

NEDDY'S LESSON ON GRAVITY

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AS PEOPLE get older they are inclined to reflect on the past, to reminisce. I suppose this is not surprising since the retrospective vista is extensive, there is a lot to look back on—people, pets and things you have known, places you have been to and events witnessed or being part of.

That is not to say that older people do not look forward as much. I, for example have many projects pending, places to go, people to meet, wheels to invent, proposals and plans sufficient to make God laugh.

But back to reminiscing, over the past few years I have occasionally thought about Neddy, our ass, he was an important part of our farming life back in the late 1960's. He was with us from 1968 to 1970, and my memory of him is that he certainly earned his keep, I could tell epic tales of his Trojan work, whether it was carting manure out to the fields, bringing turf from the bog, or the heavy Herculean hauling of hay from the meadows below our house. Not forgetting bit parts in our 'Cowboys and Indians' adventures.

One episode with Neddy remains vivid and grounded in my memory, which I will relate to you. It was the summer of 69,—as the song goes, when I was

close on 11 years of age, my dad conferred on me the responsibility, the power and honour—I was elected— to bring Neddy into Mick O'Connell's forge on Castle Street, Manorhamilton, so that Neddy could have his hooves pared and new shoes nailed on.

Whether it is unconsciously selective or not, but I recall very few rainy days from my youth, and this particular day was just fine as I took the reins, mounted Neddy and headed off on my big adventure. The journey from Corthoon, down Faughary hills, through Curraghfore and Skreeney was uneventful, though the scent of whins and meadow sweet must have been intense, because those rich sweet smells can bring that time back to me, or bring me virtually back in time.

I arrived at Mick O'Connell's sometime after midday, he was busy on other jobs at the time, and indeed no more than for many in the present era—he was contending with change. He was forging out new areas of expertise, using heat and power to meld and weld metal into more than just shoes for hooves.

I waited around until he finished some jobs, and before he went for his lunch he gave me 6d—six pence—to go and get an ice cream for myself—what a lovely

treat. I would have brought some of the ice cream home only the weather was too hot, so I had to eat it all myself. In the afternoon Mick attended to Neddy, and in no time at all he had four new shoes attached to four well pared hooves. My dad who worked in Killasnett Creamery about 200 yards from O'Connell's would call over later to pay for the job, so I thanked Mick and headed off.

I rode Neddy up through the Fairgreen, past Hamilton's Castle on our right, up Sheila More's Brae and through Skreeney. The main road to Ballaghmeehan, which, in our house, was called the lower road, continued on to our left, while we veered to the right onto the upper road towards Corthoon.

We were in no hurry home, since there would always be work to be found on the farm, so I let Neddy take his own steady pace, bedding in his new shoes while he was at it and grabbing the occasional clump of soft sweet grass you get along the roadsides. Thus we sustained our adventure.

The gradient of the road was gentle enough for the next mile and a half, until we got past John Fox's in Faughary, then we faced a series of hills for a little under a mile. Nowadays this is a great test for the many walkers on the road. When we were near the top of the

hill- the highest point on this upper road, I thought I might give Neddy just a little encouragement so I flicked the end of the reins on to his rump. He at that time had settled into a slow steady rhythm on his monotonous march up the hills, so this unexpected and painful encouragement had profound precipitous personal consequences, not for Neddy, for me.

Naturally he was instinctively impelled to remove himself from this encouragement, so he bolted forward in an instantaneous impressive propulsive push, resulting in me being propelled

upwards, parting me from his back seat. He progressed, moved on, leaving me in the past, with my behind in mid air. It was then that the effects of gravity fell into place, I descended from the coordinates of time and space where he had placed me, and was brought down to earth, left right behind in the middle of the road. I tell you I was shook, got quite a gunk with this turn of events and the humiliation of the world giving me a kick in the behind. But guess what? Things could have been worse, I experienced something that was wistfully desired by many in Ireland a few years ago, I got

a soft landing. You see Neddy, relying on instinct and common sense, was taking a steady path, a middle of the road path, and back then this upper road which diverged from the lower road at Skreeney, was the road less travelled, and that made all the difference to me in the past. The middle of the road had a generous lush growth of grass, which softened my landing.

I caught up with him in a few minutes, and we walked home side by side, I took the reins off him and let him try his new shoes across the land. Job done and lesson learned.

ICA MEMBERS AT WORK IN MOHILL LIBRARY REVIVING AN OLD CRAFT LUMRA WOOL MAKING



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