

PLAIN
CHANT

By Jim McGuire

Timothy the
tortoise and the
Crimean War

RECENTLY the last living link with the Crimean War (1854-55) passed away peacefully at the age of 160 years - a noteworthy life span given the comparison with the brutal massacre in their short lives of the thousands who went to untimely deaths from the guns, disease and military muds inflicted on what the 'Times' called the "finest army ever to leave England's shores."

Both France and England combined in this defence of the crumbling Turkish empire from Russian occupation and eventual domination of the Black Sea. British enthusiasm for the war was inflamed by the actions of the Russian Black Sea fleet sailing out of Sebastopol to sink every ship in a Turkish fleet it found on the south shore of the Black Sea with the loss of 4,000 Turkish sailors.

Not that Timothy the Tortoise, a mascot on board HMS Queen which bombarded Sebastopol and which later carried Timothy to further service in China without his shipmates being aware that Timothy was actually a she until an attempt was made eighty years ago to mate the shellback.

If mating Timothy proved an impossibility it was only in line with the impossibility of uniting the French and British military leaders in a common line of action against the massed Russians in the difficult terrain that fueled the bitter rivalry in command between the various British commanders including the Earl of Lucan who disputed every order he received from Lord Raglan, a veteran of Waterloo, who commanded the expeditionary when he was not venting a personal spleen against the Earl of Cardigan.

The latter led the charge of the Light Brigade against the Russian guns at Balaklava because of a contemptuous direction given by an impatient Captain Lewis Nolan furious at the length of time it took Lucan to comprehend the vague attack order delivered from Raglan. To be fair to Nolan, he attempted to head off the Light Brigade as it set off on its tragic course but was killed by a shell burst before he could correct Lucan from the charge that would destroy the Light Brigade and immortalise the 195 men, including Lucan, who returned from the most famous cavalry charge transformed from muddle to myth by Lord Tennyson's verse (with a little cinematic help from Errol Flynn).

The Irish were there in this campaign and in the incredible battle of Inkerman, fought blindly through brushwood and fog, the Connaught Rangers were conspicuous in meeting the Russian drive against the Sebastopol besiegers.

There were numerous links with Irish history in the Crimean campaign including the use of the balaklava headgear which was a popular item of home knitting for the troops before recent emphasis on its use as a disguise brought the item into disrepute.

Echoes of The Famine

There were echoes of the Irish potato famine of ten years previously with the rigours created by harsh winter conditions and the failure of the creaking British commissary system to supply the troops with food and clothing.

By the time winter set in the British ranks were reduced to grubbing for roots and whatever could be gleaned from the terrain while the skeleton men, clothing torn and inadequate for the bitterly cold conditions, reduced the once glittering army to a series of foraging teams coping with outbreaks of cholera and diarrhoea in tattered tents while chaos in the shipping berths and red tape prevented necessities from stockpiled stores, demanding maddening paperwork by clerks operating an inflexible system from reaching the people it was intended to serve. Rather like our current Health Boards!

Soyer was there

At times the conditions prevailing on the peninsula mirrored the bureaucratic horrors inflicted on Ireland by a similar failure of planning and organisation.

It was a comparison encouraged by the emergence on the scene of chef Alexis Benoit Soyer of the Reform Club whose menus had been hailed as the solution to the Famine in Ireland. Soyer was a colourful French chef who was hired initially in the London kitchen of the Duke of Cambridge before being appointed chef in 1837 of the Reform Club in London. He won fame in June, 1838, in preparing breakfast for 2,000 guests at Queen Victoria's coronation and in 1847 was commissioned to open soup kitchens in Dublin and concoct a nutritious and low cost soup. He set up his kitchen in a building in the Phoenix Park and composed a set of recipes among them one at a cost of £1 per 100 gallons.

