Front cover:
Bertie Harte under the 'sign of the cow' at the Cork Butter Market after completing his run of the Butter Road on 14th October 2012

Back cover:
Early morning photo from Tullig looking down on Aubane taken by Bertie on his run.

A MILLSTREET MISCELLANY (8)

edited by

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Millstreet childhood memories

I was born in Claraghatlea, Millstreet, and County Cork, Ireland on June 28, 1927. One of seventeen children born to Cornelius and Mary O'Sullivan (nee Meaney). I was number eight and learned early in life to fight for survival, both emotionally and physically. My father was the son of a school teacher who was called, "Con (Cornelius) the Schoolmaster". This title carried on to him, but in reality he was a farmer and never taught a day in his life. He was a tall good-looking man. Regarding my mother, for many years I thought she was an only child, but only recently learned that she had a half brother whom I know nothing about to this day. Growing up in a small thatched roofed house, without toilet facilities, in the countryside of Ireland had its advantages and disadvantages.

I will dismiss for now any discussion of the disadvantages, some of which must be obvious. On the plus side I had the ability to choose favourite sisters and brothers; to have the freedom to climb Mount Clara, and walk our 70 acres of land and beyond. My dad and uncle Patrick who lived with us were responsible for the care and feeding of the animals. Father was responsible for buying and selling animals, which included cows, horses, pigs, donkeys, and various fowl. The fowl consisted of chickens, geese, and turkeys. Calves were taken to a special area in the farm where none of the other farm animals could harm them. These calves were fed twice daily, and of course had the run of many acres of land. All animals on the farm were medically taken care of by our town veterinary. Then when the calves matured a decision was made to either sell them or keep them on the farm.

This happened about four times a year when a fair was organized in the town of Millstreet a short distance from our home. That is when my dad would take his animals to the fair to be sold. When my dad did not return home with the animals he took, then it was taken for granted that he had good luck with the sale of his animals.

Our house was located in a lovely, picturesque area amid lots of trees, with the gorgeous Clara Mountain in the background. All of us had to work very hard, and many times my back ached from weeding vegetables, turning turf, which was used in place of coal for heat in the winter, and cooking our meals on a wide open fire all year. Needless to say we never went hungry, as there was plenty of produce and livestock. Our meals were filling but uneventful except for certain holidays during the year and on Sundays. Concerning Sundays, they were the only days we had for play, and I took full advantage of them by always playing outdoors and taking long walks. This was also my escape mechanism.

I still remember my mother singing constantly as she had a baby in her lap or arms. Her songs were sad and quite often in Gaelic reflecting or referencing to the brutal English invasion and the subsequent oppressive rules the Irish endured for many years. As mentioned she was an only daughter, with one stepbrother whom l never met, nor did she ever mention his name. She was a tall slender lady who worked very hard, and was pregnant 22 times.

I often recall how much her life changed when she married my dad, as she lived in a house in the town. In a house with all the modern day conveniences and, by that l mean indoor toilets, electric lights, decent beds, etc. My mother gave up all these conveniences when she married my dad. I am sure way back then even if she was unhappy she was not allowed to express her feelings. She had to follow the teachings of the Catholic Church, which taught one to endure and persevere. Although l had 16 brothers and 5 sisters, l never met the other 5 as they died either in infancy or before the age of two.

My mom endured a great number of hardships, working from early morning until late at night. Her dress attire was dismal. She wore an apron made of material that the oats would come in and this was like burlap (hessian) or some very course cotton. She did all her own sewing.

I will always remember l gave my home address to a colleague of mine, when I was a student nurse in England. She lived about 15 miles from my home. She did go and visit my parents. However when she returned to England she informed all my colleagues that my mom had two different shoes on. That really hurt my feelings, as l was ashamed that the other students would find out

about this. My mom wore different shoes because she did not own a pair without holes. However she did own a long black coat, which was given to her when she was about 55 years old. A doctor's wife in the town where we lived gave this to her. Mom also wore a hat with this coat, given to her by a friend. She looked elegant in this coat and hat. Looking back, I realize she had so few pleasures in life.

OPEN SPACES

I recall with joy the Sundays l would go up the mountains with my brothers and sisters and take a bucket, or some kind of a container, where we would spend hours picking gooseberries, blackcurrants, or any wild fruits. Also on the way home, we would pick apples from someone's orchard, bringing our pickings to mom who would make the most delicious pies and apple cakes.
This was usually done on Sunday afternoon, as that was the only time we were free from work on the farm. The weather was usually nice then, and l was able to enjoy those few hours away from slavery, by having fun with my brothers and sisters. We took the dogs with us on our berry picking adventures. They sensed when we were getting ready to go out into the fields and became as excited as us. Of course they spent their time running around the fields.

At the base of Clara Mountain ran a stream along a ditch and here we spent a great deal of time watching all kinds of nature in action. There were bugs, insects and tiny animals, sheltered in overgrown grass and ferns. Here too, earlier in the year, we found frogs croaking, surrounded by a jelly like substance encasing an abundance of tiny black dots, trailing little floating legs, which were the baby tadpoles. Those tiny tadpoles would grow into frogs of all shapes and colours. They were yellow, green and sometimes black, and jumping along the sagging ditches of the meadows.

Families of rabbits lived on the drier side of the meadows. My father would frequently set traps to catch rabbits, and with great delight would bring them home, remove their skin and inside organs and prepare them so my mother could cook rabbit stew. Believe it or not, my mom made the best rabbit soup that I have ever tasted and believe it or not I have never been able to find rabbit soup since. She would make it thick, as it was always filled with all kinds of vegetables from the farm, especially potatoes as she made so many meals with potatoes. Boiling them was the most popular way of cooking them with rabbits. We certainly had plenty of vegetables to eat growing up. But oh my, if l did not finish what was on my plate, then my dad would start yelling. Only on Sunday did we have a change from an everyday diet of boiled vegetables. Then we might have boiled sausages or a big treat would be chicken, as my mom would save these chickens so she could sell their eggs and buy tea and other food items. We never went hungry, but food never changed, Breakfast everyday consisted of oatmeal. For lunch we took bread and butter, and occasionally we put jam on our sandwiches. Then we would have dinner at around 6 pm., which we called supper. During the school year we did eat dinner earlier and had a light meal in the evening.

FUN WITH THE ANIMALS

The farm animals were the joy of my life, and I was very attached to them. Some of them were older than us and very much a part of our home life. Several generations were born and raised on the farm. The burial area for all the animals was up on a large field called the forth. Here the jennet (donkey) when he decided he had enough, laid down and died and was laid to rest. My dad had a large white horse which I felt he treated him very humanely. I actually saw my dad cry when his favourite horse died. The donkey we had for many years was used by my brothers who would take him every morning to the creamery where they delivered the milk, which ultimately was churned into butter and other dairy products. The donkey was a dark brown animal that brayed and kicked like a devil. My brother only had to whistle and he came running to the gate every morning, as he knew that he was fed after he returned from the creamery. Catching the horses on the other hand was a big job as they had to be coaxed and sometimes they were unco-operative. The white mare was no problem and all one had to do was call him Paddy and he would come running. I never rode the horses but frequently rode Jennet the donkey and my legs would touch the ground as I rode, which was a big joke in my family for the 15 years that I lived in the house as my legs were so long that they touched the ground. My nickname became "Long Shanks". I loved that donkey and felt a real kinship with him. For some reason my siblings were all given names after the animals. For example, Eily was the goose,

Kate was the gander and Nora the fox. The animals were close to all of us. When it came to slaughter them, I just could not take it, hearing the pigs cry out for mercy as my dad was killing them. I usually took off to the fields so as not to hear their pitiful screams

AT WORK ON THE FARM

A day in the meadow was sunshine and sweat, hard work and ambivalent feelings regarding having to work so very hard. Hayseeds and innumerable forms of insect life found their way into my hair and frequently clung to my damp back. Usually barefoot, we picked up numerous thorns and other prickly things. This annoyance was relieved by the soft feel of mossy patches beneath our feet and we developed a sixth sense about where it was safe to tread. Luckily for us there was a stream, which ran through the property and oh, the joy on a hot day to plunge into the icy water to cool down and rid ourselves of all this sticky irritation.

Back in the bog we all had to take turns digging turf which eventually, after a long period of drying became our fuel for heating and cooking. This is still done today throughout Ireland. During harvest time we had a contraption called a tumbling paddy, which was used to collect the rows of hay into big heaps. Made entirely of timber it was like a giant comb with two handles at the back. When it was full to overflowing with hay the handle was thrown forward so that the comb tumbled over and all the hay fell out. This was then used as the base for the cocks of hay, or wyndes as we called them.

When the butt had been made somebody stood on it and packed the hay down while the tumbling paddy collected more hay which was packed onto the wynde until gradually it grew tall and pointed. Standing on the wynde was a job for somebody light and agile. Pikes of hay were generally thrown up at you, and had to be pulled under your feet and danced on to firm this wavering creation.

