
two parkmen

BRASS BAND

No one now knows how Johnny Shanny got his nomenclature but it was not earned by his musical prowess. Johnny was born into an inheritance of the family gardens and a right to membership of the ancient fraternity of Abbey fishermen. He was a gentle and remarkable man. Gaelic games were his first and last loves. Brass Band made a life-long study of hurling and football, attended as many matches as he possibly could and read all the available literature on past games. He was a unique hurler on the ditch and was an expert at gauging the games and players as they passed across the sporting stage. To his quest he brought an uncluttered mind, a flawless memory and a passionate energy. This combination made him a walking encyclopaedia. The Park 'memory man' was regarded as being absolutely infallible in his chosen subject and his judgement was accepted as final in all cases of disputation.

Like others of the Shanny clan, Brass Band often laboured in the gardens until after sundown and rose the following morning at 3 a.m. After calling the other members of his crew, he would walk up the bank to Phelps' house (later "Willow Bank"), where their brecauns were kept moored since the previous day. Fishing commenced before "first gloss" (the initial reflection of daylight on the river before dawn) and, depending on the conditions and the time of the year, frequently went on all day.

While most Abbey fishermen became distant cousins of all humanity when they were fishing, Brass Band proved there was at least one gregarious member of the fraternity, for he sought after prospective bank-rambling conversationalists and often engaged them in lively banter, much to the chagrin of his other impatient crew members. Father Noonan, for many years chaplain to the Little Company of Mary nuns at Millford House, was a close friend of Johnny and the rest of the crew had a trying time in their attempts to break up conversations between the two men. The priest was known to the anglers of Plassey as "Blueskull" and was a likeable and true "brother of the angle". When he wasn't engaged in studying form — he liked a little flutter — or attending hurling matches, he spent most of his spare time fishing, usually between the Falls and Plassey Bridge, on the Limerick side. He also enjoyed an occasional pint and, when his finances permitted, he often made a sally across the bridge to Shanny's Pub to quench his thirst.

It was the custom of the Abbey fishermen to cook their meals on the south shore when fishing Tannyvoor. However, Brass Band's crew always cooked on the north shore, thus avoiding the inevitable long delay when the two sporting enthusiasts met. It was with the encouragement of his clerical and Waltonian friend that Johnny first ventured to a race meeting. On that occasion he had the good fortune of backing an 8/1 winner, only to discover when going to collect his winnings that the bookie had welshed. The imperturbable Parkman treated the incident with his characteristic and ever philosophical good humour.

Brass Band was a sincere and religious man. He never missed the annual pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick, and never worked on Sundays. His application to labour in the fields and on the river was spontaneous. This work was only varied by the rising and setting of the sun and the changing of the seasons. To him hard work was not a necessary evil but a way of life.

Men such as Johnny Shanny are not often met nowadays. He walked quietly through the Biblical "three score and ten" with a conscience as clear as the water on which he laboured. He carried his sporting lore as lightly as he carried the navy blue suits he always wore. He was one of the most amiable men ever to come from Park.

by Kevin Hannan

MICK MOORE

Mick Moore was as much a part of the winding Groody river as the kingfishers that feasted on the succulent minnows that shoaled in their myriads at every gravelly bend. Even the most indifferent observer must have been convinced that the little river meant the whole world to Mick. It was once said by a local wit that "if he had gills he would never come out of the Groody".

On breezy October days intent Waltonians were sometimes made to feel much cooler at the sight of this strange river man standing naked in midwater and dousing himself with buckets of icy water.

The banks of the Groody were rarely traversed by any but anglers in the autumn and springtime and groups of small boys in the heat of the summer, who gathered for a dip in the sandy pool midway between the Dublin road and the Shannon. But Mick was a daily, all-year-round enthusiast. The rigours of winter days had fewer terrors for him than the disruption of the tranquility of his favourite refuse on warm summer days.

Aptly named "The Ghost of the Groody", Mick might have lived out his life unnoticed, like the quiet and retiring gentleman that he was, were it not for his strangely peculiar habits. He bathed in the familiar pool winter and summer. He never wore a bathing suit, and when the level of the water was reduced in the summertime he used his galvanised iron bucket as an improvised shower.

To him the bucket was a *sine qua non*. He never appeared without it, except on Sunday mornings, when he also wore his navy blue jacket. His striped working man's shirt was also fastened at the neck on this occasion. He never wore a hat or cap.

The more serious part of the regulation of his daily life was centred around an area of black earth from which he wrested an existence. He had served an apprenticeship with the best gardeners in the land and his spade was as much a part of him as the iron bucket of his idle hours.

His garden, a short distance above the Groody Pike, overlooked his favourite pleasure ground. This was a circumstance that must have softened the impact of his labours, for he always appeared relaxed and not bothered or overburdened with anything.

Though his remarkably long stride (no-one could keep up with him walking) was a talking point around the parish, it must not be confused with the bustling gait of one who must rush impatiently from place to place. Mick was never in a hurry, and never hustled. More likely, his unusual walking pace resulted from his daily trips downhill to the river he loved so faithfully and for so long.

He was his own man and did his own thing and was totally independent and oblivious of the cares that burdened those around him. He was simply taken away, and invigorated by the never failing waters of the Groody. There are still many old anglers amongst us who can testify to the relish with which he enjoyed his favourite element.

He passed quietly from the scene in the fifties, and, despite the connotations of his nickname, was never seen again in the old familiar pool.