

Mariseo's House

The Web Log of writer Brian Byrne. These days I'm powered by [AlphaSmart](#).

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 04, 2005

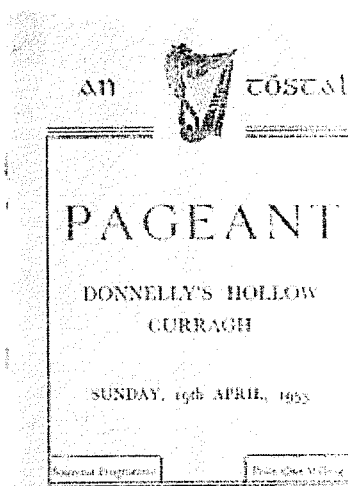
The Donnelly's Hollow pageants

They only happened twice, but the Donnelly's Hollow *An Tostal* pageants held in the early 50s are still strong in local folk memory.



They're certainly embedded in mine, because as a nine- and ten-year-old I was one of the lucky youngsters who sold programmes at the events for a shilling apiece. I think we were allowed keep tuppence on each, so it was a profitable gig.

The *An Tostal* background was a national festival scheme, which encouraged local communities to undertake pageants and similar events both as a cultural endeavour and to provide something for



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the budding tourist industry.

And in this case it was a time when the Kilcullen Boxing Club was doing well sportwise, but needed an injection of funds. Such clubs always did, because there were considerable expenses in ferrying the young lads to tournaments, which took place in all corners of the country.

At the time my Dad, Jim Byrne Jr, was president of the club and Lieut Cyril Russell was the trainer, and at some stage on a club night the plan to commemorate the famous 1815 bare-knuckle fight between Dan Donnelly and the English champion of the time, George Cooper.

The Kilcullen connection was quite strong, as the Irish fighter's mummified right arm -- which had been taken by a Dublin surgeon for study after he had temporary custody of the fighter's body courtesy of a couple of grave-robbers -- had very recently been presented to Dad for his Hide-Out pub.

The original fight had taken place just before Christmas in 1815 at a hollow just on the edge of the Curragh, in from the Kilcullen Road.

Donnelly's story and that of his arm are worth pieces in their own right, and I'll probably get around to them later. God knows, in my own time running the pub in the sixties and seventies, I told it often enough. In the meantime they have been written about extensively elsewhere.

Anyhow, the pageant idea was enthusiastically taken up by the club members and other locals, and plans were put in train to make it an event which would attract an audience from far beyond the locality.

The key characters were casted -- Jim Berney was to be Dan Donnelly, and Kevin McCourt would play the part of Cooper. My uncle and godfather, Tom Byrne, and John Ffrench were appointed as seconds to the fighters, and a 'crowd' was to be played by the Kilcullen Football Team.

With Sunday April 19 1953 as the date of the occasion, a number of things had to be done. The fighters themselves had to learn the Rules of Bare-knuckle Boxing, formulated in 1741 by the then British fighting champion Jack

Broughton.

'Rules' might not be the best description, because in this pre-Queensbury Rules time, such tactics as gouging, butting, hair-pulling and pouncing on the adversary when down were all permitted.

A certain choreography also had to be devised for the pageant, because the original fight had lasted eleven rounds and a long time. This re-enactment was just the first event of a programme which was to include demonstrations of wrestling, fencing, judo, and boxing under the Irish Amateur Boxing Association rules.

That last was a significant tournament, and would include Kilcullen club notables like John McKenna and Hugh Peacocke, as well as a number of Army gloves and members of clubs from Newbridge and Crumlin in Dublin.

There was also promotion to be organised, and -- in a time when there was no television -- this was dependent on friendly newspaper correspondents and a version of what would today be termed as direct personal marketing.

Quite simply that involved the main protagonists and the Kilcullen Football Club 'rent-a-crowd', and anyone else who wanted to go on a skite for the night, dressing up in costume and doing a tour of the towns in the locality in the backs of the trucks of Dad's 'Leinster Beverage' mineral water enterprise. Stopping points in each town and village were, by no accident, pubs.

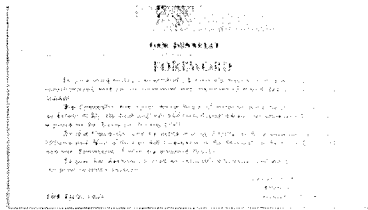
Other elements of the day had to be organised too. Seats and PA systems would be provided courtesy of the Army, programmes were written for printing by the *Leinster Leader*, and advertising to pay for same had to be gathered.

