

**Jackie White RIP**  
**Funeral Mass**  
**Errill Church**  
**Friday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

John (Jackie) White, Ballagh, Errill, Co. Laois. March 9th 2021. At Limerick Regional Hospital. Deeply regretted by his loving wife Ann, his son Sean and his daughters Catherine and Mairead, daughter-in-law Margaret, sons-in-law John and Mark, grandchildren Laura, Jack, Ciarán, Eoghan, Claire and Hugh, brothers-in-law, sister-in-law, nephews, nieces, neighbours and a wide circle of friends.

I recently came across a variation of a quote attributed to Winston Churchill. It said 'We shape our communities; thereafter they shape us' During his almost 83 years of life Jackie White helped to shape this community of Errill but perhaps it is even more true to say that Errill shaped Jackie. What has happened in a community can shape, directly or indirectly, how people see it, feel about it, and create memories around it. This can range from the collective pride felt from the success of a local hurling team or a well-known historical event happening nearby, through to communal grief experienced after a local tragedy. Such memories and stories are as much a part of the identity of a place as the bricks and mortar.

Yesterday I was looking up Jackie's Baptism and Confirmation records. I noticed a few interesting things. Jackie received his Confirmation on the 28<sup>th</sup> of May 1950. More than half the boys in Jackie's Confirmation class took Kieran as their confirmation name. I wondered about that and was it because the ruins of St. Kieran's church and cemetery was just across the road from the school and had they been told of the tradition that St. Kieran had travelled through Errill and founded his church here. Whatever the reason, by taking the name of the saint, their own identity was being shaped by the traditions and history of their community. Two other things I noticed from those records was that Jackie's class were the last to be confirmed in the old church in Rathdowney (and then I wondered how the Errill boys and girls felt about having to go into Rathdowney for their Confirmation. But I won't go down that road lest I

get myself into trouble.) More interesting for me and (as I have noted on the few occasions this has happened before, I cannot resist mentioning it) Jackie was born on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June 1938. He was baptised in Grogan at that font over there two days later on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June. The priest who baptised him was Fr. Pat Delaney, a native of Camross. As already mentioned Jackie got his Confirmation on the 28<sup>th</sup> May 1950 and he received from Bishop Patrick Collier, another Camross man. Bishop Collier's nephew Fr. Sean Collier served here for many years and was somebody he very much liked and admired. And then here we are today as Jackie leaves on his final journey, another Delaney. Delaneys at the beginning and the end of his life and two Collier's in between Four Camross men. How blessed was he .....no wonder he turned out so well!!, and surely such a litany of Blessings ensures a safe passage into heaven for him today.

Whatever about the Camross influence, this community of Errill was in Jackie's DNA and he loved this place with every fibre of his being. Jackie was born, as I said, in June 1938. Depending, I suppose on your point of view, the day Jackie was born was also a very historic day in Ireland because there was a general election that day and Mr. De Valera won the first overall majority in the short history of the Irish state. Jackie went to school here in Errill and after that he worked at various jobs, helping local farmers, on the railway, in Bord Na Mona and then Donaghmore Creamery. Like many young local lads Jackie loved hurling and he loved to hurl. Hurling played no small part in how much Jackie loved Errill. But as much as Jackie and his friends loved this community and were proud to represent it on the playing fields of Laois, this was 1950's Ireland. Economically, there were not many opportunities locally and in many ways rural Ireland was a somewhat restrictive, and some might even say oppressive time for a young person to live. Many as we know left and moved to England or even further afield. Jackie left too but stopped short of leaving the country. Perhaps because he still wanted to be able to hurl for Errill he opted for a new life in Dublin. He had answered an add for a job as a carer at Stewarts Hospital for young people and adults with special Mental needs.

Even though he was from the heart of the country, Jackie loved the years he spent in Dublin and the opportunities his life in the capital of the early 1960's gave him were a kind of a liberation. He still kept very much in touch with home and regularly made the train journey to Ballybrophy to tog out in the green and white jersey.

But perhaps the greatest reason Jackie had such fond memories of his time in Dublin was because it was there among his working colleagues in Stewart's Hospital that he was to meet and fall in love with a young Westmeath woman, Anne Merlehan from Clonkill. The rest as they say is history and Jackie and Anne were married on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September 1968. They continued living in Dublin for a few years after their marriage but early in the 1970's the need to give greater care and support to Jackie's parents was the encouragement for them to finally settle here in Ballagh. Jackie initially worked in the Harp Textile factory in Rathdowney which was thriving in those days but in 1977 Jackie secured a job with Laois County Council maintaining the roads locally and later across the county.

