

Mayo Heritage

Newsletter



Vol. IV Issue 22
28th May 2023

YouTube



We profile Charlestown's

**John Healy, Journalist
(19930-1991)**

Brief history of the townland of **CASHELDUFF** in 1838

Are you interested in tracing your Mayo roots?

If you are interested in professional help to research your family history or are curious about your ancestry, why not contact us? All research can be done remotely. *Perhaps we can help you!*

Tel: 096 31809 Email: northmayo@gmail.com or visit northmayogenealogy.com



The North Mayo Heritage Centre

Cover image: Pictured at the opening of the N5 Charlestown bypass, (the John Healy Road) in 2007, are the then Minister for Transport Noel Dempsey, John Healy's widow Evelyn, family members and dignitaries (*image from rtearchives.ie*)

Tel: 096 31809 www.northmayogenealogy.com Email: northmayo@gmail.com Email: nmhmanager@gmail.com



Healy, Reporter

April 22nd marks the 93rd birthday of the late John Healy (1930-1991). The man who became a giant of Irish journalism and social commentary in the second half of the 20th century was born on the Knock Road in Charlestown, the son of Stephen Healy and Nora O'Donnell.

He spent a lot of his childhood around his mother's native farm in Cashelduff, five miles east of Charlestown. His mother, the local midwife, had trained as a nurse in America. Unlike her three sisters, Mary, Anna and Kit, Nora returned to live in Ireland.



John managed to get a secondary education (a rare thing at the time) in St. Nathy's College in Ballaghaderreen. His mother wanted him to study medicine. Healy had no such intentions. To his mother's horror, he wanted to be a newspaper man. He got his first posting in 1948 in the Western People in Ballina.

They weren't laughing when they opened the next edition of the Western, looking forward to seeing their annual show reported in glowing terms. There was no report, just a notice stating that since proper courtesy had not been extended to members of the press on the day, the paper would not carry any report of the event. The backlash was predictable, but Healy's editor backed him.

It involved a 30 mile commute twice a week on his bike, and his wages didn't cover his board. Undeterred, within a month of being on the Western's staff, Healy had brought in a story which made front pages in Dublin and London; '*I was on my way and I knew it*'.

Healy progressed to the national press, and wrote for the Irish Press and later the Irish Times. He became a *Dáil* correspondent, and was a vocal, and controversial political commentator. His stance was often at odds with the rest of the Dublin-based media.

When he was sent to cover his local agricultural show in Charlestown that summer, signs of the future journalist emerged. Presenting himself to the committee men in charge, he requested full press facilities. The committee, seeing him only as a youngster from down the town, laughed at him.

He often championed Charlie Haughey, which made him even less popular. Once, in the early 80s, with Haughey looking politically doomed, Healy wrote a robust defence of him. Healy's editor rang to ask if he really wanted the piece published. '*Leave it, gloriously right or gloriously wrong*' was the reply.

He once asserted '*some love me, some hate me, but they all read Healy first*'. He even co-founded The Western Journal, a local Mayo newspaper, which ran for a number of years in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

But it was for his books that John Healy is perhaps best remembered. His work '*Nineteen Acres*', about his mother's family and their struggles on a small holding in Cashelduff, is an emotive and spine-chilling read which is an essential piece of background reading for anyone wishing to research their family history in Mayo. It is filled with poignancy, articulated brilliantly by Healy's language.

Healy wrote a series of articles for the Irish Times in the 1960s about his hometown, and its decline since the mass emigration of the Second World War.

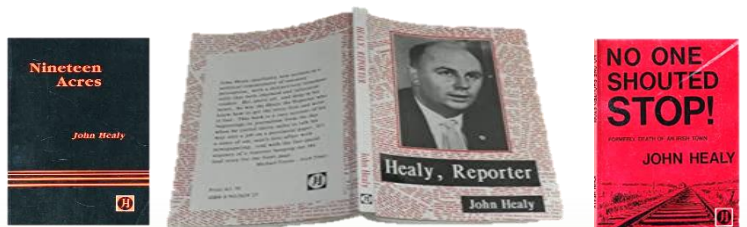
Sources:

Healy, J. 1978. *Nineteen Acres*. Kenny's, Galway
 Healy, J. 1991. *Healy, Reported; The Early Years*. House of Healy, Achill
 Healy, J. 1968. *No One Shouted Stop! The Death of an Irish Town*. Mercier, Cork
 Waters, J. 1991. *Jiving at the Crossroads*. Blackstaff Press, Belfast
www.dictionaryofirishbiography.com

His editor, Douglas Gageby, encouraged Healy to turn these articles into a book. '*No One Shouted Stop!* The death of an Irish Town' is an angry, poignant and frighteningly prophetic analysis of rural decline in Ireland. Healy wrote in typically forthright style.

He had seen enough small holdings around Charlestown fall into dereliction, as the family who held them went to England, hoping to come back, but never being able to. He also wrote a memoir, '*Healy, Reporter*' about his path into and through Irish journalism. It is filled with anecdotes, including the all-expenses paid trip to America in 1957 which started out as Healy's first steps towards emigrating permanently, and finished up with his decision to stay in Ireland. Or how the First Communion Day of the son of the famous freedom fighter Ernie O'Malley netted Healy his first big pay day in journalism.

John Healy died on the 6th of January 1991. He is commemorated in his native town by the road which bypasses Charlestown and cuts directly by the old O'Donnell holding in Cashelduff.



Extract from Ordnance of Survey of 1838

Brief history of the townland of

CASHELDUFF

(*Caisiol Dubh*, meaning black stone fort).

Located in the south-east of the parish of Kilbeagh and east and west of the road leading to Ballyhaunis. The property of Thomas Phillips, Esq. The surface slopes considerably to the north. Soil, gravelly to the north, moory to the south, producing oats, flax and potatoes. In a part of this townland known by the name of Carrowcastle is a public house. Also in this townland are a Roman Catholic Chapel and burying-ground. A school is held in the chapel, and the teacher is paid quarterly by the pupils. There is a Police Station in this townland.