The value of meatless soups was widely questioned on nutritional grounds, one scientist claiming that the costliest concoction was the least nourishing and the influential Lancet declaring that filling famine-battered bodies with watery soup did more harm than good. Nevertheless Soyer was widely acclaimed for his inventive qualities including the provision of a stove where food could be cooked at the table.

Soyer resigned from the Reform Club in 1850 and a year later opened a magnificent Kensington restaurant at Gore House on the site of the current Albert Hall. It was the most flamboyant restaurant in London planned to feed 5,000 people daily from a varied selection of menus for different classes of people. But within three months Soyer had to close the operation down with a loss of about £500,000 in to-day's money.

He then concentrated on promoting his cook-books and special stove until 1855 when as a result of the 'Times' featuring a series of articles from correspondent William Russell on the horrendous conditions in the Balaklava hospitals where men were dying from malnutrition and cholera, he volunteered to go to the Crimea at his own expense. He got official authority to make whatever changes he considered necessary and with Florence Nightingale arranged inspections of the Crimean hospitals to such an extent that the 'Morning Chronicle' hailed him as having saved as many lives through his kitchens as Florence Nightingale did through her wards.

He arrived to find a system by which soldiers would get their rations directly so they put buttons or pieces of metal on the meat to identify theirs after it was cooked. Soyer organised the system by which each regiment had a trained chef to collect the rations and prepare the food and devised a field stove that could cook food under any conditions. It was only after his death in 1858 that the man whose mother wanted him to join the church, came to be acknowledged as the celebrity chef of the 19th century - and in the lack of any formal memorial to his humanitarian work as "The Man History Forgot".

He is buried in Kensal Green cemetery, London. Timothy the Tortoise outlived them all and his demise sets a longevity record that not even the tortoise pace of the Tribunals, despite the snail-pacing by the legal eagles, can ever hope to equal.

Twin Links Society
celebrates anniversary

THE Calderdale-Mayo Twin Links Society established by Killasser native Joseph Kneafsey celebrated its 14th anniversary recently at a gala function held in the Elland Cricket and Athletics Club, Elland, Halifax, Yorkshire.

The society established on February 16, 1990, by the then Mayor of Calderdale Joseph Kneafsey aims to promote economic, social, cultural, educational and sporting links between Calderdale and Mayo as well as working to increase tourism between the two areas.

Speaking at the function Twin Links founder and society President Joseph Kneafsey said he was delighted at the success of the society since its establishment, the number of people who visited Mayo from Calderdale has continued to increase with a number including himself spending much of the year in Mayo having acquired a home there.

Joseph thanked all the businesses who had supported the work of the organisation over the past 14 years and singled out the Gateway Hotel, Swinford, Joe Mellett, Auctioneer; Swinford, Connacht Gold Co-Op Society, the Welcome Inn Hotel, Castlebar, Pontoon Bridge Hotel, Ridge Pool Hotel, Ballina, Bartra House Hotel, Ballina.

The society President, Mr Kneafsey has worked closely with Knock Airport in the promotion of increased business into the Mayo air base and is currently aiming to establish a link between Knock and Leeds/Bradford airports. Paying tribute to Joe Kennedy, Chairman, Desmond O'Flynn, Marketing Manager and Liam Scollen, Chief Executives of Knock Airport for the work they have done to improve the facilities and increase services. Mr Kneafsey said that with the decentralisation, Knock Airport would grow, expand and develop in the years ahead.

Extending an invitation to the people of his native Mayo to become involved in twinning, Mr Kneafsey said it offered a great deal and much benefit would come to those who participated in it.

Mr Kneafsey paid tribute to the officers and committee of the Calderdale Twin Links Society and to all who had supported their work. It is his hope that their efforts will continue to bear fruit in the years ahead.

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FINE GAEIL ARD
FHEIS

The Fine Gael Ard Fheis will be held this year in the City West Hotel, Dublin, on the weekend of April 23 and 24.

