

Murroe's heart has a different beat these days

■ No longer does the clang of the forge dominate the East Limerick village; now it's JCBs and trucks clearing land to build new houses

THE main street of Murroe on a summer's day echoes to the clang of heavy construction work. Right in the centre of the village, former rugby international, Peter Clohessy is building a state-of-the-art pub and restaurant - scheduled to open in November - while just off the main street, yet another new housing estate is nearing completion.

This is the vibrant picture of the new Murroe, the population of which has quadrupled in five years and is still growing. But some people believe that the one time estate village built around the former Barrington castle is already overwhelmed by too much development and too many uniform and inappropriate housing schemes.

"They put the cart before the horse and built new estates without putting a plan in place first," said one, who didn't wish to be named for fear of being seen as "unwelcoming to the newcomers".

"We've always welcomed the stranger, but the thing is the main street has lost its character," he said.

But the plan is there now - a County Council village design statement - which is still at the consultation stage but which everyone hopes will create a new, happy and sustainable community. Others feel that they have been presented with a daunting challenge.

There are encouraging developments, however. Murroe was one of a number of East Limerick villages handed over this summer by the Tipperary Leader Group to Ballyhoura Development.

"We have started the process of integrating the people in the different estates," said Ballyhoura's Eileen O'Keefe. "We held a community meeting in Murroe earlier in the summer, inviting both the newcomers and

NO 1: MURROE

■ **Population:** Almost 2,000 - quadrupled since the 2002 Census which recorded a population of 468

■ **Twinned:** with the French village of Evry-Gregy-sur-Yerres

■ **Famous for:** the Cloncurry evictions and the Land League huts; Glenstal Benedictine Abbey.

■ **Most famous son:** Canon John Hayes, the founder of Muintir na Tire.

■ **Biggest ever event:** More than 200,000 people converged on Murroe in 1843 to listen to a rousing address by the Liberator, Daniel O'Connell.

Your Neighbour' weekend."

Like every small village in the country Murroe is also concerned about the new rural drugs culture.

"This is something we are conscious of and we aim to do everything we can to resolve it," said one community worker.

Paddy Hourigan, the current chairman of the community council and the man who represented Murroe on the County Council for 32 years, said that the village is lucky to have two good gardai, one of whom lives in parish.

Murroe had only one pub up to a few years ago, thanks apparently to a by-law introduced by the Barringtons to keep the villagers overindulging in alcohol. They failed however to stop a number of illegal distilleries flourishing in the hills

"The village is well patrolled," he said. But most people he said were not prepared for the changes.

"They came here from all over East Limerick and North Tipperary to have their horses shod. This was the focal point of the village. This was where people met and where news was exchanged. Everyone knew everyone else. But walk down the street of Murroe now and you'll meet a lot of strangers," he said. "But that's not a bad thing either."

Unlike other villages in the county there is no fear of Murroe losing its remaining shops - there are three now, but there once were seven. Peter Clohessy's investment should bring new life to the main street too. His pub will be the third in the village.

Rare enough for an Irish village, Murroe had only one pub up to a few years ago, thanks apparently to a by-law introduced by the Barringtons to keep the villagers from over indulging in alcohol. They failed however to stop a number of illegal distilleries flourishing in the hills above the village.

Breda Ahern, who has been a shopkeeper on the main street for 35 years remembers when it was "a grand quiet village".

"The building all started about six years ago and changed the shape of everything. Some people believe it is too much, but it has been good for business."

Breda's shop "Day-break" is a hive of activity all day long. She also

village needs a focal point, like the forge once provided. She remembers coming there from her home outside the village as a child. "I was only in the national school when I brought a horse myself to that forge to be shod," she said.

Everyone we met praised the input of the Benedictine order in Murroe. They have been part and parcel of the community since the first monk arrived at Glenstal in 1927 and apart from the Abington creamery where 20 were once employed and where up to 40 people now work in small industries, Glenstal was the biggest local employer.

A little known fact, we're told, is that Glenstal might have played a bigger part in Irish history if an offer by the Barrington family following the tragic death of their daughter Winifred during the War of Independence had been taken up.

The Barringtons offered the castle and its magnificent grounds to the new Irish State in 1922 as a residence for the first Governor General, Tim Healy. The offer was turned down, because the village was too far from Dublin.

One of the current monks, Brother Anthony Keane, is delighted with the new Murroe.

"It's wonderful to see different people moving in here from all parts of the country and indeed from all over the world. They are breathing new life into the area and inspiring us all."

Brother Anthony, who has been in Murroe since he first came to school in Glenstal in 1959, would love to see a community "Ploughlands" developed in keeping with Murroe's heritage, where people could grow their own vegetables and food. He would also like to see the area's equine heritage, particularly the draught horse industry, restored.

