

Life

Deathbed
visions of
Corkonians
Pages 22/23



INSIDE

Meet
Cork's
People
P24/25

Tea
break
fun
P26/27



Cork
dance
scene
Page 28



**PATWELL'S
VERDICT**
by Michael Pattwell

Pub purchase that capped a fabulous break in Kingdom



NATURAL BEAUTY: Michael Pattwell enjoyed the delights of Dingle on a recent getaway

SOMEBODY close to me recently suggested that all my *Pattwell's Verdict* articles lately were very serious and that perhaps I'd take a break from giving out about the new taxes, the government and everything else I have been sounding off about for the past month or two.

I reflected on that for a while, came to the conclusion that it was indeed a very good idea and immediately I thought what could be more light-hearted than a few lines about the Kingdom of Kerry and what it means to me.

When we think of Cork and Kerry at the same time it is too easy to think of rivalry, especially when it comes to football, competitiveness and, some may even say, resentment. That, of course, is not the truth of the matter at all.

True, all these things may exist between the peoples of the two neighbouring counties for short periods of time leading up to and during important football matches, but overall I believe there is mutual respect and friendship.

At this stage I must declare what some may perceive as a personal bias; my father was a Kerryman and I spent long periods of my childhood there. I still spend quite a lot of my leisure time in Kerry. Having said that, however, I feel that I know the county and many people who live in it and I feel I am qualified to speak about it.

Kerry is the anglicized name for Ciarrai (or more anciently Ciarraighe) and it means the 'people of Ciar'. Ciar was the name of the pre-Celtic tribe who lived in the area. The legendary founder of the tribe was Ciar, son of Fergus mac Róich. In Old Irish, 'Ciar' meant black or dark brown, and the word continues in use in modern Irish as an adjective describing a dark complexion.

One of my very favourite places in Ireland, or anywhere, must be the Dingle Peninsula and I was lucky enough to be able to spend a few days there recently. Dingle, of course, is in the barony of Corca Dhuibhne and is often referred to under that name. We found marvellous accommodation at the 4-star guesthouse, Castlewood House, and I have no hesitation in saying that it easily surpassed any hotel or guesthouse I have ever stayed in for luxury, comfort and friendliness. They provided a huge range of excellent and delicious food for breakfast, the likes of which I had not experienced before.

We were blessed with very fine weather while we were there and we spent the first day pottering about in the Ballyferriter and Murreagh area, coming back via Brandon Creek, past the Bóthar pub, stopping here and there to take a photograph of the stunning scenery — and of one another — as we enjoyed the sunshine of early spring.

I'm always very sceptical when I hear people say that the people of one county are different to the people of a neighbouring county. How

could an artificial line on a map, by some magical means, change the nature of people? To me there is little or no difference between the residents of my own native West Cork and the people of Kerry — apart, that is, from a slight difference in accents. Otherwise they are generally decent, hospitable and open-minded people who would prefer to be helping out a neighbour than doing him harm. Having said that, however, I would have to agree that certain things can happen in Kerry that would be unlikely to occur anywhere else.

One cannot, of course, go to Dingle without visiting the An Café Liteartha at Dykegate Lane, an amazing bookshop where you are likely to find a book on any subject and you can browse through it while enjoying a coffee in the back room.

One would think that coming from West Cork I'd know all about the raid on Baltimore in June 1631 when Algerians pirates attacked the village and carried away to slavery 107 men, women and children. In fact, I knew nothing about it except that it had happened. Browsing in An Café Liteartha I came across a book that

tells the whole story of that awful event and the sequel to it. (*The Stolen Village*, Des Ekin, The O'Brien Press, 2008.) I've had many enjoyable hours since dipping into it and learning about what happened there.

We visited the Catholic Church and walked along Green Street in the direction of the Main Street. We dropped in to say hello to our friend Niamh Utsch and to admire her beautiful handcrafted jewelry in her shop, NU Goldsmiths.

Emerging onto Main Street we crossed the road and I noticed a large shop window with a good display of cloth caps on a pillar on one side of the window. There were a few shirts hanging at the back of the window but the rest of the display area was full of boxes of seed potatoes and onion sets; nothing else. I was actually looking out for a cap for myself and liked one of those displayed in the window. Though I thought this was a strange stock combination I decided to go in and enquire about the cap that I fancied.

On entering the shop, I soon discovered that it was neither a drapery shop nor a garden supplies shop, but in fact was a pub. There were two counters running the full depth of the shop, one to the left of the door and the other to the right. The right side was a well stocked bar and there were a few people availing of refreshment there, even though it was only about five o'clock in the evening.

On the counter on the left was box after box of several varieties of seed potatoes and a few boxes of onion sets. Some of the shelves behind that counter were empty but more were full of caps. Nothing else but caps.

Because we had come so far we decided to perch ourselves on a couple of high stools at the bar side of the shop and avail of some refreshments ourselves.

We instantly felt at home and very comfortable, and without introduction of any kind we became part of the chitchat between the other patrons. After a while I plucked up the confidence to ask about the cap on the window that I fancied. The barman crossed over to the other side of the shop and in behind the counter. He then removed the boxes of seed potatoes from the window and clambered in to retrieve the one I was looking for. He then replaced the boxes of seed potatoes in the window and handed me the cap to try it on. It didn't fit.

After trying on a few more of the caps we at least found out what size I should be looking for and the barman then rummaged around among the dozens of caps on the shelves but was unable to find my size in the pattern I wanted. Undeterred, he then got down on his knees and foraged in several cardboard boxes under the counter but again couldn't find the size and pattern I had set my sights on.

While all this was going on, the other patrons entered into the spirit of the search and the light-hearted banter that flowed to and fro soon made me forget my embarrassment for putting the barman to such trouble.

Rising to his feet, he then announced that he wasn't finished yet and that he'd try upstairs. He soon returned with a few more boxes of caps and after a careful search pulled out with great triumph the very cap I wanted in the perfect size.

After I had paid for it and we had ordered another drink, we were sitting at the bar admiring my newly acquired headgear when my wife suddenly said: "I bet I know what shop this is. I think this is Curran's Pub where Peig Sayers came to work when she left the Blasket first."

I had totally forgotten that Peig had ever come to work in Dingle but when we enquired of the barman if this was so, he instantly confirmed that indeed it was the very house where Peig Sayers had lived and worked.

Naturally, of course, my new cap is now known affectionately as 'Peig' and my grá for the county of Kerry and its people is stronger than ever.

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