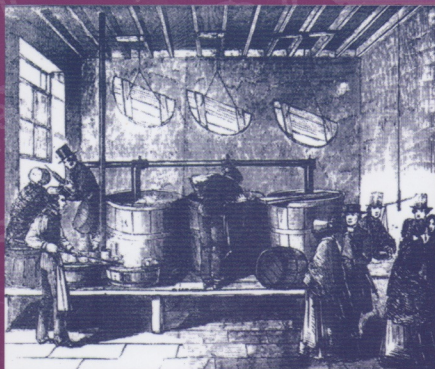


THE HISTORY OF **CAHERAGH** PARISH



Donal J. O'Sullivan

He was a highly intelligent and learned man and a good salesman as well. His proper name was Tim O'Driscoll.

In the days when home births were the norm there were always experienced women [otherwise known as 'handywomen'] available in every townland to assist the maternity nurse with the births and in many cases they carried out the duty on their own when nurses were not available. Nurse Nora Connolly of Drimoleague [nee Hayes of Caheragh] and Nurse Mattie Kingston of Gortdromagh attended at most home births in the parish during the first half of the 20th century. She was aunt of John Kingston Gortromagh.

There were always men in the parish available to attend to the castration of calves, bonhams or foals for farmers in their locality and vets. were never called on to perform this service.

Considering the fact that it is very much a rural parish, it is extraordinary how self-sufficient it was in so far as tradesmen and craftspeople were concerned.

TRANSPORT

The Railways

Very few parishes in Ireland had a train service which could match that which Caheragh enjoyed while the railways were operational for business. Two separate railways traversed the parish – from Drimoleague to Bantry and Drimoleague to Skibbereen. Furthermore, the Skibbereen – Schull tramway was located just outside the south – western corner of the parish. The history of the railway development is a most interesting one.

The Railway from Albert Quay in Cork city to Bandon town was completed in 1851 and the first train ran on the line on December 8th 1851. Nine years later in 1860 a group of prominent business people from West Cork got together and formed the 'West Cork Railway Company' with a view to extending the railway to West Cork from Bandon. The first sod for the project was turned by Lord Carbery on the 16th June 1863. The

project engineer was Henry Connebeare. The first stage embarked on was from Bandon to Dunmanway with railway stations at Enniskeane and Ballineen. Smaller stations were built at Castlebernard, Gaggin, Desert and Manch. The first train ran on the Bandon/Dunmanway line on May 1st 1866.

Due to lack of finance by the West Cork Railway Company it was unable to extend the railway line westwards from Dunmanway and a new company named the 'Dunmanway and Skibbereen Railway Company' was formed in 1870 and to get the work underway the company changed its name in 1874 to 'The Ilen Valley Railway Company'. Fr. Davis of Skibbereen put a lot of effort into the venture and was instrumental in



AN OLD STEAM TRAIN AT DRIMOLEAGUE
RAILWAY STATION CIRCA 1950



MADORE RAILWAY STATION WITH OLD
STEAM TRAIN IN THE 1950S

raising some of the necessary capital. A London based Engineer, Mr George Crowley was in charge of the project. The first train ran on the new Dunmanway to Skibbereen line on July 21st 1877. A railway station was erected en route at Drimoleague. Two small railway stations were constructed shortly afterwards at Knockbue between Dunmanway and Drimoleague and at Madore to serve the southern half of Caheragh parish. The railway from Dunmanway to Skibbereen was serviced initially by 'The West Cork Railway Company' and in 1880 'The Cork and Bandon Railway' Company took over control of the entire railway system from Cork to Skibbereen.

On completion of the railway line to Skibbereen, efforts were immediately initiated to have the railway extended from Drimoleague to Bantry. The prime mover behind the project was Warner Payne and the cost was estimated to be in the region of just over one hundred thousand pounds. Thomas Dowling, a contractor from England took on the construction which commenced in November 1879. The line was officially opened on

July 4th 1881. Two stations were built along the route at Aughville and Durrus Road. The original station in Bantry was in an elevated position over the town and some distance from the centre. A decision was taken to later extend the line over a distance of about a mile from that station down to the pier and this work was carried out in 1892. The contractor for the latter extension was William Martin Murphy who later went on to found the *Irish Independent* newspaper and who was a native of Castletownbere. The extension to the pier facilitated the transport of the large fish catches then being landed at Bantry and of course the transport of goods, fertilisers, and hardware supplies to the major business premises in Bantry and the Beara Peninsula. A very tragic accident occurred on the Drimoleague/Bantry line in the 1920s when a Sunday excursion train from Bantry - taking passengers to see the new Electric Power Station at Ardnacrusha - crashed through the level-crossing gates at Aughville which were in the process of being opened and fatally injured the lady gate-keeper, Mrs McCarthy, who was opening them at the time. The Horgan family then took over as gatekeepers at Aughville.

