

Written by Johnny Mee  
Tuesday, 18 May 2010 14:53

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I have always known they make folk tough in Burren, a very pretty village a few miles north of Castlebar. It was here the famous Morrison brothers were born, renowned turf cutters. Mike, Willie and Eddie Morrison could clean a turf bank with the best in the country. Their brother-in-law, Aneas McDonnell, who worked for many years with Tom Joyce, building contractor, was also a handy man with the sleán.

Back in 1949 this pretty village hit the headlines for another reason when a local man, Martin Murray, puzzled the leading medical specialists at the time.

A migratory labourer, Martin was working in haymaking operations in Chester, England, when he was involved in a serious accident. After examination in the Royal Hospital, Chester, Martin was found to have a fractured neck and all his limbs were paralysed. There was little hope for his survival.

Leading medical experts were rushed to the hospital from Glasgow; they worked feverishly on Martin for several hours and after 12 weeks he was released wearing a metal neck support. He returned home to Burren for Christmas and described his survival as an absolute miracle. It takes a lot to keep a Burren man down and Martin was living proof of that.

### **Michael Flannery: supreme athlete**



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Nowadays athletes have top-class facilities, are given the proper diet and have many incentives to reach the top rung of the ladder. Sixty years ago, when young Michael Flannery from Townaculawee, Castlebar, was making a name for himself in the world of athletes in the west of Ireland, there were very few facilities available.

Son of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Flannery, a very old and popular local family, Michael was a fine cut of a man who won several major trophies, in the process beating some of the leading athletes in the west of Ireland. Michael was also a prominent member of the NACA, Gaelic League, Young Farmers' Club and the Thomasíne School of Dancing.

His death at an early age cut short a very promising athletics career. He often competed at the same sports as another great Castlebar athlete, Eugene Giblin, Chapel Street, brother of Maureen Giblin, Auray Place, Castlebar. It is fitting that Michael Flannery, athlete supreme, be remembered in his native Castlebar because he was an outstanding athlete.

### **Strange object in Derrywash bog**

In the early 1900s rumours abounded in many parts of Ireland about unusual objects being spotted by local people. Once a rumour started it spread like wildfire, and as with all rumours they were wildly exaggerated.

One rumour focused on the sighting of a strange object in a small lake close to Derrywash, Castlebar. It was, in some ways, the Loch Ness Monster back in 1915. Large crowds from the surrounding countryside flocked to the lake and one local resident maintained it was a crocodile. A crocodile in Derrywash? I doubt it somehow.

The lake was dragged but the creature proved very elusive and was never brought ashore. However, the controversy raged for a few days before dying down. I know the lake in question and will make a close examination of it the next time I visit the area.

Like the Loch Ness Monster, I doubt if the creature will ever again surface. But we live in hope, and hope springs eternal in the human breast. I must ask my old friend, Seán Rabbette, who lives in Derrywash, if he ever heard any talk about the strange happening in a local lake.

### **Castlebar man's Good Service Medal**

Many of my readers will remember Charlie Hanley, Station Road, Castlebar, when he served as postmaster in Castlebar. A renowned angler, he was a close friend of Tommie Gillespie, editor of The Connaught Telegraph, P.T. Moran, Station Road, Eddie Burns, Chapel Street, and Tom Coucill, Main Street, all keen fishermen.

The Hanley family's association with the postal service in Castlebar goes back close on 100 years. Charlie Hanley was father of John Hanley, retired businessman and a fine athlete in his younger days.

John Hanley's grandfather, another Charlie Hanley, was a respected local gentleman in the early 1900s and after his retirement from the postal service he was presented with the King's Good Service Medal after working for 39 years in Castlebar Post Office. He was praised by Herbert Samuel, Postmaster General, for the faithful service he had rendered to the State. John Hanley's father Charlie, a fine all-round sportsman, was a founder member of Castlebar Celtic in 1924.

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### **Parish priest in Turlough**

Turlough, Castlebar, had its own parish priest just over 100 years ago. In July 1909 Fr. Michael Bourke was appointed to the pastoral charge of Turlough, having served as curate in the area for some time. Turlough was a place of some ecclesiastical importance in the early 1900s as a Church of Ireland clergyman was also based in the area at the time. I think he was a man named Pasley.

The population of Turlough and surrounding areas has grown considerably over the years. Regrettably, the local school was closed some years ago and now acts as a community centre, a splendid amenity for the area.

The late Paddy Quinn, Newantrim Street, Castlebar, taught in the school for many years. A member of the Mayo team which won the All-Ireland senior title for the first time in 1936, he was father of Monsignor Joseph Quinn, Knock.

### **Castlebar cyclist in Paris**

Tom Reilly, a native of Balloor, Castlebar, was one of the country's leading track cyclists in the 1940s and represented Ireland in the world championships in Parc du Prince, Paris, in 1947.

The Reilly family lived in Balloor in a house now occupied by Jimmy Nally and family.

Another great cyclist in the 1940s and 1950s was Tom McHale, Rocklands. The Reilly family later moved to Dublin where they were in the garage business.

Tom Reilly's family originally came from Glenisland and were related to John Reilly (later spelt Riley), who emigrated to Australia and became known as the Man from Snowy River. Banjo Patterson, the famous Australian songwriter, penned a tune about the life of John Riley whose achievements were also the subject of a major film, starring Robert Mitchum.

### **Heifer with a wooden leg**

It happened over 100 years ago, but when it did it caused consternation among the people of Castlebar and was the object of much curiosity. Believe it or believe it not, a cow was offered for sale in Castlebar with a wooden leg. It is thought the animal lost its limb through a shooting accident.

Nowadays an animal with a handicap like this would be sent for killing. But the owner of the cow, a fine beast by all accounts, had the animal fitted with a wooden leg and it made its way to the fair of Castlebar.

The stump of the cow's artificial leg was fitted with padding and when the animal was at ease no defect could be seen. After being sold for a profit of £2 10 shillings, it was walked to Westport Quay for shipment to Glasgow. The day before the fair the animal had been walked by its owner from Crossmolina to Castlebar.

Even with modern technology it is doubtful if a cow could be fitted with an artificial leg. I must ask George O'Malley, a popular local veterinary surgeon, if he ever heard of a case like this. Over to you, George.