

100 Donegal Democrat Anniversary 1919-2019

Baptism of fire for new publication

Michael McHugh who has had a few turns of the wheel at the Democrat over the last 27 years looks back at those early days - but not his!

In the midst of turmoil and at times terror, so the infant Donegal Democrat came into the world and was christened, a century ago.

The paper's first publication in June of 1919 in Ballyshannon was no mere coincidence.

Its owner John Downey was very much to the fore in the national cause and the paper was reflecting the aspirations of new Ireland, not under the direct control of the British.

The Erne town was an influential player and location in the county and had a strong tradition of printing, dating back to the 1800s.

While its port was on the decline, it had both the Great Northern Railway and the County Donegal Railway operating either side of the River Erne.

Indeed, it is fair to say that the paper itself has been a mirror image of the transformation of Irish society from its fledgling, if imperfect start, to the modern thriving, if still imperfect Ireland of the 21st century.

For Donegal people, it had already been a decade of great sacrifice. The Easter Rising of 1916 was a huge catalyst to the activities that were taking place throughout Donegal and much of the rest of Ireland in 1919.

Print Tradition

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The country had also suffered through the involvement of many of its young men in the calamity of World War One.

The same time frame of 1919 also saw the re-emergence of the

GAA and the Donegal County Board.

That strong association with gaelic games is a theme that has continued over its

eventful history.

In its first editorial, it boldly exclaimed: "We make our bow to the public at a critical period in our national and local history, and it shall ever be our object to uphold anything that will further the National and local interests."

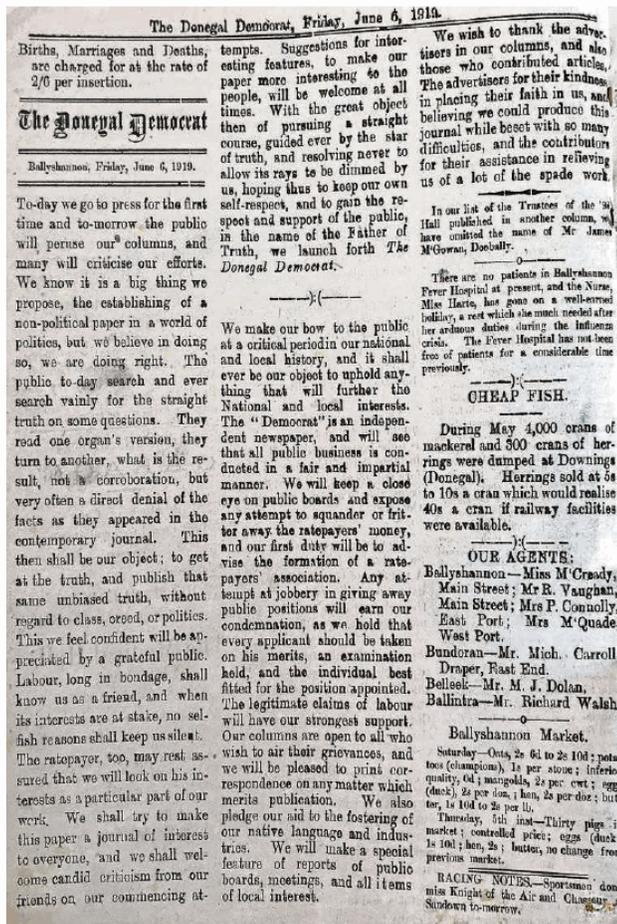
A flavour of those early publications shows the context of its origins.

In its edition of Friday, December 19, 1919 the curate in Ballyshannon, Rev. J. Trainor found himself being "congratulated", but it was not for what might be expected.

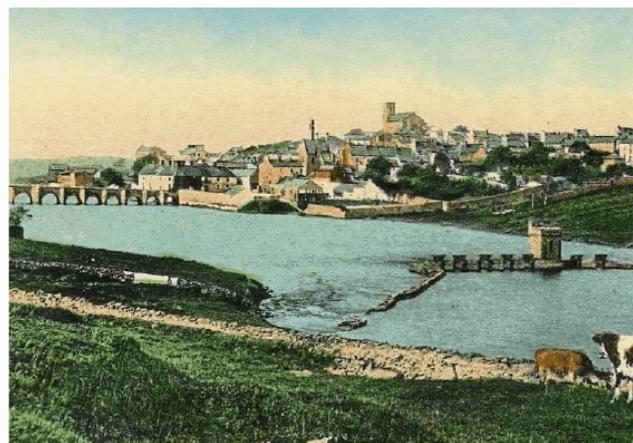
It related to an incident on the Derry to Dundalk train at Ballybay where a bullet entered through the window of the carriage on the moving train. He received some facial injuries, thankfully from broken glass rather than the bullet itself.

