

# Caoin na Gael

The Hammersmith Irish  
Reminiscence Group



## FAMILY LIFE

Not long after I was born my mother died and my aunt brought me up in her house. Her house was a little old Irish cottage, like the ones under the feudal system. I have a vivid memory of an incident that happened while I was there. I must have been about eight or nine at the time. Apparently a Cronin family had lived in the cottage at one time and one of them came back and threw my Aunt and myself out of the house. The poor man was mentally ill. He claimed we had some of his goods upstairs. I thought we were locked out for days but it can only have been for a few hours while the neighbours rallied around and found someone to take him away. He had been to America and had returned to his ancestral home to find it was no longer in his family. I often wondered what became of him. My Grandfather looked after my two brothers and my Aunt always took me on the back of her bicycle when she went over on Sundays to do their washing. She also baked a few cakes to take with her to help my father out. He worked at the Shannon Scheme. Sunday evenings he would take a couple of the cakes and cycle the 25 miles to Ardnacrusha and come home on Friday evenings. It was a tough life but there was nothing else. We



would have a mug of gruel before going to bed, it warmed you up because we only had top coats and things thrown over us. If any of the family joined the army or FCA. they would be issued with a uniform and the topcoats were often used as extra bed covering.

Halloween was the one night in the year when we would sleep in a neighbour's house where all the

other youngsters would have gathered there, and you would go with your night-dress under your arm. It was an exciting outing, just a few doors down from your own house. We would all stay together afraid because the ghosts would be out and the night passed with us all coiled up together. The woman of the house we stayed in also put up the local teacher and bank manager. So the bread was sliced very thinly, it was not home made bread but it was that this loaf smelt like heaven. And the tea in the morning, it all tasted so different. It was a real treat compared to now.

My Grandmother often told me how her husband was taken with some other men by the British. They went out to the pub one night during the 1914 war and were never seen again. They were taken when they were drunk. I remember her telling stories of the Black and Tans coming and shooting at her black skirt while she was milking the goat at the side of the road. The shots sent the goat flying, throwing the milk all over the road. The Tans drove away laughing, but she survived.

Did any of you have a pucker goat? Well we had one at home and when my father was out my brothers would have the local youngsters bring in their nanny goats to mate with the pucker and they would pocket the money. But the smell of the old pucker, oh terrible, the smell was desperate.

We were different, but we were not unique. In our town there were loads of families where someone was ill, someone had died, something had gone wrong, things weren't normal, but because we were all the same it didn't seem to bother us. It is only when you look back you think that you've had it hard. Yet, when I look back on my childhood I realise I had a wonderful time, free and easy, hurling out on the road. I don't look back with any sadness at all, sad that my mother died of course.

If a man in the parish died, all the men helped the wife to bring in the harvest and do all the other heavy work, and the other way around if the woman died all the women would help with all the cooking and the baking and the children. It was a

great community then when you think about it, much better than now.

Did anyone in Ireland have a normal childhood? We all have different stories to tell and none of us seem to have had what is called a traditional family with Mum, Dad and children all growing up in the same house.

My family were ten in total and I was born in a mud cabin. Two of us died and I believe I had double pneumonia when I was three weeks old. My brother and sisters were kind of murdered by society. A lack of nourishment and we all suffered from malnutrition. Our hair fell out. We felt bad about this for a long, long, time.

I suppose that is what moulds us, the early years. I didn't fit in, we had that kind of mentality, you are what you own, if you didn't own something you felt you were nothing. You couldn't afford to go to secondary school so I worked as a farm labourer until I was seventeen and old enough to get away. At that particular point in time no one thought of staying in Ireland in the 50s. You would get letters from London or Birmingham saying all your mates were having a great time, so I came over to join in the fun.

Every Summer a couple of us would be sent to each Grandmother to holiday in the country. I remember when I was about six we were met at Rathmore Station by Grandmother. She settled us in the horse cart and set off on the six mile journey to her home. Everytime the horse defecated or farted she would hold its tail down with the whip and myself and my brother would look at each other and suppress our laughter in case she disapproved. Then one Sunday going to Mass in Gneeveguilla she told us the story of the runaway bog at Knocknageeha as we passed it. How it wiped out a family of eight, swept the house and buildings with it. I was terrified ever after whenever we passed the place either going or coming from mass. When I was eight in Cork City on one of my frequent visits to his surgery the Doctor informed my mother "He is an iochtar (weakling) he will never come to anything but he

will probably bury the rest of the brood. Fortunately Grandmother was on one of her rare forays from the mountain fastnesses of Iveragh. She was indignant at any of her grandchildren being called such a name.

"Let me have him for a few years and I will make a man of him and prove that doctor wrong." So as



soon as the Summer holidays arrived I was packed off to her. We got on very well. I was what she called a picker. Would not eat meat or potatoes but I did like porridge. So I had it for breakfast, dinner and evening meal with brown sugar sprinkled over it and a cup of cream from the churning tub. It was delicious. The house was known as a rambling house. People called every night and on Sunday nights the kitchen would be crowded. The men would play cards while the women sat by the fire tracing relationships. Who married who, who their children married often many generations back. I got to know the bloodlines of everyone in the district maybe better than some of the people themselves. When the cards finished the storytelling would start. When the subject was ghost or fairy stories I hung in there until exhaustion set in afraid to go to my room. I was away for five years and went back once when Aunt Ange came from America. My Mother came down in the holidays at Christmas and Summer and she would bring the last baby for me to see.

My parents came to England before 1920. They had lived in County Cork, about 10 or 12 miles between their villages and they had never met until they came over here. You just did not go outside your

own area in those days. My recollection of Ireland in my young days was the sheets being spread on the bushes to dry. And then all the apple tarts, they never made just one, lots of them would be lined up on the table.

I remember my father telling me that back in the country there was a young dog who went after sheep and as a child he cried because the owner just strung him up and father said he could not believe it as he had been playing with the dog a little earlier. It was done in public to show the farmer that they were doing something. It was psychological.

## RURAL LIFE

My father had a pony and the man up the road had



a trap, so on Sunday mornings that man and his wife as long as they had the pony and trap for Mass would let us have the trap in the afternoons. My father always liked his few pints, so we went miles in the pony and trap, the aunt who brought me up, my two brothers, and myself. We used to love that Sunday outing. I can still hear my father

saying "go on" and holding the tail down and adding "you dirty old devil" to the pony.

We did not use the pony and trap for going to mass. We walked about a mile to Mass. The only people who went by horse and trap were the elderly. We used it for a good country drive on Summer Sunday evenings, but somehow we always ended up in a pub with a bottle of lemonade and a few biscuits, it was great.

They used to have those big metal churns, tankards we used to call them, which used to be on the horse cart going to the creamery and the men would stand up driving the horse and they would keep their balance perfectly in between two tankards. At the end of our village there was a pump and farmers would drive up with horse and carts fill tankards with water to take home. Of course if you were a big farmer the creamery cheque supplemented other income. But, people like my father with only four or five cows found it hard to survive. He'd take the milk to the creamery, then wait for the cheque at the end of the quarter, what ever it was you had to live on that until the next one. We had goats and as children we would have the kids as pets. When they were fattened at six weeks we would come home from school one evening to find them hanging up. It was awful but that was the way meat was provided.

Just before Christmas the chimney would be swept. The conventional way was tie a bush on to a rope and pull it up and down the chimney. We had an easier way. The goose nominated for the Christmas dinner would be dropped down the chimney. It would flap its way down bringing all the soot with it. Then it would be driven to the river to clean itself prior to execution. It was believed this deloused the feathers before being put in the tick. You would be arrested if you did this now. It was a hard time for man and beast. Money was always very scarce and hard to come by and every trick in the trade was used to lay hands on some. There were a group of fellows in our parish who wanted money for a dance. A local farmer had a prize ram he had obtained from the Dept. of Agriculture. It was intended to build up the quality of future flocks. One night the lads sheared the ram and sold the fleece. The following day the farmer spent hours with his dog driving the ram off his land. He thought his breeding plans. When he realised what had happened all hell broke loose. Luckily he never found out who the culprits were. One was his son.

