



Mohill-Maothail Mancháin: fifteen
centuries of trade, markets and fairs
our people, our history, our stories





Mohill Mo Scéal

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*Mohill Mo Scéal – Mohill My Story – a
storymap of Mohill-Maothail Mancháin*

Mohill Mo Scéal

This booklet accompanies a digital storymap (link opposite). The digital stories contain significantly more text, multiple images and web-links. Some include voice recordings, music and video, as indicated by the icons below.



Images



Voice



Music



Video



Scan to access
Mohill Mo Scéal
digital storymap
or go to
[www.leitrim.ie/
visit/mohill](http://www.leitrim.ie/visit/mohill)

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Comments and ideas welcome via mohillheritage@gmail.com.

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1. Mohill's narrow gauge railway

Mohill's narrow gauge railway line operated for over 70 years until its closure in 1959



The Cavan & Leitrim Railway operated between Dromod and Belturbet with stops at Derreen, Mohill, Rosharry, Adoon, Fenagh and Ballinamore.

The first commercial service, on 6 September 1887, carried pigs from Mohill fair. The line quickly became critical to Mohill's fairs and markets by enabling efficient transport of livestock and produce. The line was also used by

workers to commute from outlying areas. For many departing emigrants, it became a site of sad farewells.

By the mid-20th century, modernisation had made the service largely redundant: it carried few passengers and was losing money. It closed on 1 April 1959.

After decades lying empty, the station house has now been renovated and given new purpose.

Digital storymap

Hear locals cheer and sing as the last train leaves Mohill in 1959; also other songs and recordings of the era



2. Jimmy Gilmartin, blacksmith

When Jimmy Gilmartin's forge closed in the 1970s, it marked the end of a 1500-year-old trade in Mohill



As late as the 1930s, there were three forges in Mohill. One was on Station Road, operated by blacksmith, Jimmy Gilmartin. Like all the blacksmiths before him, Jimmy was kept busy shoeing horses and asses, making wheels for carts and even forging metal gates. He also mended and made farm tools like slanes

for cutting turf or spikes for a harrow.

The forge was an important focal point for locals to meet and trade and exchange news. The fire, blasted by a large bellows at the centre of the forge, was hot enough to soften the iron horseshoes and offered welcome warmth on a chilly day.

Jimmy Gilmartin was still working in the 1950s and 60s but there was much less demand for his skill as tractors, cars and buses replaced the old farm horses and donkeys. When the forge closed in the 1970s, it ended fifteen centuries of the blacksmith trade in Mohill.

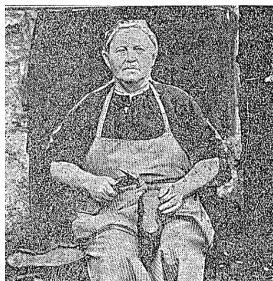


3. Cobblers and shoemakers

Key trades at a time when shoes and boots were built to last and replaced infrequently

Frank Heeran

Frank Heeran operated out of a small workshop on Bridge Street up to the 1970s. The walls and floors were filled with boxes and shelves of spare parts. The pungent smells of leather and glue and resin hung over the crowded bench where Frank sewed, stitched and hammered.



made shoes for inmates and other locals.

Kate O'Reilly & Kate Cashin

Mohill had at least two female cobblers in the 19th and early 20th century.

Kate O'Reilly and Kate Cashin were both employed as shoemakers by the workhouse and

Kate Cashin toiled at the workhouse for at least 25 years from 1885, and was still working at the age of 66. Kate O'Reilly also had a long career. In 1913, somewhat to the surprise of the *Irish Independent*, O'Reilly could 'turn out a shoe unaided from start to finish'.