The weather might have been prayed for, too.

The programme for the first pageant itself -- there's a copy in the Kilcullen Heritage Centre -- is interesting in its own right. Not just for the articles, which included a Ballad and



a Profile of Dan Donnelly and a contemporary account of the famous fight as well as some detail on the Brougham Rules and the various more modern fighting sports which were to be presented on the day. The advertisements, to anybody still with a memory of the old days in Kilcullen, are gems.



The opening one was an appeal for the founding of a Fund for injured professional jockeys, on a page donated by 'a well-known Amateur Rider'.

The 'Famous Jockey Hall Hotel' with its Riding School and Hunting Establishment also bought space, while the spot beside it taken by the Irish Judokwai organisation was probably a 'contra' for their taking part in the Pageant. They were selling a three-month course in Judo for twenty-five shillings.

The Grand Hotel in Droichead Nua (Newbridge) was 'justifiably famed for its admirable Cuisine and Homely Atmosphere'.



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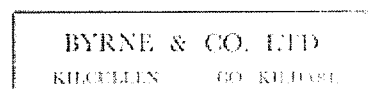
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D Brennan & Sons in Kilcullen were 'Main Ferguson Dealers' and sold 'any make of car' as well as being Builders Providers, Ironmongers, Seeds & Fertilisers salesmen, and also ran a General Hardware and Drapery.

Byrne & Co Ltd, my grandfather's business of General Hardware and



Drapery Merchants, could supply 'all Farm and Household Requisites' and were agents for 'Hoover' cleaners, 'Wolseley' electric fencing and 'Rayburn' cookers.



The advertisers in the key timetable part of the programme were Peter Moloney, Draper and Outfitter; D O'Connell MPSI, Pharmaceutical Chemist; the 'Hide-Out' Lounge and Grill at Byrnes of Kilcullen; Nolan Victuallers; and T Berney & Sons, Saddlers.

Other adverts were placed by Mallick's Bar, 'just a stone's throw from Donnelly's Hollow'; The White Horse Inn in Kilcullen; McDonnell's Radio and Electrical Stores who provided 'all leading makes' of 1953 Radio 'from 3/6d weekly'; Joe McTernan's Lounge, whose 'customers come back'; Ideal Chicks Ltd from Ballina and Dundrum, Dublin; and the Curragh Bloodstock Agency, which specialised in insurance and transport of bloodstock worldwide, as well as organising summer holidays and business trips for those not necessarily of a horsey bent.

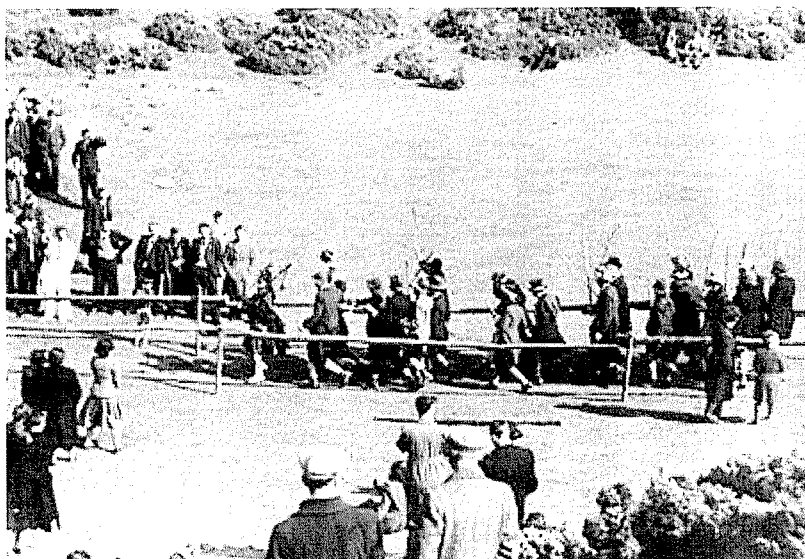
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Donnelly's Hollow
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BEFORE,
DURING
and
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TODAY'S PAGEANT