Rabbits and game were exported to England during the war and proved a source of income. There was a graveyard near us that was overrun with rabbits. Nobody would touch them as it was felt it would not be right. When the price went to four shilling a rabbit the colony was wiped out in days. I lived in Cork City and there was an exporter called Lane there. A youngster near us had a pet pigeon which died. So he put it in a shoebox, dug a grave for it in a bit of waste ground and all his friends went to its funeral. Later that evening my brother and I did a bit of grave robbing and sold it for one and six, picture money.

Years ago there was no piped water in farmhouses. You drew water from the well, stream or river. It was not purified but it was lovely.

If there was a bad summer the Bishop would grant a dispensation to allow farmers to work at saving the harvest on Sundays. This would be announced from the altar at Mass.

In coastal areas where the land was poor farms would not support a family. So income was supplemented by fishing and the American cheque.

## THE BOG

Turf was the main source of heating in most of the countryside. Adjacent to every house and cottage could be seen the turf rick with the years supply of fuel for heating and cooking. Cutting the turf was a big day for adults and children. It was usually done in May in the space between setting the root crops and saving the harvest. The first thing that was done was organise a 'meitheal' that is a gang of workers for days work in the bog and you would give them a days work back when they were cutting their turf.

Turf was cut with a 'slean' a spade like implement with a sharp wing on one side. The shape and size of 'sleans' differed from parish to parish. Bord na Mona had difficulty with its workers when it organised turf cutting in the war years. Workers insisted in using the type of 'slean' they were used to at home. The first job in turf cutting was cleaning the

bog. The top layer of rushes, sphagnum moss and bog cotton would be removed and put aside. Then the slanesman would cut sods of about nine inches long and throw them out to another with a turf pike who would pass it to another and lay the sods out standing up against one another. Later on the turf would be footed that is made into stacks and left



for a few more weeks before being drawn home.

In our district they'd be a person cutting the turf and someone catching the sods and putting them into what was like a bowl which a donkey would pull out into a clearing. It would be tipped out on the ground and piled up to about three feet high and probably in two or three weeks it would be ready to take home. Of course if it rained a lot you would have to wait for fine weather to dry it out so that it would burn. It could be a long process, maybe a few months. Turf was brown on the surface and when you got a few sods down you would come to the black. The black turf would last longer in the fire, the brown would burn quicker. You would cut down quite a depth. Each sod was nine inches long so you might go down what they called nine floors that would be nine times nine inches to get to the end of the bog. If you got half way down and the water started to come in you would have to abandon it and start somewhere else.

Father took us children with him to the bog. When he cut it we would make the odd bits into a ball so as not to waste it. We would press them together and squeeze the water out of them and put them up on the banks to dry. They were great for starting the fire because of their shape and of course they burned quick, but they got the fire going. It

was a great thrill for us children to see the balls we made in the fire. It was like a holiday, it was lovely in the bog, you could cook eggs and everything. It was so nice I always enjoyed it. You would make a fire with old turf, get it going, fill up the pan with nice clean water and let it boil, then put your eggs in. It was wonderful.

What I remember about the bog was the fleas there, they would eat you alive. When I was older



and lived in London, we went back there often and we would always be visiting who ever was doing the turf and I used to dread it. I'd be eaten alive going to make the tea. And they never bit my father.

Now they have machines for cutting turf. One man and his machine can cut as much turf in a four hours the same amount as we would in a week.

Well you did the turf and then the hay, in our case

we had the graveyard hay as well. My father looked after the graveyard and kept it nice. He cut the patches of hay in between the graves we'd all help in saving it. For me the biggest novelty was the bottle of tea in the sock to keep the tea hot and eating out in the open air.

## FOOD AND COOKING

I remember the bastible oven on top of the griddle stand. For baking there would be coals on the cover and coals underneath. When I look back we used to have some cracking meals though the cooking facilities were primitive really.

Do you remember the new potatoes, completely different from the potatoes in this country. We used to dig them out of the garden, in to a bucket of water, swirl them round, put them in the pot and the skins would fall off and how they tasted, unforgettable.

The cheese we had in Ireland years ago came in blocks with silver foil around them, you never see that now. And there was the sally bun. It was a sweet little loaf with a bit of white icing oh top and a few currants in it. Butter was sold loose as well and the shopkeeper would weigh out the amount and pat it into shape.

Killing the pig was a big event in every household. The pig's squeals could be heard all over the townland. Then there was fresh pork and cured bacon for a few months. What I liked best of all was when the black puddings were boiled and then hung on the handle of the kitchen brush between two chairs to dry.

Next day the children would be sent around to the neighbours with black pudding and a piece of pork steak. you would be warned not to take anything from them because when they would kill their pig they would bring us a bit of theirs. But, I always took a backhander, all the children did.

I have a friend and she always tells the yarn about when she used to go to pick up the turkey. The butcher was well off and he always gave her family a turkey for Christmas and when she would go to collect it with her mother, the butcher's wife would make tea for them and they would have cakes and buns. Soon her mother would say "now you've had enough now, Mary" and she never knew how her mother knew that she'd had enough. If someone offer you a cup of tea, you were supposed to say no even if you were gasping for it, and then if they did not force you, you'd say what mean people. It was

a kind of ritual dance. "Ah go on." they'd say. There was a river bordering our land and we often whipped a salmon out of it. My Gran would cut the salmon in half, boil the front bit and fry the other half. She liked the front bit herself, the eyes when boiled would come out like white hard marbles. Every time she would try and pick them up with the fork they would run away and she would chase them around the plate with a fork before eventually giving up and picking them up with her fingers. I was always fascinated with this performance and watched out for it whenever we had boiled salmon.

What we used to do in our house was make a big pot of porridge in the Winter's night and the men would come in after a few pints in the pub maybe and have a couple of mugs of what they called gruel. It tasted delicious.

We were fussy about what we would eat. We never ate rabbit. We sold them, you would get four bob for one.

## SCHOOL

I went to a National School and my abiding memory of it is the brutality and injustice. There was class distinction in that school. There were the untouchables and us. We were slapped for every perceived misdemeanour. The untouchables, sons of shopkeepers and hotel owners, who left to go to boarding schools at the age of eleven or twelve, were never slapped when they did not know the answers. An incident that occurred one wet morning still rankles. Some boys arrived late and were beaten. Half an hour later the woman who owned the hotel drove to the school with her son. The teacher went to the door to meet her and bowed and scraped for a while then escorted the boy into the classroom without a word of reprimand.

The parish priest used to come and examine us for the confirmation class and he would borrow the stick from the teacher to belt anyone who did not know the correct answer. He was a monster of a man with a big red face and a bull neck on him and you know when you are small you were terrified of him.

My father could not afford fees and I was put on a different side of the classroom from the kids from professional backgrounds and that is why I left school at fourteen: I wasn't going to be treated like that. I played truant and unfortunately for me, my uncle was a postman so he saw me. The more you missed school the more you had to miss, you



daren't go back or you got walloped. I remember a teacher who knitted and if she could get you quick enough, she'd give you a poke of the needle, a real sadist!

It was horrible at school, the teacher wasn't qualified, so you were just beaten. I could answer things in Irish but I didn't actually know what it meant. It was pure stupid. The church was too powerful.