4. Turlough O Carolan (1670-1738)

One of Ireland's greatest composers, O Carolan was a travelling bard, but made his permanent home in Mohill



O Carolan came to Leitrim in 1688. With clear musical talent, he was apprenticed to a harper after he lost his sight to smallpox. With the patronage of Mrs McDermot Roe and others, O Carolan entertained in many of the big houses of Ireland, including the Croftons of Mohill. He composed over 200 pieces and earned Europe-wide fame.

O Carolan settled in Mohill after his marriage to Máire Maguire in 1720. Máire died in 1733, followed five years later by her husband. O Carolan's wake at Kilronan lasted four days and was marked by lavish hospitality and music.

The O Carolan statue in Mohill is the last work of the eminent sculptor Oisín Kelly (1915-1981). It was unveiled by President Patrick Hillery in 1986.

Digital storymap

Listen to O Carolan's harp music and, for the first time in centuries, hear his lament for Máire, sung by Fionnuala Maxwell



5. St Manchán and early Mohill

The founding of a monastery by St Manchán in the 6th century established Mohill as an urban centre



St Manchán (d. 538 CE) founded Mohill monastery in the early 500s. Mohill's roots as a centre for trade, craft and markets can be traced back to this period. A direct link is Monaghan Day, a fair traditionally held on St Manchán's feast-day.

In the 12th-century, Mohill monastery became an Augustinian priory. One noteworthy novice was Cathal Mac Raghnaill – Charles Reynolds – who travelled to Rome in 1535 and persuaded the pope to excommunicate Henry VIII.

Mohill priory was dissolved in 1590; its lands were granted to John Crofton. His son Henry acquired more land, including 600 acres from Plantation. Crofton built a castle around 1690, but only the base of a tower remains. Today, St Mary's church stands on the priory site.

By the late 1800s, the Croftons held 9,611 acres around Mohill. Though increasingly absent, they continued to earn revenue from town leases and fair green tolls. In 1749, the purchase by Nathaniel Clements of c.10,000 acres around Mohill entrenched British governance and cemented the shift to anglicisation.



6. Nan Fitzpatrick, singer

Amongst the first female singers from Ireland to be recorded in the 1920s and 30s in America



In 1929, at the age of twenty, Nan followed her older siblings and emigrated to America. After an 'American Wake', with singing and dancing into the early hours, Nan set off from Mohill train station on the long journey to New York.

Nan grew up in Drumshanbo North, between the parishes of Aughavas and Cloone. All of the family – parents James and Rosie Fitzpatrick and eight siblings – were highly musical. Her brother, Pee, established Fitzpatrick's Céilí House in Mohill and was a talented fiddle player; another brother, Phil, wrote the anthem 'Lovely Leitrim'.

In New York, Nan met with Frank Quinn, a native of Drumlish, who was already a recording artist. Nan was soon performing at social events and within weeks was being recorded at Columbia studios.

Digital storymap
Nan talking about leaving Mohill; links to Nan singing and more about her career



7. Serving time with the Gibsons

Violet Crowe was one of many young women apprenticed to shops in Mohill; she went on to own the business



When Violet Crowe finished school, she left her home in Dromod and went to Mohill to work. She was 14 when she was taken on by the Gibsons as an apprentice. The Gibsons – Sophia, Harry and Minnie – had a shoe shop beside the Church of Ireland and a drapery business across the street. As was the custom, Violet worked for three years without pay while serving her time,

after which she earned £1 a week. She and the other shopgirls lived above the shop. When the Gibsons retired, Violet took over the shoe shop and started her own drapery business with help from her sister Anna.

Every Tuesday – a half-day for the shop – Violet would rush to get the train to Dromod to visit her parents. Often the linesman would hold the train for her as he knew her habits.

Violet married Ted Tuthill in 1955. A few years later, with two young children and Anna leaving the business, Violet closed the shop and moved to the family farm in Tullyoran.



8. Gannon's and Dunleavy's

Amongst the many traders in Mohill at a time when the town bustled with grocers, drapers, and hardware shops

Gannon & Co

Established by TJ Gannon in 1896, Gannon's drapery and footwear shop spanned two properties on Lower Main Street (*G on map*). It was notable for its polished wood interior and a suspended pulley system that transferred cash and receipts from one end of the shop to the other.