I seemed to be the guinea pig for this performance and l will admit that many a time l was scared, as somehow the hay would hide an odd scratching briar. Now one would slide down the side of the wynde when it had reached its peak, then it was pared of loose hay at the base and finally tied down. A piece of hay with its ends firmly embedded in the base of the wynde or as we used to call it then " a bale of hay" wound around the hay twine and knotted with it. Finally, the ball of twine was crossed over the cock and tied on the other side in the same manner.

So it continued all day, wynde after wynde was created until someone brought us the tea, which consisted of homemade bread and butter and sometimes an apple cake. That was the best part of the day as we got about 15 minutes to eat and relax. It is said that hunger is a good sauce, but hunger and thirst certainly made tea in the meadows a feast with a special flavour, like manna from heaven.

The aroma of sweet smelling hay blended with the tea. It was also a time for funny stories and riddles, which made for great laughter and fun, and the whole occasion took on the atmosphere of a gay picnic. With tea over, we returned to work but there was a new pep in our step and gradually the wyndes rose like mini pyramids around us. Towards evening as the shadows lengthened across the fields, we gathered up our forks, rakes and other tools. And together with the horses made our weary way homewards. Eventually the hay was drawn into the barn.

We all enjoyed this task, as there was an air of achievement, a fulfilment of the basic need of man to fill the barns and prepare for winter. Next to his family needs the welfare of my father's stock was closest to his heart and it was to him, like other farmer's the dread or fear to not have enough to feed his animals during the harsh days of the winter.

Drawing the hay into the barn was an event all by itself. The hay was put on a horse drawn float. In the field the float was tilted up front so that the back edge lay by a wynde of hay. Then the thick float ropes that were wound around an iron roller at the front of the float were unwound and tied behind the wyndes. The roller was turned, winding up the rope and bringing back the cock of hay up along the float. Once filled the horse drew home his load with the driver sitting on top of the wyndes while the children sat at the back of the float, dangling their feet while leaving the field. Drives on the float were part of our summer entertainment on the farm. The workers in the barn removed the load under the supervision of my uncle allowing the horse and

float to return to the field for another load. My uncle Patrick usually picked the hay up and one of us took it from him, and passed it back to another who packed it in the back of the barn. While the barn was being loaded we had and enjoyed our brief rest in between delivery of the next load of hay. Finally with the last load stashed away, we were grateful that this marked the end of the haymaking season. When the barn was full of soft golden hay we knew our animals were safe against the ravages of winter no matter how harsh it might be.

The seeds we had planted in the spring grew through the summer months, and as the crops ripened the difference between them became evident as the wheat turned a golden brown and the oats, a butter yellow. Cutting the corn in the autumn meant another chapter in the winding down of the year's work and equally important this was a time when all the neighbours came to help one another. Now the biggest performance that occurred on the farm was the threshing and the cutting of corn. The wheat would be thrashed into grain, which would eventually be turned or ground into flour for our bread and other baking needs. Seeing the threshing going on at other farms made us wonder who would be next? It was like one big party as that was a time when some of the men would meet one another only once a year, at threshing time.

This social event gave them a time to discuss all that had happened throughout the year. Each person had a specific job to perform. Some of them passed the bales of wheat and threw the shaves to those on top of the thresher. Now the main event occurred when the little trap door was opened and the golden grain poured into jute bags. These were paper bags and filled four inches or so from the top, sealed and were exchanged for empty bags. The full bags were carted across the haggard to the loft for the winter.

Underneath the loft was the stall, which was the place the cows were milked and housed for the winter. On the day of threshing, the men worked steadily breaking only for dinner and tea. Truly, this had an air of good fellowship and fun. The haggard or barn is where the men and children stayed while the women remained in the kitchen preparing food for workers who had big appetites. It was a sad moment for us children to see the end of threshing, as we knew that this just happened once a year.

The geese and ducks returned to the fields and were delighted to find a feast waiting them, as some of the corn and other grain was spilled on the ground. This was party time for them and they feasted for several days during their harvest thanksgiving. My uncle who lived with us took on the responsibility of collecting the cows from the field and bringing them in for milking. He, along with the help of my brothers and sisters milked the cows, a task I never mastered. When milking the cows my brothers and sisters sat on stools known as blocks because they were made of solid wood supported with three legs. The milkers sat down with a bucket between their knees and rested their forehead on the cow's silky body. Evening milk time was an enjoyable time, l must admit l think l was the only person in the family who never milked a cow, and that was related to the fact that l left home when I was fifteen years old. At first the milk hit the bucket with a sharp metallic sound and as it filled up mellowed to a drowsy hum and the cold bucket grew warm between their legs. Milking time was singing time, or it could be just dreaming time. I have seen some cows kick their milkers and send them sprawling in the middle of the barn. The milkers carried the buckets full of milk to the churns, which we called tanks and were situated on the stands outside the stalls, and around the top of each tank was a muslin cloth through which the milk was strained. Then it was taken to the creamery and sold to be made into various dairy products.

MEAT STORAGE, BIRTHING AND OTHER THINGS

I visualize all the hog meat hanging in our kitchen and near the fireplace. My father would cut and salt the meat, eventually removing the meat to cut into bacon strips then using the remaining pieces for boiled dinners. Beyond this, we really didn't store much in the way of meat as chickens and geese as well as turkeys were killed for only special occasions like Christmas and Easter. My sister Nora was great when it came to preparing for the holidays. The house was transformed overnight with bright decorations and she also helped prepare the holiday meal with all the trimmings. We were all caught up with the holiday spirit.

BABYSITTING THE PIGLETS

As a child growing up in Ireland, I recall what a treat it was to stay up all night, and watch

the mother pig take care of her newborn piglets. This was done in our kitchen with the floor covered with straw made into a bed. The object of our all-night vigil was to prevent the mother pig from rolling on her little piglets and suffocating them. I usually worked the midnight shift with my sister Eileen and during the night she cooked the best pancakes with apples and blueberries. That is why I really enjoyed staying up and taking care of the piglets, since the rest of the family was asleep. The sow and her piglets slept in the kitchen for about a week, then they were returned to their own home out in the barn.

GOING TO SCHOOL

Going to school in the winter mornings through the gravel roads had its own beauty. The bushes and briars took on unearthly shapes of frozen rigidity, and the trees glittered with outstretched arms like graceful ballerinas. The beauty was absolutely breathtaking.

My dad did drive us to school in the bad weather. This was done in a horse and trap. He would get the horse and trap ready and we would all pile into the trap, with some of us sitting on the floor. He did have a big leather rug, which we all covered ourselves with and the comfort of keeping the rain out was one of the positive things he did for us. Sometimes when it was raining hard he would be waiting for us outside the school. This was a great luxury for us and we were grateful.

Physical punishment was a daily treatment from some of the nuns. This particular day both of my sister Eileen's feet were so discoloured and swollen from the stick the nun used on her that my mother had to bathe her feet in lukewarm water. My mother wrote a letter to the Principal and despite this the abuse continued.

I was never allowed to say anything negative about those teachers and when l did l was simply beaten more. There was terrific class distinction back then. For example, the children from rich families were never punished; we were amongst the minorities then as we were very poor. On the nicer days when my father would not pick us up we managed to find the longer way home from school, through the fields, shedding our heavier clothes and shoes to romp in sheer freedom. Perhaps my father knew of this but never let on.

Education was important in our home and discipline went hand and hand with it. This is all to my parents credit. While we may have complained at the time, we benefited from this priority, which was to see us grow up as well educated as we could be.

Summer days came at last. We welcomed it and the freedom it brought from the shackles of winter. When the warm days were firmly established we kicked off our heavy boots and long black stockings and danced through the warm grass in delight.

The day in school was just an unwelcome interlude then between the morning trek and the return home, and if the journey to school took about thirty minutes, the coming home could take anything up to two hours. My uncle at that time worked at the side of the road breaking large stones into small ones, which in turn were used for various holes in the repair of the roads. I would frequently stop and talk with him and he would give me a penny, which I used to buy candy.

When eating there were never enough dishes to go around so we shared the dishes with one another. This time was very stressful for me as if we laughed and my dad did not approve we were verbally reprimanded. However, education was encouraged in our home as each day after school we all had to sit around a large wooden table and do our homework. Anyone caught talking too much or goofing off was punished. Discipline was the rule in my home.

Sheila O'Sullivan-Becker

‘The Bard’ - North Cork’s Leader in the Land War 1881-1891 by Barry Keane© 2012

A biography of someone called ‘the Bard’ would no doubt mean only one thing to most readers – another biography of the ‘the Bard of Avon.’ However, the subject of this book was known as the ‘Bard of Millstreet’ and could hardly have been be more different. He was a legendary leader of Moonlighters in North Cork during the Land War and public enemy number one for a decade.

Yet he did have something in common with his namesake from Stratford. There is no evidence that either of them ever wrote a poem or a play. And both had the title of Bard thrust upon them.

Our ‘Bard’ got his nickname from the second syllable of his middle name in Irish, Riobaird, (Robert). Having the rather ordinary and nondescript name of John Sullivan it was felt necessary to give him a more exotic title because of his distinctive characteristics and activities. So ‘the Bard’ was chosen for this purpose. His descendants gloried in association with him and the name Robert became a family nickname and one of them who was a schoolmate of mine is known as ‘Bobby Robert’ – a sort of double insurance that he would not be mistaken for a member of any other of the Sullivan clan.

