

IRISHTOWN

welcomes you to the

150th Anniversary

Celebration

of the birth of



Michael Davitt

on Sunday, June 2, 1996



U ACHTARAN NA hÉIREANN  
PRESIDENT OF IRELAND

**MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT ROBINSON**

I am very pleased to send warmest greetings to the members of Irishtown Community Council and to congratulate you on your plans to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Michael Davitt's birth.

While Michael Davitt is popularly known for his achievement in founding the Land League in 1879, there are many aspects of his life that I believe would merit closer study, not least his determined opposition to sectarianism in any form.

The commemorative events that you are planning will help to focus attention on the life of Davitt and his significance, especially in the present time. I wish you every success.

Tá súil agam n-éireoidh go geal leis an gcomóradh.

MARY ROBINSON  
PRESIDENT

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**COMMUNITY COUNCIL**  
**WELCOME**

Irishtown Community Council would like to take this opportunity to welcome each and every one of you to the 150th birthday celebrations of Michael Davitt.

We would like to thank everyone involved in making this event a success, from the Committee Members to the helpers on the day. Thanks to all our guests for taking the time to come to Irishtown and making this a high profile day for the Irishtown area. To those guests who contributed to our book, again our thanks. To President Mary Robinson for her message of good wishes. To our Master of Ceremonies, Ger Conroy, for his time and effort. To all our sponsors and advertisers, especially the AIB in Claremorris, who have been of great assistance to us, we thank you all sincerely. To the FAS team for all the work they did on the monument and Irishtown in general and Mayo County Council for their help and support, thank you all. And to the school children for writing their essays, one which is printed in full and excerpts from another two are also printed.

**Community Council Committee**

Chairman: Michael Roche  
Secretary : Breeda Nolan  
Treasurer : Teresa Boyle  
P.R.O.: Mary Prendergast  
Members: Ann Ronayne, Jimmy Roche, Joe Cosgrove, Frank McGrath, Tony Melvin, Pat Reapy, Gretta McManus, Mary Kirrane, Josie Ryan.

# AGENDA

2nd June 1996  
M.C. Ger Conroy

**Principal Speakers:** Brian Mooney  
Bernard O'Hara  
Michael D. Higgins  
John Donnelly

**Guests:** Jim Higgins      P.J. Morley      Gabriel Corr  
Michael Marren      Pat Rabbitte      Emmet Stagg  
Pat McHugh      Pat Higgins      Richard Finn  
Jim Mannion

**Photographer:** Tricia Forde      **Video:** Michael Keane

- 12.30 - 1.30      Reception in Allied Irish Bank in Claremorris.  
1.45      Leave Claremorris. Short parade led by Hanley's Riding School.  
2.15      Arrive at start of Irishtown Parade, half a mile from Irishtown on the Ballindine Road. This will be led by Slattery's horses and Balla Pipe Band.  
3.00 - 4.30      Speeches in Jarlath Cosgrove's field.  
5.30      Re-open Davitt monument (following renovations).

## Other events planned:-

Live Street Music, Cross Road Dance, Geoghan Amusements from Dublin, Judging of Painting Competition, Horse Shoe Throwing Competition, Car Boot Sale, Drama Group, Vintage Cars and Vintage Farm Machinery

There will be lunch served in Bourke's back lounge for all invited guests at whatever time suits you.

Challenge Football Match on Monday, June 3, at 6p.m. between Moy Davitts and local Davitt Team, followed by presentations in Bourke's Pub.

## MESSAGE FROM JIM HIGGINS

Please convey my sincere thanks to your Community Council for the invitation to attend the Davitt Celebrations in Irishtown on June 2nd.

I will of course be delighted to attend and to say a few words.

I want to congratulate you and the Community Council on your initiative in organising the commemoration ceremony. Indeed I had the pleasure on 25th March of unveiling a plaque to Michael Davitt in the Library in Haslingden near Manchester which was often frequented by Davitt and where he studied Irish History.

I look forward to being in Irishtown on June 2nd.

Kindest personal regards to all.

JIM HIGGINS. T.D., Minister of State & Government Chief Whip.

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## MESSAGE FROM P.J. MORLEY

I wish to thank Irishtown Community Council for inviting me to attend the Davitt 150th Celebrations. I will be very pleased to attend on the day and I wish you every success in organising the event.

