

Review of the County edition



Taking part in the Newcastle West to Ardfagh railway walk to commemorate the last passenger train along the line 45 years ago, Carmel Lyons O'Connor, Newcastle West, whose father was the station master in Newcastle West, and Liam O'Farrell, chairman, Great Southern Trail.

PICTURES: OWEN SOUTHE

Railway walk recalls last train the rolled out west

NEWCASTLE WEST

Martin Byrnes

THE schoolgoing daughter of the stationmaster stood on the platform at Newcastle West railway station and watched as grown men cried.

Their faces were but dimly lit by the few outdoor bulbs and by the glow from the windows of the short set of railcars passed and purling at the platform.

Carmel Lyons had never seen men cry before.

It was the bitterly cold evening of Saturday, February 2, 1963, the dark, cheerless and silent occasion when the last daily passenger train between Limerick and Tralee ran. A service which had operated since New Year's Day, 1867, was to be no more, and the ending of the passenger service was to prove but the first stage in a series of downgradings that saw the line closed for good in 1976.

Carmel Lyons O'Connor, now living in Tralee, came to Newcastle West last Saturday and stood beside the pretty cut limestone house, which she had once known as home. All the rest of the station is gone, the shunting yards, goods shed, the platforms and loading banks, turntables, buffers, water tank, signal cabin, even the quaint twin-eyed bridge.

But the line is not gone.



Denis McAuliffe, Tempaglantine; Mike MacDonnell, Newcastle West and Eileen Corbett, Newcastle West, on the walk from Newcastle West to Ardfagh

even if the tracks are, because it is being progressively developed as an amenity for use by walkers, joggers and cyclists. And the best developed stretch is that from Newcastle West to Ardfagh.

The founder member of Great Southern Trail, the voluntary company which has developed the line for recreational use, Liam O'Mahony, was a passenger on that last scheduled train in 1963, having walked from Newcastle West to Ardfagh with his late mother, Anne, specifically for the purpose.

He had a role to play last Saturday, delivering the address to those who undertook the trail walk to Ardfagh and back, commemorating the end of passenger trains 45 years to the day.

Mr O'Mahony recalled

1963 and being served their tickets by Ardfagh halter keeper Kevin Magee, and noted that Mr Magee, with his wife, Maura, were enjoying their retirement in Tempaglantine. Those tickets would be the last business ever transacted at Ardfagh station because it, with Barnagh and nearby Devon Road and, beyond Abbeyfeale, Kilmorna, were shut for all purposes and merely stood mute while the daily goods trains trundled by.

Mr O'Mahony recited the names of the railway community along the line, their transfers after 1963 and their subsequent retirements.

Today, 45 years on, we remember not only those but all train crews, permanent way staff, gatekeepers, hauliers, passengers and customers of the rail-

ways," he said. "Cúimhneacháin é sin. So when you walk, run or cycle the Great Southern Trail, remember that you are treading on a path steeped in history and heritage."

The railway from Limerick to Tralee had stations or halts at Patrickswell, Adare, Ballingrane, Rathkeale, Ardfagh, Newcastle West, Barnagh, Devon Road, Abbeyfeale, Kilmorna, Listowel, Lixnaw, Abbeydorney and Ardert. At the time of closure, a train can run from Tralee at 8.30am to Limerick, arriving at 11am, with a return service leaving at 5.25pm, arriving in Tralee at 6.05pm.

Patrickswell, Adare and Ballingrane were also served by the passenger and goods service on the Askeaton and Foynes branch.

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Rathkeale Arts Centre celebrates opening

RATHKEALE

Leader Reporter

IT was a night to savour in Rathkeale. Following on the heels of the official opening of An Táin Seán Óg, Limerick County Council's new arts centre, library and arts centre in the town, Rathkeale Community Arts Group hosted a celebration to mark the inauguration of the arts centre.

And, despite the icy road conditions, dozens turned up to join in the fun and to admire the paintings on exhibition, part of the council's permanent art collection.

The centre is over the library in the former courtroom, scene of numerous district and circuit court sittings. But it has been transformed as part of the €4m refurbishment and rebuilding project that has given Rathkeale and the surrounding area a handsome and accessible public building.

"This is a long-hoped-for night," Norma Prendiville said, welcoming all those who came on behalf of Rathkeale Community Arts Group. The group, she continued, had campaigned and worked for many years to achieve a dedicated arts space in the town.

She paid tribute to town manager Ned Gleeson, the area councillors and arts officer Joan MacKernan for making the dream a reality.

"Our hope is that this centre will achieve three things: encourage local people to participate in the arts and nurture local talent; bring the best of what is available in the arts to people in this community and in the wider community."

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Two school buses a day pass along the road, Mr Healy pointed out. The group is encouraging as



Sinéad FitzGibbon, Rathkeale, poses with some of the brightly coloured art work at the new Rathkeale Arts Centre.



Canon Joseph Dempsey and Dean Maurice McMahon at the arts centre

Askeaton out in force over plan for new quarry

Norma Prendiville

ALMOST 300 people attended a public meeting in Askeaton on Monday to protest against the development of a quarry at Ballyclogh, west of the town.

An application by a private land-owner to develop the quarry, located down a small road off the main N69, was turned down by Limerick County Council last year. But a new application, by Centex, to develop over 35 hectares as a limestone quarry, has now been lodged with the Council.

"As far as we are concerned, it's the same," said Tommy Kelly, spokesman for the West Askeaton Action Group who called the meeting. Pointing out that there are already three working quarries in the area and over 50 in the county, he said the feeling at the meeting was that Askeaton did not need another quarry which could mean up to 100 truck-journeys a day along a country road.

Two school buses a day pass along the road, Mr Healy pointed out. The group is encouraging as

many people as possible to lodge objections before Wednesday next, February 13, and is relying on the council's own reasons for turning down the development last year.

These included being located in the Shannon coastal strip, the inadequate road structure, potential pollution of a nearby river and the devaluation of adjacent homes.

Members of the group

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