On my first day at school in England the teacher asked me a question which I couldn't answer and as he walked past I ducked out of his reach and he asked "what are you up to" and I said "I'm just watching your hand". He looked a bit puzzled but passed on to the next boy, and then I realised that I wouldn't get walloped. I never missed a day's school over here.

A Protestant lady, Mrs. West, who owned a shop in our village took me under her wing and gave me a book at least once a week to read at home and when I brought it back she would ask me what I thought of it, whether I enjoyed it and what I liked about it. In anticipation of those questions I began to take a greater interest in what I had read. After the questioning she would give me another book to read. I believe she did more for me than all my years at school. She gave me the first book I ever owned "Green Rust by Edgar Wallace." I am forever grateful to that kind woman.



The school I went to in Waterville had a golf course nearby and there were several young fellows we would not see from about May on, they'd be caddying. They would go to school on a wet day maybe, it was accepted.

## HOLIDAYS

The river flowed through our part of town, if you walked up through a couple of fields it was rural and we used to dam the river there. The best memory I have is back in 1949. It was a great Summer weather wise, and there was a miners strike which lasted about eleven months. Because all the men were off they built us a proper dam that lasted for years, so whereas in previous years we had a shallow pool, suddenly we had a proper swimming pool.

I had one day out by the seaside when I was a boy. We went by train to Tramore for a day, it has a massive beach and the tide goes out a long way. I was

having a great time until somebody said the tide is coming in, and that was it, I was away, off the beach. It had taken hours to get there but as soon as I heard the tide is coming in, off I went. Well I had seen the sea around Dublin, but I had never really seen the proper seaside. And that was the only day out we had ever had.

Farmers sons got extra holidays in the Summer. They did not have to come back the same time as us, they could take extra time off to help with the harvest, particularly if it had been wet. We would go back on the first Monday in September, they would go back a couple of weeks later and that was accepted as part of the deal.

On a small farm you used to work all the year round, you couldn't leave the cattle or the milking or the animals to fend for themselves. You had to be there all the time so therefore there were no holidays. Most of our Summer holiday was taken up with work. We used to have to go out and cut turf in the bog for the Winter fuel and that could take a couple of weeks. It would take a month or two to dry before you could bring it home.

I came from The Golden Vale. The Golden Vale as you know is what it says, the epitome of farming and of course they could afford holidays. Although you got a holiday from them, you'd work for yourself like saving the turf.

My Uncle was the steward of the local estate. As well as the estate the owner controlled all the fish going up the river. My uncle was given Coronation Day 1937 off. It was the first holiday he ever had after twenty years of work. He went off along the coast shooting and his mother went mad, he should have stayed at home working. She didn't believe in holidays either.

Some of my holidays were spent in the country I used to help out in the corn fields, binding and stooking. Even when I went home I went to my uncle's, where I would take the donkey with a whole complete dinner, cabbage, potatoes, the meat and also a load of buttermilk for the men to

drink because it was very hot in them days. It was lovely weather in Ireland then. I'd set off with the donkey to this other farm to bring all the men their dinner. Another thing I used to do is go out to gather blackberries, gooseberries and apples. We used to make jams. We'd cover the jars with greaseproof paper tied around. We used to have bees for honey, but I never touched them.

In Cork City there was a swimming pool out by the Straight Road. It had days for boys and days for girls. If it was a girls day or a pay day we used to swim in the River Lee at the back of the swimming pool. We were expressly forbidden to do this as every year two or three children were drowned there, but high temperatures and peer pressure usually won the day. Besides swimming we played hurling and football on the sloping pitches of Bellsa.

There is one holiday scene forever etched in my memory. I was staying with my Grandmother in the country. My uncle who had an outside job did his harvesting in the evenings. Late one August evening we were drawing hay from a distant field. It must have been about eleven O' clock when we were coming home, down a woodbine scented breen, with the last load. I lay on my back on top of the load of hay watching the greatest show of celestial pyrotechnics I have ever seen. Against the backdrop of star strewn velvet sky, every few seconds a shower of meteorites would zip crackling through the sky. Whenever I smell woodbine I am again back on that load of hay that night. That time we were told meteorites were falling stars and that they were souls going to heaven from purgatory.

#### RECREATION

There was only one cinema in Mallow, and it was considered the 'in' place because lots of towns did not have one. I remember that there were wooden forms that you sat on as there were no proper seats. You had to sit down there and if you made a fuss you'd get lynched by all the others. They showed cowboy films, really old ones.

They used to show pictures in our local parish hall. There was this weird system of paying. If my brother went with me, I'd buy one ticket and the two of us would get in on one ticket. You'd have to tell the man at the door there's two of us on this ticket.

We used to spend Christmas at the pictures. There was a special show in the morning and you would get sweets and a little toy.

I remember being with my uncle, this was in Limerick, we'd be catching the hares for the local coursing club. The coursing would be in November, a great time, they'd be selling tea, cakes and sweets. You'd take the hares down to one run in the morning and leave them there and in the evening you'd bring them all back. We had about 70 or 80 hares.

Us youngsters tried rabbit catching and as we did not have a ferret we caught crabs and with a bit of lighted candle stuck on their backs we would put them into rabbit burrows.

We would cut a slot on the candle to let the hot grease run on the crab's back because otherwise he would not move. It was not a successful venture.

### WORKING LIFE IN IRELAND

There was no sick pay then. I met a man this year I hadn't met for 50 years, a wonderful storyteller and I remember he got such a bad injury. His legs were bruised from his hips to his ankles. He lived about four houses down the lane from us and he'd drag himself off the lane and he'd get on a horse and cart and my mum would go out and help him, because if he didn't go to work he would not be paid.

I got an offer to go to South Africa gold mining in 1949. I had a broken hand and was walking around town one day when I met two friends who said the South Africans were in Morrison's Island looking for miners. So we went there and found the room full of men and the most weediest individual of a doctor. He rejected at least half the group just by looking at them. The remainder had to take their shirts off and do a little jog after which he listened to their chests after which he rejected most of the remainder. Then we had a talk about the job we would spend a year in the mine and then had the option of going to college and graduating as a mining engineer. The talk concluded with you would not see grey days like we had in Cork instead the skies were always blue. My friend Finbar piped up "Could you see the blue sky when you are half a mile down a mine"? He was out then. My friend and I were accepted but neither of us went. Out of the 206 who went for the medical only six were accepted. I often wonder if I had gone supervising all those poor black workers, reinforcing apartheid. Perhaps it was a good decision.

I come from a coalmining village. It is gone now. There were quite a few coal mines on the Kilkenny and Laois borders. Coal mining wasn't a job for

human beings. I suppose it was the camaraderie that kept miners together. But the illnesses they had, the injuries they had!

People used to be frightened of them because they had blue marks from the coal where they got cuts that went blue and they looked a bit fierce. My uncles were all down the mines. My mother took me down once and we went down to what was



called the first landing, and believe me, if ever you wanted anything to make you want to study, this was the thing to do. Just walk down the mine and see what it was like, you'd never want to go down one again. All the farmers had their own sons, so rarely would you get a job on a farm. You could leave school on Friday and be working in the mines on Monday. My cousin was 13 and his father said to him there is a job going in the pit and its yours from Monday. That was his schooling finished. A job was a job and you were lucky to have one. And because there was no other industry in the area you went down the mines.

My family were in service to some farmers and that was a hell of a life. It was emotional and mental persecution. I remember my brother coming home from the farmer's place on Christmas Day. We had a chicken and we had eaten it all, you just had enough in those days so when he came in about 2 o'clock we were washing up, we had the old basin on the table, there was no running water then. When he came in my aunt said "I suppose you had a good dinner Tommy" and the tears rolled down

his face. They had said to him go home now and when you come back to milk the cows you will get your dinner. The servant girl and servant boy were put out to eat. That is why when they talk of the plight of farmers today I find it hard in my heart to have sympathy for them.

