

# MY RECOLLECTION OF THE COTTAGE SCHEMES

*By Sean Mc Namara*

I am Sean Mc Namara, born in 1923 in Co. Roscommon and qualified B.E in UCG in 1945. I worked in the Co. Council offices for about six months, without salary, to gain experience. I was then appointed supervisor at 13/6d. per day for a six day week. Based in Castlerea, I signed gangers books from Cloonfad to Donamon and learned about turf cutting, River Suck drainage and tar spraying etc. Job opportunities in Ireland were few and open cast coal mining in England did not entice.

I underwent an interview and was appointed to the Turf Development Board (Co. Kildare scheme), for £260 per annum in September 1946. Once I reported to Newbridge I was sent by ration van to Lullymore Lodge supervising Cush. Later I went to Derries, Codd, Killinthomas and the Black River.

We surveyed face banks from Allenwood to Edenderry in winter, before I decided to learn more civil engineering with contractors in Dublin, Belfast (Falls Road), Lisburn and later in Athy on the towns main sewage scheme.

The new Board na Mona advertised for site engineers at £12 a week. I applied and was appointed to Mount Dillon where three cottage schemes were planned on separate sites. I negotiated a salary of 13 guineas and the use of a van to do all three sites with John Mc Shane as my very capable assistant. Later, I transferred to Head Office at £750 per annum and worked on the building section until my retirement in 1985.

Cottage schemes were a natural follower to the Hostels, where migrant male workers were housed during the 'Emergency Years' to produce fuel supplies from the Bog of Allen for Dublin and other cities.

The workers were mainly from the west of Ireland; Cork, Kerry and in some cases Donegal, all of whom were salt of the earth and prepared to do piece work for very meagre earnings in very basic conditions.

This was around 1950 before the war had been forgotten and labour was a much bigger part of production planning. The machines in use were the 'Dolberg' and the 'Ackerman' of which 26 were delivered from Sweden but only two were

assembled and worked in the Black River. They, like others of that era, were semi-automatic with a GM diesel engine. Turf was shovelled into an 'Elevator' and put through a 'Macerator' and spread on pallets on a wire conveyor and using more than twenty men (piece work being the target for this operation also).

With permanency in mind, the planning of the houses went ahead and designs by Frank Gibney, the most highly thought of town planner of that time, were negotiated for the first schemes planned. Tender documents by Tom Darcy were brought out for the same schemes and Tom complained to me in later life that he was not told of later schemes. Not having been in the office at that time, my recollection is that a target of £1000 per house was set which, as time went by, became the builder's budget. Site works were done by direct labour i.e. at first cost to the Board. Schemes were planned for Clonsast (2), Mount Dillon (3), Littletown, Timahoe South and North, Boora, Ballivor and Derrygreenagh and sites were acquired in due course.

House design was far ahead of the Local Authority Housing of that time with turf fired boiler cookers - Nuturf, later Faun - Hot Cylinder, hot and cold taps to sink, W.H.B and bath, indoor W.C and fuel store. Gibney who was an accepted Co. Council Planner went as far as showing a school, chapel, community hall, light industry site, in the site area owned by the Board but they have not been built.

The schemes first put in were Brackna, 50 houses for Clonsast, Derraghan 22 houses, Clootuskert 70 houses and Lanesboro 64 houses for Mount Dillon which is on both sides of the Shannon, and Coill Dubh 160 houses for Timahoe.

The following is my recollection;

**BRACKNA:** Built by Kelly Bros. Of Mullingar, supervised by Frank Kilty, consisted of 30 bungalows and 22 two storied in a terrace with a Community Hall. Sewer's were connected to the Tuke and Bell Ejector designed for 300 people but that was before the washing machine and detergents came along. The water source was a bored well 8" in diameter and 100ft deep with a geomantic pump, later a Sumo submersible pumping to a 16' x 16' Braithwaite Tank on a 30' steel tower. The water main was later connected to the local Group Water Scheme and I think a 4" Toschi A.C pipe is still in use.

**DERRAGHAN:** This was also built by Kelly's of Mullingar and has 10 bungalows and two terraces of two storied houses. The sewers and gun barrel water pipes had been laid here in a false start some years before and were connected. The sewer discharged to a simple septic tank and water came from the works borehole again to a steel tower and tank.

**CLOONTUSKERT:** This was built by Gallagher, Furlong & Roarty, and consisted of bungalows with two shops which later became school buildings. Sewer discharged into a Tuke and Bell Ejector system and water initially was from a poor borehole to a second hand storage tank. Both bore and tank gave endless trouble and later the supply was taken across country from The Works and Hostel Water Supply which I believe is still in use.

**LANESBORO:** Was the third scheme under my supervision with John Mc Shane. This was built by P.J Mc Loughlin of Longford. Sewer which was laid through solid rock discharged into the local village sewerage disposal works. Water was supplied from the village water supply by Longford County Council. There are 32 bungalows and 32 houses in terraces, including a round house which was not easy to roof. Blasting of sewer and water main trenches supplied almost enough stone to hand pitch the roads, in a method long forgotten.

**COILL DUBH:** Consisted of 30 bungalows, 130 houses, which were set out very well in terraces of great variety, with 4 shops all built by Mc Inerneys of Scariff now much more than famous men. Contractors were supervised by Harry Huggard and site works and direct labour was under Archie Mc Quillan. Water supply was from a 10" borehole pumped by a submersible pump to a 24' x 24' x 12' Braithwaite tank from which the 4" Toschi asbestos main is laid. There were problems of hardness of the water and after years of cleaning the boilers a Permut softener was installed. The sewers are graded in one out fall were a Tuke and Bell pumped system operate again to the standard of the day. Later schools were built on a site indicated by Gibney, and later a Community Hall.



*Coill Dubh 1952.*

In those initial schemes it became necessary to omit baths to stay within Department budget. They were later installed at a cost to tenants of 6d. per week onto the rent of 7/6d. per week.

**KILCORMAC:** This scheme was built by Healy of Drogheda under the experienced eye of Harry Huggard. All 104 houses are two storied and built to a curved terrace. A school was later erected and there is a site for light industry. Sewerage is discharged to the adjoining village scheme and water is supplied from the adjoining village also.

**ROCHFORTBRIDGE:** The Rochfortbridge scheme adjoining the village was built by Roarty Ltd., who had partnered Gallaghers earlier, and was supervised by Archie Mc Quillan. All houses are two storied and built around an open area. Sewers, laid by direct labour, discharge to a Co. Council disposal works. Water mains were laid by Westmeath Co. Council and supply is from their source. There was later a provision for Tennis and Pitch and Putt with major involvement from Tennant Groups.

**BALLIVOR:** Eight bungalows were built on a Co. Council site to form part of their layout, which was not built.

Schemes planned for Clonsast, Littletown, and Mucklon were not built because of reduced labour requirements largely due to automatic production machines. Housing maintenance from plumbing to painting gradually became manageable only by contract and tenant interest in purchasing houses. This led to the eventual sale of houses to tenants and later by tenants to people who had no connection with Born na Mona.

I wish them well.