P. J. MORLEY. T.D.

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## MESSAGE FROM PAT RABBITTE

Michael Davitt is one of those people in history who is claimed by everyone to themselves. He is a member of the Irish socialist pantheon, among the saints of rural Ireland, and a national patriot to boot.

But who was the real Davitt? What were his beliefs? Who properly can claim him and is he still relevant.

Davitt, of course, was a socialist. He was also a Fenian who believed in, and struggled for Irish Independence, a Republic. While he founded the Land League to fight for recognition of tenants' rights in the land this was not the same thing as peasant proprietorship. Furthermore in his republic land would have been owned by the State in the name of the people, nationalised in effect. This would not have been in conflict with individual possession and the "three Fs", fair rent, fixity of tenure, and free sale of tenant right, would have applied.

Davitt's view on the land question was based on that of James Fintan Lalor and also coincided with that of the noted American economic philosopher, Henry George. It may have been radical and socialistic, but it was also at the time, actually highly respectable.

Davitt also believed in what we now call national economic development. His thinking on economic development, in a sense foresaw Griffith and the economic philosophy of the original Sinn Fein. It also conformed to the German idea of national economics, which was in opposition to laissez faire. Again, Davitt advocated this approach from an essentially socialistic and patriotic perspective. As Crotty describes it Davitt, and later Griffith, argued that *"the combined action of all sections of the nation had won for the farmers the ownership of their land and, in return, a moral obligation rested upon them to pay the initial price, in the form of higher costs, of creating an industrial nexus in Ireland; the industrial nexus, once built, would be self-sustaining and would add immensely to the general welfare and wealth of the nation."*

We still strive for both these objectives, a self-sustaining industrial nexus in Ireland and a reasonable contribution from the farmers of Ireland towards achieving that objective. These are still the great themes of Irish political life, and Davitt still speaks to us on these themes. He is as relevant today as ever he was.

PAT RABBITTE T.D., Minister for Commerce, Science & Technology.

## MESSAGE FROM BRIAN MOONEY

My mother came from Burrish. Her name was Sheila Corr. She was the daughter of Luke and Mary Corr. Her brother Vinnie and his wife Mairead lived in her home place until Vinnie died some years ago.

I have very pleasant memories of holidays spent in Burrish in the 50's. I remember cycling to Kitty McHugh's in Irishtown for the messages. I remember long nights spent in John Corr's and Jimmy Rattigan's listening to stories of long ago. It was there I heard that my grand parents match was made at the Gooseberry Fair in Ballindine at the turn of the century.

My mother and her cousin Maureen Mannion came to Kiltimagh to work in a drapery shop. They both settled and married there. My mother married Martin Mooney and Maureen married Tommie McNicholas. Their hearts never left Irishtown and not a month passed without a visit back. The Irishtown link is still strong and the visits still go on. Everytime I come to Irishtown I feel I'm coming home.

I am delighted to be invited to join the celebrations on June 2nd and I wish Irishtown every success.

From BRIAN MOONEY, MAYO MAN OF THE YEAR 1996.

*Best wishes from . . .*

**IRISHTOWN  
FIANNA FAIL  
CUMANN.**

## MESSAGE FROM WILLIE REILLY

I would like to take this opportunity to compliment the organising committee for their work in commemorating the birth of a great Irishman. I compliment and thank, not just the organising committee but all the other Community Councils and committees that have worked so hard down through the years to make this community a better place to live in.

As someone with a rural background who has worked at community level in rural Ireland for the last twenty two years I am aware of the steady decline in population that is continuing to happen, a decline that is creating and will continue to create difficulties for those who are left behind. I am equally aware of how little has been done or is being done by the powers that be to rectify this situation. Michael Davitt was a man of vision who could see the problems and difficulties of his own time and who worked to overcome those difficulties. That is the very reason why we celebrate the 150th anniversary of his birth.

My hope would be that this celebration would inspire those involved in community work here in our own community and in other communities, to continue to work towards bringing more life back into their communities in spite of the fact that they are pushing against a very strong tide.

Rath De ar an obair seo.

William Reilly, C.C.

