else along the entire route. You knew when you had arrived. The bus stopped and switched off. It was the terminus. You now had the freedom of Enniskerry.

The houses and buildings looked different. There was even an attractive old hotel in the centre of the village that had an historic aura about it. I had never in my limited travels ever before been where a huge granite clock-tower monument seemed to act as the epicentre. You could actually mount some steps on it and walk all around to examine its details more closely. The setting round about was not all sedate. There were shops of all kinds at a glance and in particular there was Windsor's where the ice-cream cone was a special treat. You could even hire a taxi there too!

A group of us normally arrived together. Vinnie Butler would often come on board at the Scalp. Our mission was normally to challenge the locals in a football game in the Bog Meadow. These, at times, to put it mildly, could be quite robust. I had a bad experience one day, having been given the all clear to travel by my dear mother who was a real softie, but on one condition; that I get back home before my toil-weary father did for his tea. Grandfather had preached to him against the vice of wasting good time and his attitude was the same. Happily he grew to realise the dangers to Jack (and himself) of "all work and no play". Anyway, back to the action: as I crouched to collect a low ball, my eye took the full force of a local hob-nail boot! A prize-fighter's "shiner" bloated out instantly. I left the scene in resignation, and took the next bus home to face the music! It was not always war in the Bog Meadow. You dressed up and looked respectable there on Sports Day.

Many a film we saw at Noel Roe's Cinema/Ballroom of Romance emporium just down the Dargle Road. For our patronage he was competing with the Odeon, subsequently known as the Apollo Cinema in Dundrum. If the pocket money was healthy the Sandford in Ranelagh was a contender. Locals of course could assess the offerings at the Royal and Roxy in Bray, just a handy single-decker run away. Getting back to the Enniskerry venue, sad to relate but there was yet another early exit for me from here too one Sunday! We had brought along a younger brother, Brian, to introduce him to the movies and just when the M.G.M. Lion in the opening sequence went into his bellowing/head rotation routine he became implacably scared and had to be taken home – another early departure from terminus 44.

When secondary school beckoned we again met up with some of the locals. The Enniskerry lads, Matt Kennelly, Sean Woodcock and George McNulty were heading for Westland Row CBS while we were on the Synge St. roll-call. The morning bus was really crowded with a cross-section of students, male and female, workers and commuters. On Monday mornings we invested in a weekly ticket, hand-written by the conductor. With a full bus, one frequently heard the three bell signal, meaning no more stops to collect passengers only when alighting. That green bus was a type of institution in many ways. Not only did you know the passengers, you knew where they sat. You knew the team of driver and especially the conductor by name. You knew his moods and mannerisms. He knew a bit about you too. You even got to know how partial the driver was to a full throttle! The homeward trips from various schools, with more space and fewer adults around, were rather more noisy and open to expressions of rivalry, but harmless really. There was, of course, no CCTV as a deterrent. The trip too afforded an opportunity for, let's say, two-way romantic evaluations!

There was an interesting local evolution in the Gaelic versus Soccer codes during those years. Lads from Kiltiernan such as the McDonnells were useful soccer players as was Vinnie Butler, having honed their skills in Sandyford, Glencullen and early Wayside Celtic teams. They still relished their Gaelic nonetheless and played in various Enniskerry teams with more than a little success. I am told the classic give-away soccer signals of body swerves and so called "shimmies" did not go down well when used against certain other Wicklow opposition, especially when the latter were

made to look and feel foolish by “being sent the wrong way”. This might result in an angry plea to teammates to inflict appropriate retaliation on “that soccer so-and-so”!

The lifting of the infamous Ban in the seventies, thankfully, was accompanied by quantum changes. We had talented players from Enniskerry; the likes of Pat and Dick Seery, Sean Woodcock, Liam Keogh, Jack Kearns and Jimmie Byrne actually playing soccer with Wayside Celtic. The late Jim Bradshaw born in Golden Ball who played soccer with Barnaville (from Barnacullia) went to live in Kilmacanogue and made a huge contribution to soccer in Co. Wicklow, a tradition followed by his son. Catering for sport of another kind, Butler’s Hall in the Scalp became a Mecca for male and female table tennis players from Bray CYMS, Enniskerry and, of course, members of the host and local families. Late night tournaments and challenges running into the small hours were common, thanks to the generosity of Mrs. Butler and the goodies in the kitchen of her tearooms. A notable but modest, talented and popular participant was the late Alan Kelly Senior (1936-2009), 47 times capped for his country, and then playing with Bray Wanderers or Drumcondra before joining Preston North End. He was of course father of goal keeping sons Gary and Alan Jnr.

My connections with Enniskerry were not just through sport, entertainment and school-going friends. We had frequent chats with the legendary and lovable Andy (“A”) Doran who was the ploughman on Fox’s Verney Farm, only a stone’s throw from my home on the Glencullen Road. The same Fox family were related to Charlie Keegan, the first ever Irish World Ploughing Champion and former President of the N.F.A. His win which was greeted with much local, nay national, adulation was in Austria in 1964. He farmed in Enniskerry all his life and through his talent in ploughing a straight furrow, he enjoyed seeing many parts of the world. I was thrilled to see how his memory had been marked in 2002 near the river bridge in Enniskerry with a site known as the “Ploughman’s Corner”, comprising a plaque with citation and a granite bench with words denoting it as his seat. Happily Andy is remembered too, with a Pitch and Putt Challenge in his name held annually in Glencullen.

My later contacts with Enniskerry were also maintained through the lorry work of my father, Charlie Walsh, who had many good friends and customers in the village and the area in general. He was a great friend of fellow trucker, Robbie Kavanagh, a friendship that still holds strong today between his widow, Lily, and our family. My



Sports Day at the Bog Meadow, Enniskerry



Charlie Walsh, Blacksmith, Kiltiernan

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father drew sand and gravel from Coogan's pit and turf from the bogs of Glenree for numerous cutters as well as that saved by us as a family enterprise aided by some men he hired from year to year for their expertise. I have unhappy memories of the discomfort imposed on us by the midge population of the area while working in the late evening loading up the last load for the day. He also hauled timber out of Knocksink Wood. His Ford V8 truck was a familiar sight on the roads and tracks around.

The establishment of Ardmore Studios, Bray, in 1958, gave cast and crew easy access to a myriad of diverse and wondrous locations. It became a major national success story and a real world showcase to the treasures of the Garden of Ireland which hosted the lion's share of the 100 plus films made over an 85 year period. It is appropriate that the Excalibur Film Drive proudly graces the local area, such is the versatility of its magnificent scenery. As part of the sylvan and historic settings the iconic John Hinde post-card picture of the village makes it instantly recognisable. It is no wonder that so many discerning artists over the years have perched at their roadside easels using that very same vantage point, thereby perpetuating the image of a location that is a little special – the village of Enniskerry.

Joe Walsh is a writer with a keen interest in local history.