

CLASSICAL GAS

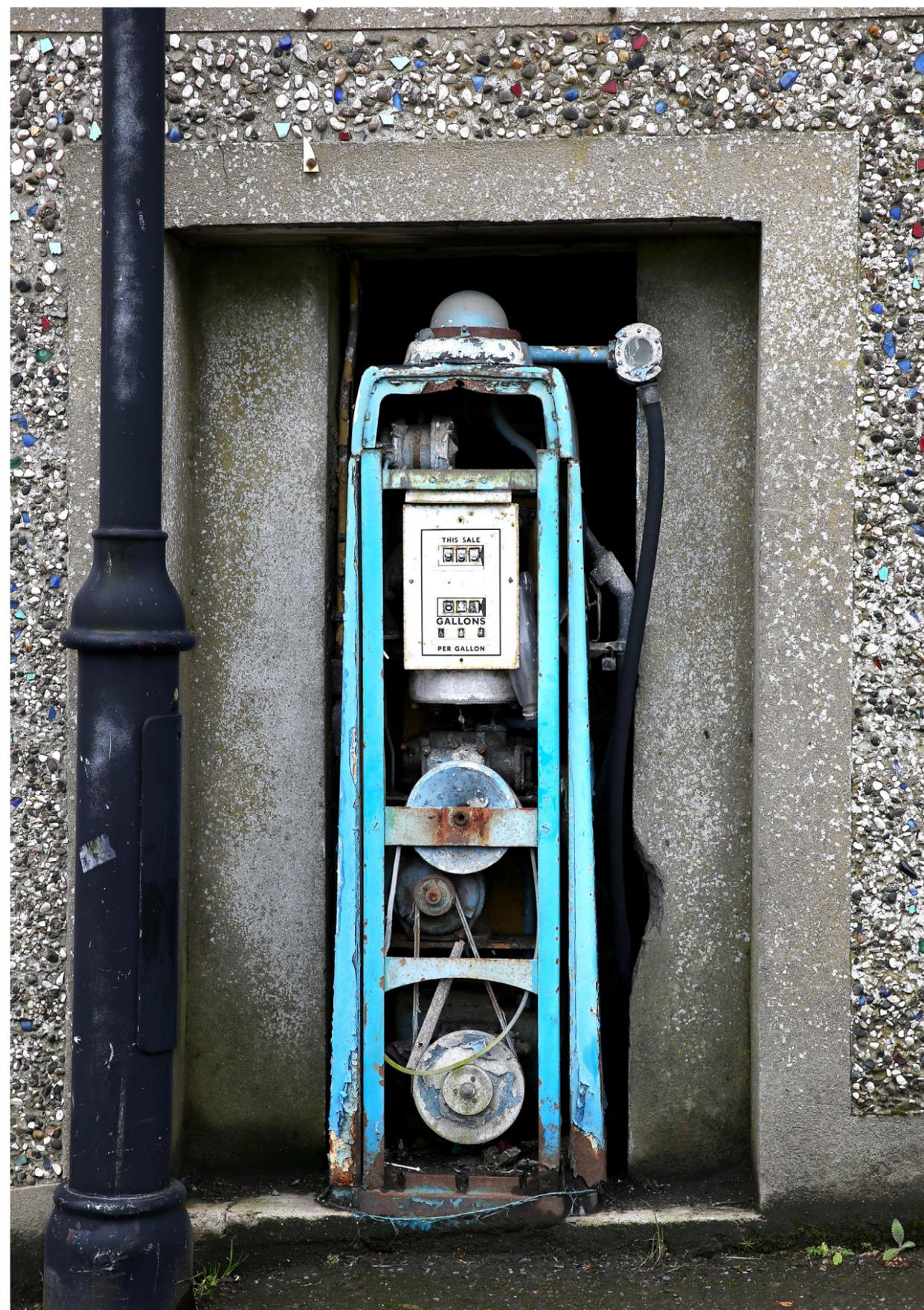
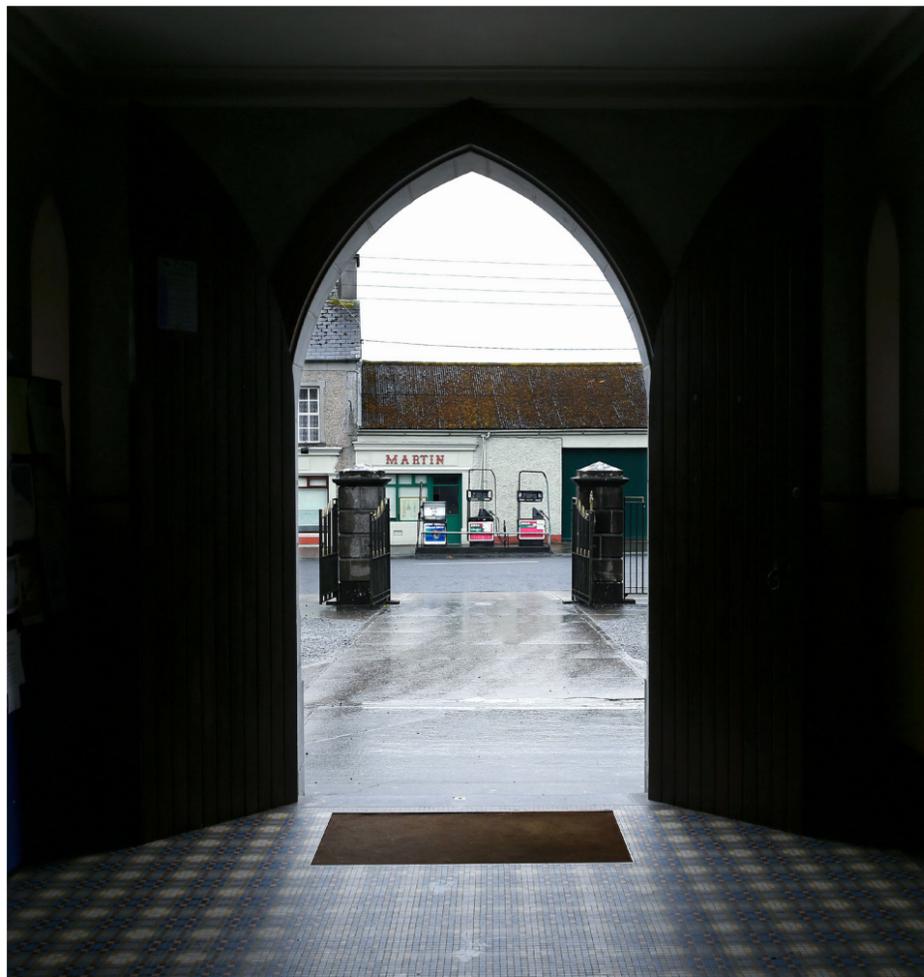
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"Where does a hearse get its petrol?" It's one of those things you never really consider and I hadn't either until I saw the local undertaker filling up his big, black shiny motor at Edward Byrne's filling station in my hometown of Antrim (*above*). It was such a strange sight, I stopped and took a photograph. Byrne's is still going strong today, a pump standing either side of the doorway almost 30 years after I captured its likeness in my first picture of an Irish filling station. A small family business that relies as much upon firewood, sweets and groceries for its income as it does petrol and diesel, it is typical of the small establishments found alongside country roads all over this island.