*Best wishes from . . .*

**JOAN CULLINA & FAMILY**

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*Irishtown.*

## IN MY GREAT GRANDFATHER'S TIME

*Mary Teresa (Waldron) Reaney*

The Land League has always had a very special significance for people from the Irishtown area as many of us grew up hearing stories concerning its foundation, and of the part played by our own ancestors in it which had been passed down through the generations. My grandfather, Laurence Daly, Boleyboy, often recounted stories told to him by his father, Jimmy Daly, concerning his role and that of other local people and their involvement in the events leading up to the meeting held in Irishtown in April, 1879. The landlord in Oldtown at the time was Walter Bourke. He had acquired the townland of Quiniltagh in 1878/79. Through a combination of bad harvests and poor crop returns, the tenants found themselves in arrears with the rent. To make matters worse, Walter Bourke imposed a fine of a half year's rent on top of the arrears. They refused to pay because they couldn't afford to. They were then threatened with eviction; Quiniltagh tenants appealed for support. It was at this time that Walter Bourke died, and as his son Joseph was with the British Army in India, the management of affairs fell to Canon Geoffrey Bourke, P.P. of Kilvine, an uncle of the new heir. Contrary to local optimism, the change in management did not change the situation regarding the threatened evictions.

Jimmy Daly told of a family by the name of Nestor from Quiniltagh, who came to his house in Boleyboy to ask him for help. He said that they asked him to intercede with Walter Bourke on their behalf as they were unable to pay the arrears. They knew that he sometimes worked for the Bourkes, and felt that he may have some influence. They were informed

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that Michael Davitt was coming to Claremorris and that they should meet with him. It was as a result of this that a group of farmers from the area met the man that was to have such a huge impact on land ownership in this island. Davitt was to come to know many of them, for he would sleep in their houses and was often welcomed among them at meetings in the West over the next two years. Those who attended this meeting, in what is now the Allied Irish Bank in Claremorris, were Jimmy Daly Boleyboy (Fenian and Whiteboy), great-grandfather of the Daly family in Irishtown, and of the Canny and Waldron families of Boleyboy, and of the Bane family, Knockadoon. From Burrish came Pat (Crop) Corr and his brother John who was foreman at McDonald's Stores, (now Glynn's) in Milltown. It has been said that Davitt stayed in Corr's house the night of the meeting. Also from Burrish came Pat Ronayne, great-grandfather of the Ronayne family, and Jimmy Rattigan, brother of Fr. Rattigan, P.P., of Williamstown. Also present were Pat Huane, Rockfort, Thomas Daly and John Bourke, Boleyboy.

Davitt himself writes:

"One day in Claremorris, County Mayo — it was in March, 1879 — I was in company with John W. Walsh, of Balla, who was a commercial traveller. I met some farmers from Irishtown, a village outside of Claremorris, and talked to them about the crops and the rent. Everywhere I heard the same story, and I at last made a proposition that a meeting be called in Irishtown to give expression to the grievances of the tenant farmers, and to demand a reduction in rent. We were also to urge the abolition of landlordism, and I promised to have speakers there, and

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they promised to get the audience. I wrote to Thomas Brennan, of Dublin, John Ferguson of Glasgow, and other Irishmen known for their adherence to Ireland's cause, and I drew up the resolutions."

He continues:

"The meeting was held (April 20, 1879), and was a great success, there being between 10,000 and 12,000 men present. In the procession there were 1,500 men on horseback marching as troop of cavalry; and this feature, inaugurated in Irishtown, has been continued ever since at every meeting of the Land League. The meeting was not fully reported in the Dublin papers, but was, as far as the object went, a success, for the landlords of the neighbourhood reduced the rents by twenty five per cent."

Other reasons given as to why Irishtown was chosen as the venue for the inaugural meeting include its location, roughly in the centre of Connaught. The field in which the meeting was held is actually in Burrish. It is said that this site was chosen because a short distance west of it can be seen the ruins of a large village that had suffered mass evictions. The landlord in question actually resided in Dunmore. Patsy Nolan, grandfather of Eddie Nolan, Creeveshill, often told stories concerning this village, which had been passed down to him by his grandfather, . . . Culliney, whose ancestors had been tenants there. One such story concerns a farmer from this village who, having sold a heifer at the fair in Dunmore, went to pay his rent. The landlord decided to take his neighbour's rent also and sent the tenant away empty-handed. A

