

PEOPLE

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Frank's given 70 years to Milltown and isn't done yet

- First elected a councillor in 1967



SEVENTY years have passed since Frank Glynn first arrived in Milltown but the following decades have seen him leave an indelible mark on the small north Galway village. A renowned businessman and passionate politician, Frank's legacy to his adopted homeland will no doubt be the continuing community activism that belies his 82 years. Born in Kilkerrin in 1935, the third of William and Ellen's seven

children, Frank was encouraged to take over a great uncle's premises in Milltown while he was still studying commerce at University College Galway. "My father started his shop in 1930 and my oldest brother Tom went on to take that over when he passed away in 1945. So when my mother was offered the business in Milltown by her uncle, Pat Noone, she took it on as they wanted to keep it in the family," he explains. "My first visit to Milltown was during the big snow in 1947, when I came to the shop with my mother. By 1953 I was finished in St Jarlath's College and headed into the university in Galway to study commerce. "I got sick before my finals with a punctured lung so I wasn't able to sit them. I came to Milltown where



ALWAYS ready to lend a hand, Frank Glynn of Milltown. PHOTO: RAY RYAN

the manager had recently left and my mother asked me to step in. A lot of my lectures were on Fridays and Saturdays so I was able to combine working in the shop during the week and then studying at the weekends. I eventually graduated in 1958. Glynn's in the 1950s comprised a grocery, bar and drapery. Frank's wife Mary (nee Coyne), with whom he will celebrate 60 years of marriage next year, was already working in the business when he arrived, having been hired from a shop in Ballygar by her future mother-in-law. "We had a nice little country drapery which Mary took over along with the grocery," said Frank. "We were married in September 1958 and the first of our nine children, Liam, came along a year later." Over the next 15 years, Frank and Mary added to their brood

and focused on strengthening the business, which drew custom from Tuam, Kilconly and Claremorris. "Back then we were general traders, and the equivalent in Tuam were Heskin's on Shop Street and Cahill's in the Shambles, which were second and third generation family businesses," he said. "We seemed to be a bit more enthusiastic so we proved healthy competition and there was very little to rival us in Claremorris either. Back then we were reaching out to a four or five mile radius and into Dunmore, so we built the business up by degrees." In the 1960s Frank decided to develop the 16 acres opposite the shop that had come with the business and soon they had built stores and had a van on the road. "By 1967 we made the move into Tuam and the site I initially wanted was Cahill's on Bishop Street but Joe O'Toole outbid me," said Frank.

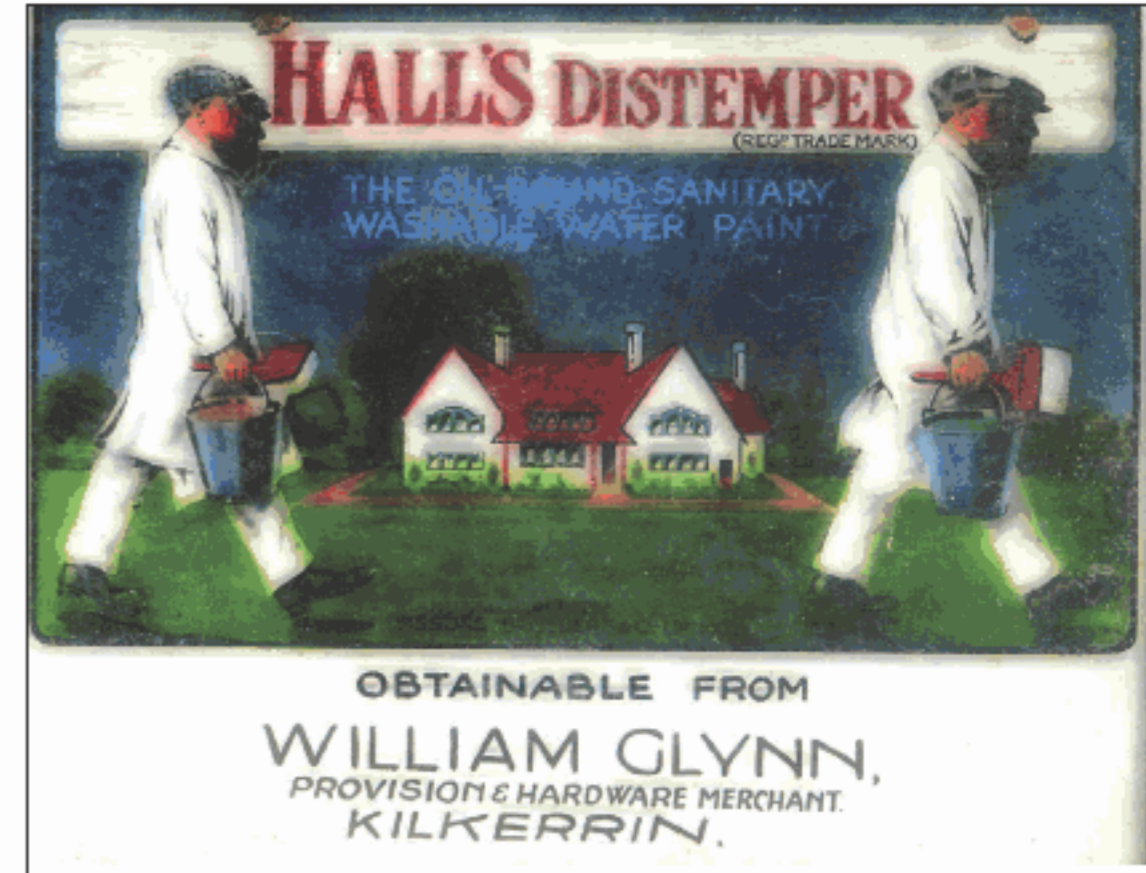
"My solicitor Frank Maher told me of another site that was available, Rushford's old wool store that the GAA were looking to develop as a training ground. I got wind of the fact they were having trouble raising the 2,300 pounds so I offered the same and we got it. I hired Tony O'Loughlin to manage the place and the first job I gave him was going on to the site with me with shovels, spades and barrows to clear the place." That initial site is now part of the vast Glynn's complex on the old Ballygaddy Road that was the accumulation of seven different properties down through the years. The acquisition of the Tuam site meant the family were overseeing the construction of two new stores, with a new premises also being constructed in Milltown. Not content with building his business empire, Frank decided to dip his toe into local politics in 1967, running for a seat on Galway

