

Remembering Cornmore

Pat MacDermott (*grand nephew of Sean MacDiarmada*)

IT WAS 1969 and I was seven years old when I first stayed in the house in Cornmore; we had arrived from Glasgow for a month's holiday. From living in the smog and grime of an industrial city, to arriving in Cornmore, fresh air, fields, lakes, mountains and ANIMALS! Cows, chickens, sheep, a donkey (I wasn't allowed to call it an ass) and my Uncle John James' collie. Arriving from a tenement in Glasgow, to a thatched cottage in North Leitrim, from our supposed mod cons of a gas geyser & cooker and electric lights, we were confronted with no electricity, an open range, oil lamps and no running water AND no TV! This wasn't just a change of scenery for me, this was time travel and I loved it! But...a working farm has no place for passengers, chores still have to be done.

The nearest drinking water was from a tap almost a mile away and off I'd go every morning with two buckets to bring back as much water as my seven year old arms could carry. My younger sister would occasionally also bring a bucket but it arrived back to the house almost as empty as it was when we had left and then I'd have to go off to fill it again.

With the water fetched (numerous times), chickens fed, cow milked (by my

uncle John James), it would be breakfast time, followed by turf cutting (John James again) and said turf stacked by yours truly. As a treat (after the chores), we could take a dander into Kiltyclogher (a mere three miles away), to the shops. A six mile round journey for a few sweets was bliss, we felt that everyone we met along the way knew us, we were Dan Donal's kids, (surnames were optional, either never used or occasionally stated only once), and we were staying out in 'the house'. Before the first week was out we knew lots of new people, especially after mass on Sunday (preceded by a three mile dander), we were introduced to even more people, which was handy, because soon we would be helping them to bring in the hay.

John James would mow the meadow with a scythe, this was hard backbreaking work; John James would've been in his early 60's and could still mow the meadow. Once cut, the grass was left to dry out for a few days and then, the young cubs (I was already picking up the lingo) would be put to work to rake the grass into rucks, before it would be piled high with pitch forks into a haystack. These long summer days would be punctuated with lunch and dinner being brought to the meadow. Lunch was sandwiches washed down with milky tea from lemonade bottles

and followed by spuds in the evening, washed down with even more milky tea.

Once the hay was saved, the cubs would now be guns for hire (a seven year old's cowboy dream), to be called upon to...bring sheep down from Thur Mountain for dipping, drive cattle from one field to another or to stack (even more) turf. Cornmore and the surrounding areas were a rural community and everybody helped everyone. This wasn't exploitation, this was fun. This was what it was all about, all mucking in together. My father and John James had done this also in their youth and so had their father (my grandfather) and their uncle Sean.

Now though, Cornmore and its surrounding areas are quiet, no longer a vibrant community, just lots of old ruined houses whose memories are embedded within the stones they were built from, the stones like the memories are being reclaimed by the bog. However, it is still the birth place of an Irish hero and his home still over looks Cornmore, with its views of Lough McNean. His home was my father's home also and during summer holidays (however briefly) over 40 odd years ago it was my home, it is Teach Shean Mhic Dhiarmada, Sean MacDiarmada's House.