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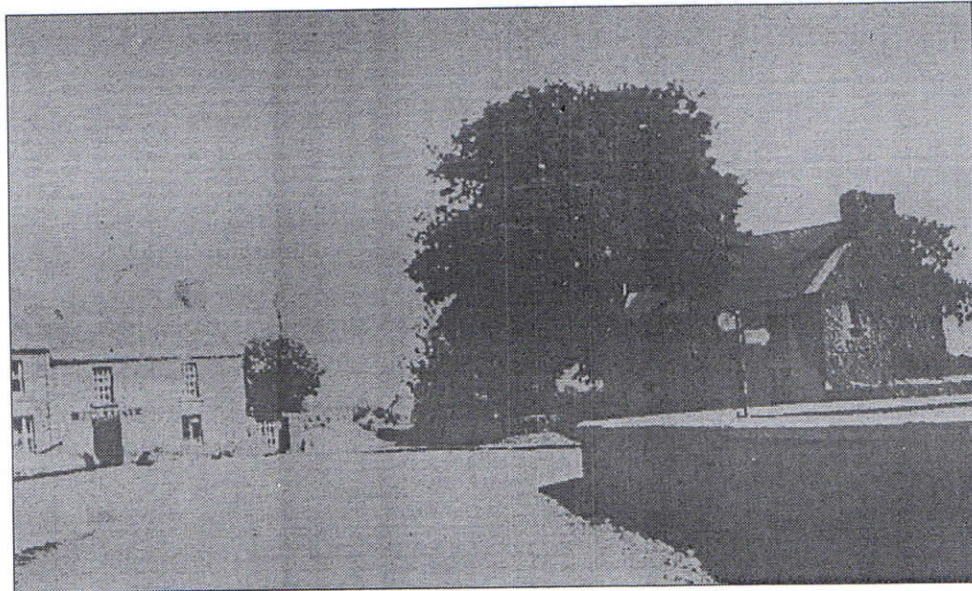
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short time after this, all the tenants in the village were evicted as the landlord wished to stock the land himself because the land was of prime quality.

Historians have not been slow in bestowing Irishtown its rightful place in history. Senator John A. Murphy wrote: "You had Irishtown, the Gaelic League, 1916, and the eventual freedom in that order. "It can well be argued that land ownership is a first step towards freedom and hence, Irishtown was indeed a milestone in Irish history.



Elm Square, Irishtown.

*Best wishes from . . .*

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## **The Land League and our days in Irishtown N.S.**

During my time in Irishtown N.S., local history was an important part of the curriculum. (Remember the museum!!) Before the days when field trips and school tours were seen as integral part of education, we had our own outing – to the Land League monument, which is situated across the road from the school. I can remember, as I'm sure many others can also, being instructed by Tom Kirrane to learn the inscription and to be able to recite it on returning to the classroom. After all those years, few pieces of knowledge have remained with me as clearly as that inscription. For any of you that may need reminding of it, here it is:

"Here, on Sunday, April 20th, 1879,  
inspired by Michael Davitt, was  
held the first meeting of the  
agitation which led to the  
foundation of the Land League  
and the restoration of the land to  
the people. By their courage and  
resolution the seven thousand persons  
who attended helped to destroy  
landlordism in Ireland and to save  
the Gael from extermination. "

### **A word of thanks!**

I would like to extend a special thanks to my mother, Mary Waldron, Boleyboy, and to my Uncle, Tom Waldron, Feamore, for sharing the stories and memories of the Land League, passed on to them by past generations. Go raibh maith agaibh.

*Best wishes from . . .*

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*Irishtown*

## CHANGING TIMES

There have been many changes in towns and villages in Ireland over the last century and Irishtown is no exception, even the name of the village is changed. The area was once known as Ballinvilla, and it still is known as the townland of Ballinvilla. One half of the village was known as Drymills and the other as Irishtown but now it's all called Irishtown. But you will often still see Drymills on the map and very seldom see Irishtown.

The village itself has seen many changes too. There has been a number of new houses added and many of the old ones have changed hands.

The following list is made out to the best of our knowledge.

