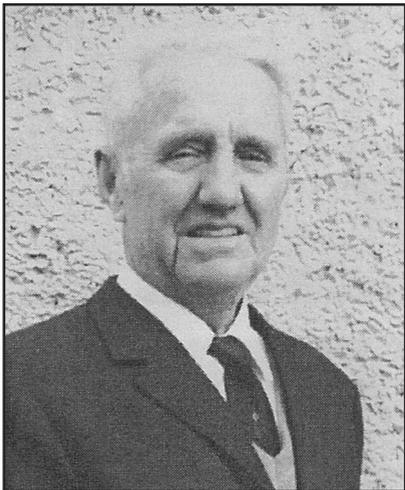




William and Hannah May Weekes.



Danny O'Riordan

LOUGH GUR GROUP WATER SCHEME

By Austin Cregan

Introduction by Tim O'Donnell

We live at a time when many people cannot even contemplate life without running water in the home. No running cold or hot water for the myriad of daily activities that are essential to modern day comfortable living is largely unimaginable. And yet, it is just a little over forty years ago since the majority of homes in Grange and the adjoining parishes of Lough Gur and Meanus didn't have that luxury.

Now and then, perhaps once in several years, a home may be without running water for a short period; maybe owing to a spell of severe freezing weather or essential maintenance works. Well, it is one thing to never have experienced something that is good or desirable; but it a very different matter when one has something taken away that they have grown accustomed to and has become essential to everyday living. So it is with running water, when temporarily unavailable in the home, we are almost at a loss as to how to cope. No running water for the humble cup of tea, teeth cleaning, cooking, not to mention the critical body functions that require copious amounts of running water every day.

I have referred to running water as a "luxury" – in today's Ireland, it cannot be regarded thus; it is most definitely an essential and has been for a long time. However, when running water arrived in Grange some decades ago, it most certainly fell into the luxury category, even if that was only for a period of time. As human beings are creatures of habit, it did not take long for the luxury to become indispensable.

We live at a time when the Irish Government has introduced a household charge for water used, a decision that has met with much opposition and fury and impassioned pleas from many quarters to reverse the decision. It is a difficult subject matter for many who have experienced the severest brunt of the recent economic recession. Charge or no charge, water, essential for life on our planet, is one of nature's great gifts, and we should respect and protect it at all times.

Those were great men from Grange, Lough Gur and Meanus, who came together in 1969 with a common purpose and effectively brought running water to the

many homes in the parishes as well as to farms and businesses. In Grange, Tony Clancy's name, in particular, was synonymous with the 'water scheme' in those earlier years, and others took up the challenge subsequently. For my part, it has been and continues to be a privilege to participate in serving the community.

Austin Cregan, involved from the outset, did over the many years and continues to do tremendous work for the scheme, and it is appropriate, therefore, that the history of the Lough Gur Water Scheme, has been written by Austin and follows here. Thank you, Austin, on behalf of many, for your selfless giving of expertise and time to communities served by the scheme.

By Austin Cregan, Chairman

The foundation of the water scheme goes back to the spring of 1969. Some few years before this, the 'Group Water Scheme' idea was mooted by County Councils throughout the country, and Limerick was no exception. In every community, water on tap was one of the greatest needs.

As we had progressed through the years, with farmers installing milking machines and housewives installing washing machines, the pump in the yard or the well or the stream half a mile away were no longer sufficient to meet our needs. Good grants became available, and people in rural areas came together with a view to forming a 'Group Scheme'.

The idea in this area first materialised in Grange and as the old saying goes, "good news travels fast". Soon the enthusiastic householders from Lough Gur and Meanus were eager to be included.

A group from Grange led by Tony Clancy, Tim O'Donnell, Pat O'Donnell, Paddy Doherty, John Joe Hourigan, Tom Dineen, Tom Bulfin and Joe O'Shea looked



Tim O'Donnell, Bridie O'Donnell, Breda Clancy and Tony Clancy.

at a few wells and other sources in the area, which were found not to be adequate for their needs.

At around the same time, a group from Lough Gur, led by Thomas Ryan, started canvassing houses with a view to the formation of a group scheme in the Lough Gur area. As Thomas Ryan was a member of Limerick County Council, he had some advance knowledge, so he convened a meeting in the old school, Lough Gur (now the Honey Fitz Theatre). The meeting was well attended, and all were very enthusiastic about the formation of a group scheme.

