

Robert Finn Moonlighter

He was said to have been the original Captain Moonlighter. Bob Finn was born in Castlegregory in March 1860, the son of William Finn and Sara Casey. The following year the family moved to Castleisland, where Bob Finn would spend the rest of his life. We know very little about his youth, but it seems that sometime in 1879 he, together with Batt O'Leary and Justin McCarthy, formed the first company of

moonlighters. Bob Finn was appointed captain. These men were responding to the agrarian situation that then existed in Kerry. The bad harvest of the latter half of the 1870's together with the world economic slump created an agricultural crisis. The landlords continued to demand rent, and when the tenants were unable to pay, eviction followed. Finn and his followers took a more militant stance than the newly-founded Land League. In



Bob Finn addresses a meeting organised by Liam O'Brien at Castleisland in 1905.

time, however the violence perpetrated by many of the moonlighters was so extreme that Parnell sent Michael Davitt to Castleisland to appeal for calm. The result was a decrease in moonlighting. There was another side to Bob Finn. He was an outstanding athlete: an excellent runner and jumper, and a good weight-thrower. He was said to have been the first person to win a 'bone-shaker' (Penny Farthing) bicycle in Castleisland. He was also a footballer of some ability.

When the Desmonds team was picked in 1888 to play Tralee in Gaelic football, it is no surprise to learn that Bob Finn was included. The following year he was again picked and also captained the team, which distinction he held for many years. He then became treasurer of the Desmonds football club and was one of its representatives at County Board meetings.

In July 1888 he married Margaret Reidy, daughter of Maurice Reidy, spirit merchant, and Catherine

Fleming. They were to have three sons and two daughters. One of the daughters Catherine (Liz) married Denis Haniver, a civil servant, who was reared in Castleisland. Two of their sons still live in Dublin.

Bob Finn was a cooper by trade. His workshop was located in Church Street, on the site now occupied by Castleisland Motor Factors. It seems that Bob did not always endear himself to some of his neighbours, as he often worked late into the night, with the result that they were kept awake by his constant hammering. In between times he ran the public house, given to him by his father-in-law, though this seems to have fallen into decay, especially after the death of his wife, some time in the early 1900's.

Bob Finn was a good singer, but it was as an accomplished fiddler that he was best known. He played for hours for young and old at the back of his public house, and as he played, a cat sat on his shoulder. It did not take

much to coax him to play at dances or at card-houses. Usually he was accompanied by Tom Hogan, Mikey Daly and Thady Tom Brosnan, all great fiddlers. These excursions often lasted for days. Those who still remember Bob Finn speak of his gaiety, his fun and that he always had a smile for everyone. One person recalls a famous occasion when Bob's shepherd dog, Shep, died. Bob's son, Mossie, organised a huge procession from Finn's house down Church Street to the river-bank where the dog was buried with great solemnity. The worries of the world lay light on Bob Finn's shoulders. In July 1935 he took ill and spent sometime in the Mercy Hospital in Cork, where he entertained his fellow-patients with many a song. The end however was fast approaching. Within a short time of his return home, Bob died on 5th August 1935 and was buried in Old Kibanivan.

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