



Leyland 270 tractor sold to
Holycross Football Club by Joe
Ahern.



Joe Ahern with family and
friends. Old threshing machine
at rear.

REMEMBERING JOE AHERN

By Kieran Hourigan

Joe Ahern, a native of Newport, Co Tipperary, located to Grange in the very early 1970s with his wife Joan (nee Flavin), a native of Fedamore. They had one child, their daughter, Caroline. Joe and Joan acquired a property in Upper Grange from the Shinnors family, popularly known as “The Shop”. The property comprised of living quarters, which they subsequently upgraded, a shop and adjacent land.

Much to the satisfaction of local people, the Ahern family continued to operate the shop, working hard to develop and grow their grocery business. The shop supplied other commodities such as briquettes and bottled gas. Petrol and diesel pumps were added, and business was vibrant.

Joe was a skilled mechanic, and local people began to bring their motor vehicles to him for repairs and upkeep. His skills extended to panel beating and paint-spraying, and he was adept at welding as well. As he was multi-skilled, and no job was too large, Joe soon built up a good and reputable garage business. His enthusiasm and energy for work knew no bounds, and he thrived on being busy.

Joe came from a farming background, and his experience and skills shone through when he worked on farm machinery and heavy plant equipment – the bigger, the better for Joe. When it came to dealing with diesel engines and hydraulic components, Joe was a mechanic and fitter of considerable aptitude and mastery.

As he expanded from servicing and repairing motor cars to farm equipment and plant, word quickly spread that Joe was re-building tractor engines and hydraulic systems. His business experienced a massive increase, so much so that he had to build a much larger garage to cope with demand. Joe’s garage business went from strength to strength over a matter of a few years, all due to the combination of skill and commitment to hard work over very long hours. Customers liked Joe, not only for his work ethic, but also because he was good-humoured and entertaining.

It was no surprise when Joe’s business was awarded a dealership for British Leyland/Marshall Tractors. As time went by, the business secured further dealerships: for CASE International Tractors, CLAAS Machinery, Major Steel Products and Lely Lotus Hay Turners. These were among the top brand names in the world of agricultural machinery and accessories.

I worked in Joe Ahern's garage, and I still recall listening to him when a customer called on the phone or in person to order tractor or other machinery parts. All of the thousands of parts involved had a unique part number. Joe knew these parts and their part numbers 'by heart', and it was seldom, if ever, that he needed to consult a catalogue, book or slide. He was incredibly resourceful and efficient. Consequently, customers travelled from all over Ireland to purchase new and second-hand tractors and machinery from the Ahern Garage, which became one of the largest dealers, not only in Munster but country-wide. First-class customer care came naturally to Joe, and his staff members were indoctrinated accordingly. Consequently, his client base was very loyal to him.

The silage/hay season was an especially busy time for the business. Joe would work into the early hours of the morning to ensure that machinery was in running order in time for daily start-up by contractors and farmers alike. He was always cognisant of the economic impacts for the parties involved – of expensive machinery lying idle owing to breakdown.

When time permitted, Joe liked to socialise over a brandy, whether at The Hamlet Bar or elsewhere, where he met neighbours and friends for a chat. Being a Tipperary man, hurling was his sport, and with great pride in his county, he would sing *Dear Old Newport Town* if requested. His wit was never far from the surface, and his turn of phrase, not always printable, endeared him to people. There are many stories!

A highlight of the year for the business was the Limerick Show in summertime. Joe would have a large stall, displaying a great range of the most up-to-date machinery and equipment. Joe and his staff members drove tractors in convoy along the fifteen-mile route to the showgrounds in Limerick City. This was a spectacle to be experienced and enjoyed. The purr of turbocharged engines could be heard for miles away. The sweet noise coupled with the smell and heat from the exhausts of new tractors on a summer's day would draw people to the road-side, especially young lads, to gaze first hand at the magnificent and pristine new machines, as they passed by on route to Limerick.

The annual show event was important to Joe's business. Joe was an excellent salesman, and over the show days deals were negotiated. It was also an opportunity to meet some of his regular customers and to take a drink or two with those and new customers, as well as friends. New friendships were made.

Following each show event, Joe and family took their annual holiday in England – usually five days to visit good friends, Seamus and Peggy Byrne. Upon his return, Joe would be asked if he saw any tractors for sale while he was away. Almost before he could reply, an articulated truck would pull into the yard, laden with three tractors – six more would be delivered over the following days. These were refurbished over the winter for sale in spring-time.

Joe was a great friend of the local soccer club, Holycross AFC. Keeping grass cut in the playing fields, over summer months, was a time-consuming job for volunteers. Joe, in his generosity, permitted the club to borrow a tractor and mower, from time to time, over a number of years until the club elected to purchase a small tractor and mower. Club funds were scarce at the time, and so a tractor requiring refurbishment was bought at a reasonable price. I was nominated to ask Joe if I could use his garage to rebuild the tractor in my own time and, most importantly, if he would supply the parts and paint. Joe, as usual, was helpful, and the rebuild was completed within six weeks of commencement. Of course, Joe kept a keen eye on the upgrade work, and when the time came, he gave the tractor 'a clean bill of health'. The tractor was looking like new.

I reported to a club committee meeting that the tractor project was completed with great success. A difficulty arose: there was an excellent tractor without a mower, and little funds to acquire one. On this occasion, the club nominated Tommy O'Connell to call to Joe Ahern to explain the problem. Tommy conducted his research and approached Joe with the manual for a mower in hand. Joe looked at the manual and confirmed that the tractor and mower were compatible. He told Tommy that he would order the mower and parts for delivery to the garage and that the club could pay him when funds permitted.

The equipment was delivered a few days later. Joe and I connected the mower to the tractor, and I drove the machinery to its new home in Holycross. Many people attended to witness the new tractor and mower in action. Joe demonstrated how the grass should be cut. Afterwards, many of us, including Joe, retired to Reardon's Public House to marvel at the fantastic new cut and the machinery that made it possible.

Joe was fully paid in due course, and the tractor gave ten years of service. Subsequently, the club purchased a Leyland 270 tractor from Joe – this tractor is still in operation.

Joe Ahern was a great neighbour, a great friend to our community and a loyal personal friend. He was a man who always saw the good in people. At a personal level, I enjoyed Joe the skilled man and Joe the individual and human being. I learned much about mechanics directly from him as I did about life itself.

Joe was taken from earthly life at a young age, on 18th December 2008. Great memories of him and many stories live on with his family and his many friends. Inevitably, when I think of Joe, I smile spontaneously.



PJ Ahern, Joe Ahern, John Williams and Martin Ahern.