

TOM McNAMARA
An Appreciation

Oh, I long to see the Church yard,
By Lough Gur's romantic shore,
Where the shamrocks and the ivy ever grow,
Where the wild dove. and the raven,
Like protecting spirits soar,
O'er the green graves of silent, Teampall Nua.

Tom McNamara was laid to rest in Teampall Nua last Sunday. He is with his wife Anne who died five years ago, a woman he lived a happy life with and her passing was never forgotten by Tom. Anne was his pillar of strength and now he rests with her 'neath the silent grave of New Church.

The verse above was composed by Owen Bresnan of Knockbolg who was born in 1847 and died in 1912. In it he pays tribute to Thomas Connellan, a poet/harper from County Sligo, who died in Boucher's castle 300 years ago and is buried in an unmarked grave in Teampall Nua. The poems and songs of Bresnan were kept alive by Tom McNamara and it's little wonder that he should have done so, as they tell of many happy and unhappy events around Lough Gur and district in times now almost forgotten.

Tom was born in Herbertstown some seven and a half decades ago. Of farming stock he worked hard through good and bad times, when work on the land was for the greater part manual: Like the young men of his youth he played hurling with Herbertstown, a team he never won a medal with, but almost had compensation in this respect, as in his own words he joined the Confraternity to get a medal, but low and behold the supply ran out when the priest came to Tom.

For Tom, life was not about winning medals. There were many other ways of enjoying it when the hard toil of day had ended. Folklore was a fascination of his since childhood and when he married and moved to Lough Gur, he had the perfect setting to reflect and build an oral library of his tales. These he related to school children from Herbertstown, Lough Gur, Knockainey or any school in the region. It was with these young people he found the greatest enjoyment as he relived the tales of Geroid Iarla, the Goddess Aine, Sean O'hAoda, and the man from Bruff who went to Limerick for an eye test with the blind pension in mind. These same tales he told countless visitors from overseas, all captivated with his knowledge of folklore. Only two weeks ago he was on local radio telling of his exploits when he met the 'dead hunt' on the lake shore. Fairies, ghosts, dead hunts, coach a bowers, piseogs, or any story about the happenings under the waters of the lake, were his specialty.

Friends of Tom published a beautiful 60 page book of the "Lays and Legends of Lough Gur and District" by Tom last Christmas which is at this early stage already a collectors' item. Versatility was Tom's best asset. He did not confine his story telling prowess to admirers as far way as Derry and Down to Knocknagoshel, and to the annual story-telling weekend at Lough Gur, but on many other stages was acclaimed as a scribe, actor, lover of drama, poetry and anything that added to the betterment of life around his beloved Lough Gur. He played small parts in T.V. dramas and his role in the d'Unbelievables last video release was most enjoyable.

Local publications such as The Dawn and the Lough Gur Journal are littered with his writings and perhaps the current Lough Gur Journal is a fitting tribute to his work in this field as he gives a well documented account of happenings in Lough Gur over many years. His contribution to this journal and many others is proof of his knowledge of history, particularly at a local level. Then there was the drama society in Lough Gur with whom he played leading roles over the past 20 years. Three years ago he initiated the poetry circle and the monthly recitals at Riordan's of Holycross. At the funeral Mass in Patrickswell his favourite poem "The Deserted Village" was recited by Deborah Leo, Elizabeth Clifford, George Finch and Sean McNamara.

Under his guidance it grew in stature to become one of the leading monthly events in the district. Add these interests to Rambling Houses in Ballinvreena and any gathering in any county where Irish music is played and nurtured. Tom 'was involved in everything with an Irish flavour and only last week he was in the Honey Fitz with the youthful Lough Gur Ramblers singing and reciting. He was a founding member of the local Historical Society, served as chairman and vice chairman and loved the outings to places of historical interest or beauty. On top of all this he found time to help the Lough Gur Development and all organisations involved in such projects.

Tom was a friend of everybody. This friendship was genuine. He helped to forge relationships with every member of the district, talked and chatted as if the day had no ending, had no enemies and his home of Knockroe was open to all. Fr. Sean Fennelly aptly described him in his Homily as "the chief" indicating his leadership in local matters, but to many he was simply Tom Mac.

We laid Tom to rest in the quiet of Teampall Nua last Sunday. The final verse in Bresnan's tribute to Connellan could apply to Tom McNamara from Rutagh in Herbertstown and later of Knockroe, Lough Gur:

May the clay press lightly o'er him,
Where the shamrock and the ivy ever bloom,

And the beech trees tall and shady,
Overhead him gently sway,
'Till the trumpet blast shall call him from the tomb.

Dick Penn penned lines which conjured his affinity with his native place,
Herbertstown:

I oft times dream of sweet Mohane,
And lovely Ballinard,
Old friends I knew in Rutagh too,
Are gone to their reward,
Ballyloundash grand old brass band,
Sweet music of our own,
Oh, many a happy night we spent,
Back home in Herbertstown.

H.G.