The author, Barry Keane, is a great grandson of the Bard and he has written the first biography of the man and interweaves family, local and national history into a well told story. It’s lucky for us that Barry got there first with his biography because if the Bard had first ‘got the treatment’ from our modern academes he would no doubt be classified and dismissed as just an arch terrorist. The authorities of the day believed so and were so convinced of it that he received a sentence of 24 years hard labour at a show trial in Nenagh in 1891.

Barry does not forget the plight of his wife with six children in this situation. To survive she broke stones by the roadside to fill potholes in pre-tarmacadam days.

He was released when the Liberal Government came to power in 1906 through the efforts of D. D. Sheehan, William O’Brien and the All For Ireland MPs.

His arch enemies were a very successful local self-made Catholic businessman, Jeremiah Hegarty, who used ‘credit crunch’ tactics (and the traditional supplementary tactics now out of fashion in these situations) against tenants in financial difficulties and thereby acquired their land; the other was the local Catholic Parish Priest, Canon Arthur Sands Griffin, who orchestrated a long and well thought out campaign against the Land League, locally, nationally and internationally. The two were a formidable combination and with all the powers of the State and the Establishment actively supportive of them they seemed invincible. Hegarty was made a Justice of Peace with the purpose of hounding the Bard.

The ensuing conflict made Millstreet known as the ‘cockpit of Ireland’ for a while. It was not a pretty sight and not for the faint-hearted. That conflict resonates to this day and remains part of the DNA of the area.

But a most interesting aspect of him is that he became an ‘All for Irelander’ after his release, became constitutional in his politics, became a farmer and showed every sign of adapting very positively to the situation where his war, the Land War, had been won. He was not and never could be a rebel without a cause. The same went for the vast majority of his peers. He and they were not looking for another war after they had just won their own war. His extended family became upstanding and model members of society which they have remained down to the present day. They turned up in large numbers at the launch of this book and spoke vividly and proudly of their ancestor.

Why then, just over a decade after his release did he live to see a bigger war in his area than he had ever experienced and one he could hardly have ever imagined despite being the very personification of a war himself?

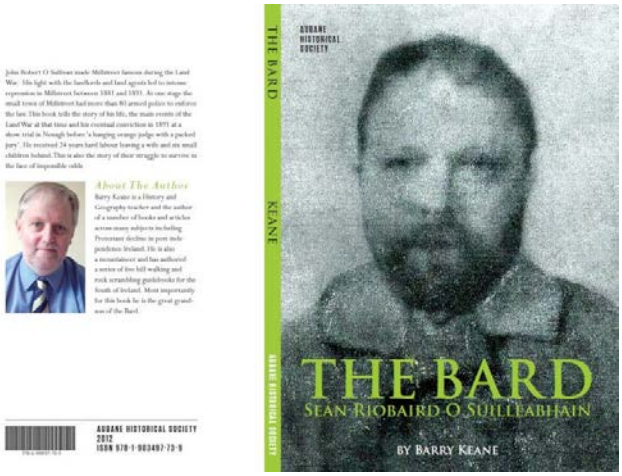
Did something come over the people to go to war? Reading modern historians this becomes a mystery. The farmers had their land, the labourers had their cottage and an acre, the town tenants became owners of their homes and business, older people got their pensions, churches were built, the

Catholic Church also got its University, schools and hospitals, Ne Temere, and other privileges, the Gaelic League was flourishing, etc., etc. Democratic County Councils were established. The list goes on. The people were nearly killed with kindness. There was a relationship with Britain that our modern revisionists would die for, it was their paradise. The people volunteered to join up in their hundreds of thousands to fight and die for the consolidation of this in the form of Home Rule. And then they revolted! As the editor of the Irish Times said on a later occasion: '*What sort of people are we?*'

The fact is the people did not change. The Irish, despite any claims to the contrary, are fundamentally a conservative people as they believe they have more to conserve than discard – and they are right in this. It is Britain in its wisdom that changed the rules of the game - the one constant in its politics. It said, essentially, fight and die for us in our war, wait for Home Rule (after waiting for over 30 years), and after you voted for what you believed you had fought and died for –'*the freedom of small nations*' – we will treat it as a bad joke and shit on you with the Black and Tans.

People can get upset about things like that. The Irish continued to believe in what they had always believed in and fought for – the freedom of small nations – except that they now found they had to fight at home for what they thought they had fought for, and won, abroad. The Bard himself was not in a position to fight again but he celebrated the victory and his spirit and example helped secure that victory.

Jack Lane



At the launch of "The Bard" in Millstreet G.A.A. Community Hall on Saturday, 18th August 2012. Included are (from left) John Sheehan, Aubane Historical Society, Barry Keane (Author), Cllr. Joe Kavanagh, Deputy Lord Mayor of Cork City and his wife. Also included are Barry's mother and his aunts.

Between the ditches, running on forgotten roads in Ireland

I still wonder why anyone would want to run a marathon. For me it doesn't seem very attractive. I prefer to just throw on my runners and head off, if I run shorter or longer it doesn't matter, if I run faster or slower that doesn't matter either.

Running fires the synapses, opens the heart, lungs and mind to everything that goes on around us.

When we drive we pass over the landscape, when you get down low and run, you become part of it, the whole countryside comes alive.

Slow down, look around, see what you're missing. Wave at every car, say hello to everyone you meet, connect with people, that's the important part, connect.

I'm a family man trying hard to avoid a mid-life crisis, or maybe I'm deep in it and just haven't realised it yet. I took up running, or rather I returned to running, in late 2009 on medical advice. I was overweight, unfit, and if I'm completely honest, borderline depressed.

Initially I couldn't run, I was out of breath, in pain and didn't see the point of it.

Slowly, one foot in front of the other I kept at it, first 1km without stopping, then 1 mile, then 5km, 10km and so on.

I once commented to a work colleague why I couldn't understand why so many people run, and why so many want to run marathons? Why would anyone want to put themselves through 26.1 miles of discomfort, what is the attraction? Thankfully over the last 3 years I've come to a realisation.

Running is enjoyable, and if you run often enough and far enough it changes who you are, in a good way. I still don't know why so many people want to run a marathon. There's a lot more road out there.

The Butter Road:
Tralee-Castleisland-Rathmore-Millstreet-Rylane-Tower-Cork

I first saw this route on a map and wondered why there were straight roads everywhere, straight roads are generally man made, but this was an old road. Roads usually follow old droving paths, follow old herd routes and meander through the countryside, working with contours and gradient, not try to plough straight through. I drove some of it a few years ago and didn't realise how important it had been. For me, at that time it was just a way to avoid traffic on a spin back from Kerry to Cork.

It was only much later; when I started to think about the idea of running it that I began to appreciate its history and significance. I read as much of the historical record about the road as I could find. I started to become intrigued about how much of the old road remained, not the surface, because this has been replaced time and time again, but the fabric of the road, the remains and ruins of toll houses, coach houses, inns, resting stops, water stops, everything else that would have been part and parcel of the original road.

From conversations and emails with Jack Lane of the Aubane Historical Society I finally began to realise that I had to run it. Of course Jack publically announcing my intentions during Heritage Week meant that I had to see it through.

Saturday September 29th 2012:

The train pulled out of Millstreet, turned on my ipod, battery flat, this was going to be a long day....

Standing outside Kerry County Museum at 08:50 I'm off, one foot in front of the other, it's only 57km on my own with no music and I know it's going to be hilly....

The next six hours and eight minutes were fun; it may seem odd to anyone who has never tried a long solo run, but trust me, it was fun. It was also painful, uplifting, depressing, invigorating, interesting, boring, cold, warm, overcast and sunny all in one short time on one day. At least it didn't rain. Much. I wasn't sure what to expect from the run.

Hills, no shortage of hills, that much I was sure off, but hills aren't too bad. At least before the hills started I had a flat 20km warm-up from Tralee to Castleisland.

One of the things I like about long-long runs is how it isn't "normal," it must look odd (judging from the looks I get) to see someone running with a back-pack, flashing led lamps front and back, energy gels strapped to the bag and a smile on their face.

It's all about the smile. The smile means that everything is in check. I also count to myself to keep pace. 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-----499-500 that's another

kilometre done. I can do that for hours on end - it's worrying.

I passed, and was passed by, a lot of cyclists around Castleisland. Everyone gave a polite nod, wave, or hello. The strangest look I got was running up the main street in the town as the early morning shoppers were out and about. I'm not sure if the smile at this point was friendly or manic.

An elderly man with a walking frame offered me a race, we laughed until I told him where I was going, he told me to go easy, and enjoy my day. After that the road got quiet.

May The Road Rise Up To Meet You.

To say that it rose up to meet me is a bit of an understatement. Just outside of Cordal there is a hill, it isn't long but it is steep. The hill didn't come from nowhere. It didn't sneak up on me suddenly as I rounded a bend. It didn't hide behind the treeline, waiting to unveil itself. No, it announced itself early, I could see if for a long time before I got to it. I could trace the outline of the road in the distance, cutting serpentine-like through the terrain, a serpent that evidently likes to climb.

