

Mother Moore and her Summerhill Drainage Gang

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Her vocation was to serve, to care for one child or another
But fate just intervened and she wound up reverend mother.
When a legacy came to her, a vow of poverty she'd made
She could not take the money; she had a problem it was said.
Then she had a great idea, a vision if you will
She'd use up all the money to drain old Summerhill.

It was in the hungry thirties and the peasantry was poor,
She'd pay them well for digging, this wonder "Mother Moore".
And while they did the digging she'd teach them how to pray,
They'd get salvation, education and a half a crown a day.
She did her own recruiting, twelve strong young men and true,
Neither jury nor apostles, but a good hard working crew.

Paddy Dwyer and Bill Colleran were half the men from Drum,
Christy Jarrett and James Lennon made up the full foursome.
Cornafulla's Jack McManus and Pa Colleran, Kielty's man
With all the rest from Crannagh, I'll name them if I can.

Sonny Donlon, Richard Higgins, and Jack Harney all were there,
Mickey Murray, Patrick Harney and Tom Curley of red hair.

Two of those men were carters, who got an extra bob a day
Mickey Murray and Jack Harney, they drew all the stuff away.
Mickey Murray had a jennet, Big Jack a clydesdale mare
They both received a shilling; Jack said it wasn't fair.
But the Mother interjected, "don't crib about the pay,
It was a cousin of the jennet, our Saviour rode palm day".

They started work at eight; each answered the roll call
Christy Jarrett led the prayers; answered fervently by all.
And when the prayer was ended; the Mother she would say
I want an honest day of work for the honest way I pay.
The mother she would urge them, to work with all their will
And sometimes she would call, work faster, faster still.

On the south side of the building, at the entrance to the school
What was once a cool spring pond was now a stagnant pool.
To get this water flowing, round to the bull field drain
A trench they'd have to dig, through very rough terrain.

Full five feet deep and four feet wide, they'd have to dig this drain
Worked by just tools of hand, with muscle brawn and strain.

The gravel was rock hard, the boulders tons in weight
Yet progress fast was made the effort was so great.
From eight to twelve each day, there was neither stop nor stay,
Till twelve bells gave the summons, to wipe there brow's and pray.
They prayed with great devotion, slow, reverend and devout,
For men who are work weary, will stretch the least timeout.

They worked in every weather, rain, frost or snow or sun
Yet not a single day was missed by Mother Moore the nun.
When falling stone crushed big Jacks toe he winced in searing pain
And uttered words so loud and clear and just somewhat profane.
Then Mother said, "Hell waits for those who utter words like that"
Jack muttered low beneath his breath, "Sure hell is where we're at".

When standing on the bank one day, above the toiling men
The earth gave way beneath her feet and she just tumbled in.
Pat Harney then and Sonny rushed up to give her aid
Imagine then their great surprise when Reverend Mother said,

“Just hand me here the ladder and don’t you stand about”

Though dirty wet and injured, she quickly clambered out.

At last they got the great drain dug, and water flowed so free,

They lined it all with large flagstones; it was a sight to see.

And ever since it worked so well that all the yard stayed dry,

And children play and skip around and never once think why.

Now that the group have all aspired, to heaven’s sweet refrain,

I wonder if they think at all of Summerhill’s “auld” drain.

Patrick Donnellan who was known as “Sonny Donlon” told this story

And he was the last survivor of the group when he died in 1998.