**BOURKES:** This building was built around the early 1870's and was first owned by Bernard Daly. It was later bought by Martin Slattery, Cloonfrayne, who married a grand aunt of Pake Corr. In 1962 it was sold to Pat Rattigan, Burrish and in 1965 it was sold to Sean Bourke, Rockfort, who had returned from Canada. He made it into one of the leading Singing Lounges in the West of Ireland.

**FREELEY'S:** This was first built by Andy Mullarkey in 1850, later sold to Mrs. Lavin who had a Bar/Grocery/ Bakery. Lavin's daughter married Willie Molloy but died a few years later in childbirth. Molloy left Irishtown and the business was sold to Joseph Freeley in early 1900 and he had a Bar /Hardware/ Bakery / Boot Merchant and was an agent for Goulding Manures. It is still in the Freeley family, though not in business.

**MANNION'S:** Where Mannion's grocery is now was once Kirrane's Bar and grocery. Where the Bar is, was a private house belonging to an RIC policeman called Kirby. He later sold his house to Griffins (father of Gerald and Tom) who opened a drapery shop. This was later sold to

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Kirrane's who extended their premises to what it is now. The name changed in later years when Kitty Kirrane married Christy Mannion in 1965.

**SHERIDAN'S:** This building was once the RIC Barracks. It was rented by Joseph Freeley from 1904 to 1906 when Martin Sheridan, from Bohola, bought the premises and opened a drapery business. It is still in the Sheridan family and still in business today.

**GRIFFIN'S:** This was first owned by Tom Nolan and was another Bar. His daughter Katie had the business and married O'Donnell. Their son Paddy died young. A cousin, John Mullarkey had the business then for a while. It was then passed on to another cousin Francie Heneghan who sold it to Gerald Griffin in 1945. He opened petrol pumps and garage. It is still in the Griffin family though not in business.

**GRIFFIN'S:** This building was first owned by Nestors, then McGarrys. Molloy's bought it in 1931. Peter Roche, Crimlin, bought it in 1936 and in 1961 Tom Griffin bought it and moved from Kirrane's where he continued running a Bar like the previous owners.

**MULLARKEY'S:** This was built by Andy Mullarkey in the late 1800's and was a very successful Bar and general hardware business. It was later run by Kitty and Margaret McHugh, until Kitty's death in 1995 when Margaret Rattigan took over. It has been just a Bar for the last number of years. *The picture below is a taken from an actual billhead dated 1910.*

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**FREELEY'S:** David Freeley's was built around 1934 where he had a shop and petrol pumps. It had been closed down for a number of years until it was purchased by Seamus and Ann Ronayne who now have the petrol pumps open again, and also have a shop with groceries, hardware, trophies and giftware on sale.

Across the road is Cosgrove's house built in 1994.

Next is Liam and Celia Griffin's house which was built in 1988.

Gerald and Kathleen Griffin's house was built in 1955 by Pat McHugh, Ballindine.

**DALY'S:** This house was built by Jimmy Daly, who was a builder by trade, around 1955 also. He had a hardware shop there for a number of years but is no longer in existence. The family are still in the building business.

**McMANUS'S:** Next at the cross roads is McManus's. This was once Katie Cullina's shop where it is mostly remembered as a sweet shop. There was also a dressmaker in residence there at one time. The house was also shared for a number of years with a Connelly family. Remember the big tree outside where you could sit in the shade and where the altar was erected during the May processions. This premises was bought in 1965 by Annie Rattigan who later married Joe McManus.

Next along the line is the Church of the Holy Family and St. Oliver which was built in 1975 to replace the old one which was built in 1838. The priest's house was built around 1970. The old church is now the Community Centre.

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Then we have the school which was built in 1897 and celebrates its centenary next year.

**FREELEY'S:** Maureen Freeley's next to the school, used to be known as Cullina's and had a small shop. This was a two-storey building until it was renovated around 1985. It's name changed when Maureen married Tommie Freeley.

Billy and Mary Freeley built their house in 1984.

**CULLINA'S:** This shop was built in 1934 by McGarry. The name eventually changed to Cullina when Joan McGarry married Michael Cullina. It is still in business.

Melvin's house is next and was built in 1955

The **POST OFFICE** is the one building in Irishtown that never changed names. It was always owned by the O'Donnells and was built around 1800.

Bill Griffin's is next and was built in the 1960's.