When I got to the base of the climb it loomed large in front of me, the grey asphalt stood out against the verdant greenery, like a wall. A wall! I kept an eye on my pace and then it slowed to a walk, a slow uphill walk. Still, the views were nice. There was a lone cyclist who passed me, he didn't say much, can't say I blame him. The Gravity of the Situation.

What goes up must come down. I was enjoying the run/walk. The views across to Mount Eagle were fantastic. The views all around me were fantastic. If it wasn't for all of the hills it would have been perfect.

At the base of one of the hills there is a little bridge. I don't know how long it's there but there is an old feel to the place. It's difficult to explain but on my own with the light filtering in from above, the shadowplay on the trees and the stillness of the air it felt like I had gone back in time. I'm not at all spiritual but there was something so calming about it that I started to think about my own place in the world.

I started to think about others who had made this journey, at a different time, under different circumstances. For me this was a day out, something I wanted to do for my own enjoyment. Others had made this journey out of necessity, and paid a toll to do so. Here I was, following the road, but I couldn't have been further from their footsteps.

As a nation we have moved along, but I'm not sure if we've moved on. The ghosts of our colonial past are scattered along The Butter Road. There is no record of what lay before its path. It cuts directly through the landscape, giving no quarter to anything the stands in the way. It doesn't deviate much from a straight line.

I started to feel that the road says something about where we have been and where we find ourselves now.

The fact that there is little in the way of historical record of the journeys made by those who relied on the road for their living says a lot. The Irish at the time didn't have a voice, they didn't leave any echo. It got me thinking that in our current economic predicament we appear to be silent. Are we speechless or censored?

A mental low after the hilly highs.

"*Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls*" (Jeremiah 6:16). I had to Google that.

On a hill outside of Ballydesmond I reached a crossroads. I had finished with the worst of the climbs, they were behind me. The road to Rathmore isn't flat, in fact it's really hilly, but there is a net drop the whole way there. So, in essence I would be running downhill, even if I was running (walking) uphill.

It's easier to think like that on long runs, I don't know why but logic and common sense have no place at 50km or above. Not only had I left the worst of the climbs in the past, my mood was lifting. I didn't realise it but the negative thoughts about our economic woes had taken from my enjoyment of the road.

When I came up from the heavily forested area and looked west towards Tralee and the mountains of West Kerry it was as if my eyes were opened to the majesty of the countryside.

We might have no money, but we have a beautiful country, all we have to do is slow down, take off the blinkers and look around.

It was then I realised that the run so far had been cathartic.

The section of the road I had just travelled was a link to the past, largely untouched by the excesses of the Celtic Tiger, no gaudy show homes, no automatic gates. It was pure, uncluttered and unspoiled. I had run through time, the surface may have changed, the recent plantations of non-native trees were alien, but the landscape itself remained. It was sheltered from modernity. Running through it

stripped off layers of materialism, there was something fantastical about it.

A voice from the past had whispered to me, I hadn't heard it, so now it was shouting at me. History is still there, it hasn't left, it's up to us to go back and visit it again; it has a lot to tell.

At Barnagh bog the gates are locked and rusted. A reminder of an industry in decline. Some machinery is still there, but nature is starting to reclaim it, I stopped and looked through the gate. What should have been an ugly scarred landscape was full of life, butterflies and rabbits took off. An explosion of colour against the backdrop of the high bogs of Kerry. My mood was great, this was exactly what I was looking for in the run. I was smiling again, it's all about the smile.

"It's easier to go down a hill than up it but the view is much better at the top." (Henry Ward Beecher)

From Barnagh on I knew I was on the home stretch. I knew that there were lots of rolling hills into Rathmore, but it didn't seem to upset me. Each climb would be its own challenge and each descent its own reward. Simple, walk the ups - run the downs. One foot in front of the other.

What did surprise me however was how active the countryside had become again. There were houses all along this section, and people going about their busy Saturday activities. Farm machinery on the roads, in fields and yards. People, actual human contact, for the first time in ages. It was nice to get to say hello again, it had been a long quiet day after Cordal.

The feeling on the road also seemed to up a gear, I had a spring in my step and was looking forward to getting to Millstreet, not so much looking forward to being finished, but I had a sense that I would complete the run with a bit of energy left, and hopefully not be too broken up by the experience. The countryside was alive, so was I.

The rolling landscape was great, the scenery appeared and disappeared into the dense treelines. Cluster of native woodland replaced the commercial forestry operations and the lush greenery was soothing.

A few buildings along the road caught my eye. Old buildings by the look of them, that had been modified and updated but still looked to be a snapshot of times long gone.

I started to wonder if any of them dated a far back as the original route, were some of these, toll gates, rest houses, feed stores? My mind was active, chasing glimpses of the past in the present.

I have my doubts about the longevity of the buildings, but even if these weren't original they may have been built over or on top of older structures, perhaps using the original materials, recycling before we even know what it was.

Again, I couldn't stop my mind from comparing then and now, our apparent progress weighing heavily on my mind. Except this time I didn't seem negative, I thought it's great how we can link back to our past without even knowing it. In fact I began to think that the best way to judge perspective is to position yourself as far back as you can, and a long straight historical road is a great visual aid to do just that.

"*My heritage has been my grounding, and it has brought me peace."* (Maureen O'Hara*).*

"We travel, some of us forever, to seek other states, other lives, other souls." (Anais Nin)

I've been asked, more than once, why I like long runs. There is no short answer to this, the reasons change with every outing. It started as a way of testing myself. It became a way of punishing myself, and even a way of rewarding myself. Currently it's a combination of all of the above. I also seem to have found a nice way to deal with life pressures and keep myself on an even keel, of sorts.

I've been trying to convince my regular running buddy to join me, but he seems happy to aim for faster and faster marathons. He doesn't get me, I don't get him. To each their own. All I know, about my own experience, is that at a certain distance everything just clicks, gels, comes together. It's weird but I find the long runs, say 50km or above very relaxing. Below that I always try to run a fast time, above that the competitive switch goes off and I just drop into a regular rhythm and the distance glides by. It's almost as if I enter a dream-like state, conscious of everything around me, tuned in to the immediate but also tuned out from the background clutter.

The best way I have to describe it is "Zen-like" but that's far too close to spiritualism for me to be comfortable with.

I wrote earlier how running changes you for the better, I can't put my finger on the how or why, but I can say with absolute conviction that running is good for your mind. Another thing I've noticed is that longer distances are much, much more rewarding. There isn't the same pressure for time as with other distances up to marathon.

Run a Marathon and people will almost always ask "What time?" Equally they may have a benchmark by which that time is judged. The

accepted time for "good" is under 4 hours, under 3:30 is "very good" and under 3:00 "fantastic".

I can't understand that fascination with time. Why does it matter so much? It's like that saying, "walk a mile in their shoes..." If you want to know what a time feels like, go out and do it, it may change your perspective.

So, I mentioned my fast running buddy earlier. If our goals are different how do our paths cross? Actually it works out well. I will gladly run with him for up to 3 hour slow runs, I will go off-road on forest trails and we will push each other along. So I think we sort of support each other in the common ground between longer slow runs and fast marathons.

That sort of sums up the whole reason why running is a positive thing, it's a great leveller. There are days I speed up, other days other people slow down, but we can still meet in the middle and enjoy the company.

That's normal for standard distance training. It's a lot more lonely on longer runs. Clubs don't really cater for long, long runs. So they tend to be solo efforts. I enjoy the solitude. It allows me to clear my head. It's free therapy. Doctors should prescribe it. The prescription would read.... Put one foot in front of the other, repeat.

The Road goes ever on and on

"*The Road goes ever on and on*
Down from the door where it began.
Now far ahead the Road has gone,
And I must follow, if I can,
Pursuing it with eager feet,
Until it joins some larger way
Where many paths and errands meet.
And whither then? I cannot say."

(J.R.R. Tolkien)

Okay, so my run wasn't quiet as exciting as Tolkien's epic. And my feet aren't that hairy. But, something had happened to me along the Butter Road.

I made it over the rolling hills to Rathmore and turned for the home stretch to Millstreet. My legs were tired, but on balance I felt fine. I had already started to think about cutting out the section along Claragh road because I knew it had some abrupt climbs, and I had my fill of climbs. The section to Millstreet is boring, it's mostly ugly with the hedge line missing in places and deep drainage ditches slicing open the land. One foot in front of the other, repeat, that's all I had to do.

The finish was in sight. But what about the end? Does a start have to have an end? I knew I would finish the run, but what about the journey?

The volume of traffic bothered me, the speed of traffic bothered me, inconsiderate drivers bothered me. At one point, on a straight section of road, a line of cars approached me at speed. The first jeep indicated well in advance and moved well over to pass me. I could see the next car doing the same, indicating well in advance and giving me a lot of room. Even the third car recognised something must be ahead and gave a wide margin. The forth car, a silver 08 Audi A4 was feeling "Curious" so the driver actually pulled in towards the margin (where I was running) to see why every other vehicle had pulled out. I jumped up into the ditch and got nicely stung by nettles. It could have been worse.