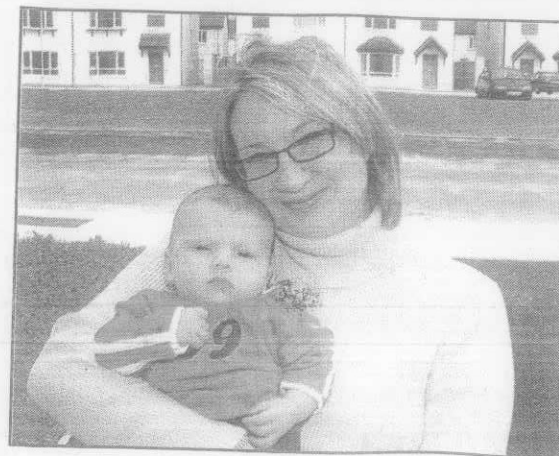
Clohessy has been farming in Murroe for three years.

characters, the late Charlie St George. She used to camp in Glenstal when

local club has provided its own pavilion. The GAA is also a big

said long time community activist," John Egan.

eventual triumph of the tenants, will no doubt



Top: one of a number of housing developments in the village of Murroe, which has seen its population quadruple in five years

Above: a photograph of the village from another era

Far left: Dorothy Madden and her baby son Denis, whom she one day hopes to see lining out for the local hurlers

Above left: Breda Ahern has been a

LA: LIMERICK LEADER
15 TH SEPTEMBER 2007
PAGE 6

NOVEMBER - while just off the main street, yet another new housing estate is nearing completion.

This is the vibrant picture of the new Murroe, the population of which has quadrupled in five years and is still growing. But some people believe that the one time estate village built around the former Barrington castle is already overwhelmed by too much development and too many uniform and inappropriate housing schemes.

"They put the cart before the horse and built new estates without putting a plan in place first," said one, who didn't wish to be named for fear of being seen as "unwelcoming to the newcomers".

"We've always welcomed the stranger, but the thing is the main street has lost its character," he said.

But the plan is there now - a County Council village design statement - which is still at the consultation stage but which everyone hopes will create a new, happy and sustainable community. Others feel that they have been presented with a daunting challenge.

There are encouraging developments, however. Murroe was one of a number of East Limerick villages handed over this summer by the Tipperary Leader Group to Ballyhoura Development.

"We have started the process of integrating the people in the different estates," said Ballyhoura's Eileen O'Keeffe. "We held a community meeting in Murroe earlier in the summer, inviting both the newcomers and the older residents. Over 50 people turned up at the meeting and 23 of them were from the new estates. Three or four of these new estates are now in the process of forming residents' associations and hopefully will be in a position to elect their own representatives to the new community council."

"Many of the new residents," she continued, "were very active in the Macra na Feirme 'Know

■ Biggest ever event: More than 200,000 people converged on Murroe in 1843 to listen to a rousing address by the Liberator, Daniel O'Connell.

Your Neighbour' weekend."

Like every small village in the country Murroe is also concerned about the new rural drugs culture.

"This is something we are conscious of and we aim to do everything we can to resolve it," said one community worker.

Paddy Hourigan, the current chairman of the community council and the man who represented Murroe on the County Council for 32 years, said that the village is lucky to have two good gardai, one of whom lives in parish.

Murroe had only one pub up to a few years ago, thanks apparently to a by-law introduced by the Barringtons to keep the villagers overindulging in alcohol. They failed however to stop a number of illegal distilleries flourishing in the hills

"The village is well patrolled," he said.

But most people he said were not prepared for the changes.

"Everything happened very quickly and the infrastructure couldn't keep pace."

Also people still hanker after the tight-knit community they once knew. Listening to the noise of the JCBs on his way to daily Mass, one of the oldest inhabitants, Patrick Rainsford from Cappanahanna, remembers a time when the street resounded to a different noise - the Blacksmith's anvil.

"They came here from all over East Limerick and North Tipperary to have their horses shod. This was the focal point of the village. This was where people met and where news was exchanged. Everyone knew everyone else. But walk down the street of Murroe now and you'll meet a lot of strangers," he said. "But that's not a bad thing either."

Unlike other villages in the county there is no fear of Murroe losing its remaining shops - there are three now, but there once were seven. Peter Clohessy's investment should bring new life to the main street too. His pub will be the third in the village.

Rare enough for an Irish village, Murroe had only one pub up to a few years ago, thanks apparently to a by-law introduced by the Barringtons to keep the villagers from over indulging in alcohol. They failed however to stop a number of illegal distilleries flourishing in the hills above the village.

Breda Ahern, who has been a shopkeeper on the main street for 35 years remembers when it was "a grand quiet village".

"The building all started about six years ago and changed the shape of everything. Some people believe it is too much, but it has been good for business."

Breda's shop "Day-break" is a hive of activity all day long. She also holds the key to the local Muintir na Tire hall, a distinctive edifice that once served as a church.

"The hall is used very night of the week all year. We have dancing classes, 45, unislim, karate, everything."

