

THE CROSS ON KNOCKFIERNA

By Jim Houlihan



**The cross at the summit of Knockfierna
was constructed to commemorate The Holy Year, 1950.**

All people mentioned have passed to their eternal reward.

May they rest in peace.

**The following is an account from memory of a number of people
who were there at the time.**

The late D J Madden Auctioneer and Dail Deputy for West Limerick first mooted the idea during a visit to Granagh in the Autumn of 1950.

A deeply religious man, he told of how the many times when on the road from Rathkeale to Ballingarry, he wished he could build a Holy Year Cross on the highest point of the hill. His audience were impressed by the idea and they immediately decided to set wheels in motion towards realising it.

Paddy Power, The Glen, was nominated to talk to friends in Ballingarry. His first call was to Thomas-Stuart Trainor.

Tom's enthusiasm was instantaneous and for a man who relished a challenge it was a must. Both men were aware that to complete such a project the full commitment from both parts of the parish was needed.

Word was passed round and a meeting was held at Trainor's Hotel, Ballingarry. An estimate of materials required was made and the mode of conveying them to the hill top was discussed. At the conclusion of the meeting a committee was formed to progress the project.

The committee met on a Sunday at where the road from Ballyelan intersects with the road from Chawke's Cross towards the Tinkers Cross. It's purpose was to select the best possible route for transporting materials to the hill top.

Among those present were Tom S. Trainor, Paddy Power, Ml. O'Grady, Gurteen, Jack Fitzgibbon, The Glen, Jack Curtin and Dan Sheahan. Ballyvologue.

Meanwhile, Der. Liston, Ballyneale had made a sleigh. It was semi- circular, made of steel with attachments for a set of quins. A wheel barrow, minus the wheel, was laid into it. Dee Fitzgerald, Kilmacow, whose horses were familiar

with the hill would have transported sand, gravel cement steel for reinforcing, timber and scaffolding on Der. Liston's sleigh. His principal assistants were Jim Houlihan and Pat Joe Clifford, also of Kilmacow.

Two cwt could be carried each round. Ned Sheehy Ballinleena and Peter Stapleton, Knockfierna drove tractors and trailers up the slopes as far as it was safe to do in slippery winter conditions. Of course tractors were not available every day nor, were they required. Paddy Power carried water for mixing the cement on a pony and cart to the Black Hill. From there it was taken on a sleigh by Michael (Ogie) Cronin, using his own white pony which he called "larry".

Much preparatory work had to be done before construction got underway. Scrub had to be cleared allowing a passage for the horses and their cargo. Local man, Jack Lynch, was given the task of preparing a place for the foundation. Jack was used to sinking and lining wells so, he was the ideal man to sink down the required eight feet.

In order to ensure the cross was at the highest possible point, the site chosen was on the Cairn. The Cairn had been the subject of much speculation over many years. How did it get there and what was underneath? Some people did not rule out the possibility of finding gold. One individual from Ballingarry believing in the prospect, kept almost constant watch for sight of the precious metal while the foundation was being prepared.

Being the period after Halloween, there was no scarcity of rings from Barm Bracks. A joker dropped one in the path of our treasure seeker. At first he was ecstatic at his "valuable" find. His joy was short lived.

Jack Curtin was appointed honorary foreman on site. He supervised the mixing of the concrete, by shovels. Jack ensured that the shovels in use were of equal size and the amounts thereon did not vary. He counted every shovel full and then added in the correct admixture of cement and water.

Danny O'Grady, Jack Daffy, Tom Trainor and Jerh. Morrissey combined to make the timber casing for the mass concrete. One side was left open to facilitate filling. Pre-made panels were slotted in as filling moved up. It would be impossible to count the number of man hours that went into it. Most of the work was done during November 1950. Every house was asked to give some help and almost every house did.

In addition to names already mentioned regulars on site were the Ahern's, Chawkes, Treacy's, O'Donovan's, Walsh's, Noonan's, Joe Bridgeman Jim Cussen, Kilmacow, Ned McGrath, Ballycahane, Croom, John Reidy, Tom O'Gorman, the Fennel's Ballingarry and others helped out.

Local ladies played their part in bringing hot tea to the hungry workforce. We well remember Chriss Chawke, Jo. Curtin and Nan Power, (Nan O'Keeffe, Clonregan, Ballingarry.)

The cross is sited on Fitzgerald's land. Much of the materials were purchased from local contributions and some were donated.

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8th, 1950 was the day for the Blessing by Canon Wall P. P. . Also present were, Fr. Dan O'Keeffe, C. C., Fr. Michael Connolly C. C., and Fr. Gerard Wall. In his address to the large crowd Canon Wall called on visitors to the cross to pray that the evil spirits which had long been part of the folklore of the hill would be banished for all time.

The Lighting of the Cross.

Tom Trainor fixed some lights on the cross and with the help of a petrol driven generator had it lighting for most of the night. It could be seen for many miles , well into counties, Clare and Tipperary.

With the coming of rural electrification the committee applied to the ESB to have power taken up the hill. The Board agreed on condition that there would be voluntary labour to take up the polls and make openings in the ground where there was unavoidable difficulty with rock. Dan and John Sheahan with Jack Curtin carried up the poles attached to horses.

On August 15th, 1952, Fr. O'Keeffe officially switched on the lights from the house of Jack, and Bridie Lyons who had purchased the former homestead of Michael White.