I reached the planned turn for the Claragh road section. There is a petrol station/shop on top of the hill. I really, really wanted a strawberry or banana milkshake.

SEMI-INTERESTING FACT: Long distance running allows you to eat vast amounts of rubbish, my normal recovery drink is a milkshake, because it has protein (milky goodness), carbohydrates (sugar) and goes down well. FACT, I read about it on the internet, so it must be true.

So, there I was with a milkshake craving, and there was a shop. Well, no way was I going to pass that up. I went in and while there were no milkshakes I did get a yoghurt drink. The woman in the shop was so friendly. She asked what I was up to, and when I told her she couldn't believe that I had ran from Tralee. She called her husband in and we had a great chat about the Butter Road, they were genuinely enthusiastic and gave me a pint of milk to drink free of charge. I asked how hilly Claragh road was and they both hinted that it was steep and the direct road to Millstreet might be a better option. I said my goodbyes and took their advice.

Full steam ahead to Millstreet, Claragh road will have to wait. The last few KM flew, the road was inviting, the turns gentle and I was in good spirits. Perhaps the worst bit was the final straight into the town, it's not especially hard but as it is a long straight it seemed to drag a little. I was also running on the concrete footpaths, which are harder on the legs than the road. I felt like I was flying, realistically I was not, I felt that I was fresh, I looked nothing like I felt.

I crossed the Junction at the top of the town near the church, I was counting down the seconds, my fancy GPS watch was counting down the meters to "The Wallis Arms".

100-90-80.... my heart was pounding. 70-60-50...I had goosebumps and nervous excited energy tingled, radiated from my core charging my whole body. 40-30-20...The relief, I could see the steps where I knew I would be stopping. My world slowed down. There was only colour, in glorious high definition, no sound, I was experience the greatest running high, I felt like I had stepped outside of myself. 10.....5..... AND THEN I STOPPED RUNNING.

I had made it, against my own doubts, over the hills from far away I had reached the end point of my run. I remember instinctively stopping my watch and sitting down on the steps. I heard someone talking, calling my name, "Bertie?" they asked. I was warmly greeted by the representatives from The Aubane Social Club, John Francis Kelleher and John Dineen. They had been following my progress live using the GPS tracker I had. We're very high tech in North Cork.

We discussed my run and how enjoyable (or not) it was and my plans to do the second leg two weeks later.

My mind is a little blank on what exactly happened, I do know there was a photograph taken.

I was also aware that there was a wedding party exiting the Wallis Arms while I was standing there. I remember there was one woman in a blue dress with a pair of very high heels on. I remember thinking that I had just ran for 6 hours (and 8 minutes) and my feet wouldn't be as sore the following days as hers would be after her wearing those shoes for the evening.

A while later I began to feel the familiar burn muscle pain so I got a kind lift back to the train station from John Kelleher and collected my car.

When I got home my wife and kids were at the gate to greet me. They had been following me online as well. There was a cool bath waiting so I soaked away my aches and pains for an hour or so. Sent a few emails and slept for 2 hours. Then I went to work from 8:00pm until 2:00am.

"I may not have gone where I intended to go, but I think I have ended up where I needed to be." (Douglas Adams)

The following day the rush had passed. I had taken on part one of my run and passed its test. I had mostly enjoyed the day and I had a feeling that I would run it again at another time. I posted the GPS history on the internet and a few of my fellow long distance runners sent their well wishes. There is interest in a re-run next year, how much remains to be seen as things don't always follow plans.

On a personal note I'm looking forward to running Tralee to Millstreet again. It was a fantastic run and an even more rewarding journey. I know that a part of me stayed on the Butter Road that day, and it's nice to go back and revisit.

The second leg

"There are two ways to get enough. One is to continue to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less." (G.K. Chesterton)

After completing the first part I was looking forward to running the Millstreet to Cork leg. For me it was the "local" part, a road I was familiar with and a road I wanted to see at a slower speed. I plotted the map and counted the hills, 13 in all, unlucky for some? One foot in front of the other, repeat as necessary.

I woke on Sunday the 14th October and had a light breakfast, did a final gear check and drove to Millstreet. It was cold, -2c by the car display. A nice crisp morning, no cloud and a bright early morning sun.

My spirits were high, I had tackled the two big climbs of Tullig and Mushera before, my plan was to run as much as I could but mostly to enjoy the experience.

Millstreet - outside *'The Wallis Arms'* posing for a photograph for John Tarrant. He keeps asking me to put my hand out in a big "*thumbs up*". It's -2c, dry air I'm freezing and I'm standing here trying to smile. With my thumb up, Looks like I'm hitching a lift.

Eventually I have to leave. I'm beginning to lose the feeling in my toes. Really, it was that cold.

A while later I turned off the Mallow Road and faced into the climb over Tullig and Mushera. I had run this road before, I knew where to slow down and where it was okay to push on. I had a camera with me to take some photos along the way.

The climb over Tullig didn't feel too bad on fresh legs, I actually enjoyed it, it was a nice way to get the blood (and heat) pumping. I crested the first of the big climbs and looked down across the valley of Aubane.

My thoughts turned to Jack Lane, who was instrumental in my undertaking this run, this was the type of view he would like. I stopped and took a

picture, the view was unreal, bright early morning sun and a low mist cascading down the mountain, it looked magical.

I ran down the hill and over the river at Aubane, I marvelled at the clarity of the river, and how pristine the countryside looked this early in the day.

I gave a cursory nod to the plaque and statue at Aubane Cross (The statue didn't nod back), only one way from here, up and over.

The climb over Mushera doesn't ease off, even the flat sections still point up, and the brief drops only make the next bits harder.

I stopped at the Kerryman's table to take a photograph, the camera wouldn't work, I kept getting low battery warnings. Thankfully my body appeared to be handling the cold weather better.

I ran onwards and upwards, the views were fantastic, the air was clear and looking northeast I could see for miles.

As I neared the top of Mushera I got a phone call from my running buddy, Frank. I was due to meet him in Rylane, he would be joining me for the push into Cork. I gave him an idea of what time to expect me, then he told me he was bringing his brother-in-law along for the run. Charlie Byrd doesn't do slow runs, ever, and Frank is competitive, the latter stages of my run would be in the company of two men who don't do slow runs. Great.

As if sensing my thoughts the lovely wispy mist I had seen cascading down the mountain earlier turned into low lying cloud. When I reached the summit I couldn't see anything, it was really eerie, no noise, no sight, I was worried about traffic. Thankfully at that hour the roads are deserted.

A view would have been nice, I had taken on Mushera and ran most of it, I felt really good physically, strong and fresh, my reward? Running in low cloud. It reminded me of a picture I once saw, "*Wanderer above the sea of fog*", by Caspar David Friedrich. Except in my case it was more *"wanderer in the sea of fog*". I knew my destination, but wasn't sure what the in-between bits would be like.

"Sometimes, if you stand on the bottom rail of a bridge and lean over to watch the river slipping slowly away beneath you, you will suddenly know everything there is to be known." (A.A. Milne)

On the way down the other side I became aware of the sound of running water, fast running water, and lots of it. I could see a torrent of water running down from Seefin on my left, I could track its path and as I was getting closer to the point where it cuts under the road the noise was loud. I stopped to look down into the stream, to take in the force of nature.

There was a fridge-freezer dumped over the ditch, lying broken and battered against the rocks. I struck me as sort of sad. Out here, in an isolated stretch of the country, someone had gone to the effort of dumping a large and unwieldy object. So much for progress. I ran on, not leaving it cloud my mind.

I remembered reading in Jack's pamphlet an account of an infamous highwayman who used to hide out in the unforgiving landscape, sighting his victims as they approached along the road. Pity he isn't around now, he'd make a great litter warden.

The countryside along here, just after the summit, is open, rugged, exposed and beautiful. Harsh, hard, moorland, low scrub and few trees. There is a sublime beauty in it.

But it doesn't stay that way for long, from once you drop down into the shelter of the valley the trees are back, greenery everywhere and signs of life. Fences give way to stone walls, give way to houses and farms and the signs of farming life. The landscape changes so much in a short distance that it is easy to put the mountain behind you. Houses, lots of houses, some new, some old, some abandoned but complete, more empty shells. Again I was looking at the remains and wondering how many, if any, reach back in time.

Compared to the first leg this section appeared as if it had been reasonably well populated, the signs of life were everywhere, and at one level the landscape was more accommodating, so it followed that people may have opted to locate here.

There also appeared to be a greater infrastructure in place here, more bridges for one. I can only remember passing over a few bridges on the way from Tralee to Millstreet, but it seemed here that I crossed over more rivers or streams on this leg. The landscape was also more undulating, it seemed like I was constantly either climbing up or going down, I wasn't too bothered, I still felt fresh but I knew I would feel the effects later in the run.

I also knew that from Rylane on there were some big rolling climbs. Before I got to Rylane I reached another climb and then a fast drop over a bridge and a brutal sharp climb back up the other side. I opted to walk it, I met a man walking down towards me, we exchanged hellos, that was the first human contact I had since leaving Millstreet, and I

hadn't even noticed, I was either really enjoying myself or not paying much attention. I'm going with the former, it was a great, interesting and challenging run so far.

