



The Phoenix of the Glen

Gone is the beautiful old thatched home that embodied for generations both the character and psyche of the village of Glencorrib. Local history that had etched itself onto the landscape and infused itself into the memories and perceptions of the local folk was housed within its confines and the confines of that ageless two-storey outbuilding adjacent to the old homestead. This imposing rectangular stone building, which housed among other things farm produce from grains and vegetables to bales of wool as well as farm tools and occasionally some farm animals, has many tales to tell if only its wide stone walls could speak.

To the villagers back then, it was endearingly the Store; to those further afield, it was Murphy's Store. Long before community centres came on the scene, the Store had become the focal point for dances and the occasional wedding. As a child not yet at school, I had my first and very memorable encounter with the Store back in 1942 when I attended the wedding of Bridie Biggins and James Brown. Bridie had grown up with my Grandparents, Michael and Bridget Murphy, who had organised the reception on the first floor of their old Store which my mother called the Loft.

The wedding, as I recall, was a spectacular affair with the customary large celebratory bonfires and burning sheaves along the side of the

road as well as large straw ropes across the road at the top of the hill between the church and the Store. There were guests everywhere at the rear of the building as they gathered to mount the external stone steps to the loft to the accompaniment of the liveliest collection of jigs and reels enthusiastically played out on melodeons, accordions, fiddles and flutes. The celebrations continued throughout the afternoon and night into the early hours of next day as fiddlers and players were replaced by others only too eager to maintain the pace. When not dancing themselves, the guests sat on makeshift wooden stools and bags of grain placed strategically along the walls of this large imposing loft as inhibition after inhibition gave way to generous servings of locally brewed poteen.

Indeed, the old Store walls and the Glen itself were already accustomed to the beat of the bodhrán, the shuffle of feet and the strains of the fiddler's bow. The only entertainment available was locally generated and dancing came to the fore providing an opportunity for the local lads and colleens to meet, socialise and enjoy themselves. For years, my uncle, Sonny Murphy, and his cousin, Tommy Biggins, organised and conducted dances in the Store on a regular basis. Admission cost the young men sixpence a head but the young girls were allowed in free. While there was no scarcity of musical talent, music initially was provided by Paddy Moran and the Goggin brothers, Tony and Joe. In later years, Martin Noone and others filled the void. The main dance types popular at the time were Old Time Waltzes, Half Sets, The Siege of Ennis, The Stack of Barley, Shoe the Donkey, The Verse of Vienna and Ladies' Choice. When it came to lighting, particularly during the long winter nights, improvisation was the order of the day. With no form of electricity available back then, lighting was provided by paraffin lamps and lanterns. Occasionally, the local priest, Fr O'Farrell, would arrive on the scene with his newly acquired motor vehicle and by positioning his car in the gateway would train the headlights on the double door

to the Store thereby providing more lighting than otherwise available. Many lasting relationships had their beginnings here.

There was a time when the welcome sight of the old thatched home meant one had arrived in Glencorrib. In more recent times, it is the sight of this grand old Store that has dispensed that salutation. For long, it has stood proud of its service to past generations; to-day, it stands equally proud of what it has to offer future generations.

Though still presenting as a simple but sturdy stone structure, it has undergone a very significant and enriching transformation, bringing it into the world of fine living. The new in-style stone structure added to the rear of the Store is so unobtrusive that to the passer-by, it is still that grand rectangular stone building where the loving attention it has received has added beautifully and aesthetically to its enchanting and quondam self. To walk through its door is to enter an amazingly evocative modern dwelling displaying the best in architecture, technology, style, art and comfort. There is a great sense of satisfaction and affirmation in the realisation that all this transformation is so fitting and becoming to such a grand old building, and stands as a reminder of man's ingenuity and inventive talent.



Throughout the modern world, historically significant buildings continue to be heritage listed in order to protect and save them for posterity. Gerard Murphy and Claire Walsh, as well as Gerard's parents, Teresa and Gerard, are most deserving of all our congratulations and commendations for their sense of family and history and indeed for their insight and talent which have ensured the preservation of this grand old building for the use and enjoyment of future generations.

Martin Coleman.

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