If you were a servant boy or girl for the farmers you worked hard. Milk the cows, cook the dinner and come back, the girl might have two hours off. You would see her coming and going on her bicycle.

There was a lot of class distinction in Ireland when you think about it. Especially, between the domestics and the other shower, the ones that were doctors and other professionals. I had a taste of that in Dublin before I came over. You'd have to come in, you'd wash up before you went out, you'd get a half day and you'd go out and have to be in by 10 o'clock.

Come the Winter, you'd have to fill the kid's hot water bottles and wrap their pyjamas around them. Pity it didn't roast the arses off them.

## FINDING WORK IN BRITAIN

I went down to the Labour Exchange and got a job in a piano factory, you would take anything of course the first time you are here. That was on a Monday or a Tuesday, I worked all week, then a fellow lodger told me they were taking labour on in his site and the pay was better. So I went with him on Saturday morning. I remember while waiting for the bus the manager of the piano factory passed and gave me a queer look. I got a start with a piling contractor and the money was much better than at the piano place. At the end of the following week my new employer wanted my insurance cards so I had to go back to yer man at the piano place for them. Oh, he got very snotty, he laid down the law, there is direction of labour, 'You people come over here. You break the law' and all that crap. To be honest I crawled for awhile, then I got mad. I left a roar out of me "I can threaten you too". He jumped up and gave me the cards straight away. you can only take a certain amount.

There was plenty of work here in the fifties and six-

ties. You could walk out of one job and into another on the same day.

There were lists of vacancies outside factories, shops and building sites. Just walk in and you would be welcomed with open arms. There was lots of casual work at places like Joe Lyons, Cadby Hall and all the hotels. Merchant seamen often availed of this work between trips or ships.

I knew a fellow who would go to Claridges for casual work. He always tried to get next to the door. The head man would open it in the morning and say first three or four or whatever he would want. They would go in and do the washing up and they'd get £5. You can't really do that now.

## WORKING IN BRITAIN

I remember when I first came over, if they gave you too much work to do, there was a great phrase, they wanted an Irish donkey. The donkey was meant to have the cross on its back. I was a bus conductor. I came over in 1961. It took a bit of getting used to especially when you did not know London. They gave me a bit of training before hand and you went around London on the bus, it was very difficult. I had been living here for a few months and I saw the job at the Labour Exchange in Shepherd's Bush. I was on the buses for three years and I got tired of the shift work. Some of the shifts would start at 5 o'clock in the morning and every third week you would have to work Sundays, so I got a better job in a factory. First of all my brother arranged for me to look around the factory. I turned it down, the noise of the machines. I was still working on the buses at that time, but after a couple of months I reconsidered. However, they were only taking people who would work night shifts then. So I took the job knowing that after a few months of that I would go on day work.

Working nights took a lot of getting used to. At 4 o'clock in the morning you'd get that sleepy feeling. A shift in those days was from 9 o'clock in the evening until 7 o'clock the next morning.

The government were trying to encourage people to go and retrain, have a shot at something better and there was this book-keeping course, so I went and asked for this six month course. I got paid while I was on the course and I was given a chance to do

something better. After that they placed you in a job and I worked for a company for two years. Then I saw that the local council were advertising for a timekeeper on their building sites and I applied for that. The money was £5 more than I had been getting through the hours were a bit longer. I didn't get the job initially, but two months later I had a letter saying they were still interested, so I went to work for the council. I was there for 5 years, working on sites. About a hundred men on the site. I had to be there first thing in the morning to open up, clocking people in, answering the phones and clocking the amounts of materials going in.

But then that was under a Labour Council, they were building a lot of council houses but when the Tories came in their policy wasn't to build houses to let, they wanted to sell them off. So I was transferred to general stores and I was there for about another 20 years.

The Irish Sisters of Charity ran a hospice in Hackney and they made it very homely for us. You weren't supposed to stay on there once you were



18 and then you were encouraged to go out and start your nursing training, but they wanted young people amongst the dying and I suppose you could see why. If people are terminally ill they want to be surrounded by people with a little life and bubble you know, a laugh, and God knows there were some great characters there.

During my time training we had to do a big spell of night duty. I did about 3 months in the Eastern

Hospital which was a hospital for T.B., you know a fever hospital, and that was a very lonely time. There was nobody from home there, and because you were on night duty you lost contact with all your good friends. They tended to employ nurses from overseas because they would better understand having seen typhoid and malaria. So I remember that as being a terrible limbo time here you'd just be working, I was as miserable as hell because when I was off during the day all my friends were working.

My brother met me when I came over and fixed me up with lodgings. The Landlady had a nephew and the other lodgers did not accept him perhaps because he was her nephew. Anyway I got on very well with him. He had been a coffin maker at home and decided to try his hand as a carpenter here. One Saturday he came home and said " they told me I'd be hanging doors next week and to bring my plumbob." What is a plumbob? So we went out and bought a plumbob and I explained what I thought it was all about and anyway he seemed to succeed. Afterwards he was foreman with that firm.

My first job was in the piano place. The pianos would come in, you would take them apart and clean them up. The keys would be taken out and buffed.

They would be a yellowy brown and you would get them a lovely white: a filthy bloody job.

After a few days I got a job with a piling firm and when the piling was finished I stayed there with the building firm. My first day with them I was sent up a ladder I was petrified. Shortly after I was erecting scaffolds six storeys high without a qualm in the world.

I went with the same firm to an underpinning job in St John's Wood. The house was almost over the tube line and it had been shaken to pieces. It was owned by a doctor and had been let to three American Air Force families at £8-10 shillings per flat. (To us a huge amount of rent) The doctor called every day to see how the work was progressing. There was an electric stove in the ground floor and we used it for making tea as the nearest cafe was a considerable walk away. One day the doctor noticed us using the stove and went spare. We were using his electricity. Never had permission. He got an electrician in to cut off the supply. When he called next day there was nobody on the site we were all at the cafe. When we came back he

attacked the ganger for nobody being working on the site. Bill, a cockney, calmly explained that men had to eat, that these facilities were normally provided on a site and where they were not workers had to seek another source. It was unfortunate that the nearest cafe was half an hour away but we were allowed travelling time to and from our source of food. The next day the doctor offered to reconnect the stove. Bill refused the offer saying it was unhygienic to eat with all that dust and dirt around.

The man next door to that site was a small builder and he had a contract to put in floors in Pepsi Cola in Blackfriars. He sub contracted to Bill. Every Saturday for two months his lorry pulled in to the site, we loaded it with tools and materials and drove to Blackfriars where we worked all night. Came back to the site and worked until 2 O'clock. We got £25 a night for the Blackfriars job and of course the firm paid for our Sunday work.

I didn't stay in the building business for long. It got cold and I thought I took one cold Winter and never again. So I gathered my thing up and got a job in a Tyre Factory.

I told the head foreman I was leaving and to give him his due he said if they want a reference tell them to ring me and I will say send him back to me and that is the best reference you could ever get.

I spent 24 years in that job and when it closed became a Civil Servant until retirement.

When I read of the plight of some former construction workers. No homes, no family, no pensions, too proud to return to the homeland. I recall being astonished at the live for the day attitude particularly with fellow countrymen I encountered when I was in the construction industry. They would come along to the site and ask a worker "Do they sub?" If not they would walk away, if they did they would ask for a start. Ask for a sub at midday and pack up at the finish of the day. And come around in a day or two for another start. Most of them were very good workers and usually told of the big wages they had in other jobs. Lifetimes frittered away.

It was like the "lump" in the building industry some years ago, a lot of people did not pay tax for years. The awkward thing is when these people come to get their pensions, they don't exist, they didn't have any stamps, there isn't any record of them.