Thankfully Rylane seems to sit on a plateau of sorts, the roads levelled a little and I was able to do a bit of damage assessment. I had been aware of how many gels I was taking, and how much water I was drinking, I was on-plan with both, a gel every 30mins or so and a sip of water every 15 to 20mins. My legs felt okay, the early climbs hadn't punished me too much but I could feel the early effects of all the rolling hills.

"Most of us plateau when we lose the tension between where we are and where we ought to be." (John Gardiner)

Rylane: 'The Anvil Bar' was to be the meeting place for my companions, but I was ahead of time, surprised? Me too, I had planned on running at around 6:00min/km pace but was actually closer to 5:40min/km. That doesn't seem like a lot but after almost 20km I was 7 minutes ahead of time.

I knew the lads were coming from Cork along the road I was running so rather than stop and wait I kept going, I met them further along. When they stopped the car all I heard was "*you're early!, you're going too fast, you need to slow down, see you in a bit.*" I told them to park at the shop in Rylane and catch up.

I got to a junction in the road, for some reason I wasn't sure if they would know to follow me so I stopped running and waited. I waited for a few minutes but my legs were starting to cramp, I had to start running again. The pain was intense, usually it would subside after a few seconds but this time it lingered, especially my thighs. Eventually the lads caught up with me, we exchanged greetings and Frank asked how Mushera was.

I told him the truth, he thought I was crazy for running it. Charlie thought I was crazy for running the whole road but we all admired the views from up around Rylane.

I mentioned in the first part how we miss out on things like this by being in a hurry everywhere. A few cars passed us and the people inside were isolated from their surroundings.

Meanwhile, 3 men running along a historic road were commenting on how nice the countryside was looking, green rolling hills as far as the eye could see, a really great morning. We spent a while chatting about other routes we liked and how Frank should really think about going over 50km for a change instead of running fast marathons. He reckoned I was just jealous.

We also talked in some depth about how quiet the road was and how it would be a perfect tourist route; the only problem is the road would be ruined by buses.

My pace was beginning to drop off at this point, the rolling hills near Courtbrack were killing my legs, I ended up walking sections while my companions ran on ahead before looping back to get me.

We were still in high spirits but I was aware that if this pattern continued the lads would have a longer run than they wanted, and despite all of my climbing, my day was beginning to go downhill.

It was around this point that a lot of things started to happen. I was feeling poor, I was trying desperately to stay positive for the two lads who were good enough to have given their morning to join me. But, no matter what spin I put on things, and no matter how nice the views, it was obvious to them both that I was beginning to suffer.

The wall

"Your mind will answer most questions if you learn to relax and wait for the answer." (William S. Burroughs)

There is a state that distance runners reach. It comes before the euphoria of the runner's high. It can be mild, or it can be deeply unpleasant. It's referred to as "THE WALL!!!!" (My exclamations thunder in the background to make it seem more dramatic)

On that day, at that time, somewhere around Courtbrack I ran head first into my wall. It had been a long time since it happened to me on a run, I don't recall it happening on the Tralee to Millstreet leg, but I could feel it coming on fast.

I do so many long runs I know the build up intimately:

-Thirst-Check.
-Brief flashes of displacement, not really knowing what's going on around me - Check.
-Self doubt - Check.
-Even more self doubt - CHECK!

Frank could see it, we run a lot together, he dropped back and tried to coax me into running, I hadn't even realised I had stopped.

I had to take off the long sleeved top I had on, it was wet with perspiration, I drank lots of water (loaded with salts), he had to stop me because he knew if I drank too much I would cramp or empty it back up.

I wasn't dehydrated, my sugar levels might have been a little low after all the hills so I took a few gels together. We walked for a bit, with Charlie circling out and back, offering words of encouragement.

We made it to the Shebeen Pub, I know that place, I had gone there once for a pint, it was a really nice pub. I remember it well, there was a half-door, and a few elderly men sitting inside, a turf fire and that wonderful sense of history.

It was a great pint too. It's closed now, has been for years, another casualty of the rural demise that seems to be an all too common a price for modernity.

I would guess that stricter drink driving laws were responsible, which in itself isn't a bad thing, but I can't help but feel that the more we strive to become more cosmopolitan, more European and assume airs of sophistication we lose a lot of our identity.

When we lose our rural traditions we lose our best link to the past, our oral tradition dies. Twitter, Facebook, Bebo, and whatever will eventually replace them are no substitute for personal contact. So, modernity and ease of transport and communication have shrunk the world, at the expense of a local identity. Is that a price to far?

I stopped outside the pub and Frank took a photo, it was only afterwards when I saw it I realised how bad I looked, my shoulders were slumped, my whole demeanour was one of defeat. The road was giving me a beating, worse still, I was allowing it to beat me.
Instead of enjoying the experience, even the bad bits, I was wrapped up in the negativity of my wall.

It was then that the two most significant occurrences of the day occurred. The first was when Charlie ran on ahead, he started to chat to a couple walking a dog. Frank, who had started to run ahead joined him. Eventually I struggled up the road, the two others had ran on but the couple with the dog started to cheer me on and express their surprise that I would even attempt the run, and were genuinely positive.

I was taken aback, I know Charlie and Frank were responsible, but it was exactly the lift I needed. I slowed again to a walk and we chatted briefly about the road. This couple were out walking it, but were oblivious to the history of it, so I gave them a very short account.

After I said my farewells I started to run again, proper running, lifting my feet to match my lifting spirits. At a guess the gels were kicking it about this time too.

Then as Frank rejoined me, we notice Charlie talking to someone through a car window, we ran on, gave a polite hello. Charlie joined us and explained how it was a group of American tourists who had taken a wrong turn. I laughed and said they had stumbled onto a hidden gem, and I hoped he had told them all about it.

A short time later the car passed us on its way back to Blarney, to visit the woollen mills and the castle. If nothing else it reaffirmed why I was undertaking this journey, it was as much to promote the route as a personal journey.

Physically I was still suffering, but mentally I knew that I would finish the run, because I had to. Plenty of others before me journeyed here, in far greater hardship than I can ever imagine. We owe a debt of gratitude to those before us, time for me to pay my respects.

People visit these parts and check out a stone in a castle, check out the woollen goods, but aren't informed that only a few short miles away lies a part of the very road that allowed trade to prosper in the region. The road should be advertised as an alternate route to Kerry, especially if people are already in the vicinity.

"It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop." (Confucius)

We ran on, we were picking out little glimpses of the past in the landscape, some houses had distinct feature that made it easy to see stables, and perhaps old blacksmiths workshops. Did we spot the remains of some toll houses?

I hypostasised that buildings, or the remnants of them, built right at the roadside may have been part of the infrastructure.

The lads agreed with my theory, not sure how to go about proving it, but it kept us occupied on the long drags heading towards Tower.

There is a lovely stretch of road as we were approaching the troubled Blarney golf resort. The road is straight, the mature trees form an elegant arch framing the horizon, it's not restrictive at all, it should be as it forms a tunnel, but it is actually very scenic. We talked at length about the golf resort and all of the lost promises it represents. We talked about how as a nation we faced down worse and came out the other side intact.

The tree-lined tunnel was the perfect metaphor, we could only see what was directly ahead, our view was restricted yet pleasant, but when we began to emerge the vista opened before

us, the open countryside was there, static, waiting for our eyes.

Everything is temporary, everything fleeting, things change, the whole world is in a state of flux, if you stand still you miss it. The important bit is to keep moving forward.

Tower village was waiting at the end of the hill, we got some weird looks from the masses in their cars, I'm guessing that people don't usually run out this way.

Next stop, Kerry Pike. The hills, the hills. They are steep, short and just in the way.
I walked every one, I gave up trying to run them, but I didn't give up.

One foot in front of the other, repeat. I noticed rundown glass houses, perhaps from not too long ago when all we desired was fresh, locally produced fruit and veg. We had an organic movement long before it was cool, everyone I knew had home grown veg, we went to the local orchards to pick apples. Now we buy everything pre-packed, air freighted, everything is homogenous, everything looks the same. Apples are the perfect example red or green, celery is crisp and we can get strawberries for Christmas dinner if we desire.

There's something so wrong about all of that, nature is not perfect, it's full of blemishes, apples should have the colour that reflects their growth, they should be mottled, rough and above all tasty. Celery should taste of the earth, the way beetroot does.

We were running through an area that would, at one point, have been the market garden for the city. Now it was scattered with displaced urban overflow, obnoxious one off buildings hiding behind automatic gates. Agriculture had been replaced by bricks and faux-stone. And eventually, as if by magic I climbed the last hill. I hadn't actually noticed it, I was on auto-pilot.

Clogheen Cross is the end of the rural stretch of the Butter Road, it's all part of the city from there on in. It's like a switch, Country to City in the blink of an eye.

Frank and Charlie had long since said their goodbyes, knowing that I had to finish as I had started, on my own, they had taken a turn at Mackey's cross and were heading back into the city along the Lee road.

So, after all of my troubles, and all of the day's highs and lows I was on the final straight, it was all downhill from here.

