WHEN I WAS YOUNG...

Thomas Kelly

IN CONVERSATION recently with a returned immigrant who has spent much of his life abroad and discussing changes in the countryside, he expressed the phenomenon of the growth of hedges that has changed the entire look of the landscape. Something we have been oblivious to as someone wrote recently, we are seeing it but not observing it. In searching for a reason for this springing up of hedges and remembering the many other changes since leaving his country home, we concluded it was due to the dearth of an industry. Procuring of scallops to secure thatched roof which are now almost a thing of the past. Sally rods were also used in both creel and basket making, utensils much in use even by our generation. With the non-use of those in houses and on farms, the almost demise of thatched roofs it has ended an era and likewise a profession that is in danger of being lost (permanently or terminally).

Now very much into twilight of a long life a nostalgic look back on how it evolved since earliest memories should be attempted, I recall lorries conveying black and tans (as they were called) passing our house and to be told not to stay where we would be seen, it was known they had fired on seeing people at windows.

My parents, father Francis Kelly, mother Susan Meehan, were both Co Cavan born. He the fifth of eight sons. He had three sisters. She, youngest of three daughters, also three brothers. My father, after primary school worked and lived with his mothers' cousin Fr Pat McGauran. Mother, at 18, sailed to New York, worked there for eight years and made her first return visit and remained.

When my father felt it was time to consider marriage and a family and with only primary education, the only option was to secure a farm. He secured a forty acre farm in Drumarigna with a recently constructed one and a half storey slated dwelling, Parish of Lower Drumreilly. He and Susan married in February 1916. I, their first born, arrived February 1917. By mid 1929 two more boys and give girls and joined me.

Pupils of local families attend Lisacarn School (Ballinamore Parish) two miles away, but by crossing a steep hill through fields, the journey was cut by half.

Teachers there were two females. At my age of twelve my two brothers and I were transferred to Aughawillan our Parish, where the principal was a male.

Even at primary you meet like minded pupils to yourself. This opportunity to broaden the horizon and find some from each and who have remained cherished and trustworthy ever since, even distance apart has not caused that friendship to wane.

At the age of fifteen my schooling ended, a happening I longed for. I also longed to be trusted at working the horse, a taste of which was experienced when I was placed in the saddle of a 16.2 hands horse at the age of nine and ridden to Pat Gormleys forge in Ballinamore for a new set of shoes.

It should be stressed this animal possessed an ideal temperament, perfect in every way for one even of my young years to use him. With education ended immediately I was permitted to go into town for cart loads of feeding stuff and other goods for the country shop we ran then. A real thrill was got by getting the reins driving two horses mowing meadows. An equal thrill was trotting the horse in our back to back traps.

By 1937, farmers had to earn enough to live on from other sources due to the effects of the economic war. From mid January until early April, I got carting from Corgar quarry to Garadice

in preparation for tarring the road from Cavan border at Lisnagun. At the outset, I was informed that nine runs had to be my aim for the day. Full and empty by hand eighteen tons and a slow moving animal doing 17 miles each way left little time for delay.

In early 1937 was a test of my stamina, the latter part brought a most favourable result to the year as a whole. Back drawing mid August to early October from the same venue on towards Newtowngore, eighteen carts in all with a different horse who was faster moving. I still regard that period as the most enjoyable holiday of my life.

By 1942, while this animal was still doing his work as well or better than most, it was prudent to have a replacement on the farm. I cycled to Cavan Fair, bought a young animal, a slow mover reluctant to trot on an ice covered road. Reached my destination at 3am the next day.

He was the first of three I purchased there and trained over a five year period. Each one was better than the one that preceded it. During those years before motorised transport took over. I spent most of springtime with two horses turning sods to form potatoe ridges for neighbours. We were tempted to sell horses at a profit and this necessitated the purchase of a number of trained horses. This was a very fulfilling period.

In the forties, I would have viewed with disdain someone who suggested that the latter half of my life would be lived without even one of those lovable animals in my possession. Alas, we can't predict accurately what our future holds.

Back: Michael, Eugene, Frank, Sr Felim (Mai), Fr Conleth, George, Jim & Pat Front: Úna, Rosaleen, Eileen & Lily. Inset Father: George, Mother: Elizabeth. Eldest son: John Joe