As the Grange group were in a spot of bother as to supply, they asked for a joint meeting with the Lough Gur group. Some few weeks later, this request was granted. It must be stated at this stage that the “Boiling Well” in the Red Bog, Lough Gur, was earmarked as a probable source to meet the demands of both communities. A working committee was elected at this meeting consisting of the aforementioned Grange group and a group from Lough Gur comprising of Thomas Ryan MLCC, Tom Carroll, Dan Ryan, Frank Burke, Mick Hickey and Austin Cregan. The following were elected at a joint meeting in the summer of 1969.

Chairman: Tony Clancy (Grange); Vice-Chairman: Thomas Ryan (Lough Gur); Secretary: Austin Cregan (Lough Gur); Treasurer: Pat O’Donnell (Grange); Trustees: Tony Clancy, Tim O’Donnell and Thomas Ryan.

A group from Meanus led by John Corbett, Tim O’Regan and Tom Brouder met with the above two groups with a view to extending the scheme to include Meanus. This was agreed to later that year (1969), and the Grange-Lough Gur-Meanus Group Water Scheme was founded.

The area engineer from the Department of Local Government was contacted. Plans of the area were drawn up and, most importantly, the “Boiling Well” was tested for capacity. The County Council engineers put a test pump on the well during the month of October, and it produced 6,000 gallons per hour over 72 hours continuous pumping. They were satisfied that this was adequate for the number of houses in the area at that time.

The committee met very regularly around this time to select contractors, nominate bankers (and arrange loans) and appoint a caretaker. Wavin Pipes of Balbriggan, Dublin were chosen to supply all piping, valves and other equipment. Bank of Ireland, Bruff, was the preferred choice in banking. Eddie O’Donnell from Croom was doing this work in the Bradford area in England, was well-known locally and was anxious to move to Ireland – he was awarded the contract for laying the pipes and all other works including the house connections. Buttevant Concrete was selected to build a 75,000-gallon reservoir on land procured from Mick Hickey on the hill of Knockroe. John Coffey was appointed caretaker, and he also built the pump house at the well site. Avonmore Pumps from Mallow secured the contract to install three ‘Mono Pumps’ to take the water to the reservoir. Any two of these pumps working together produced 6,000 gallons per hour.

The contractor moved in to lay the piping in October 1969. The reservoir and pump house were completed during 1971-1972. All other ancillary works, including the plumbing of the houses, were completed, and the scheme was ready and water flowing towards the autumn of 1972.

At this time, there were about 220 connections to the scheme. These included private houses, farms (including farmhouses) and about twenty non-domestic (land only) outlets. Twenty connections included churches, schools, community halls, nursing homes and businesses – public houses, shops and other smaller enterprises.

The official opening of the scheme took place on the reservoir site in Knockroe in the summer of 1973. The official ‘turning-on’ was done by Maureen Cregan (himself being in bed sick running a high temperature). Father John Hayes PP, Knockainey, performed the blessing. Tony Clancy (Chairman) welcomed the Department and Council Officials, and he thanked everybody for their huge input in making the whole enterprise possible. An official get-together and dance were held that night in the Golden Thatch, Emly, and from reports, I believe a good night was had by all.

Phase Two

And so, for the best part of twenty years, the Boiling Well supplied the needs of the area. As the economic boom took root, more and more houses were being added, farming became more intensive, and as water was more in demand, the well was no longer able to supply the demands. Worse was to follow – it also became polluted. A chlorination system had to be put in place. It needed a high dose of chlorine, and, as a result, the drinking water became unpalatable. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, government cutbacks hit all initiatives and extra monies for the further development of the water schemes were hardest hit. However, in the early 1990s, matters improved again, and our committee with the help of the local government engineer put a major upgrading plan into process.

The plans included procuring a new well, the addition of a second reservoir with capacity of 100,000 gallons, increasing the pipe size in a large portion of the scheme to increase pressure in the higher areas and, more importantly, to provide water for all the extra houses which were coming on stream.

An excellent well was secured in lands belonging to Jerry O’Dea at Mohane. John Lynch of Crystal Water Drilling, Cappamore, was contracted to bore the well, and he found water at 60 feet. He bored on to about 300 feet. The County Council put a test on this well, and they confirmed a capacity of 13,000 gallons an hour, pumping for 72 hours in October 1992. They also told us that the quality was excellent. The local engineer, John Fitzgerald of Mallow, then put the upgrading procedure in motion.

The total cost of the project was £240,000. He told us that a grant of £180,000 was available for this major development and £60,000 was to be collected locally. The committee put this detail to the people, and we had no problem collecting the extra money as people were assured of a good supply of quality water.