A special bus will leave Swinford on Saturday 24 and all those who wish to travel are asked to contact Councillor Joe Mellett immediately on 094-9251942 or 087-2573752.

Your chance to voice
views on Kilkelly hall

AN open meeting to discuss the future of Kilkelly Community Centre hall will be held on Wednesday, April 28 at 9pm in the Centre. The proposal to form a group to manage and plan for the centre will be the top of the agenda. All interested parties are asked to attend.

LADIES MARATHON

Western Care Association is on the look-out for ladies to participate in the upcoming Evening Herald Ladies Mini Marathon which will take place on Bank Holiday Monday, June 7. Further information and sponsorship cards are available from the Fundraising Department, Western Care Association, John Moore Road, Castlebar. Tel: 0949029136.

FIRST COMMUNION
MEETING

A meeting for parents of First Holy Communion children will be held on Wednesday, April 21 at 9pm in Tavrane N.S.



Attending the 14th annual Calderdale-Mayo Twin Links Society dinner in the Elland Cricket and Athletics Club, Elland, Halifax, Yorkshire, were: Leas Cathaoirleach of Mayo County Council, Richard Finn; Cllr Joe Mellett; Cllr Geraldine Carter, the Mayor of Calderdale; Mr Francis Brennan, Killasser; and Mr Joe Kneafsey, founder and President of Calderdale-Mayo Twin Links Society. Picture: Peter Fawcett.



At a party held in Campbell's Bar, Swinford, for the retirement of Patricia McDonagh, Staff Nurse Unit 2, in Aras Attracta, Charlie Meehan, Director of Services and Mary B Rice, Assistant Programme Director made a presentation to Patricia.

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KILLASSER/CALLOW
DINNER DANCE

Friday next April 23rd promises to be a great evening in the Gateway Hotel when everyone, from the parish and beyond, is invited to the first annual parochial dinner dance. Music by Michael Fox.

Tickets cost €22.50 and can be obtained by telephoning 094 92 51367. Don't miss this great opportunity to meet with friends and support local charities at the same time.

Kilkelly

MARIAN HARRISON.
Shamher, Kilkelly.
Tel: 0879846411.
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hotmail.com

ALL-IRELAND DRAMA
SUCCESS

Congratulations to O'Gragas Chillmooove (Kilmovee teenagers) and their producer Joe Smyth on winning the All-Ireland Drama Competition in Dublin last week.

MONSTER CEILI

A monster ceili with the Four Provinces Ceili Band will take place in Gortganny Hall on Friday night, May 7. Great night assured with monster raffle and lots of prizes. Tea and refreshments served. Gortganny Hall is located approximately three miles from Ballyhaunis on the Ballaghaderreen road. All welcome.

ROAD
IMPROVEMENTS
WELCOMED

The road works being carried out between Mount Falcon and Bohola have been welcomed by Joseph Kneafsey, President Calderdale-Mayo Twin Links Society. Speaking during a visit to Mayo, Mr Kneafsey said the improvement would be of great benefit to the area and he was pleased to see this investment in Mayo's Roads Network.

SPONSORED WALK

There has been a good response to the Teampall Maol Cemetery decision to hold a sponsored walk on Bank Holiday Monday, May 3.

The purpose of the walk is to raise funds towards the cost of erecting a Memorial Plaque in

Teampall Maol Cemetery, as a mark of respect to all the faithfully departed, both known and unknown.

This plaque will be erected during the course of the summer and will be unveiled at the celebration of the annual Mass which will take place in August.

The walk will commence in Foxford town, proceed to Attymachugh Church, a distance of 5.5 miles which will pass the historic Teampall Maol Cemetery.

Anyone who would like to take part in this sponsored walk can do so. Sponsorship cards can be arranged by contacting Kevin Hughes, Coolegrane. Tel 094-9256526.

COMMUNITY LOTTO

There was no winner of the €5,800 jackpot in the Swinford Community

lotto draw which took place in Greaney's, The Square, Swinford on Tuesday, April 13. The numbers drawn were 4, 9, 10 and 30.