Back across the road again to Joe Lally's.

**LALLY'S:** This place was first owned by Anna Maria Godfrey, who had a drapery and dressmaking business. She eventually moved to her sister's in Tuam and Joe Lally bought the shop in 1948. He had a grocery shop for a number of years. This building was sold this year to Tommie Joe Birmingham, Meelick, to be used as a private house.

**Anthony McLoughlin**

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**McHUGH'S:** Michael Slattery (MASTER) built this house next to Lally's where he and his wife Teresa Dolan, Dalgan, lived until their deaths. They were both teachers in Irishtown N.S. The house is now owned by Andy McHugh, from Straide, and his wife Mary Teresa and family.

Then we have a new house being built by Peter Harrison.

**HARRISON'S:** This was first owned by Michael Raftery and his wife. It was later bought by Jim Rattigan for his brother Michael, who left it to his nephew Paddy, who sold it to Jack Harrison.

**ROCHE'S:** Jimmy Roche bought this house in 1984 from the McGarry family. It was built in 1900 by Pat McGarry, who moved over from where Tom Griffin is now. He opened a grocery and hardware business. His son Paddy took over the business and it was later sold to Roche's who had a grocery shop for a number of years but it is now a private house.

**OLD TOWN HOUSE:** This house is situated on the Milltown road and was built in 1740 for the Bourke family who were Landlords in this area. This family is also connected to President Mary Robinson's family. The house was sold to William Curran in 1917 who shared it with Master Slattery until he built his own house in Irishtown. In 1992 Clare Campbell (O'Donnell) bought it from the Curran family.

Researched with Tommie Freeley, Ger Bourke, Kathleen Griffin and Kitty Mannion.

Compiled by Breeda Nolan.

*Best wishes from . . .*

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## IRISHTOWN AND MICHAEL DAVITT

by Bernard O'Hara  
Regional Technical College, Galway.

*Author of "Michael Davitt Remembered"*

When a huge crowd (variously estimated to be from 4,000 to 13, 000) assembled at Irishtown, County Mayo, on Sunday 20th April 1879, little did they think that they were about to initiate a national movement which would bring about the greatest social change ever witnessed in Irish history and in the process transform tenant farmers into owner-occupiers by constitutional means. The meeting was convened on the advice of James Daly, editor of The Connaught Telegraph, to protest against the threatened eviction of tenants on the Bourke estate in Irishtown. Michael Davitt, the father of the Land League, invited the speakers and drafted the resolutions which were put to the meeting.

The platform for the historic meeting was erected on the land of Mrs. Higgins by Jimmy Daly (Crimlin), Michael Cullina (Drymills), Patrick Corr, John Corr, Jimmy Rattigan, Pat Ronayne, Andy Mullarkey, J. Leonard and was guarded the night before by Pat Huane, Thomas Daly and John Bourke. The timber for the platform was loaned by Joe Dalton of McDonnell's store in Milltown on condition that no nails were put in it. The meeting was chaired by James Daly and the speakers were Thomas Brennan (Dublin), John O'Connor Power, MP for Mayo, John Ferguson (Glasgow), John James Louden (Westport), Matthew Harris and Malachy O'Sullivan from Ballinasloe. Michael Davitt did not attend, presumably because he was then a convict on a ticket of leave. The meeting was very successful, the eviction notices were withdrawn from the Bourke tenants

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and the rent was reduced by twenty-five per cent, but even more important, it ignited the flame which led to tenant ownership of the land within a generation.

Some landlord privileges were eroded over the years, but it was Michael Davitt, the organising genius behind the Land League, and his supporters, starting with the Irishtown meeting, which banished landlordism and servility into oblivion and paved the way for the emergence of national independence and the creation of a modern democratic state.

Michael Davitt was Mayo's most famous son and one of Ireland's greatest patriots. He suffered many hard knocks and disappointments in his voyage through life but bore them all with admirable fortitude. His life included; birth at Straide, Co Mayo in 1846; eviction with his family at the age of four; emigration to England; a child factory-worker; a printer's devil; a typesetter; a book-keeper; a Fenian; a prisoner on penal servitude; a social reformer; an agitator; the founder and organiser-in-chief of the Land League; a lecturer; author; a Member of Parliament; Founding Patron of the GAA; a pioneer of the British Labour Movement; a bankrupt; a war correspondent; an international journalist; and ever and always a champion of the marginalised and exploited world-wide until his death in 1906. Considering his background and opportunities in life, one can only speak of the man in superlative terms.