In June 1881, a serious incident or possible disaster was narrowly avoided on the Drimoleague/Skibbereen railway line. The Land League War was at its height at the time and Fr. Murphy, Parish Priest of Schull and Ballydehob was very active in fighting for the rights of the small farmers in his parishes. Wild rumours spread all over West Cork that Fr. Murphy had been arrested and was being conveyed in custody to Cork. A number of men from Drimoleague and Caheragh who were active in the Land League decided that Fr. Murphy should be rescued from the train in which he was being conveyed to Cork. At Ballaghadowan between Mutton Bridge and Madore Station, they removed a section of the railway line on both sides of the track and put up red flags along the line from the Madore side to warn the train driver. The plan was that when the train was compelled to come to a halt, the constabulary and military expected to be on the train were to be attacked by a large group of men carrying an assortment of firearms and weapons. When the rails had been removed and all the arrangements finalised for the ambush, word came through that Fr. Murphy had not in fact been arrested and this resulted in the ambush being abandoned. A railway linesman discovered the damage caused to the line and raised the alarm. The weather was exceptionally warm at the time resulting in the rails which had been removed expanding with the heat. Repair of the line could only be carried out when the rails had cooled

down and contracted. It was most fortuitous that no train came on the scene from either direction before the damage was discovered, otherwise the results might have been disastrous. This was one of the notable incidents carried out by Land League activists during the Land League War.

In May 1891, an extension of the railway line commenced from Skibbereen to Baltimore. It cost sixty-two thousand pounds and the contractor was again William Martin Murphy. The work included the construction of the fine steel bridge over the River Illen which still stands at the rear of the West Cork hotel as a monument to those engineers who constructed it. The first train on this extension ran on May 2nd 1893. Business on the line was slack in the early years but improved considerably when the new pier was constructed at Baltimore and facilitated the landing of fish and goods. It became very popular for 'Excursions to Baltimore' from railway stations all over the county and particularly for the annual Baltimore regatta which was one of the big social events in West Cork. Over a number of years the construction of the railway lines had given much valuable employment to men in the area and many farmers were employed with horses and carts drawing stones and gravel for the construction.

The official Opening Dates for the West Cork Railways are as follows:

Ballinhassig to Bandon	-	July 30th 1849.
Cork to Ballinhassig	-	December 12th 1851.
Bandon to Dunmanway	-	June 12th 1866.
Dunmanway to Skibbereen	-	July 21st 1877.
Drimoleague to Bantry	-	July 3rd 1881.
Bantry Extension to Pier	-	October 22nd 1892.
Skibbereen to Baltimore	-	May 2nd 1893.
Skibbereen to Schull	-	September 9th 1886.

In 1885 the construction of a narrow gauge tram line was commenced between Skibbereen and Schull and it was completed by September 1886, when it was officially opened. There were stops en route at Newcourt, the Woodlands, Kilcoe, Church Cross, Hollyhill and Ballydehob. The erection of the long spectacular viaduct at the eastern side of Ballydehob proved to be the biggest engineering task of the project. The tram consisted of a small scale steam-driven railway engine drawing passenger carriages and goods wagons. While the tram was the butt of many jokes about its performance it nevertheless provided a transport service for people and goods during its existence and the stations at Church Cross

and Hollyhill provided access for the residents at that end of Caheragh parish. The tram had problems negotiating inclines due to lack of power and poor quality turf being used for the engine boilers, resulting in the common joke about the service being that, First Class passengers were ordered to 'remain in their seats'; that Second Class passengers were asked to 'get out and walk' and that Third Class passengers were directed to 'get out and shove'. One of the extraordinary aspects of the tram-line was that at least some – if not all – of the passenger carriages were built by Michael Cottom of Skibbereen and they were reputed to be works of art. The tram-line is famous amongst 'railway enthusiasts' and at least four books have been published about it. It has also gone down in railway history as 'being the most un-remunerative railway ever built in Ireland'. Following the end of World War 2 it could no longer compete with the motorised transport of people and goods and the Skibbereen to Schull tramway finally closed down in January 1947. What a tourist attraction it would now prove to be had it been retained?

The railway lines from Bantry to Drimoleague and from Skibbereen to Drimoleague as well as the tram-line to the west provided a first class transport service to the people of the parish. They maintained a lifeline between the parish and the rest of the world. They provided a service during two World Wars and the War of Independence.