The €70 voucher winners were Theresa Kelly, Brackloon, and Anne Spragg, 12A Oak Drive, Swinford. The match 3 winners were Jackie Flannery, Curry, W. Kilgallon, Midfield, Pat McHale, Bollingbrook Drive, Swinford, Phyllis Campbell, Meelick, C. McCann, Rathunas, S. Tierney, c/o Ballymores, May Cawley, Dromore West.

The lotto payout for that week was €350.

BLOOD TRANSFUSION
MOBILE UNIT

The clinic times on Sunday, April 25, are 12 noon to 4pm at the Gym, Scoil Muire agus Padraig, Swinford. New blood is always needed.

AGRICULTURE AS
CAREER

Students who are now deciding on their choice of Career have been urged to consider Agriculture or Agribusiness by Mr Francis Brennan, Chairman Western Farming Co-Op. Mr Brennan said the sector provided many good job opportunities and he urged students to give them consideration.

GARDENING CLUB

The next meeting of Swinford and District Gardening Club will be held at Horkans Garden Centre, Turlough on Tuesday next, April 27, at 7.30pm. There will be talks and demonstrations and members will get a discount on anything purchased on the night.

Members are reminded to renew their membership of €10 for the year.

On Friday, April 30, there will be a members only evening outing to Sarah Powers Nurseries where there will be a great selection of plants for sale. This will be followed by a social at Marie Lukes, Tourmakeady. The all in cost will be €12, and this will include finger food and live music.

If sufficient numbers book, two coaches can be hired, so it will be possible for those who don't wish to stay for all of the social to be home early.

Coaches will leave Market Square at 8.15. Please book your place with Gerlie McNulty on 087-6569782, Doug Hack on 094-9256052, Marian Welsh at Discount Two or any other committee member.

25 CARD DRIVE

Winners of the monster 25 card game held in Scoil Mhuire agus Padraig in aid of Meelick National School, on April 9, were: Sean Quinn, John Colgan, Sean Brennan, Michael Ruddy, Noreen O'Hara and Bernie Hunter; 2nd, Michael Mulroy, Willie Kilgallon, S. Kelly, M. Carney, Barry and Mark McDonnell, P. Noone, P. Kneafsey, Tony Ruane, Martin Ruddy, John Maye, Jim Forkin, P. Cafferty, M. McNeela, Jimmy Jordan, S. Conwell; 3rd, Louis O'Grady, Sarah Jane McNulty, John Chambers, Peter McCann, Michael Igoe, Padraig Loftus, John Moore, TJ Hyland, Billy Murphy, Vincent O'Brien, Winnie Gallagher, Teresa Murphy, Michael O'Neill, John Gallagher, Jim O'Neill, Paddy Stenson, Sean Duffy, Kevin Walsh, JJ Murphy, Paddy McNicholas.

Highest 2nd half, Michael Doherty, Maureen Devaney, P. Gallagher, M. Sheerin, Tom Lynskey, Noel Smith. Spot prizes: M. Doherty, M. Devaney, M. McNeela, P. McNeela, John Moore, TJ Hyland, M. Doherty, M. Devaney, Sarah McNulty, Louis O'Grady, Pat Durkin and Eric Higgins. Raffle winners: Sean Quinn, Geraldine Turbitt, Maureen Roache, Padraig Walsh, Francis Rowley, Mary Doyle, Eugene Mullarkey, Fr Peter Gallagher, Willie Kilgallon, Padraig Cafferty, Paddy Byrne, John Dunne, Michael O'Neill.

PLEASE
NOTE

PLEASE note all news items for inclusion in the Swinford Notes in the "Western People" are to be handed in to Mellett's Newsagency, Market Street, Swinford, by Wednesday evening to ensure their appearance the following Tuesday, until further notice.

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