

The Lore and Legend of Butlerstown



Kieran Foley reports

'UNLOCKING Butlerstown' is a fantastic new book which has been compiled by Meitheal Staire Butlerstown (the Butlerstown History Group).

The book was launched on Friday March 18th at The Fr. Rufus Halley Hall in Butlerstown by Billy McCarthy from WLR FM. 'Unlocking Butlerstown' is a treasure trove of lore and legend of the Butlerstown parish and offers a peek through the keyhole of history into this area which has been home to generations of people proud to claim Butlerstown as their own.

Dr Eddy Fitzgerald acted as editor, and there are a number of articles from different local contributors.

The book is dedicated to the memory of local man Fr Rufus Halley who was a well-known and much loved missionary of the Society of St Columban.

He worked to build peace between the divided Muslim and Christian communities in the Philippines, but was shot on the island of Mindanao in 2001.

Along with detailing the life of Fr Rufus, the book explores many other interesting characters who live or did live in the area such as Faith Healer Jimmy Cahill, Sister Brendan (Julia) Keane and horticulturalist Herman Dool.

Included are those who have enjoyed sporting success such as the De Bromhead family and Special Olympian John Deevy. Fr Pat Fitzgerald, PP of Butlerstown and St Paul's, has described the book as "a treasure trove of the lore and legend of this parish".

"Over a period of about a year, a group of people with a love of place, have every month been sitting around a table in the Fr Rufus Halley Centre trading stories and yarns, recollections and rumours, words and pictures of the history and happenings in every townland within the parish limits," he explained.

"These were great sessions in which one story was trumped by another, and one recollection sparked the next."

He added: "We are indebted to the enthusiasm and initiative of the local history group for retrieving so much of our heritage, so many of our memories, and providing a stepping stone for further explorations of this ancient landscape and its people."

Many of the articles about local characters are particularly interesting, including the story of Willie Walsh from Carrigroe who joined the British Merchant Navy.

Around 1930, he was passing through the Panama Canal when he was informed that the ship was to be inspected by American police personnel.

Captain Walsh shouted down to the police on the quayside and was answered by an officer in white uniform with a strong Irish accent.

It transpired that the police officer was Tommy Foley from Killoteran.

He joined Captain Walsh on board and both men retired to the captain's cabin for a chat.

On leaving, Tommy asked Captain Walsh to bring The Munster Express with him the next time he was passing through the Panama Canal!

Along with proving that the world really is a small place, this lovely story highlights that Butlerstown connections have spread throughout the entire world.

There are of course some locations in Butlerstown which enjoy national and world renown such as the Woodstown Viking Settlement and the famous Mount Congreve Estate, and these are also examined in the publication.

Perhaps less well-known is the Harp Stone in Whitfield which is one of the best examples of a pre-historic standing stone. With a striking diamond shaped cross section, it measures 3.4 metres in height and resembles a giant stone harp.

It has been visited by many people from throughout Ireland and abroad who are interested in history and archaeology.

Also located in Butlerstown are the impressive Gaulstown and Knockeen Dolmens.

Interestingly, 'Unlocking Butlerstown' includes the origins and meanings of place names in the Butlerstown area such as Knockeen, Sporthouse, Orchardstown, Pembrokestown, Whitfield, Lisnakill, Killoteran, and Bawnfunne.

The book contains many quirky stories and anecdotes, including a surprising article on tobacco growing in Butlerstown.

Tobacco was grown extensively in Butlerstown as well as other parts of the country in 1945 and 1946.

The growing of the crop had been revived after World War II in Waterford, Wexford and Cork under strict licence to Power Seeds of Waterford.

'Unlocking Butlerstown' is sure to be of interest to anyone with a connection to this area of County Waterford.

Much research has gone into this book and the end product is a credit to all involved.

The book has preserved many of the stories of the people and places of Butlerstown which may have otherwise been forgotten.

If you would like a copy of 'Unlocking Butlerstown', contact any member of the Butlerstown History Group (pictured).