Seoirse Clancy built a new pump house, Willie Wrenn did the rising main, and the 100,000 gallons reservoir was built by Shay Murtagh and Company, County Meath – price of £25,500. PJ Maher of Dromin was contracted to do all

the pipe laying work and provide all valves necessary for the smooth operation of the scheme. The members should be eternally grateful to Jerry O’Dea for providing the site for well and pump house at a nominal price. Also to Ciss Daly, Tom McNamara and Michael Smith, through whose land the rising main was laid. A huge debt of gratitude also



Joe O’Shea making the presentation to Johnny Coffey upon his retirement from the Lough Gur Group Water Scheme. Also pictured: Austin Cregan.

goes to Bank of Ireland, Bruff, for overdraft facilities until the grants came through. Tom Hickey is to be commended also for providing an extra piece of land for the site of the second reservoir. Without the cooperation of all those people mentioned above, nothing would be possible.

During Phase 2 of the operation, a Co-operative was formed. This was mainly for the protection of the trustees. The scheme is now known as “Lough Gur Water Scheme Society Ltd”. The scheme is also insured against public liability.

A lot of changes have taken place in the committee since that first one formed in 1969. Gone to their eternal reward are John Corbett, Tom Brouder and Tim O’Regan (all Meanus); Joe O’Shea, John Joe Hourigan, Paddy Doherty, Tony Clancy and Tom Bulfin (all Grange); and Tom Carroll, Tom McNamara (who served as vice-chairman for thirteen years), Danny Ryan and Michael Hickey (all Lough Gur). All the above named did Trojan voluntary work on behalf of the community.

Phase Three

A meeting was held in Adare in the spring of 2003. Joe O’Shea, Austin Cregan and Leo Carmody attended, where a group of twenty-two schemes had come together (known as the “Bundle System”) to form a design, build and operate (DBO) structure. Four of the twenty-two schemes represented at the meeting later withdrew. The remaining eighteen schemes participated, and the final phase went into operation. Grants of 85% were received, and the “Bundle” had no problem collecting the remainder of the contribution. The final number of houses in the “Bundle” was 2,500 – the Lough Gur Scheme accounted for almost one-third of that number.

During the completion of the final phase, the National Federation of Group Water Schemes, the Department of the Environment and Limerick County Council were all involved. The Department of the Environment provided the funding in co-operation with the County Council. The National Federation through their

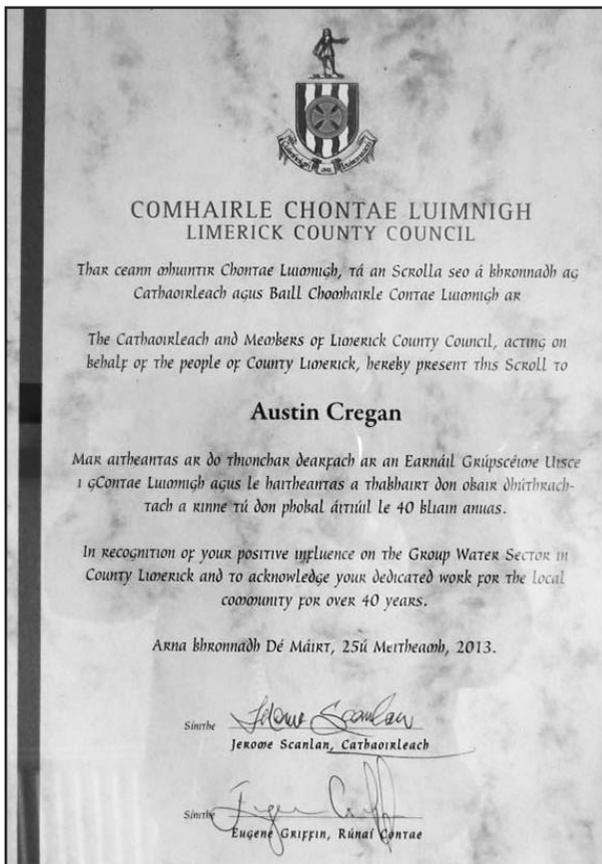
coordinator, Sean Clerkin, and area officer, Joe Gallagher, oversaw the successful completion of the very important works.

The Works

Electrical Pump Services of Mallow obtained the contract for the main work at the pump house. This was a twenty-year contract to ensure the provision of treated water to the two reservoirs. An additional parcel of land was necessary at the pump house and in this regard, Gerry O'Dea (committee member) was most cooperative and forthcoming as he has always been, and whose generosity contributed enormously to the scheme's success. A second borehole was completed, thus providing two pumps working alternatively. A new chlorination tank was installed. Major internal work was done in the pump house. Our scheme now operates the most modern system available at the pump house, providing the highest quality water to the two reservoirs, which are kept optimally full on a continuous basis. In the event of a breakdown, an alarm rings at a central point, and the problem is attended to promptly.