"Without ambition one starts nothing. Without work one finishes nothing. The prize will not be sent to you. You have to win it." (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Actually, the downhill bit came after the top of Blarney Street. It was great to know the end was near. My GPS watch was again set to display the countdown, meticulously plotted to the Firkin Crane. I was taking it easy on the way down, my upper legs had taken a beating on the climbs and now I was subjecting them to a long descent.

For a main street in a heavily populated part of the city it was really quiet. I'm guessing that it was Sunday Lunch time, maybe everyone was busy eating. The hill down is a great place, there are old interesting buildings, some great views and it was getting me closer to my end goal.

The only criticism I have is that the footpaths are really high. Every time I had to step down from one it hurt, and going back up the other side felt like I was climbing.
I opted to run on the road, no traffic, no pedestrians, just me doing a tired legged mix of running, falling and limping. What a sight.

Eventually, like all good things, Blarney Street came to an end. At the Junction with Shandon Street I turned left and up. Up, up the hill, the last punishment for me. No walking.
There's people looking at me, I must look a state. Am I smiling? More of a grimace?
Is that an open top tour bus? I crossed over the road, ran up the hill and turned onto Dominic Street.

My watch was counting down. 100-99-98-97..... Well to be fair I was going pretty slow at this point. I spotted the curves of the Firkin Crane, Left turn, there's the Butter Museum. I'm here. I stopped running, stopped my watch, and well..... Stopped.

I felt sick, my stomach was cramping, my lungs were screaming and my legs were on fire. I could hear voices, voices I knew. I looked up, saw my sisters and my father. They looked worried. One of them laughed a little as if to break the tension. I stood upright, gave a smile.

I'm not entirely sure, but I think the first words out of my mouth were along the lines of, "*I'm glad that's over, I'm not in a hurry to do that again."* I think that when I heard myself say it, I knew I was done, my goal was made, I had ran the Butter road.

All of it, every step from Tralee to Cork. No one, no pain, could take that away.
I did it.

Paddy Maloney introduced himself, we chatted briefly and he had the good sense and

courtesy to leave me recover a little before taking the photos for Jack.

While I was there I did some stretches and Paddy got me a carton of milk, best tasting milk I had ever had. My mother-in law and sister-in-law joined the group, with them was my eldest son who came running up asking if *"Daddy won*?" I told him I had, not strictly a lie as I was the winner in a race or one. He asked me where my medal was.

There was a group of people waiting around, we got some strange looks. Waiting to collect their children from dance class in the Firkin Crane I wondered if they knew anything about the buildings around them, how important they had been?

But, you know what? At one level I didn't care, at that point I was just so happy to have finished. There had been a point, earlier that day when I was close to stopping, I hadn't, I had pushed through. I was beaming, I had goosebumps. I said my goodbyes to everyone and drove home.

"Finish each day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities no doubt crept in; forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day. You shall begin it serenely and with too high a spirit to be encumbered with your old nonsense." (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

The aftermath

Was it worth it? Yes. Will I do it again? Yes. High point? Too many, views were great, the sense of loss while fitting in perfectly, the personal satisfaction for stepping outside my comfort zone on more than one occasion.

Low point? The pain, the countryside being ruined by fly-tipping and obnoxious development, the lack of any waymarks or information on points of interest along the route, the closed pubs, abandoned buildings.

Overall? Superb, a magnificent journey along the road, physically, emotionally and educationally. The road is fantastic. It is a great trip, it showcases the best we have to offer and even shows the worst. It's a slice of realism in a world of tweedle-dee-dee.

It's Ireland in a nutshell, a montage of where we were, where we are, and where we could be. It is challenging, rewarding, relentless and forgiving. It will take your breath away, especially if you run the hills.

It should be developed, it should be promoted and people should learn about it in school. This is part of what we are, it is a reason why the countryside developed and how a trading city survived for so long. We can learn from the past, but only if we look at it.

Whizzing around, sooner, faster, bigger, better, now. That's a way to exist, not a way to live. Slow down, relax, take stock, take pictures, take memories and pass the word around.

It's on the doorstep. All you have to do is cross the threshold.

And above all, enjoy it. Smiles optional.

Bertie Harte

The Kerryman's Table

The end of the Toll Houses on the Butter Road

"A meeting of the Trustees took place in Millstreet, on Tuesday, 28th, (July) where all debts and demands on the Trust were paid off, the Gates and Toll Houses disposed of, and the 31st being the day, on which contracts &c. cease, the road will be free to the great joy of the farmers and inhabitants along the line who have felt the severity of the tax for a long time. We understand that bonfires are being collected where the Gates stood, and that great rejoicing and festivities will take place."

(Cork Examiner, 31 July 1846)

Why Cork Irish?

I am often asked why I am studying Cork Irish. Isn't it obvious that when you learn a language you learn the standard form of it? And then, if you're still interested, you can delve into dialectal literature. So why am I not learning Standard Irish?

My key objection to Standard Irish–which I would prefer to refer to as Standardized Irish–is that this form of the Irish language, if it is a legitimate form at all, was devised by a government committee and is a mish-mash of elements found in the various real dialects of traditional Irish. Imagine if the various countries speaking English decided to standardize English by combining Cockney with Geordie and Scouse, a dash of Lowland Scots, and some of the Queen's English on the way: that would not be a "standard" form of the English language. A real standard is based on the historically correct grammatical forms and exemplified in the writings of the best writers. So, with English, the elements of standard grammar are mostly clear, and they are exemplified by the writing of Dickens, Hardy, Austen and others.

In the case of Irish, the dialects have developed differently for centuries, but the form of Irish closest to the historically correct grammatical forms is Cork Irish, and the form furthest from them is Galway Irish. If we compare the situation with English, Cork Irish is analogous to Oxford English and Galway Irish to Cockney. The reasons for this probably include the cultural histories of those regions: in Cork a literary history was maintained all the way through, whereas most of the poets of Connacht were illiterate.

The synthetic verb forms used in Cork Irish were once used throughout the whole of Ireland, or are derived from synthetic forms used throughout the whole of Ireland. That is not to say that Cork Irish is conservative in every respect. It would be unusual if it were, and in fact features such as the dropping of the relative form of the verb, the use of provincial forms such as **deinim** (derived from the original pre-standard **do-ghním**) and the supplanting of many historical nominatives by what were originally dative forms are among some of the innovations in Cork Irish.

But the incidence of such things is much lower in Cork than elsewhere. Relatively speaking, it is the most conservative dialect. In terms of literature, the Irish literary canon is much narrower than its English equivalent. There was almost nothing in print in Irish when the Gaelic Revival began, save the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, a couple of dictionaries and Bishop Séamus Ó Gallchobhair's sermons. The Revival was a work of collecting and printing manuscripts as well as of producing new original works of Irish.

A fairly substantial body of works was printed by the Irish Texts Society and hundreds of works of Irish published between the beginning of the Irish Revival and the introduction of the artificial **Caighdeán Oifigeamhail** in the middle of the 20th century. It would be idle to claim that all those works were in Cork Irish–Séamus Ó Grianna, writing from the Donegal Gaedhealtacht was one of the most prodigious authors of the period, and he certainly did not write in Cork Irish–but the Irish priest and author, Peadar Ua Laoghaire, was probably the most prolific author of the Gaelic Revival, and taken together with the output of Kerry authors the Munster contribution to the Revival was significant. In fact, all the Gaedhealtacht areas participated in the Revival, with no clear predominance, but Munster Irish was particularly influential in the Galltacht, where learners attempted to imitate the perceived "correct" Irish of Canon Ua Laoghaire.

The Caighdeán Oifigeamhail would not have been introduced had one form of Irish become accepted as the Standard for the island of Ireland, but an Irish Pronouncing Dictionary was produced, using Munster pronunciation, and the Christian Brothers' Grammar largely disseminated a Munster form of the Irish language.

One is struck by the passage in the early editions of that grammar book counselling learners of Irish not to imitate the use of **muid** as a personal pronoun. Whereas in Cork, the first person plural pronoun was **sinn**, but the conjugated forms of the verb itself (e.g., **glanaimíd**) required no pronoun to be appended, in the West and North of Ireland, where the verbal conjugations had broken down, the verbal form was reanalysed as containing a pronoun: **glanann muid**, and the use of **muid** instead of **sinn** as a pronoun spread therefrom. This is an error of similar proportions to the use of "could of" instead of "could have" by many native speakers of English–while such usage is undoubtedly native English, it is scarcely educated usage, and the old grammar book advised learners of Irish not to copy similarly corrupt usages in Irish. It is not a valid objection to state that each phase of a language's history consists of a corruption of what went before, and therefore that all corruptions must be accepted.

The key point is that in a linguistic culture,

the educated often hold out against corruptions – "could of" would not be accepted among the educated–and only once the educated have finally yielded themselves has the pass been truly surrendered and the standard language changed. There are cases where two rival versions maintain themselves for a time–we can think of the use or non-use of "whom" in English–and no-one would dream of claiming that the use of "whom" could be decreed by the government to be a mistake from now on; for as long as significant numbers of educated people continue to use traditional forms, they cannot be wrong, even if, as with "whom", it no longer feels right to insist on their usage.