Emigrants left the local railway stations at Durrus Road, Madore, Aughville and Church Cross and made their way to the four corners of the world and regrettably many never returned. Likewise they facilitated the return of emigrants who did return on holidays, through the railway links with all the major ports in Ireland. Very few people left Caheragh parish to emigrate or work elsewhere over an eighty year period prior to 1960, who did not leave from one or other of the railways stations mentioned. From the point of view of commerce, all goods and necessities of life coming into the parish prior to the 1950s came via the railway system. All animals reared on the farms and sold were transported by rail from the fairs at Bantry, Drimoleague and Skibbereen. For young lads helping their fathers or neighbours to drive cattle to the fairs at Drimoleague or Skibbereen, it was always totally fascinating to watch the 'drovers' employed by the cattle dealers. Having got the 'ticket' from the cattle-dealers and being paid for the animals one invariably headed for the railway station with the animals to be met at the entrance by several tough-looking individuals weaving big sticks and shouting at the top of their voices in their strange Cork city

accents: 'Horgan's cattle in here'; 'Driscoll's cattle in here' or 'Hurley's cattle in here' while each group of drovers directed animals bought by their respective employers to the proper wagon reserved for that dealer. These drovers travelled around by train from fair to fair for their employers and their shouting and gesticulations with the stick was like a free circus – particularly when the odd dispute broke out.

With the development of sugar-beet growing in the area, the railway stations were busy places as the beet was loaded into wagons en route for Mallow Sugar factory. During the 1930s and 40s the stations were also busy places with horses and carts coming and going and drawing away sand from the railway sea-sand wagons. The Government paid a subsidy of thirty shillings to the farmer for every wagon of sand purchased by him. The sea-sand supply which came to Madore mostly came from O'Donovan's of Courtmacsherry while at Durrus Road and Aughaville it came from Bantry. [The sand from Bantry had a lot of sea shells and high lime content and was regarded as being superior to that from Courtmacsherry.] Arising from the non-availability of fertilisers during the 1939/45 War there was a very brisk business in sea-sand.

With the increase in passenger motor transport and lorries for carrying goods, business declined on all the West Cork railway lines in the late 1950s. The Skibbereen/Schull tramway had closed down in 1947. In 1960, a decision was taken to close the main West Cork railway lines including those to Bantry and Skibbereen. It was only a few years prior to that, that diesel electric engines had come into operation on the lines, putting an end to the huge, black-coloured, old steam engines which had pulled the trains prior to that. For more than two generations, people living within sight of the railway lines had become accustomed to long trails of steam left behind by the old steam engines and they had always synchronised and adjusted their clocks with the passing of the trains which always kept their time schedules.

There was a lot of agitation and representation by groups to keep the lines open but to no avail. Legal history was made in March 1961 – just one month prior to the closure – when a Writ was sought in the High Court by Mr J.P. O'Regan, egg and poultry merchant of Casement Street, Clonakilty, and who at the time was Chairman of 'The West Cork Save The Railways Association'. The Counsel acting on behalf of Mr O'Regan were, Mr John A., Costello S.C. [former Taoiseach], Mr John Gleeson S.C. and Mr Sean Collins B.L. [former T.D. for West Cork]. The legal

action was taken to prevent the closure of the West Cork railways and was based on a declaration that the closure of the railways was 'ultra vires' to the provision of the Transport Act, 1958. An injunction was also sought to prevent Coras Iompair Eireann closing down the lines. The action was successful in that the fiat of the then Attorney General was obtained and a writ was served on Coras Iompair Eireann, but in the subsequent hearing of the claim it was found by the High Court that the closure of the lines was not in conflict with the provisions of the Transport Act, 1958.

In the December 1960 issue of the journal of the 'Stephenson Locomotive Society of Great Britain' the closure of the West Cork Railways was deplored. It stated–

Quite naturally there has been very considerable opposition to the proposed closures and this has been particularly strongly voiced in West Cork. Here an area of over 1,250 square miles will be left without any rail facilities whatever and a population of over 100,000 will have to rely on road transport.

Many communities, ranging in size from the big market towns of Bandon and Skibbereen to the small seaside resorts of Courtmacsherry and Baltimore have held their protest meetings and formed their railway defence committees but these are receiving no encouragement in high places.

This is particularly regrettable in the case of West Cork, where the train service has been transformed during the past seven years by a service of two diesel trains each day with much accelerated timings.