## SOCIAL LIFE

My work friends by and large are English, we'll have a drink, all the usual stuff like that its enjoyable, but then my social friends are Irish so when I go out with them its a completely different experience. Its far funnier with the Irish, the things they say, the yarns they tell about things that have happened, the way they tell them, its a vastly different experience. Talk about English people getting carried away, I have actually had people say to me "Sean, you're not a typical Irishman" and I always say "no I'm not a typical English man's view of what a typical Irish man should be". I'd say "there are lots of Irish men like me, I'm not an exception."

We all went to dances at Leytonstone, Manor House or The Blarney in Tottenham Court Road. We went at least once a week and to the pictures of course, we were quite a good community of Irish Nurses, so we kept to ourselves really for companionship, It was all Irish even then.

I used to go to the Hibernian in Fulham and that is where I met my wife. There were two clubs in Hammersmith, the Garryowen and the Emerald.

I used to go to the Galtymore in Cricklewood. The last dance just finished as the last bus left for Hammersmith, it was a trolley bus, a 626 if I remember rightly. All the lads would rush straight out and get on, so there would be a couple of hundred on the bus. The conductor would shout "I'm not moving until you get off". The passengers would reply in unison "We are not getting off". "I'm not moving", "We are not getting off". And of course he wanted to get home too so he rang the bell because he could have stayed all night and the lads weren't getting off. Every week it was the same.

## THE CHURCH, RITUALS AND FOLKLORE

Our Society was very slow, people were not accepted if they were disabled. it was definitely linked up with the sins of the forefathers. It was a very harsh life for some people. If a girl fell for baby outside of wedlock, she was ostracised, hidden shut away.

Even now, I know a child, she's only eighteen who was adopted and her whole aim in life is to find her Irish heritage, because her mother was shut in a convent, the child was adopted and sent over here, and her mother sent to Australia. Of course the church was behind it all, with this thing of shame. Anything to do with sex, they were madly fascinat-

ed with it. They were about sex, like we are about the weather. Well, it is run by a crowd of celibates.



You see the stories coming out now about priests and religious and these reform schools. This is the first time it is really opening up and they are only scratching the surface. For generations back these misfortunate children were abused.

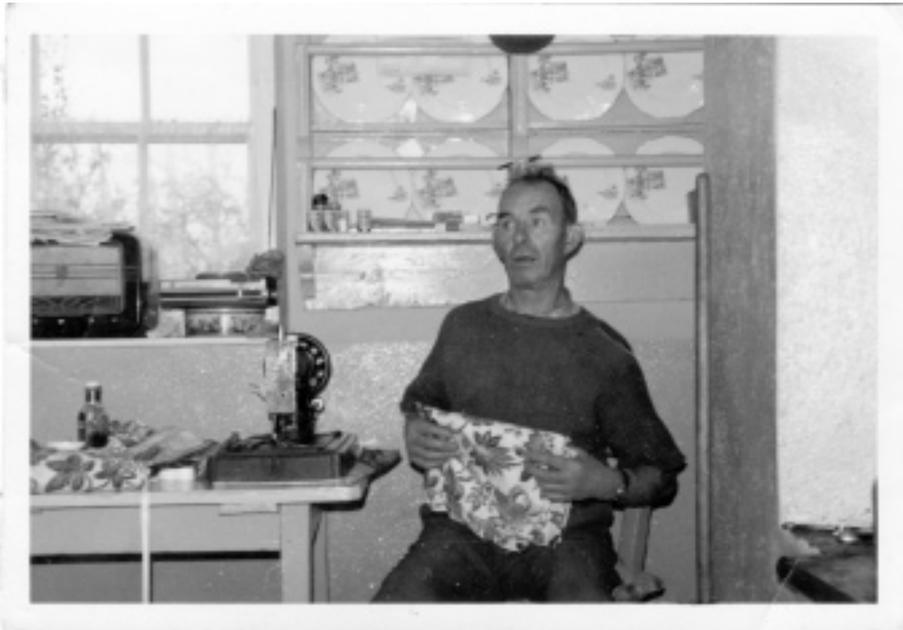
The thing with the church, the bishops, the priests, they were just an extension of the aristocracy. They took authority and we let them, we were so uneducated. You didn't question their authority, how could you, that was driven into you. There weren't many jobs around, you needed the church and the priest's reference if you wanted a job.

I remember the convent I was at, when the priest did not turn up to serve the mass, the nun who did would be kept outside the altar rail. She was not allowed inside it.

They wouldn't bury you, or bless the grave if you committed suicide. If a child died before being baptised it was not allowed to be buried in consecrated ground. There was near us a piece of walled in ground called the small wood and we used to pick blackberries there.

There was a belief that a church stood there in the long, long ago. Stillborn children were buried there, they would be taken there by night. Surely, an ungodly thing.

Any child born out of wedlock could not become a priest or a nun.



I was brought up in Ireland and like everyone else I believed the Adam and Eve story. So when someone said to me it is only a tale I said "don't be stupid. How could it be just a story?" You really believed because that is what you were brought up to believe. You were indoctrinated. People used to believe every word they were told from the altar. They were brainwashed and passed it on to their children.

Some orders like Mother Theresa's are getting vocations, but very few. You see it is a different emphasis now, other orders were founded in the first place to fulfil the needs of the time i.e. teaching/nursing, its all fulfilled now. The laity have taken over these roles, there is no need now. All those orders, including the one I belong to, were formed in the last century and they were founded because of poverty and lack of education.

There is no ceremony for finishing as a nun, it is just like a divorce. When I came out, so to speak, it was a natural graduation. I lived in Ealing and I was still under a bishop. He lived in a house across the road from me and I used to go to him and have supper with him. He died of cancer there a couple of years ago. He

was my boss for a few years until I got the final letter which comes from Rome. It is the exemption from the vows. That is what it really is. I have it somewhere. But, I still say I've had a rich life. No regrets, I haven't any grievance with it. Protestants outnumbered Catholics where I lived and none of them ever went to England, they went to Canada or Dublin. It used to be said that even the pigs were Protestants there.

My Mother used to send the News of the World home wrapped in The Universe. She sent it out religiously every week and the others used to be waiting for it and these were the holy women who went to mass every day.

I was speaking to my sister about the religion because the Aunt who brought her up was English and did not go to church. However the uncle took her to mass every Sunday and Holy day. When she was here a little while some religious order in Ireland contacted some crowd here to make sure she was being brought up right. She said one night the doorbell rang and there were two priests and a nun at the door. So the uncle brought them in and called her down. They all chatted away for a good while, but when they left the uncle was very annoyed. He said to her "in all the time they spoke to you they did not once ask you, are you being looked after alright. Do you get enough to eat? Are you being knocked about, not one bit interested. We could have been treating you like a dog and all they are interested in is whether you go to mass every Sunday." He never went to church again.

## PRACTICES AND RITUALS

In the country they had stations, that is mass said in the house. They would have them twice a year in each townland but in a different house each time. It was a big thing to have the station, they'd be a big clean up, whitewash all over the place. Family exiles would return for it. The priest and clerk would arrive. Mass would be said in the biggest room usually the kitchen. Breakfast would be served afterwards. Honoured guests and the head of the household would dine with the priest. Then the clerk would collect the dues. As soon as the priest had gone the strong stuff would come out and there would be a hooley.

Some people had their own pews for which they paid two or three pounds annually. My Aunt had a half seat in our church and she was always after me to use it. I was too shy to walk up the aisle to use it. Only half the church had seats, there were no seats at the back. I always preferred the back. I had an uncle who came to mass every Sunday but always stayed outside the door with several others.

I remember my aunt bringing in the turf on a Saturday night because nothing was done on Sunday. All we did was get the pony and trap and drive to church. We used to be stuck there half the bloody day: first it was in to a neighbour and then it was in to the church. All the women were talking about the others behind their backs. Women would sit at one side of the church and men at the other side. The priest would have a go at the women one week and at the men the next.

