

Then & Now

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Memories of two men of different eras but the same cloth

Born centuries apart Con Healy and Daniel Blake remembered this week

THE LIMERICK Association Yearbook was a very popular magazine during the 1980s and 1990s and its editor was the late Con Healy from Abbeyfeale. It contained lovely articles from many well known writers from around the Limerick area. Con would get in touch and suggest a subject a person or a place to write about and give plenty of time to the author to compose their piece. I was delighted to do so in the 1991 Yearbook when I wrote about Tom Culhane the famous footballer from Glin.

Con also contributed many fine articles to the magazine during that time span. He wrote about card playing in the Day of the Four Jacks, Limerick hurling featured in That Day in Thurles. He described the art of road making in The Stonebreaker. In history he recalled the life of Michael Davitt, and the 1916 Easter Rising. He died eleven years ago and the following tribute (no author's name) was paid to him in the Limerick Leader of March 3 2007.

Con Healy who died on February 1 aged 84 years, was a highly respected Chief Environmental Health Officer with the former Eastern Health Board, A Lecturer with CERT in the College of Catering Cathal Brugha Street Dublin. He was an Honorary Fellow of the Irish Hospitality Institute at the time of his death. The large attendance at his funeral in Raheny Dublin on both days testified to the esteem and affection in which Con was held.

Born in Ballybehy Cross Abbeyfeale, Con moved to Dublin at the young age of seventeen years but his love for his native Limerick never waned. He held the position

of Vice-President of the Limerickman's Association in Dublin for many years, and edited the Limerick Yearbook for well over a decade. Many of his colleagues who attended his removal and internment spoke of a man who brought a huge degree of professionalism to his post and were high in their praise of his initiatives to promote Health and Safety in the Hotel and Catering Industry.

His two booklets Dialogue and Interview which he wrote and published during the 1970s with their attractive and easy to understand illustrations were innovative and were highly acclaimed. These booklets were used extensively by the Hotel Industry in their training programmes at the prompting of Board Failte, to ensure the highest levels of hygiene were applied.

Many years later Con erected a shrine on the site of the forge to salute the skills of the blacksmith, which for many is lost to today's generation. The original shoeing stone his father used is there for all to see. It is not unusual to see passing tourists stop and take a photo of the monument, as they make their way to Ballybunion or head for the Ferry in Tarbert.

His nephews Sean and Tom Healy who travelled up from Ballybehy Cross told the story after his funeral about a knot Con had made in a tree across from the family home when he was only eleven years old. The knot is to be found in the tree to this day. The symbolism is appropriate because while Con lived all his adult life in Dublin, his ties to Abbeyfeale never loosened and most believe, he never spiritually left West Limerick.

Needless to say Con was a family man most of all. He and his wife Sarah suffered a tragic loss when

their son Connor was killed in a road accident in Scotland in 1990, and Con's deep faith helped him carry this heavy cross. Con and Sarah are blessed with two daughters and as a father, was very proud of their success and achievements.

Fr Gerry Moore in his homily told us Con was a fixer, because he was constantly working to help and assist people less fortunate than himself. The large representation from charitable and voluntarily organisations in the congregation spoke volumes for his unheralded work in this area. His ten year old grand-daughter Leah composed a prayer made up from the letters that constitute "granddad" and it accurately summed up Con's warmth and generous personality.

Haulie Flynn from Newcastle West was his contact around Limerick to send articles to and a lot of good local history was collected and is now preserved within the covers of the Limerick Association Yearbook. Con and Haulie have departed from the written word and the magazine has long since ceased publication, but their huge contribution will always be remembered by the legacy they left behind.

THE PATRIOTS BRIDE is the name of a poem that appeared in the Munster News and Limerick and Clare Advocate on April 28 1900. The poem is about Daniel Blake, a 21 year old Fenian, a shoemaker and a native of Rockhill.

He was killed in the Fenian attack on Kilmallock Police Barracks on March 6 1867. He had gone there with the Bruree Fenians to play his part in the unsuccessful Rising.

That morn she buckled his bright sword on,

She pinned on his breast a rosette green, She whispered low of a

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country's wrong,
And lingered long in the old boreen.

He kissed her lips so rosy red,
He kissed the tears from her waxen cheek,
He told her tales of a brave, brave band,
Who no longer crouched like cravens weak?

He bade her be brave as a soldier's love,
He whispered of victories for Róisín Dhu,
He pressed her again to his manly heart,
And soulfully whispered "My love be true",

That night he fought in the old "Balbec",
The brave, the true, for a suffering land,
Right was defeated the old, old tale,
The Galtees sheltered an outlawed band.

And low he laid in the gore-dyed street,
With a shining musket clasped in his hand,
And the zephyrs passing above his head,

Whispered, "You're loved in the Irish Land".

In a brown thatched cottage by the crooning Maigue,
His cailin is pining for his sake:
They bore his body to kindred dust,
God guard your soul,
brave-hearted Blake!
Old Shanavoha's churchyard lone
Holds not the dust of a truer Gael;
And no tree withers above his grave,
And the grass always green to the passing gale.

The authors name was given as Cormac Cas obviously a pseudonym. The old Balbec referred to was Kilmallock. The real Balbec was a Roman city in what is now Lebanon, and is famous for its historic ruins. Dr Campbell a traveller to Kilmallock in 1775 was so impressed by the town's historic ruins that he called it the Balbec of Ireland.

The line, "And no tree withers above his grave" in the poem, is explained as follows in a footnote to the poem: "A strange freak of nature is to be seen in this cemetery (Shanavoha). A notorious spy of the 67(Fenian) movement, whose body had to be guarded by armed policemen for many days, was interred here. Simultaneous almost with his interment, two magnificent trees, at the head and foot of the grave, withered."

People familiar with the story behind the beautiful Connacht love song, "Una Bhán", will remember how two trees were said to have grown from the adjacent graves of Una Bhán Nic Diarmada and her lover Tomas Láidir Mac Coistealbha, and did not cease growing until they bent towards each other and met. As the old saying goes love conquers all.



Daniel Blake was killed in the Fenian attack on Kilmallock Police Barracks on March 6, 1867