Local politicians were blamed [rather unfairly]. The Government of the day was blamed and more especially Mr Toddy Andrews who was Chief Executive of Coras Iompair Eireann at the time was blamed for the closure. The fate of the railway had been sealed and there was no reprieve for it. The last trains left Bantry, Skibbereen and Drimoleague stations on Good Friday 1961. Following the official closure of the lines there was no delay on the part of Coras Iompair Eireann in tearing up the railway tracks, demolishing bridges and selling off the railway stations. This was carried out expeditiously to prevent any further agitation to re-open the lines. So ended the railway services which for so long had provided an excellent service to the people of the parish and on which they had become so dependent for their travel needs for almost a century. With the benefit of hindsight, it is now easy to visualise what a tourist attraction

many sections of the West Cork railway lines could have been – particularly the Skibbereen to Schull tramway.

The Road Network

The early roads in the parish would have been very narrow – wide enough to facilitate the passage of pedestrians and animals. The first animal-drawn conveyances were in the form of drays – a flat wooden platform structure mounted on two runners. With the invention of wheel – mounted carts, roads needed to be of wider construction and were gradually widened from then onwards.

Most of the present-day network of roads through the parish are relatively new roads built in the last two or three centuries. In early times there were two main roads stretching through the length of the parish connecting Skibbereen with Bantry. One of those roads passed through Cloghane, Lissangle, Droumcoora, Corliss [where the Glanaphouca River was forded], Killeenleigh, Derreenaverrihy, Aughaville, Gortnascreena, Maonvagh – through ‘Murderin Glen’ – and on to Bantry. The latter section of roadway gained its infamous reputation from a highway robber named Kelly who lived there in the 15th or 16th centuries A.D. He reputedly robbed travellers passing through the narrow gorge which forms the glen. Folklore has it that Kelly killed some of his victims and disposed of their bodies in a local hole, known locally as ‘Poll na Buistera’. Kelly lived with his mother in a nearby cave and she was known as ‘Mathair Ui Cheallaigh’ [Kelly’s mother]. There are several accounts as to what eventually happened to Kelly. One account is that he was caught and hanged by Donal Caum O’Sullivan and another is that he was arrested and tried for his crimes for which he was convicted and hanged in Cork Gaol in 1805. Before he died, he allegedly boasted that that there was enough gold buried in Dromore Hill between two hazel bushes to sustain two generations. Another version given is that he said it was hidden ‘where no horse or man shall ever plough, or sun shall ever shine’. The name of ‘Murderin Glen’ has survived for generations and like many stories in folklore and legend, there has never been a shortage of stories as to how it got its name but the legend about Kelly and his mother have been the most consistent.

The second road from Skibbereen came through Lissanaroe, Coolbawn, Coolboy, Ballyourane, Barna, Gortdromagh, Dromourneen, Colomane, Baurgorm northwards to Ardnageehy and Bantry. Both of

these roads were troublesome routes with many hills to be negotiated and were difficult even for horsedrawn transport. Like all pre-historic roads they had originated as tracks for cattle and horses and were very narrow. With the development of the wheel they were developed and widened just sufficiently to take horse-drawn vehicles.

A short road – possibly from Dreeney or Madore – passed through Bishopsland where the River Ilen was forded and up the high road over Caheragh, through the cross-roads known as ‘Crois na Marbh’ and joined up with the old Skibbereen/Bantry road at Mooreville. This road is shown on Sir William Petty’s map of the Parish [1695]. The cross-roads known as Crois na Marbh reputedly got its name as a result of unbaptised children being buried there and funerals en route to the old cemetery at Caheragh stopped there for a rest and prayed there for the repose of the deceased’s soul. It was most likely used as a halting place for funerals during the Penal Laws when no church was available so that prayers could be said at the point nearest the old chapel ruin of Killeenleigh. The Bridge over the River Ilen at Bishopsland [adjacent to the Old Cemetery] was erected in 1907. An early road also joined up with this road at Bishopsland which facilitated travelling to Drimoleague via Ballaghdown.

A road was built at the instigation of a landlord in the area, named Vickery, from Gortnascreena down to Aughaville to join up with the old ‘Butter Road’ to Cork with the better road used by the stage-coach to Drimoleague and Cork. ‘The Butter Road’ was so called, because it was along this route that some of the butter from the Bantry area was taken by horse and cart to the Cork Butter Market. It is believed that the road was built specially for this purpose. The present road through Knockgorm and Inchingerig including both bridges at Inchingerig is of much more recent origin. An old road stretched westwards from Killeenleigh to the Barna cross-roads in Clouncugger and connected with an old road to Ballyourane.

The present main road through the parish from Dreeney Bridge to Aughaville and Colomane is of fairly recent origin – probably constructed in the 1820s when a lot of road development took place – and up to recent times it was commonly referred to as ‘the new line’. The bridge over the River Ilen at Madore is reputed to be the oldest bridge in the parish and it was constructed in 1824. The stretch of road from Dreeney to Aughaville had a rough surface until it got a tarred surface in different stages during the early 1940s. The tar surfacing of the road was a major