



Vincent Browne: hard times and old ways in Broadford

(LL)

## Browne recalls old ways and hard times at home

By NORMA PRENDIVILLE

VINCENT Browne has, happily, never made a secret of his grá for Broadford. In several interviews with the Limerick Leader, he has spoken of how he returns there regularly—and at one stage, how he planned to finish writing a history of the parish begun by his father.

In a piece written for the Going Home series in The Irish Times and published last week, Mr Browne spoke of the new-found vitality and youthfulness that now characterises Broadford—and where football is now being played.

And he spoke, too, of the warmth and affection that continues “even for someone who has been out of the village for as long as I have”.

His recall, however, is sharp and the details are there in surprising detail, conjuring up names and faces, some now dead like Murty Duggan of the forge and his father, sacristan Paddy Duggan, while others, like Johnny Duggan live on, a man who still greets the day and welcomes the night with a whistling tune.

And the old ways are remembered—the early morning runs to the creamery, the old farm machinery, the “wetting” of the tea.

But in typical-Browne fashion, he does not draw a sentimental veil over his early years in Broadford and returns to two

themes on which he has spoken before—the plight of “servant boys and girls” and the harsh fact of emigration.

Some years ago, when he launched a book by As Dúchas Dóchas which focused on servants, Mr Browne argued that their stories were yet another scandal from the past.

Last week, he wrote of the “tears of young servant boys and girls exploited and humiliated by farmers and the petit bourgeoisie”.

And he spoke in particular of one, Jack Moloney “who worked with us”.

“He dined separately and lived across the road in a hovel—mud floor, leaking thatched roof, damp walls, no running water, no sanitation. He had been a champion Irish dancer and, I’d say, in his day, he was a bit of a goer. But by the time he became part of our lives, whatever gaiety he had once had was gone. He got drunk occasionally and hilariously (for us) fell in love with a young woman who just teased him, and died alone on the floor of his hovel, where his body was not found for several days.”

There is a fierce honesty in Browne’s account—particularly because it is so close to his own family, who rated among the “relatively opulent”, being shopkeepers.

But he points out too that there was a lot of denial of the poverty that existed.

Not for the first time, Browne

also speaks of the fact that all but one of the boys he went to national school with had emigrated.

And there is an emotional honesty in his sense of dislocation. “It would have been nice to have had something to do during the long summers we spent in Broadford, home from boarding school. Everyone I had been with at primary school had gone. I hated those summers and began to had the sense of dislocation that leaving Broadford and going to boarding-school caused. Although I was from Broadford, increasingly I was not of Broadford. Later on, that sense of dislocation eased.”

His “affectionate but unsentimental” account was praised by another well-known media-man Eoghan Harris writing in the Sunday Independent.

But it makes you wonder about the notion of “damning with praise”.

“What a shock to find that Vincent Browne can really write when he is not saving the world”, he wrote.

And he commended his piece as a “perfect example of the subtle but steely Sunday Independent writing style he is so fond of sneering at—serious without being solemn, light as a butterfly in touch but indelible as a tattoo, full of political insight but free from the political sermons which gudge up his column”.