TJ's son Jim took over in 1940. Gannon's closed in March 2019.



Dunleavy's

Bridget and John Dunleavy opened their drapery shop on Main Street in the 1910s. Dunleavy's became known for their fine workmanship and stylish designs at a time when suits, hats, and wedding dresses were all hand-crafted. In the 1950s, Gerry and Mary Dunleavy took over the business.



9. Early's and John McGahern

Author John McGahern (1934-2006), was also a small farmer who lived outside Mohill and was a regular at Early's



John McGahern described Mohill and life here in the mid-20th century in his fiction and essays.

Mohill is our town . . . In its plain way I think it beautiful . . .

I like the town best in winter, the outskirts glistening with frost, the excitement on the faces of people in from the countryside for the late Saturday-night shopping, children and parcels being dragged under the street-lamps. When the shopping is

done, they go to the bars to meet the people they know and to discover the news, each locality to its own bar. In early March, on a Thursday market day, once I see the bags of seed potatoes and bundles of cabbage plants – Early York and Flat Dutch, Greyhound and Curly – on the corner outside Luke Early's bar, each bundle tied with baler twine of all colours, I know the winter is almost over. I think of Mohill as one of the happiest towns in the world.

From John McGahern, 'County Leitrim: The Sky Above Us' in *Love of the World*, Faber & Faber, 2009 © John McGahern Estate

Digital storymap

More extracts relating to John McGahern & describing Early's bar



10. Black & Tans, boycotts, murder

During the War of Independence, the Black & Tans and IRA warred in Mohill; in 1923, a local doctor was murdered



From 1919, IRA Volunteers conducted raids against state institutions, especially the constabulary (RIC). The authorities responded by drafting Auxiliaries and 'Black & Tans' into Mohill. They took over buildings on Glebe Street and instituted a campaign of raids, beatings, burnings,

harassment and shootings. The IRA enforced a boycott of the RIC and on those who supplied goods to the crown forces. The boycott permanently changed the Mohill's trading landscape.

Dr Paddy Muldoon



In March 1923, as the Civil War drew to a close, Dr Paddy Muldoon was shot and

killed at Bridge Street (*Mon map*). Local priest, Fr Edward Ryans, was implicated in the murder, but the powerful forces of the IRA, church and emerging state all colluded to help the perpetrators evade justice.

Digital storymap

More about the revolutionary era and Belfast Boycott. Links to a local 2023 film and booklet on the murder of Dr Muldoon



11. Glebe Street Ritz

Glebe Street was a busy place in the 1950s, especially on fair days given its proximity to the Fair Green



Public houses on Glebe Street like Pee Kenny's and Tom McGovern's provided sustenance and entertainment after a day's work at the fair. McGovern's was also an eating house and had a rare public phone. The post office was managed by Stephen Flynn who also ran a taxi service and chip shop.

The Ritz Cinema opened in 1942 and quickly became a favourite social spot.

Inside, the Ritz had three seating sections and separate bicycle doors for men and women. 'Tom and Jerry' cartoons were often the highlight before the main feature began.

Mrs Ellen Nicholl guarded the door and maintained both peace and profit in the cinema. Staff members included Babs Bohan, Patsy Bohan, and Tommy Joe Clyne who operated the projection booth.

Before and after a show, cinema-goers gathered in John Bohan's Ritz Café cross the road. Film audiences declined in the 1960s, and the cinema sometimes hosted céilís and local dances. The Ritz closed around 1969.



12. Fairs and Monaghan Day

Mohill has long been a farming area and the town was a focal point for livestock fairs for centuries

The largest fair of the year – and arguably the most significant date in the town year – was Monaghan Day. Named for St Manchán, it was held annually on his feast-day, 25 February.