Back from the big smoke Jackie easily re-connected with so many aspects of life in this community which he loved. His hurling career was coming to an end and I think his final appearance was in the 1973 Junior Hurling Final when Errill was defeated by Durrow. He threaded the boards as part of the Errill Drama group, spent long hard days working on the bog and of course always maintained an interest in farming and keeping a few cattle. I assume it was at this time that his very close relationship with his beloved blue tractor began.

But I suppose the big difference between the 19 year old who went to Dublin seeking adventure and the man who came back here fifteen years later was that now he was a husband and a father with responsibilities to care for his elderly parents and also to provide for his young family. And as I listened to you speak about Jackie, the husband, the father and grandfather I suspect that he embraced those responsibilities with great commitment.

Ann, on that early September day in 1968 in your home parish, you and Jackie made certain solemn promises to God and to each other. Ye promised to cherish each other, for better, for worse, for richer for poorer in sickness and in health all the days of your lives together.

Almost 53 years later Anne as you look back I'd say ye, pretty much delivered on those promises to each other. I'm very conscious that in recent years you have both been faced with very serious health challenges and in your turn and with the help of your family ye have cared for each other. Thank God for the blessing of those bonus years ye have had together.

To Sean and Catherine and Mairead. Even though you are all parents now yourselves, today you are children and the death of your dad brings with it for you almost a sense of un-belonging. With your mam, your father created for you your first experience of Home, a safe place to be born, to take initiative, to believe, to start the journey of loving yourselves. May he continue to guide and inspire you in the years ahead.

To Jackie's six grand-children; Laura, Jack, Ciarán, Eoighan, Claire and Hugh. I have no doubt that your grand-dad's life in recent years was made all the more enjoyable and fulfilled as he interacted with each of you and watched you grow. You will each have your own treasured memories of him and I hope you will always remember him. I might also suggest that since he is now going to be in Heaven that you should pray to him, particularly when you need some kind of help. I hope the other five won't mind if I say a word to Jack. I know you and your grand-dad had a special bond and you saw and spent time with each other almost every day. Handing over his beloved tractor to you was I suspect very significant and very emotional for him and for you. It was perhaps symbolic that his working days had come to an end but also in you Jack, he saw the future. You are not just carrying on his name but also so much what was important to him he now passes on to you. Your grand-dad's death is by no means the end of your friendship with him but you will now relate to him in a different way and the wisdom he shared with you and the memories ye created together will guide you long into the future.

We have spoken about how love of family and his commitment to this community of Errill have shaped the life of the man we honour with Christian burial on this March day. The other major influence in Jackie's life was what began over there at that Baptismal font on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June 1938. Throughout all the seasons and stages of his life Jackie was faithful

to the promises first made on his behalf at his Baptism in Grogan church. That gift of Faith was nourished at home in Ballagh and over the years in this church and in this community. Our Faith, the faith that sustained Jackie all his life, also builds on nature. Jackie has died in the Springtime and being surrounded by nature all his life Jackie too must have often reflected on the mystery which is at the heart of today's gospel. When the seed is sown in the ground it has to die before new life can come. Jesus thought of this when he spoke of the grain of wheat. It falls to the ground; it seems to die but in the act of dying and being received into the earth it gives birth to the green sprout, beautiful and bountiful. That very same mystery of nature is at the heart of our Christian faith. As Christians we believe that death, our death, is not God's final word in our regard. Yes, we die and yes, like the seed we are planted, buried in the earth but that act of dying and burial also gives way to a new life. Today is Jackie's time to die and as we bring him later for burial at St. Kieran's we realise in faith that sacred ground which Jackie passed thousands of times during his life is today the gateway for him to his new and eternal life.

With St. Paul in today's second reading Jackie can now say with confidence:

*the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith*

Jackie you have , and as we say farewell to you today we send you on your way with the words of that lovely Irish Blessing

May the road rise to meet you  
May the wind be at your back  
May the sun shine warm upon your face  
May the rain fall softly on your fields  
And until we meet again  
May God hold you in the Palm of His Hand