

# NEWSLETTER

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## Tooreen Hall

and the story of

## The Dance with the Devil



## Book of the week

On a Wing and a Prayer

*(The Story of Knock Airport)*

*Cover image: Tooreen hall (image from irish-showbands.com)*

Good luck to TOOREEN in the All Ireland Intermediate Club Hurling final against Monaleen. The match is being played Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2023 at 7pm and broadcast on TG4. Interestingly, Fr. James Horan was the first President of the Tooreen Hurling Club.

## A Dance with the “Devil”!

**R**ural Ireland in the 1950s offered little in the way of entertainment and socializing. Deciding something needed to be done, a curate in the small village of Tooreen decided to take action to improve the social life of his parishioners.

Many years before he envisaged Knock airport, Fr. James Horan had a vision for Tooreen, where he served as a Curate in 1949. Situated in the parish of Aghamore, Tooreen is located, approximately 5 miles from Ballyhaunis and 10 minute's drive from Ireland West Airport Knock.

Fr. Horan set about organising the construction of a dance hall in Tooreen, having secured the finance for the project by collecting £8,000 on a tour of American cities. The hall opened in 1951 with crowds flocking from near and far. In 1954 Tooreen hall came to international attention with the alleged appearance of the devil there. During one of the dances, a mysterious tall dark stranger drove up in a black car and entered the hall. Dressed in black, he mingled with the crowd and looked around for a short time.

With the girls lined up on one side of the hall and the boys on the other, he confidently marched to the ladies and summoned local girl, Bridget O'Flynn to dance. They danced closely and cheek-to-cheek on the dance floor, attracting the attention of many, as this type of passionate dancing was strictly forbidden by the clergy.

### TOOREEN

Tooreen, in Irish *An Tuairín* means little paddock, little (cultivated) field, little pasture

*From Logainm.ie*



The couple enjoyed each other's company and danced together for most of the night. Those who witnessed the dancing recalled that it was a really eerie experience with a fog-like mist encircling the couple – more than likely cigarette smoke in the hall!! Then, as recounted by Patrick McCormack, Clonfert, Co. Galway (from the dúchas collection): “a young man let a cigarette fall and as he stooped to pick it up he happened to glance at the man's feet and noticed that they were cloven”.

This observation rapidly spread throughout the hall with everyone gazing at and pointing to the stranger's feet. Realising what was happening, the stranger fled as quickly as he had arrived, leaving behind a puzzled Bridget O'Flynn. Those present were in awe of what they had just witnessed – some laughing, some blessing themselves, some skipping off home immediately and others huddled around Bridget O'Flynn offering all kinds of explanations.

News of this incident spread far and wide, even attracting the attention of the international media. Some say it was a stunt by a local rival dancehall owner to sully the reputation of the hall. If this was the case, it had truly back-fired as massive crowds travelled from near and far to attend a dance there in the hope of some further excitement.

The hall continued to thrive after that and is still in use as a community hall today.

Perhaps Elvis Presley's song “You're The Devil in Disguise” released in 1963, was inspired by the incident in Tooreen....we will never know!

*You look like an angel, walk like an angel, talk like an angel, but I got wise ...you're the devil in disguise*

### References:

“Diabhal ag an Damhsa” documentary  
*Duchas.ie*  
*The Mayo News*  
*Irish-Showbands.ie*

## BOOK of the week

### ON A WING AND A PRAYER

**The full history of a much-ridiculed Airport in the West of Ireland, built in the 1980's by a 'simple country priest in a hurry'.**

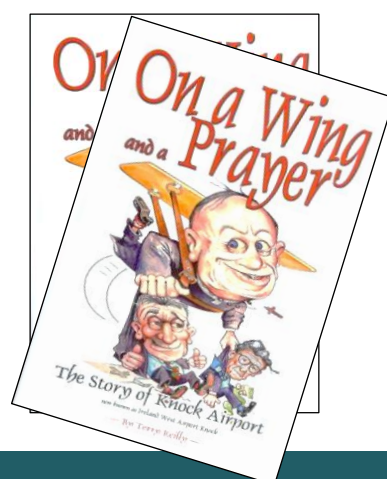
**The project was derided, called a 'white elephant' and kicked from pillar to post, but Monsignor James Horan's resilience overcame all obstacles, and he saw his dream become a reality months before he died. His was the first coffin into the Airport he built against incredible odds.**

**Knock International Airport, now known as Ireland West Airport Knock, is a huge success. Early years total spending by inbound tourists is estimated at over €60 million.**

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