As John McGahern observed, Monaghan Day was ‘the traditional day poor farmers sold their winter stock and the rich farmers bought them for fattening’. Local farmers depended on Monaghan Day for a significant part of their annual income and great numbers of bullocks, heifers, weanlings and dry



cows were traded; pigs were sold the day before.

The opening of Dromod train station in 1862 boosted trading at all Mohill fairs with special trains despatched from Dublin and Mullingar to carry stock and passengers.

Monaghan Day fairs ended in the 1970s, replaced by a livestock mart on the same site. Tolls are no longer payable for access to the fair green.

Digital storymap
*Links, images and
recollections of Mohill's
fair days*



13. Northern Bank

Formal banking was established in Mohill when the Northern Banking Company opened in 1867



The Northern Banking Company first operated out of premises west of the butter market. The current bank building – built c.1910 – is in a rarely found Art Nouveau style.

By 1881, Mohill had a second bank, the Hibernian Bank, suggesting a growing market for banking services amongst farmers and traders. The 1870s had seen the introduction of

small loans for ordinary farmers and traders. Even small farmers could borrow amounts as low as £5 at low interest rates.

The banks played an important role in handling remittance money sent home by emigrants in Britain and America. In the 1940s, such was the volume of remittance money going through the Northern Bank that the teenage son of a manager was sent from Belfast to help process the cash.

Until the opening of the bank, a farmer or business person who needed finance was restricted to loan funds or money-lenders, or relied on credit from local shopkeepers.

14. Butter Market

A weekly market for food and other produce spread from the butter market to the base of the town



For centuries, a market was held every Thursday in Mohill to trade pigs, animal skins, potatoes, oats, eggs and butter. On the streets, pedlars sold seasonal foods, crockery, clothes, and medicinal cures.

Some of the trade was for export. Dealers bought pigs in Mohill and shipped them via Longford to

England by rail. Buyers from Sligo and Mullingar bought butter and eggs from local women for onward sale and export. Egg and butter sales could amount to over 60% of a farm's cash income, enabling rent to be paid and groceries and other goods to be bought in local shops. The volumes were such that in 1868, one emigrant from Mohill returned and set up as a butter and egg dealer.

Digital storymap
*Listen to Larry Moran
talking in 1991 about
the old butter market*



15. Workhouse to Hyde Terrace

The workhouse and fever hospital are synonymous with the horrors of the Famine, but their role changed over time

Mohill workhouse opened in 1842 to provide relief to the destitute poor of the area. During the Famine of the late 1840s, the workhouse was overwhelmed by thousands of starving, desperate people seeking help.

The role of the workhouse and fever hospital (opened 1844) changed from the 1860s. The number of workhouse 'inmates' was much reduced and mostly comprised women, children, older people and the sick. The hospital began to offer healthcare to all local people.

In 1921, Mohill workhouse was closed as part of a national drive for greater efficiency. Staff were pensioned off and inmates

transferred first to Manorhamilton and in 1936 to Carrick-on-Shannon. Mohill's fever hospital evolved into St Manachán's District Hospital.



The workhouse was torn down in the 1930s and its stone used to build 36 new houses on the site. Hyde Terrace opened in May 1939, named for Dr Douglas Hyde, Ireland's first president and grandson of Mohill rector, Rev Arthur Hyde.





Mohill My Story: a storymap of Mohill, County Leitrim

Mohill-Maothail Mancháin

First settled around 500 CE, Mohill was a major centre for markets and livestock fairs for over fifteen hundred years. Despite centuries of upheaval and displacement, the town retains ancient influences in its geography, built environment, society and culture. It also retains a strong sense of place and a vibrant, strong community spirit.

Go online for more

This booklet supplements a digital storymap (link opposite) that adds richness to Mohill's stories with added detail, images, music and song.



Scan to access
Mohill Mo Scéal
digital storymap
or go to
www.leitrim.ie/visit/mohill



An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
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