

Carbon Footprints Kinlough in the 50s

Battie White

WE HEAR A lot of talk about climate change nowadays, and the devastating effects carbon pollution is having on the planet. From destructive storms to food insecurity caused by altered weather patterns, there's no questioning that carbon pollution is having a harmful effect on the planet. We are being constantly exhorted to reduce our 'carbon footprint', i.e. to reduce activities which add to the release of carbon dioxide and other so called greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Walk instead of driving, eat locally produced food rather than food produced a thousand miles away, reduce/reuse/recycle—the list goes on. We have all kinds of experts in print, on radio & TV and, of course on social media, telling us how to reduce our carbon footprint, for the good of mankind in general and of our own health in particular. Such advice is often to be found in the 'Lifestyle' sections, and is delivered with such breathless enthusiasm as to almost persuade us that it really is the *Next Big Thing*.

So, what's new? Welcome to the sustainable, environment-friendly, and low carbon world of Kinlough in the 50's. We got our milk from Whitten's dairy down the street, fresh from the cows the same day. I always remember the dairy being cool, even in Summer, and the milk covered carefully with fine muslin cloth. As a child I often walked out to the Creamery on the Uragh road, and got fresh cream straight from the separator. Fresh organic vegetables? Easy. Just go to Phil McGowan's up the Manorhamilton road. There Phil or Mary would get you cabbage, lettuce, onions, carrots, shallots, straight from the soil—the freshest and

most wholesome food you could get anywhere—no chemicals, no additives, no artificial colours, no long distance transport in massive diesel-guzzling trucks—just good locally produced food.

Connolly's Butchers, now run by Al Connolly, previously by his father Alec, and before that by Alec's father Terry, supplied quality meat to Kinlough and the surrounding area from their own abattoir in Kinlough, from cattle and sheep raised locally. How different things are today, when meat can be sourced in Argentina or Brazil, frozen for months and transported huge distances to the customer by air, ship and refrigerated truck, clocking up thousands of air miles.

Almost every family had a few hens scratching around the place, so there was no shortage of eggs, guaranteed Irish organic free range eggs.

Foraging is a term we frequently here nowadays, and we have foraging experts running courses, and hotels organising 'foraging weekends'. Well, as a child we never heard the word, but foraging is what we all did, picking blackberries and bringing them home for our mothers to make delicious jams. Which brings me to the reuse and recycling of jam pots. Large two lb. pots brought back to the shop were worth a penny, with the smaller one lb. pot worth a halfpenny. So for an hour's work you could easily amass the sum of sixpence, enough to buy a gigantic ice cream wafer from Mrs Ronan. Glass recycling wasn't confined to jam pots. The local pubs bottled their own Guinness porter in those days, complete with their own labels.

The latest initiative to promote health

among children is to encourage them to actually walk to school, as opposed to being cooped up in the back of the car stuck in a traffic jam, while Mummy or Daddy fume over the steering wheel, trying not to explode. So, guess what, we have a National Walk to School Week once a year in the merry month of May! What an amazing innovative idea! Well, again Kinlough was way ahead in the 50's. Everybody walked to school, and every week was Walk to School Week. Some walked the half mile from the town, others walked maybe two miles morning and evening, in all weathers. In Summer some children walked in their bare feet. There was no big discussion about this, no recommendations from the Department of Health, no Government Policy. It just happened.

Finally a word on play dates. Nowadays, especially in Dublin, and the larger towns and cities, children are not allowed to play 'on the street' anymore, everything has to be organised to the last detail. Invitations may be issued, children have to be transported by Mum or Dad to the house hosting the 'play date', and after a few hours the whole process of collecting the children and driving them home in the traffic begins again. Back in Kinlough in the 50's it was very different. We went out to play, on the street, up Whitten's Lane or the 'Back Way', or wandered out any of the roads out of the village, without either our parents or ourselves having a care in the world. God only knows what we got up to. There was only one rule that had to be obeyed. When the Angelus Bell rang out at six o'clock, it was time to go home for 'Tea'.