For a list of
15, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 437, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845, 846, 847, 848, 849, 850, 851, 852, 853, 854, 855, 856, 857, 858, 859, 860, 861, 862, 863, 864, 865, 866, 867, 868, 869, 870, 871, 872, 873, 874, 875, 876, 877, 878, 879, 880, 881, 882, 883, 884, 885, 886, 887, 888, 889, 890, 891, 892, 893, 894, 895, 896, 897, 898, 899, 900, 901, 902, 903, 904, 905, 906, 907, 908, 909, 910, 911, 912, 913, 914, 915, 916, 917, 918, 919, 920, 921, 922, 923, 924, 925, 926, 927, 928, 929, 930, 931, 932, 933, 934, 935, 936, 937, 938, 939, 940, 941, 942, 943, 944, 945, 946, 947, 948, 949, 950, 951, 952, 953, 954, 955, 956, 957, 958, 959, 960, 961, 962, 963, 964, 965, 966, 967, 968, 969, 970, 971, 972, 973, 974, 975, 976, 977, 978, 979, 980, 981, 982, 983, 984, 985, 986, 987, 988, 989, 990, 991, 992, 993, 994, 995, 996, 997, 998, 999, 1000

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The day itself? Well, memory is for obvious reasons a bit on the 'sunny summer days' side. But I do have the lasting impression that it was indeed a fine day. That's actually borne out by the fact that a cigarette end carelessly thrown away set the gorse on part of the 'Hollow' alight, and what might have been a disaster was only averted by the 'timely intervention of an Engineers Sergeant'. And there was great action of all kinds for a kid, especially following the walking up in Dan Donnelly's 'footsteps' by Jim Berney after having 'vanquished' his opponent.

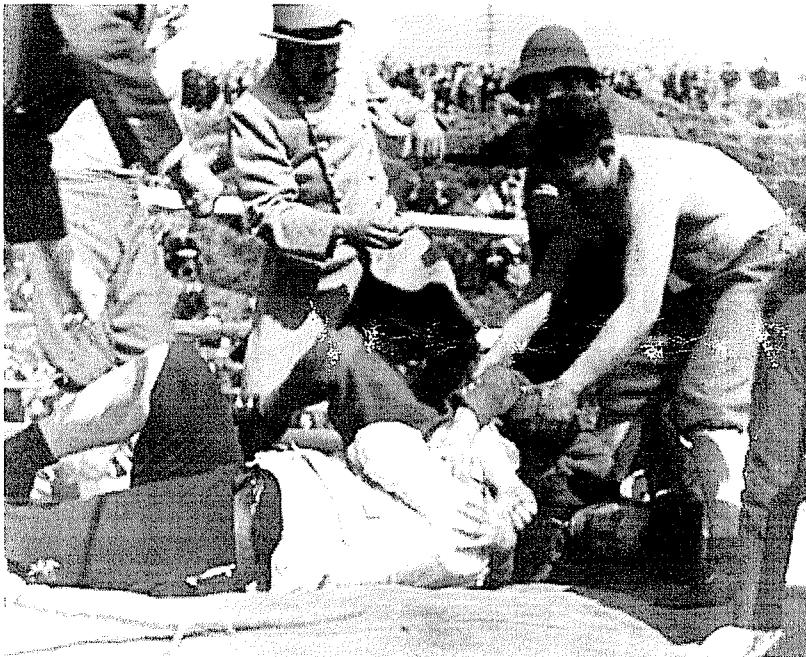
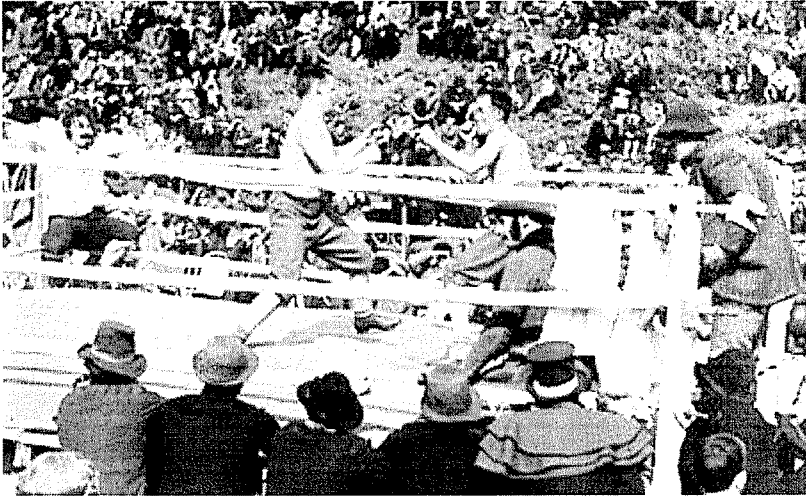


Contemporary accounts suggest there were many thousands came from the locality and as far as Dublin, thanks to the publicity efforts.