Like you in Irishtown today, all Irishmen and Irishwomen have every reason to revere the memory of this great son of County Mayo.

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## MICHAEL DAVITT LOOKS BACK

By Aine Mc Grath. 6th. Class  
Irishtown National School.

I, Michael Davitt, was born to a poor hard working tenant family, that lived in Straide on a small patch of land. Martin and Sabina or Katherine, as she was baptised, were my parents. My sisters and brothers names were Mary, Ann, Sabina and James.

My father was literate, bilingual and could read. On the other hand, my mother was illiterate, fluent in Irish and the dominant partner in the marriage. The earliest childhood memory I have is of when my family was evicted. I was four years of age, I clearly remember as though it were yesterday, standing on the side of the road with my devastated family. Without an ounce of dignity left, we watched the landlord's men trashing and knocking our home to the ground, the home that my parents had worked so hard for. My father's blood boiled with rage and my sisters sat quietly crying to themselves, while my mother held my hand tightly in hers and coughed out angry tearless sighs. She took Mary, Ann and I to the workhouse when our father went to England to get work. We didn't stay there long because all children over three years of age were separated from their mothers. A charitable priest, Fr. McHugh took us in and gave us food and shelter for 18 months until we joined our father in Haslingden, England.

He had two jobs, one of which was teaching the local children. At the age of 9 I started working in a cotton mill for 60 hours a week, earning a half a crown. I soon resigned and went to another cotton mill. At the age of 11 I had an accident and had to get my right arm amputated. In one way, this was a major draw back if I wanted to help my family financially, but also it was a blessing in disguise because I went back to school for 4 years and studied hard. I went to a Protestant school and learned that Catholics and Protestants can work side by side without fighting. After this I had various different jobs. In 1865 I joined the Fenians or the IRB and became one of the main leaders. My parents and my 3 sisters moved to Pennsylvania in 1870 and also I was arrested at Paddington Station and was charged with treason. I was moved to Millbank, then to Dartmoor, where conditions were appalling. I was ill treated and the fact that I had

only one arm wasn't taken into consideration. Later in life I spoke out about prison reforms. My father died in 1871 and was buried in the USA. When I was released from prison I was still a Fenian, and I went back to Ireland on January 13, 1878. I went to Mayo to see my hometown, Straide, where I got a tremendous welcome. I was welcomed like a prince. After making a few speeches I went back to England and started a campaign to get Irish prisoners released. In the same year I went to America to visit my family while on a lecture tour describing the terrible social conditions in Ireland.

The worst social conditions were in Mayo. The land agitation really started in the Irishtown area. The landlord was about to evict a lot of tenants when he died. His brother, Canon Geoffrey Burke, was the acting landlord because his brother's son was at war. The first Land League meeting was April 20th 1879 and the crowd was around 7,000 people. It was successful, the eviction notices were withdrawn and the rent was reduced by 25%. I now persuaded Parnell to become leader of the campaign and in 1879 monster meetings were held in Westport and Castlebar and they got great publicity. The slogan for the land league was "Land for the People". I attended various other meetings around the country and I was arrested after my speech. I went to America and raised lots of money. My mother died in July of 1880. On the tour I met Mary Yore and we got married in 1886. I became a member of the GAA and proposed that 50 players should visit America in 1888. I gave a loan of £400 for the player's tickets.

Mary and I had 5 children, Catherine and Eileen who became teachers, Michael who became a Lawyer and Robert and Cahir who became Doctors. I was elected an MP but was disqualified because of my prison

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sentence. Later I sat in the house of Commons as an MP for Mayo. Today I am very satisfied about the Land situation in Ireland. I think the farmers of Ireland are getting fair play and what they deserve. I am pleased with the social conditions. Most people have reasonably good homes. Prisons have been improved but I am disappointed at the drug situation. It is getting out of hand. In general I am satisfied with 1996, very much so with the ending of apartheid in South Africa and the freedom that people now enjoy there.



Irishtown, Co. Mayo c.1912.