Over the past two decades more and more of these emporiums have been closing down, their simple, faded beauty replaced by the huge neon lit oases that now inhabit the outskirts of every town. Keen to document their charms before they completely disappeared, I was sluggish to make a start before I chanced upon two old Esso pumps beneath an ancient shop sign one sunny Sunday morning. Long out of service but still lovingly maintained, they could not go unrecorded. Just a few miles further up the road, I came to a junction where a pair of red pumps stood side by side in front of a small cottage, like an old couple waiting for a bus (*opposite*). I have never driven past an old Irish filling station since.





Noel Bond, a native of Lisclloon in Co. Tyrone, has spent the last four decades maintaining a tradition that began with his grandfather. Alongside a post office counter and lottery dispenser, jampot covers, kettles, baseball boots and cough remedies share shelf space with bulbs and baby oil, Germolene and galoshes. In days gone by mothers would have dressed their children and furnished their houses from shops like this.

"I start at 9.30 and open until 8." Noel explains. "I got a new pump three years ago and even though I can't sell petrol because I'm too close to the road, I'll try to keep the place going."





"You get far more profit out of a cup of coffee than a litre of petrol."

With governments pledging to ban the sale of vehicles powered by fossil fuels over the next decade, it won't be just the small rural filling stations that are under threat. Men like Fitzy Chadwick, the owner of an immaculate little station in Borrisoleigh in Co Tipperary (above), knows only too well the days of a business established by his father in 1948 may be numbered. Fitzy keeps the old place immaculate, the shelves stocked with as many components as would almost build a new car.

"Who knows how things will go but I'll sail about as long as I've my health," he says with a sad smile. Then it will be for the birds. I'll leave the door open and they can fly in and out as they please."



Vestiges of another era, these little places are redolent of the Ireland of Heaney and McGahern, still stubbornly refusing to disappear as their owners shrug off the very modern contradictions of fuel pumps being stationed at a pub doorway.





Despite a dogged determination to keep the oil flowing, many proprietors have seen their tiny empires crumble. Between 2000 and 2008 over half of the filling stations in Ireland shut down. Restrictive legislation and falling profit margins have undermined the resilience of men and women who weighed out the spuds and neatly lined up spades and scallions along their shopfronts.



CARRIGAN BROS
PETROL
DIESEL

UNLEADED PER LITRE
3.5
4 STAR LITRE
41.0





Tricolour, Achill Island, County Mayo.