

# Claregalway cousins join Curragh relatives 50 years after leaving for pastures new

BY FRANK KEARNEY

**FAR too often they gathered together only at funerals – but last weekend the people of the tiny hamlet of Montiagh in Claregalway had a reason to celebrate in a happier mood.**

But their get-together was also tinged with sadness as memories of loved ones were not forgotten as they remembered the people of the village of fifty years earlier, when four families left Montiagh and became new residents of Ballyfair, Suncroft, in the heartland of the Curragh in Kildare.

The year 1959 was a difficult time in the tiny hamlet of Montiagh, an old Irish speaking village that lay close to the River Clare and was surrounded by wet lands and boggy area.

Those that could afford to go to England or America during the barren fifties went, but many from the Montiagh area simply couldn't even afford the travel to make a better life for themselves.

They had farms but the land was very wet and unsuitable for tillage and they had to travel to nearby farms where they rented a rood or two or maybe even an acre in conacre for tillage and sow the crops that would become the livelihood for their livestock, homes and farms.

Then a project came that was to change the lives of some of the families in Montiagh forever when an offer of land in the plush heartlands of Kildare became a reality for four of the families in the Montiagh area.

However, to relocate to the

Curragh of Kildare was not an easy decision to make as it meant uprooting all of the family and leaving their relatives, neighbours and friends in the close knit village, located just north of Claregalway village.

There was much discussion and thought before the four families decided to leave Claregalway and set up a new life in the parish of Suncroft within distance of the Curragh army barracks.

Duggan was a popular name in the village of Montiagh and fifty years earlier some families from the village had also left in a land commission project to another part of the Claregalway area in Kiltroque.

The departure of four Duggan families was a major upheaval in the village of Montiagh at the time and

there were fears that they may not settle or that it just wouldn't work out.

Kildare was a long journey away from Galway in the late fifties, but yet with the offer of thirty five to forty acres of land as well as a new house and barn, was not something that any family could turn their back on, although it was difficult to leave the thatched homes that covered Montiagh at the time.

Tears and fears were overcome as the four families set up for the new pastures in Kildare.

It was a most difficult decision for the family of William Duggan, Thady and John Duggan, Matt Duggan and his wife and family and Martin Duggan and his wife and family who also brought with them their father and mother.

The Duggans of Montiagh

quickly settled in their new homes in Kildare. However they had their families and unlike many who had emigrated before them, they could read and write and letter writing became a hugely popular means of communication with the people of Montiagh that they left behind.

Life changed for those that went to Kildare and within a few years life was to also change for the farming families of Montiagh that were left behind. They had benefitted from the good land near the river which they got from the land commission from those that were relocated, while much more of the wetlands was given for forestry.

Within a few years the Creamery co-ops started in the west of Ireland and

around the country and with people able to sell milk it gave a new lease of life to people in Ireland.

Indeed the families that had moved would probably never have moved had the creamery started before they left Claregalway.

Those that moved to Kildare were able to sow potatoes and grow beet and corn on their own lands, something they could never do in the wetlands of Montiagh in the fifties or sixties.

It was just a few years before that that a drainage scheme on the River Clare put in place by Dunmore based Junior Minister Mick Donnellan, gave an opportunity to people and families who lived along the River Clare to wear anything other than wellington boots.

Life was different in Kildare but the families set up home and now their extended families all reside in the county and its surrounds. Thady and John later moved back to Portumna after selling the land and took over a public house that has been a popular stopping point for people of Claregalway ever since.

In the intervening years the only time that people of Montiagh have ever had a get together was at the funeral of a family member either in Kildare or Claregalway.

Last weekend to celebrate fifty years in Kildare, the people of Montiagh village travelled in style to join in celebration with the families and their extended families who had left the tiny hamlet fifty years earlier. The reunion also featured a delightful

Mass and visit to the cemetery to visit the grave of the Claregalway natives, who made the Curragh their home and passed away in their adopted county.

They had a wonderful weekend together where stories were shared and memories rekindled of other years and people that have long gone.

It was a special weekend for ninety year old Winnie Duggan, the oldest survivor of those that went away in 1959.

It is now planned that to honour the occasion of the fifty years that the Montiagh families in Kildare will travel back to Claregalway to meet many more natives of Claregalway and enjoy a weekend in the homeland that was the base of the now extended families fifty years earlier.