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## MICHAEL DAVITT LOOKS BACK

By Ruth McCormack, 6th Class,  
Irishtown National School

If I were to come back today in 1996, I would be absolutely amazed at the changes that have taken place in my country. We were once a race of poverty-stricken, down trodden people and now, because of the spirit and courage of those people, Ireland now has her own Government, the people have the right to own their own property, and the right to choose their own way of life. But I deeply regret that our land is divided, that part of it is still under British Rule. I would dearly love to see a united Ireland, but without any more bloodshed. The people of Irishtown are this year celebrating my 150th birthday, I am honoured to be remembered after all this time. I dearly hope that they have also not forgotten the struggle and suffering that their ancestors endured, in order that they too could own their own land today. Let them not abuse this land, keep it clean, keep it fed and nurtured, for this land is your children's inheritance.

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## MICHAEL DAVITT LOOKS BACK

*By Aoife Clarke, 6th Class,  
Irishtown National School*

Looking back, you farmers today don't know how easy you have it. This European Union thing is great, the grants you get are very good, but I don't think you should have to pay a levy if you go over the quota. You don't work at all compared to the farmers in my day, and you have everything. There has been a big improvement in the jails nowadays compared to my time. I don't like hearing about the poverty in the third world countries. I think Concern, Trocaire and Goal are very good organisations set up to help those countries.

I don't like what is happening now in the North of Ireland. I believe that Catholics and Protestants should be able to live together in peace. I myself, a Catholic, went to a Protestant school and we got on very well. Life was given to people to enjoy, not to bomb and fight. God gave us the gift of life and only God can take it away, not the IRA or anybody else. It hurts me to see such horrible things happening in our beautiful country.

*Best wishes from . . .*

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## MICHAEL DAVITT

As I grow older I find that I become more and more proud that I was born within one mile of the birth and burial place of Michael Davitt. He was, and still is, a much under valued figure in Irish History.

While his role in founding and organising the Land League is well documented, the extent of his other achievements in his sixty years is quite incredible. From being evicted, from the hovel that was his home, by the English, in cruel circumstances, he ended up travelling the world in an age when very few people travelled anywhere. He learned and took a lot from the places he visited and he also gave a lot, his ideas and political and social philosophies being a major influence on people like Gandhi in India, amongst others.

From languishing in English prisons as a convicted "felon" he emerged to sit in the British Parliament, returned to these same prisons as a member of a prison review group and helped found the British Labour Party.

He defended the Jews and other minorities, he championed the cause of women in society, fought for non-denominational education and tried to establish awareness of the Arts and Culture in every small town in Ireland, innovations our society is still struggling to come to terms with over one hundred years later.

Michael Davitt was a man ahead of his time intellectually, let there be no doubt about that. He possessed almost every good quality one can think of in abundance. As far as Straide, Mayo and Ireland are concerned he is the perfect example of the prophet not being recognised in his own homeland. The least we can hope to do on this the 150th anniversary of his birth, is to try and change that once and for all. It is very little to do for a man who did so much for us all.

GERRY KING. STRAIDE.

## MESSAGE FROM J. G. CORR

Many thanks for your kind invitation to attend the celebrations on June 2nd in Irishtown. I will be happy to attend and look forward to meeting you all on the day.

I have, of course, very important connections to Irishtown and its surrounding areas. I was born in Feamore, a village some two and a half miles away. As a young boy growing up, I often accompanied my father and grand-uncle to fairs in Ballindine. A regular "pit stop" on the way home was Slattery's Pub at the corner of the village in Irishtown. I would be given the necessary finances to go off to Davy Freeleys, or one of the other establishments for sweets, ice-cream, etc. while the more important affairs were conducted inside in Slatterys.

My late father was born in Burrish and as a child he told me many stories about Irishtown and its significance historically. He loved to relate the many connections his family had with the historic Land League meeting of 1879. He had other stories too concerning Irishtown during the War of Independence and during the Civil War that followed. This instilled in me a view that Irishtown was a place of great historical and political significance. It came as a bit of a surprise to one in later life to discover that Irishtown was not as well known either nationally or internationally as I had expected from the stories of my childhood. However, this background gave me a sense of place and belonging which I have always valued and I look forward to celebrating that sense of belonging on June 2nd next.

J. G. CORR DIRECTOR

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