Under the contract, all private houses were metered as well as small parcels of land, businesses and amenities (all farms were metered at an earlier stage). By now, one hundred percent metering has been achieved. Bulk meters were installed at cross-roads to measure flow in all directions. This was very useful in tracking down major leaks and mains breakages.

The next stage was to re-route all mains previously passing through fields to the roadside. The principal part of this work involved re-routing about two miles of three-inch mains in the Rockbarton area to the Holycross-Meanus road. Ninety percent of this work involved cutting through rock, which was undertaken by Crowbar Construction. This work would not have been possible without grant aid.



Certificate of acknowledgement by LCC to Austin Cregan.

Johnny Coffey is no longer with us, may he rest in peace. He was hugely dedicated to the scheme for many years – on call 24/7, 365 days a year. His Trojan work ensured the smooth running of the scheme. On his retirement, his son, Willie Coffey, took over the reins of caretaker. Willie shares his father's dedication to and pride in the scheme and continues to work tirelessly to maintain and improve the supply.

Kevin Doody of Lough Gur joined the committee during the 2006/2007 period and was appointed treasurer. He introduced much-needed computer technology and set up a comprehensive accounts and billing system. Tim O'Donnell of Grange, one of the founder members, who had left the committee for a period, re-joined around the same time. Joe O'Shea, who was appointed chairman on the death of Tony Clancy of Grange, died unexpectedly in 2009. Austin Cregan took over as Chairman. Seamus Murnane of Lough Gur, who was co-opted to the committee around that time was appointed secretary. At the next Annual General Meeting, Pat Murnane of Meanus joined the committee and is now vice-chairman.

It was a big shock to the committee and the locality when Kevin Doody died suddenly at his home on 13th January 2014. Kevin, who epitomised good and careful organisation had the affairs of the scheme well organised in terms of computerisation and otherwise, and his death left a void. PJ Mulcahy of Holycross, who has computer technology expertise, consolidated all of the computer software and data previously managed by Kevin. PJ was co-opted to the committee and was appointed assistant secretary, and he now has business affairs in excellent order and is proving himself to be an excellent member of the team.

Electronic Metering

As the Lough Gur Group Scheme was in a good financial position, the committee felt that further improvements ought to be carried out in order to enhance meter reading efficiency, as there were so many meters (circa 800) installed and operating. As the work was grant aided, it was decided at a meeting held at the end of 2013, to commence this work during 2014 by installing transponders (circa 205) in all commercial meters at farmsteads, 'land only' supplies and businesses. Tim Hartigan was appointed to organise the work. New meters were installed to take the transponders. IPL Ltd of Slane, Co Meath, fitted the electronic reading device on each meter, and PJ Mulcahy was trained on the meter reading system and is now fully conversant with all the workings involved. It is now the practice to drive by a meter/transponder with a handheld reading device, the hand-held device picks up the salient data from the meter/transponder, and the data are then uploaded to a laptop computer. This sophisticated system brings a large measure of semi-automation to the annual billing routine. It is intended at a later time to extend transponder technology to all meters throughout the network, at which time, meter reading efficiency will further improve.

There are now eight bulk meters on the network, four of which are fitted with logging devices to keep track of the daily usage in each direction; the other four

are presently being fitted with logging devices, which when operational, will make the distribution network significantly 'watertight'.

Lough Gur Water Scheme has come a long way since that first meeting in the old school in Patrickswell in March 1969 and since the earliest days of the Boiling Well. Three members of that initial committee are still hale and hearty. Two serve on the present committee, namely, Tim O'Donnell and Austin Cregan, while the third, Pat O'Donnell (Tim's brother), resides in another part of the country.

The present day committee members are Pat Murnane, Austin Cregan, Tim O'Donnell, Seamus Murnane, Claire Gerety, Willie Coffey, Gerry O'Dea, Timmy Hartigan, Tom O'Sullivan, Leo Carmody, John O'Connor, George Finch, Derry Murphy and PJ Mulcahy.

Lough Gur Water Scheme Society Ltd is now one of the largest schemes in the country. We have a valuable natural asset in water, and it is up to each consumer to do their part in striving towards maintaining our scheme, an unqualified success, in community ownership.

[Back to top](#) 