I remember one old boy who did not pay his dues to the priest and all the old biddies in the village said "he'll have no luck". True enough, his lambs died for some reason, but I don't know if it was because of that.

I saw my Grandmother laid out after she died. She wanted to go. She would sit up, then want to lie down, then want to sit up again. She was very restless, saying she wanted to go. And she was convinced that your departed friends came for you. In the country in those days, people sat up with the dying they did not go to hospitals or hospices. Neighbours would come in and spend the night. She often told me she heard dying people talking to those who had gone before and their friends would come for them. She had conversations with her late husband in her last days. I was with her when she died. She just gave a sound and was gone. I wasn't sad just happy for her. I was sent for two women who lived half a mile away. They were the recognised layers out. We had a two-night wake with the rosary at midnight. People came from far and wide. My father died eleven years ago and we had a two-day wake. They were to kill a pig that week and my brother still went ahead with all the paraphernalia of killing the pig in honour of my father who was being waked in the house.

I was born at home and my mother died at my birth. The aunt who took care of me used to say that my grandfather insisted that when my mother's body was taken out of the bed. The Aunt and her ten year old son had to go into the same bed with less than a day old me and I roared all night. I

mean it was healthy but a bit morbid. I have never seen a photograph of my mother. It's something that lives with me.

I was brought up by an aunt because my mother died in my birth. Her mother, I always call my grandmother, lived away up in the hills between Tipperary and Limerick and when she died, she was waked, and a lot of the locals came in for their booze, some of them were roaring drunk already. I remember one of the family hiding quite a lot of drink under the bed with the corpse in it, and saying that is the one place they won't go near. Then as the day wore on and it got dusk, people were invited into the wake room to say the rosary. Strange sounds were heard as the rosary was being said. It got too much for my aunt she lifted up the valance to find a drunken intruder with a half-empty bottle of whiskey in his hand.

My brother and I got a fright from a dead person. It was late in the evening on St. Stephen's Day. The two of us were just ready to walk out the door to a dance when a neighbour knocked and said old Mrs Morgan had just died and would we move her into the next room where she would be laid out. So we went to oblige. It was a very small bedroom and the bed was large. The body lay far in by the wall. The two of us stood on the bed. I took the hands and Pat the legs. As we lifted her the air in her lungs was exhaled as a moan and we dropped her with fright. We eventually got her out to the next room and went off to the dance without a care in the world.

I remember a wake in Mallow that I went to. We used to go home in the Summer, so I must have been ten or eleven at the time. We were sent around to pay our respects, I can't remember who was with me, but it was another child. They had benches around the room and the dead man was downstairs and the bed was there and he was in it. Everything was clean and crisp and the wife was walking around the bed smoothing it and flicking her Woodbine into her hand.

What has stuck in my mind more than himself in the bed was that she was smoothing out the covers and flicking the ash from her fag into her other hand.

I remember we laid my mother out. She died over here so the English people in the road thought it was very extraordinary that they took her out in a body bag, did what they had to do, and brought her back again. So all the Irish people came to visit and when the piper arrived next morning he went up to

see her. She was taken to the church and the piper was to sleep in the room she was laid out in. When I showed him to the room he said "I have a feeling I've seen this room before." That's all he said. He slept in there, it didn't seem to bother him.

English people never understand Irish funerals. I think it is a great divide between us. They cannot understand that people would go any distance to attend a funeral. A girl who used to live in our home town, on the corner of Galway and Roscommon and now lives in Kilkenny goes home to all the funerals. If someone of her generation dies, she'll drive all the way to the funeral. People in England would hardly do that for a relative. I actually worked with a guy who took the morning off for his mother's funeral.

Years ago when a funeral was passing people would raise their hats and bless themselves, blinds would be pulled down and shops would have a shutter up. If you died before noon you were taken to the church that evening. If you died after twelve

ly lost you last night and then they're telling me how lucky I was, oh, I nearly hit someone. And I looked at my face in the mirror after the operation, and I said "who is that old bag" and it was my face and I didn't recognise it.

There was a man in our town who was a grave digger, and he was known as the raven, because if anyone was ill and he came knocking on the door asking how they were, it was good-bye.

I know a Corkman over here, he bought one of these pre-paid funerals. Then after many years he went back to Ireland and loved it there and he wanted to stay and live there but he wouldn't because he couldn't take the funeral with him. I said I couldn't you sell it on "no" he said "it's in my name".

I remember my mother had a penny insurance on each of us in case we died. You would get eight or ten pounds, probably enough to bury you then.



We used to gain indulgences for Holy Souls in November. We'd say seven Our Fathers, seven Hail Marys and seven Glorias. Come out and back in again, do the same again. We gained an indulgence every time we did it.

I went to look at my family's grave when I had only been married a year and my uncle leapt on top of me, I was just about to go into the graveyard and he said it was very bad. I shouldn't go in there: he thought I was pregnant and for a pregnant woman to go into a graveyard, well I don't know what it was. I thought he had gone off his head or started drinking early that day.

you were taken to the church the following evening. We always had a two-day wake, that was the custom in our area. You'd spend one night in the house, one night in the church and be buried next day.

I know my father told me about a year before he died that he was ready to go, he just felt the connection loosening. I don't know why, and then it was a few months after that he began to get ill.

I'm not afraid of death, it's the one thing people cannot understand: I wouldn't be afraid to go tomorrow, it's the most beautiful thing. When I was in hospital a nurse said to me we near-

Another thing when a woman had given birth she had to be cleansed. Do you remember she'd have the churching after the birth.

## NUN AND PRIESTS

When I lived with my Grandmother she used to talk about a priest who was there at the turn of the century. He'd come along in his sidecar and there would be some fellow beside the road doing nothing and he give him a cut of the whip.

There was priest at a mission who really opened my eyes because he gave a vivid and frightening description of hell, gave all the horrible details of

what went on there. I was scared and loaded with good resolutions. As we came out a man commenting on the sermon said, "He knows all about it. He must have been there himself". Then I said to myself "how the hell could he know so much about it". My resolutions evaporated.

I was in Our Lady of Sion with the nuns. I was a boarder there and when my father came to visit they'd stick him in the parlour, that's what it was called and the gate keeper, she'd be on the other side and she'd lift a little box thing so that she could view us and I'd have to go in there because he was not allowed in any other part of the convent. I remember once when I was very ill, my sister and her boyfriend came and he had to stay in that room. He was not allowed to see me and she had to be given permission because the sick bay was in the nun's part and as children we were not allowed to go there. I suppose all orders had that strictness. I joined in the sixties and we all had that. You couldn't go home to funerals. I did six years before I first went home. To give up father, mother, brothers and everything belonging to you, was literally the interpretation of the gospel. The families never choose it, it is like someone going into prison. We were also told to vote Conservative.

I used to work in Bishopsgate and the nuns used to visit all the business premises there. They would not ask for money but they would go quickly if you gave them some, they would say some nice things and leave. Otherwise they would be talking about all sorts of things, but they never asked, I remember that. Its a psychological thing about feeling uncomfortable, what the bloody hell do I do now, then comes the realisation as it dawns on you, its money. Why don't they say it at the beginning and save you all that sweating.

I was an orphan. I remember answering mass about 40 years ago and you know the way they collected dues. A new Parish Priest came and he doubled everything and he'd stand outside the church holding a box for the offerings. A judge would not have such power.

The dues were called out at Sunday Mass, those who gave money in descending order of the amount given, followed by those who gave nothing, really those who had nothing to give. I thought it was scandalous. I knew one family and they were on the rocks and the priests should have been around giving them money. Well even as a child you knew it was wrong, but you said nothing. That

was the one thing that struck me when I came over here, the churches used to run dances and we were used to them lashing out from the pulpit about dances, they were considered occasions of sin.