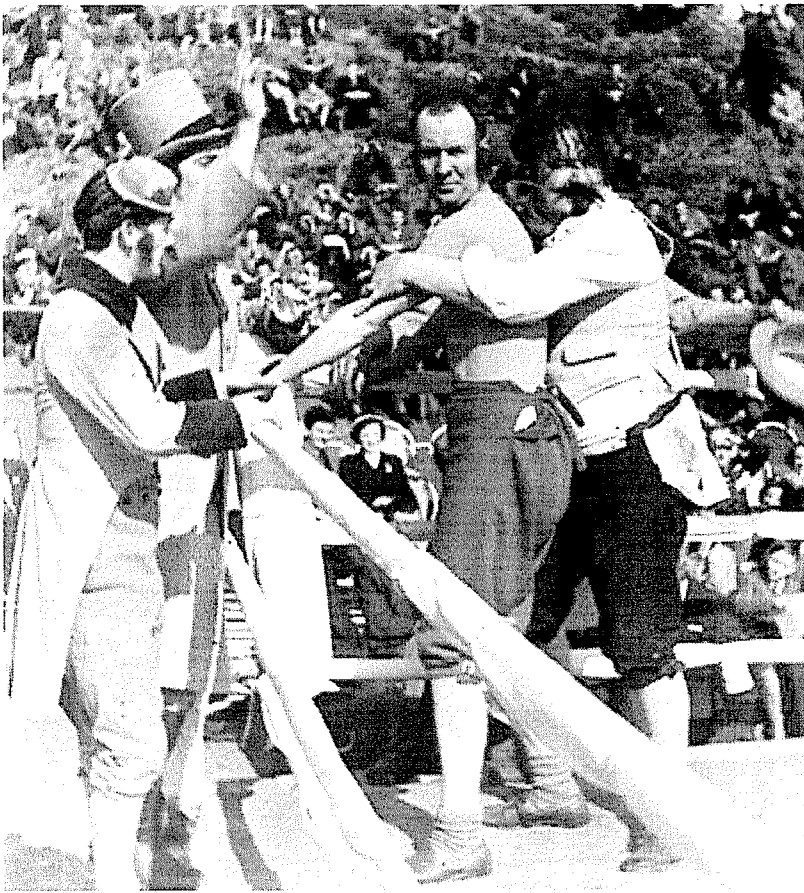


It was certainly successful enough to be repeated the following year, a little later on May 2. This time, though,

the Pageant commemoration was the Finale, with essentially the same cast of reprobates.







New advertisers in the Souvenir Programme, still a snip at a shilling, included N Bardon of Kilcullen, Grocery, Bar and News Agency; Bill Malone of Kilcullen, Grocery & Greengrocery, Newbridge Cutlery, providers of Sports Trophies, Cups & Prizes; Cunningham's 'Round Tower Bar' in Kildare; John Mahon of Kildare, Wholesale Bottler and Army Caterer; J O'Brien of Hillside, Kilcullen, Confectionery and Grocery; Mrs Burke, Kilcullen, Grocery, Confectionery and Greengrocery; The Universal Providing Stores in Naas; Naas Motors, Morris Dealers; Bestal Ltd of Newbridge, manufacturers of tubular steel furniture; JJ Cosgrove MPSI of Newbridge; J Flanagan, general merchant in Maddenstown ('The Bird'); and P Burke of Dunlavin, High Class Wine & Spirit Merchant & Groceries.

And somebody was really selling in Naas, because the whole back page was shared by E M Hayde, Newsagents; Eddie Marum, Lounge Bar; Joseph McDonald, Tailoring; Dowling's Garage; Joseph Kavangh & Sons, Wine Merchants & Grocers; W Woods, High Class Groceries, Wines and Spirits; Thomas Kerrigan, Outfitters; and The House of Mulvey, Spirits and Good Fare.

All of which are their own stories of a bygone age.



Perhaps there are readers out there who might be able to tell me their own stories of the two events, and of the people mentioned in this piece?

But in the meantime, I've already had a lot of fun jogging my own memory. And, by an amazing coincidence, as I put the last words to this piece, who should sit beside me in the bar but 'Dan Donnelly' himself, in the person of Jim Berney, now 73, who played the part all those years ago. I said I'd love to have some of the old photographs of the time, and he told me he had an album of copies.

So that's why we have more than the programme pages to illustrate this. Many thanks, Jim.



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