In the case of Irish, a broad standard, allowing the use of traditional and progressive forms together could have been accepted, but the range of language that implied would have been much larger than would be the case in English. To allow everything from Cork Irish at one end of the spectrum to Galway Irish at the other (lower) end would have been a very broad standard indeed. The bullet was bitten: the government decided to create a standard language. The more artificial such standards, the less they are likely to be accepted–and, while the Irish government has been able to abuse its control of the Irish education system to ensure the use of its standard in the schools and media, thus ensuring that most Irish written today appears in the Caighdeán Oifigeamhail, the fact that four rival sets of textbooks teaching variously Munster Irish, Connacht Irish, Ulster Irish and Standard Irish, and sometimes more particularly Cork Irish, Kerry Irish, Cois Fhairrge Irish, etc, shows that there is a mismatch between the Standard and the language of the Gaedhealtachtaí, and that to that extent the Standard has not been fully accepted, especially by learners who want to learn to speak like Irish native speakers.

Whereas the first Republic of Ireland census showed that in 1926 Munster had the greatest number of speakers, the percentage of native speakers was highest in Connacht, and within Munster itself, Cork Irish had dwindled in relation to Kerry Irish. The prestige of Cork Irish therefore depended on its perceived "correctness", and the authority of writers such as Peadar Ua Laoghaire. Within decades, Galway Irish had emerged as the majority dialect of Irish, and it was felt politically impossible to tell Galway native speakers that the Irish they spoke was incorrect. This was a question of egalitarianism: people in the East End of London do not claim to be offended when told their English is incorrect, neither do they insist that "ain't" is correct in their districts where "am not" or "have not" stand elsewhere. Standard English is valid for every district, including those where Cockney is spoken, but the politics of the Irish language movement meant that it was difficult to explain to native speakers in some areas that their dialects had diverged from the written Irish of 1600-1950 owing to the fact that their ancestors were mainly illiterate–I wouldn't recommend emphasising this point to the speakers of Cockney English either, but the facts in both cases are what they are. A further problem was the vociferous, almost spiteful, response of writers in the Donegal Gaedhealtacht to Cork Irish, which required a change in the standard to accommodate them; it is a delicious irony that the Standard chosen was not so close to Donegal Irish anyway. I am sure some people will try to tell me there was a literary tradition in Donegal in the 17th century–but those people did not write in the "Donegal Irish" of today, writing in fact in a form of Irish closer to Cork Irish. It is undoubtedly the case too that the dialects are of long standing: Uilliam Bedell's Bible of 1684 (incorporating Uilliam Dómhnaill's New Testament of 1602) shows evidence of more than one hand, including forms such as **duaidh sé** and **d'ith sé** in various parts of the New Testament. Yet the synthetic forms are also undoubtedly dominant in Bedell's Bible, compiled in Connacht as it was by a committee of native speakers from various parts of Ireland (I believe Uilliam Ó Dómhnaill was from Kilkenny, whereas Muircheartach Ó Cionga, who worked on the Old Testament, was from Offaly).

Clearly there is enough here for arguments to continue until the end of time. But the outcome was that a rough Munster standard had been established in the pre-war period, with vituperative carping against it, particularly from Donegal. The logical thing to do would have been to make Galway Irish the Standard, considering its central location, and its numerical predominance in terms of numbers of speakers–but to require native speakers to study eighteenth-, nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature not in Galway Irish (including the works of Peadar Ua Laoghaire) as part of their literary heritage in schools, just as children in the East End of London study Dickens and Shakespeare. One could have pointed to an area–"go to Cois Fhairrge! there you will hear the standard spoken!"–and one could have pointed to Gaedhealtacht writers from that county whose writing exemplified the new Standard. But the logical approach was eschewed. All native speakers had to be disobliged by the

Standard, albeit not equally. Neither was a historical approach adopted: to accept historical forms as correct would have meant accepting Cork Irish in most cases, and the very purpose of the Standard was to move away from that. It was claimed that the most frequent dialectal forms were chosen, i.e. those of two of three dialects–but this claim was untrue, as there are frequent examples where this approach was not adopted. The use of the relative form of the verb is historically correct, used by two of the three dialects, and by the majority of native speakers, but was rejected–possibly in order to simplify the language?

The use of some of the absolute/dependent forms of the verb (eg **chím** vs. **feicim**) is historically correct, used by two of three dialects, but was rejected in some cases (eg **feicim**) in favour of sole use of the dependent for this verb, as in Galway. Case distinctions such as vocatives and genitives were preserved, despite being patchily used in native speech, whereas the dative case was rejected, despite the fact that many of the datives are used in preference to the nominative in large parts of the Gaedhealtacht. In short, the claim that the most frequent forms were adopted can be shown to be false. Neither was input from the public on the Standard allowed while it was being devised. James Dillon, leader of Fine Gael and brother of the Irish-language expert, Myles Dillon, tackled the Taoiseach on this, but was rebuffed. It was claimed that the Standard was only for the Dáil's translation department, but then imposed so ruthlessly that some works of Donegal Irish were allowed to go out of print for years when the author refused to allow them to be re-edited into the Standard.

Worst of all, it is now claimed that historically correct forms still found in the Gaedhealtacht, such as **chím** (used by 2 of 3 Gaedhealtachtaí), had become "incorrect" overnight, and were now discouraged in the education system. Historically correct forms still used widely in Ireland were now "provincialisms"–all because the government said so, and for no other reason. Forms that are scarce or hardly found in the Gaedhealtacht became the prescribed forms. For example, **bhíomar** was chosen over **bhí muid** (owing to the problem with **muid**), and there is some evidence this form was used in Clare Irish before it died out, but the forms **bhíomair** (not **bhíomar**) and **bhí muid** predominate in the Gaedhealtacht. Similarly **táimid** was chosen over **táimíd** and **tá muid**–I have heard that native speakers in Donegal occasionally pronounce the m slender and so **táimid** may be found, but it is not a dominant form anywhere in the Gaedhealtacht. In general, simplification and splitting the difference were the main approaches used in drawing up the Standard: it was not a codification of the Irish used in literature up to that point, and so could not be genuinely described as a Standard when it came out, but rather an attempted artificial Standardization.

Nowadays most Irish is written by non-native speakers, who are in most cases happy to use the government's Standard, and the weaker Gaedhealtachtaí in particular have become more influenced by the Standard, at least to the extent that anyone working in the Irish-language sector has to be able to write the Standardized Irish. In the end, however, it is the native speakers in the Gaedhealtacht who speak the best Irish, and the Standard has not resolved the question of how to learn to speak like them. While the canon of literature in Gaedhealtacht Irish is small, there is much less great literature available in "Standard Irish". A browse through the works in print (eg at www.litriocht.com) shows that books for children and trashy modern fiction (featuring drug abuse, lesbianism and other reputedly exciting themes thought likely to attract the young) account for the majority of current output. Standard Irish is the language in which European Union legislation is being translated into Irish, but is not a gateway to great literature.

I do not agree that learners should learn the artificial standard. They should, rather, choose a real dialect from the start. Textbooks such as *Teach Yourself Irish* by Myles Dillon and Donncha Ó Cróinín focus on Cork Irish and would prepare the learner for the works of Peadar Ua Laoghaire, works that are part of Ireland's literary heritage, but most of which are not in print and hard to get hold of because they do not employ the "Standard". I aim to transcribe some of those works on this site and thus make them available to all.

No-one should deride learners for learning a dialect–they are not trying to "set themselves up as dialectal experts before they are ready"–they are merely trying to learn right the first time. It is a recipe for confusion to say that they should first learn Standard Irish, and then learn the grammar all over again when they start reading dialectal literature. Don't forget, none of your Irish ancestors used the Caighdeán Oifigeamhail–it is simply not part of your ancestral culture! Don't do it!

March 5, 2010

http://www.corkirish.com/wordpress/why-cork-irish

The 1921 Millstreet Ambush

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Latest publication

"Irish Bulletin, Vol. 1." is our latest publication. This was the official newspaper of the Irish Government during the War of Independence. Its aim was to provide those outside Ireland with the Government's case and the facts of the war that it had to wage. This information could not otherwise be obtained because of the suppression by the British authorities of all other outlets that put the Irish Government's case.

It was produced with minimal resources and under constant threat of suppression. It was therefore an underground publication despite being the paper of a legitimate Government.

It was unadorned with any other content except straightforward factual and irrefutable information. This is what made its reputation and because of that it became one of the most powerful weapons in the war that eventually proved successful. It deserves an honoured place in Irish history yet it has never been republished and it is hardly referred to by our contemporary historians—and when it is—it is almost inevitably in disparaging terms.

This is the first volume of the paper reproduced as faithfully as possible to the original. Other volumes will follow.

IRISH BULLETIN

a full reprint of the
official newspaper of
Dáil Éireann
giving news
and war reports

Volume 1

12th July 1919 - 1st May 1920

Aubane
Historical
Society

This is another collection of items relevant to Millstreet and surrounding areas.
We are grateful to all the contributors and particularly to those who gave us permission to republish articles from other publications.

A MILLSTREET MISCELLANY (8)

Aubane Historical Society

978-1-903497-76-0

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