One Sunday before Lent in Cork the bishops pastoral letter was read out banning all dances for Lent. So that afternoon all the musicians marched



with their wives and families to the bishop's palace and played in the courtyard a popular tune of the time "Put your shoes on Lucy". Bishop Lucey emerged from the Palace and asked what was going on. He was told no dancing, no money for musicians, no food for wives and children. So he was expected to look after them at the Palace until Easter. We never heard what followed but the musicians and families went home and dancing continued in all the dance halls in Cork and banning was never mentioned again.

I remember, I think it was in 1949 a black bishop came to Cork and when he said mass crowds flocked to see him. He had a different style to what we were used to, a lot of hand waving and gesticulations. One old hurler described it as being a performance like Tony Reddan in the Tipp goal when Mick Mackey had the ball.

I heard about this man who had a big family living in a little house on someone else's plot. This man used to cut turf on Sunday when everyone was at mass because the poor man was desperate, and of course at that time you shouldn't do any servile work on Sundays. The priest went along to the



boreen where the bog was one Sunday and he met the man coming home with his slane on his shoulder. The Priest was on horseback and he pinned the man up against the ditch and said to him "you know you will burn in hell for this". "Well I suppose so Father" he replied. "I can tell you the one thing I have always been used to is a good fire, so that will be no problem to me.

## REMEDIES

Doctors were expensive and people were poor so calling the doctor was usually the last resort. Unfortunately he was often called when it was too late. There were lots of home remedies a mixture of the tried and true and pishogues. An oft recommended cure for warts was to leave four stones at a cross roads and if someone picked them up they would get your warts and yours would disappear.

A cure for rheumatism, arthritis or sciatica, was rub the affected part with goose grease left over from the Christmas roast cover with brown paper and iron the paper on the body with a hot iron.

Poteen taken as a drink or used as an embrocation was considered a cure for a host of complaints. It was used for cows with the Murren and greyhounds were massaged with it to speed them up.

Copper bangles on the wrist and a cut spud in the trouser pocket were supposed to ward off attacks of rheumatism.

Garlic was also a cure all for man and beast but was never given to milking cows as it tainted the milk and butter.

My Grandmother insisted that I have a clove of garlic every morning and my teacher went on to me about it every day. Gran used to say to hell with him, I'm looking after you.

Black wool put in the ear was considered a certain cure for earache. Linseed and bread poultices were applied with abandon. Water from Lourdes or the local holy well were applied to the affected places.

A cure for boils which I know to be very effective, is grind white sugar and mix with shavings of plain soap. Make a poultice of this and apply to the boil. The boil will break within twelve hours and the pain disappear.

## TOWN AND COUNTRY CUSTOMS

Halloween had various rituals of its own. There was the barm brack eaten that evening with its ring, match, rag and coin. Each foretold the finder's future. The ring happy marriage, the coin wealth, the rag poverty and the match spinsterhood or bachelorhood.

Snap apple took place at Halloween too. An apple suspended on a string, if you could bite it without using your hands, a very difficult thing to do, you would get it.

Sometimes you would have a bowl or bath of water apples would be put in it and you try to get one out using your mouth only.

We used to line up saucers one with earth, one with water and one with a wreath. You were led to them blindfolded and had to choose one. If your choice was water it meant you would go to America or England. Earth symbolised death and the wreath marriage.

We used to go around dressed like the pooka. You would have a face mask on and go around knocking on doors like trick or treat but we didn't say that.

In Kerry they had the Biddies on New years night. Children went around dressed up in various disguises. They would sing or recite in the houses they visited and get a few pence which would be squandered on sweets or cigarettes next day.

On the last day of January or maybe February the Capaill would go around. It was two men under sheets supposed to be a horse, accompanied with others. If you gave them something they would sing your praises. If given nothing or insufficient they would tell the neighbours what a miser you were. It was a form of blackmail really.

On Shrove Tuesday the Skellig list would be displayed in various parts of the village. No one knew who did it. Sometimes several would appear. On it would be the names of those who were going to Skellig for a wedding during Lent. The object of the list was to achieve the oddest pairings possible. Bitter enemies were always coupled, drunks with pious women, tinkers with wealthy, young with the very old. There would be sneering and anger hence the anonymity of the composers.

The strawboys went to weddings. If you weren't invited but wanted to attend you went dressed in straw.

And there was going around with the wren. On St.

Stephen's morning the wren boys went from house to house with a bunch of holly and sometimes the pathetic little bunch of feathers that was once a wren. They would sing their little ditty in each house they visited



The Wren, the Wren, the King of all birds  
St Stephen's day she was caught in the furze,  
Although she was little, her family was great  
Rise up there lady and give us a treat.

On Christmas Day the hunt for a wren to adorn the holly bush would take place. Immortalised in Sigerson Clifford's ballad "The Boys of Barr na Sraide."

Then there was the Banshee who foretold death with her wailing, the headless horseman seen in various places and the Sprid who could strike you dead and of course countless fairies. There was a fairy fort or lios in a field near us, where we were told the fairies lived, it was all right passing it during the daytime. As a young lad you wouldn't be out late at night but in the evening when it got very quiet and you wouldn't see a soul around I used to fly past it.

## MISCELLANEOUS

I knew two old brothers who lived together, you know the old thing in Ireland of the thirties. They never married, each waited for the other to move out so he could bring a woman in. There was a bad winter and fuel ran low so they burned the steps to the loft where the older brother slept. They brought in the mule by night and the brother would step on

a chair then on the mules back up into the loft. This worked well for a while until one night the mule got sick and lay down on the kitchen floor and couldn't get up. The older brother missed the chair



coming down from the loft and badly injured himself. When the doctor came he shook his head and advised that the priest be called. The brother went for the priest and on the way back in the priest's car the priest trying to console him said he had often seen people recover after the last rites were administered. Then the brother asked "Could you anoint the mule as well."

One of the treats of my childhood was the evenings when Tom Malone called. He only came two or three times a year and always just in time for the

evening meal. He was a tall man with a hatchet face, dressed in black and spotless. He always had that days paper and they were hard to get during the war years. He was a true Knight of the Road.

He was supposed to have the Latin and the Irish and to be a very learned man. He would quote verbatim from Dail debates, discuss the price of cattle and Timoshenka's tactics on the Russian Front. Word would get out that he had arrived and the neighbours would congregate and listen to him. He would sleep on the rack and be gone when I got up for school next morning. Some said he was a "spoiled priest", some women were afraid of him. I never saw him again though I had vicarious encounters with him. First in Eric Cross's "The Tailor and Ansty." He was a regular visitor to the Tailor's household in Gougane Barra and the Tailor thought highly of him. Then I mentioned him at an Irish class in Camden Town and the teacher said he was a regular visitor to her home in Cuil Aodha. She said he had been seen in London and another Irish Teacher had tape recorded him. Then at a party a boat builder from Baltimore said he was a regular caller at his house. So he got around quite a bit I wish I knew more about him.

Did I ever tell you about the day the devil came to our house?

We had a wide fireplace in the kitchen with a hob on either side. There was a shelf over the fireplace with a picture of a fat pope in red robes on one side of the shelf. In the middle was a picture of the Sacred Heart with the names of my Grandmother, Grandfather and all their children on it. In front of it was a glass lamp with a red globe which was kept

lighting all the time. Next to that was a Big Ben alarm clock with two bells on it. On the other side of the shelf was a picture of St. Patrick standing on a rocky shore with his crozier in his hand and snakes plunging into the sea as they fled the country. Now one of my jobs when I came home from school was to bring in enough turf to last until the next evening.

