

BOOM TOWN - THE 1950s & 1960s

From the mid-1950s statutory holiday pay meant that more people than ever before could afford to go on holiday. Foreign travel was still out of reach, so families headed to the sea-side and where better than the picturesque village of Cushendun.



Courtesy of R. McDonnell

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board vigorously promoted the area with films and posters depicting an Arcadian or idyllic vision of rural life. The Ulster Transport Company offered 'package' tours and rambler tickets encouraging local travel. Private car ownership rose from under 5% of households in 1950 to 35% in 1970.

With the increase in car ownership came a new trend, touring caravans. More suited to the Irish climate than camping, caravans offered a low cost, modern and fun holiday. Situated in the former grounds of Glenmona House, the Cushendun Caravan Park opened in 1969. For fifty years now it has been the backdrop for countless holidays and untold memories.

It was the height of the 'baby boom' and the holiday business was also booming. During the holidays the demand for accommodation was intense, the children of a household were often evicted to an out-house to make room for paying guests.

The best known of the guest houses, the Villa Farmhouse, opened in 1958 run by the indefatigable and entrepreneurial Cassie Scally. Most guests still came by bus and would stay at least a week, needing regular meals. All the cooking and baking was done in house and most ingredients came from the Scallys' farm. One of Cassie's ten children, Maggie Scally remembers churning the butter every Saturday, that there was no fast food in those days "you had no choice, everybody got a job ". Maggie still runs the Villa, keeping the original interior in pristine condition.



Courtesy of P. McQuillan

Holidays were the time when friends and families could get together. In addition to the Hotels, there were the bars, the legendary Blue Room (American forces stationed in Cushendun during WWII named it after a bar in Minnesota and the name stuck), Mary McBride's, and Pat's Bar. All alive with music, singing, a bit of dancing and plenty of 'craic'. Mc Fetridge's Dance Hall at Castle Green was another draw and in the summer a marquee would be erected near the hurling field for dances and show bands.

For younger holidaymakers an equally enticing establishment was Leavey's Shop which sold everything you could possibly need, buckets and spades, shrimp nets, lucky bags, ice-cream, postcards and comics. In 1958 it was enlarged and converted into a coffee shop. The sitting room was divided to allow space for the coffee tables. To the delight of the teenagers, a jukebox was installed, playing the hit records of the day.



Courtesy of M. Mort

As the holiday market changed, hotels needed to adapt. Pearl McQuillan was the last proprietor of the Bay Hotel, a role that was thrust upon her when, out of the blue, her husband Danny bought the hotel at auction in 1984. For 16 years the hotel was the place for functions, hurling club dinners, birthday parties, exhibitions, bands and weddings (Pearl recalls hosting four weddings over one Easter weekend). When the Bay closed on the 31st October 1998 it was truly the end of an era: as one patron said, "thank you for our youth..."



Courtesy of R. McDonnell



Courtesy of M. Scally



Courtesy of The Advertising Archives

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