An Editorial of the time is questioning why butter was cheaper in England (3s per lb) than in Ireland (2s 6d per lb) as a result of subsidies.

"One would naturally expect to buy butter cheaper in Ireland, than in any of the in-



The Donegal Democrat's first editorial in June of 1919 gives a flavour of the context in which it was established



Ballyshannon had a strong tradition of printing newspapers dating back to the 1800s

dustrial cities in England. It is again a case of Irish interests being subordinated to the interests of the English consumer."

By June 20th of the following year, Hodgini's Circus and Wild West Show were set to visit south Donegal on June 24th, adding to the general 'wild west' happenings of the era.

Early reports had to be circumspect in that the British authorities were monitoring newspaper reports and their contents, as with everything else. The printing facilities were 'visited' on occasion as were its owners and manager.

One convoy was described in the edition of August 21, 1920:

"About 250 cavalry from Finner Camp, Bundoran with machine guns, field kitchens and other military equipment, passed through the town on Tuesday to Killybegs. It is now quite customary to witness five or six lorries containing soldiers going in the

Tragic incident

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same direction."

In one unrelated tragic incident, a printer with the paper Thomas Rooney, was shot dead, in a late night incident at the Bridgend, by a British soldier on patrol after curfew on the night of December 4, 1920.

Ironically the young Rooney had served with the Irish Rifles, a regiment of British Army in World War One. The earlier aforementioned Rev. Trainor officiated at the funeral and graveside.

A report of Volunteer activities in an edition of Au-

We wish to thank the advertisers in our columns, and also those who contributed articles. The advertisers for their kindness in placing their faith in us, and believing we could produce this journal while beset with so many difficulties, and the contributors for their assistance in relieving us of a lot of the spade work.

In our list of the Trustees of the '30 Hall published in another column, we have omitted the name of Mr James McGowan, Doherty.

There are no patients in Ballyshannon Fever Hospital at present, and the Nurse, Miss Harris, has gone on a well-earned holiday, a rest which she much needed after her arduous duties during the influenza crisis. The Fever Hospital has not been free of patients for a considerable time previously.

CHEAP FISH.

During May 4,000 crans of mackerel and 500 crans of herrings were dumped at Downings (Donegal). Herrings sold at 6s to 10s a cran which would realise 40s a cran if railway facilities were available.

OUR AGENTS:

Ballyshannon—Miss M'Grady, Main Street; Mr R. Vaughan, Main Street; Mrs P. Connolly, East Port; Mrs M'Quade, West Port.

Bundoran—Mr. Mich. Carroll, Droper, East End. Belleek—Mr. M. J. Dolan, Ballintra—Mr. Richard Walsh.

Ballyshannon Market.

Saturday—Oats, 2s 6d to 2s 10d; potatoes (champion), 1s per stone; inferior quality, 6d; mangolds, 2s per cwt; eggs (duck), 1s per doz; hen, 2s per doz; butter, 10d to 1s per lb.

Thursday, 4th inst—Thirty pigs in market; controlled price; eggs (duck), 1s 10d; hen, 2s; butter, no change from previous market.

RACING NOTES—Sportman don't miss Knight of the Aic and Clonlara, a Stalwart tomorrow.

gust 1920 sheds some interesting light on the kind of news that was appearing in the paper and how it was in control on the ground in south Donegal, at that time.

"A young man who got under the influence of drink while on a visit to Bundoran was arrested by the Irish Volunteers and fined £1. He was also ordered to leave the town, which he did by the next day. A motor car owner while on a visit to Bundoran refused to drive a priest on a sick call, and six armed men ordered him to leave the town within an hour, and he did so."

In December of 1921 and as the Anglo Irish Treaty is signed great jubilation is recorded in the pages following the release of internees from the likes of Derry jail and Ballykinlar internment camp.

Sadly, it was shortly followed by even greater tragedy, recorded weekly in the Democrat - the Irish Civil War.