We always had dry turf for my uncle was the best clamper in the county and the mouth of the rick was covered with sheets of corrugated iron. However our cat had found another use for the rick,

he used to pop in and leave a little message for me. And as it was the same colour as the turf I often put my hand in it in the gloomy winter evenings. This meant a journey to the river to wash it off in the icy water. I didn't like doing this so I asked the best way to prevent to cat from abusing the turf rick. An old man told me the sure cure for this complaint was to catch the cat and stick his nose in it. I tried it more than Once and it didn't work. So I asked around again and was told to apply turpentine to the cats behind and he would never do it again. I knew they were coddling me and ignored that advice, until one cold Winter's evening I made the same mistake again. I was furious as I went to the river where my uncle was repairing a stone wall. He could see what had happened and began reciting the Scholar and his Cat. I was embarrassed as well as angry and as I returned I saw the cat going in behind the corrugated iron sheets. I chose the only remedy I knew. I ran into the house, took a quill from the goose wing used as a duster, grabbed the bottle of turpentine and caught the cat as he emerged from his toilet. I applied a liberal application of turpentine and finished with a flourish. The transformation was both fantastic and frightening. His tail shot up straight as a poker. He grew as big as a dog, his back arched and the fur stood straight up. Then he began a weird ballet with his four legs of f the ground like lambs in the Spring, uttering the weirdest of wails all the time. He danced into the house with me after him. Gran was sitting on a chair by the fire. He jumped on her shoulder and from there to the shelf over the fire sending the fat pope flying followed by the lamp and the Sacred Heart picture. Oil from the broken lamp seeped into the fire and there was a whoosh of flame. The cat fell into it and with a mad screech and smell of singed fur he disappeared up the chimney. Gran was on her knees praying "Mary Mother of God what have we done to bring the devil to our house." "It is only the cat" I tried to reassure her. "Only the devil himself would jump into the fire. You have heard of the Gaderine swine, they were the devil. They jumped over a cliff and were never seen again. Only the devil would knock all my holy picture off the shelf and I saw his forked tail in the flames. She had evidently seen the protruding feather. I was about to confess but self preservation is my strongest instinct. So I tried to soften things for her, "Look "I said "St. Patrick is still up there". She looked and prayed "Thanks be to god and St. Patrick for hunting the devil out of our house and the snakes out of the country.

"Gorsoon, get the holy water from the room".

Soon the kitchen was awash with water from Lourdes, Knock, Easter Water and water from St.Crohan's Pattern Well. We tidied up, had a cup of tea and I was ordered not to tell anyone what had happened.

Then she said we will get new glass for the pictures and a new lamp. There is a station in Jerry the Smith's next week we will get the curate in to bless the place.

When the curate called she never said what had happened just said I would like the Gorsoon's name on the Sacred Heart Picture and it is a good while since we had the house consecrated I would like it done again. When he had gone the picture was put back in its place with the lamp lighting before it. Ever after when the rosary was finished and Gran



had prayed for Johann in New York, Paddy in Chicago, Ange in Boston and Dan in Rhode Island, she added one more trimming to thank St Patrick for hunting the devil from our house and the snakes from Ireland.

There were five of my mother's family who went to America:

Ange came back in 1938, and Dan he was the suc-

successful one, he came back a couple of times, but the others never returned. Mary wasn't there long when she died. Johann or Paddy never returned. Ange stayed for three months when she came in 1938, she bought a new bike and gave it to me when she left. Dan had a couple of pubs in America and he was very successful but he disgraced the family when he came. He brought his Buick with him and apparently the docker damaged it while landing it in Cobh. Dan hit him and there was a court case and he had to pay £300 compensation, a lot of money in 1932. An undertaker converted the Buick into a hearse and Grandmother always cringed when told Dan's car led the funeral.

Should I tell you about my encounter with the law, it's a shocking case. I was arrested for indecency



one time. One of those long lingering June evenings, myself, my elder brother and my friend, Finbar, decided to go for a spin. We cycled out to Carrigrohane, past the Muskerry Golf Course and into Blarney. Dolly Butler was playing in the Castle

Hotel. So we said we would go in for a while. I was drinking Tanora, it's beautiful, it's sizzly and tickles your nose when you drink it. The music and craic was so good we stayed until the session was over at one o'clock.

We tried the toilet as we came out but it was swimming so we went to where our bikes were in a field. Well I was doing my duty and the next thing I was grabbed by the shoulder and "caught in the act, you can't deny it". I turned around and couldn't stop, the dam was burst and Tanora has a multiplying factor. He was the Garda Sergeant. One leg of his trouser and his boot was saturated. He was furious. I was scared. As he marched me to the barracks every squelch as the alternate foot hit the ground was like a death sentence. At the barracks he took off the wet boot and sock and pulled the trouser leg above his knee. The Garda at the desk failed to suppress a snigger of laughter. "Get out" the Sergeant roared at him. "The roads are full of unlighted bicycles". The garda scuttled out. Three or four times I was asked my name and address. I gave it to him three or four times. "Now we will find if you are telling lies, my bucko. And God help you if you are." He'd get a number on the desk then do his one shoe on walk, with one trouser leg above his knee to the wind up telephone on the wall. And phone a Garda Barracks in Cork. He did this several times to no avail. I could see he was getting frustrated. Unfortunately I had no record so no one knew me. He asked me my name again I told him. Then I said Guard Reidy lives at No 66 on our road phone him. He did not phone him. Instead he said "If you are lying, if it is the last thing I'll do I'll get you. You will be summonsed. You will get a fair trial and be fined £5."

I met Finbar and my brother outside and we set off for Cork. We had only gone a hundred yards when we were stopped by the Garda who had been at the desk. Not one of us had a light. We thought we were in more trouble. Instead he asked "What happened lads?" So we told him. "That's great he will never live this down the old devil."

About a month or six weeks after I got a letter saying I was to appear at Blarney Court on the charge of "Urinating on the public highway in a place where the public habitually pass" I'll never forget these words. A little while later there was an item in the Cork Examiner about the judge in Blarney Court who declared he would not sit there much longer until proper toilet facilities were provided in the courthouse. At present he had to use the nearby hotel.

I felt that he could be sympathetic to my case so I wrote him a letter to explain my case: It was 2 o'clock in the morning, The nearest toilet was a North Gate Bridge 5 miles away and not accessible at high tides. And I pointed out I had not urinated on the public highway but in a field on a Garda Sergeant.

I was still fined 6d which I ignored until I got a rocket saying If I did not pay within a certain time drastic action would be taken. So a week before Christmas took a half-day off and went to Blarney to pay the fine. As I waited at the stop for the bus to carry me home who should I see marching towards me but yer man, the sergeant. I cowered behind others as he passed. Then a young fellow at the front shouted a rude remark. The Sergeant turned on his heel and came back and glaring at the young fellow demanded "What did you say? The youth looked at him with an angelic countenance and with eyes beaming honesty. He had the makings of a politician if ever I saw one. He replied "I was just reading the notice on the window Sergeant". And he read aloud "Cork Opera House, Grand Christmas Pantomime. Puss in Boots". That wasn't exactly what I had heard a little earlier.

This publication was produced by the Irish Reminiscence Group.

*They are:*

**John**, first arrived Cork 1953. Divorced/retired.

**Sean**, arrived from Co. Kilkenny as soon as the King died, 1952.

**Bernie**, arrived from Limerick 1956. Came thinking I would do well, ended up on income support and disillusioned.

**Robert**, came from Co. Kildare, 1961.

**Johanna**, second generation with my roots from Ballyclough and Mallow.

**Eileen**, Came from Co. Limerick, 1962. Nurse to Nun to Teacher. Now retired and a Therapist.

**Martha, Austin and Michael** also contributed.

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