County Council representing Provisional Sinn Fein. "I got mixed up with Sinn Fein when I was in university and a good few people here in Milltown were on to me to run," he said. "I had run in the election in 1960 but lost out by just over 50 votes so when the election came around again in '67 I threw my hat in the ring. I won the seat which marked the start of 24 years in the council, the proudest moment coming in 1979 when I was elected chairman. "The funny thing about it was in '67 myself and Willie Burke ran here in Milltown, him as an independent, and both of us got elected while up the road in Tuam where you had candidates for all the main parties and not one of them got a seat." The ending of his political career should have been a smoother affair than transpired as Frank originally decided he wouldn't contest the 1991 election.

"I had young children and the business was taking up all my time so I made the decision not to run but then Ruairi O'Bradaigh convinced me to go, promising me that I wouldn't have to do any canvassing," he said. "I put an ad in the Tuam Herald telling people that I would be running but wouldn't be knocking on any doors and that was probably a foolish move as it gave my opponents fodder to use against me. "The Section 31 ban on Sinn Fein was in force so when Paul Connaughton went on radio asking why would anyone vote for someone who wouldn't canvass, I had no right of reply. In the end I lost out by just another 50 or so votes but I've no regrets from my time in the council. "Myself and Willie did a lot for Milltown, there wasn't a by-road that hadn't been tarred in the area by the time we were done and we



FRANK Glynn and his wife Mary with staff members, public representatives and family members at the official opening of the new Glynn's store in Tuam in 1991.



ONE of the original adverts for Frank's father's business in Kilkerrin.



AN original Glynn's tea bag from the 1930s.

were also involved in bringing the first group water scheme in the county to Killafrasog. We travelled to Wicklow to study what they were doing over there as they introduced the first such schemes in the country. We brought back a lot of information that we used to get Killafrasog and then later Milltown's own group water scheme up and running. "I was able to help a lot of people out with other issues too, such as medical cards as back then public health came under the remit of the council but of course it's all different now. The most humbling thing about it was being able to help some of the poorest of the poor get the help they so badly needed. So many people would come into the bar wanting a chat and I'd take them into one of the snugs for a bit of privacy and try to help them as best I could." Now that his political and business careers are consigned

to history - he handed over the hardware business to two of his sons over a decade ago while another son runs the family's funeral home business in Tuam - Frank is still committed to working for the community. A stalwart in the Tidy Towns Committee and responsible for organising community employment and rural social schemes in the village, it's common for him to clock up 30 hours in administration each week. "I'm winding down this summer as it's time, I've been promising my family for years I would," he added with a smile. "We've achieved an awful lot in the past couple of years with the Heritage Trail and the sewerage scheme works, along with a plan to plant trees along the N17 on both the north and south approaches to the village. "We have 120 people working in the industrial park which the

Milltown Development Company started back in 1970 when we bought that land on the outskirts on the village," he said. Plans for his 82nd birthday next month will be low key as he intends to follow through on a long standing promise to his family to slow down. "I'll probably always be involved in one way or another with Tidy Towns although we've a fantastic new team that have taken over so I've full confidence in them to continue the wonderful work that is being done," he said. "I've been blessed with a wonderful family and a wonderful life and I'm very proud to have done my best to serve the people of Milltown in a variety of ways down through the years."