The 45 games are especially popular over a wide area and seen as a great social outlet for everyone rather than a profit making venture.

"We give out more than we get in," said Breda. She also says that the

part and parcel of the community since the first monk arrived at Glenstal in 1927 and apart from the Abington creamery where 20 were once employed and where up to 40 people now work in small industries, Glenstal was the biggest local employer.

A little known fact we're told, is that Glenstal might have played a bigger part in Irish history if an offer by the Barrington family following the tragic death of their daughter Winifred during the War of Independence had been taken up.

The Barringtons offered the castle and its magnificent grounds to the new Irish State in 1922 as a residence for the first Governor General, Tim Healy. The offer was turned down, because the village was too far from Dublin.

One of the current monks, Brother Anthony Keane, is delighted with the new Murroe.

"It's wonderful to see different people moving in here from all parts of the country and indeed from all over the world. They are breathing new life into the area and inspiring us all."

Brother Anthony, who has been in Murroe since he first came to school in Glenstal in 1959, would love to see a community "Ploughlands" developed in keeping with Murroe's heritage, where people could grow their own vegetables and food. He would also like to see the area's equine heritage, particularly the draught horse industry, restored.

Clohesy has been farming in Murroe for three years.

"It's a great place," he says. "Despite all the development, it's still a nice, peaceful village."

In one of the new housing estates, Dorothy Madden is delighted that she and her husband Martin, moved to Murroe.

"We're just had our first baby, Denis, and we hope some day he'll be playing hurling for Murroe in Harty Park. We have no plans to move from here."

Dorothy is a granddaughter of one of Limerick's best known rugby



characters, the late Charlie St George. She used to camp in Glenstal when she was a girl guide and always loved the area.

Two other newcomers, Sean and Alanna Cafferkey, from Mayo and Cork respectively, love Murroe. Alanna is the goalie in the ladies' soccer team. "Everyone has been very welcoming. The kids love it," said Sean.

Sport is big in Murroe and may well prove to be the real bonding gel in the years to come. Over 100 kids attended a soccer summer camp in the village in July and the

local club has provided its own pavilion.

The GAA is also a big influence and there is a huge and very successful community games involvement. But most people agree that more sporting facilities are required to cater for what will be a very large population of teenagers in a little over a decade.

The real challenge facing the community council then is the integration of more newcomers than this small village ever expected to hold.

"It's certainly not an insurmountable task,"

said long time community activist, John Egan.

Mr Egan, like many others we met in Murroe, would have preferred if the community had been consulted and involved before any of the current developments had taken place. But he welcomes Limerick County Council's Village Design statement for Murroe which has finally taken local views on board.

Murroe, which can trace its origins from pre-historic times right through Monastic, Cromwellian and English settlements to the

eventual triumph of the tenants, will no doubt rise to the challenge.

Just as it did in the Land League days and, even more recently, when the village was threatened with a super landfill site on its doorstep and again last year when a housing development was proposed on the GAA's Harty Park in the centre of the village.

The spirit of Canon Hayes and that of his latter day disciple, the late Paddy Fitzgerald, is still very much alive and ready to take on a whole new social reality.

Top: one of a number of housing developments in the village of Murroe, which has seen its population quadruple in five years

Above: a photograph of the village from another era

Far left: Dorothy Madden and her baby son Denis, whom she one day hopes to see lining out for the local hurlers

Above left: Breda Ahern has been a shopkeeper in the village for 35 years. All the development has been good for business she says, but has changed everything

Peter enjoys the peace despite developments

IN a village where 500 new houses have been built in the past five years, former international and Munster rugby star Peter Clohessy, who has been living in Murroe now for over three years, could hardly fit the picture of a "blow-in".

Peter is now a familiar figure in the village where everyone recalls his sporting prowess. The former Young Munster player who went on to be capped for Ireland and who played with Munster in two unsuccessful Heineken Cup

finals in 2000 and 2002, is still regarded, despite his obvious reticence, as one of Limerick's most popular rugby men. He's certainly no stranger. "I came here from Monaleen first and then from Annacotty, so it wasn't exactly a

big move into the country," he told us.

When he said goodbye to a great rugby career, he and his wife Anna bought a farm on the outskirts of Murroe, where he continues to farm actively. But he also saw the potential for a top-class

restaurant and pub in the main street of a rapidly-developing village. "With a growing population, I felt that this would be a great facility for the village and the surrounding area," he said. The 8,500 square feet venture, with separate pub and

restaurant, is nearing completion and is scheduled to open in November under a name which is still a secret, but which, Peter says, will have a big connection with the heritage of Murroe and Glenstal. Views differ as

to how the development will impact on the village, but mostly it is welcomed by the inhabitants. For Peter, there's no place like Murroe. "Despite all the development it is still a very nice, peaceful village," he says.

Peter Clohessy on the main street of Murroe where he is building a pub and restaurant

