If Walls Could Talk

Aodhán Ó Céileachair

As we travel around rural Ireland we sometimes become sentimental at the sight of a closed up farmhouse. We bemoan the passing of a rich culture and how often do we say 'if these walls could talk'.

The same walls contain the real archives of music, song, dance, chats and yarns. Most of it has disappeared with the crumbling plaster and very little will ever be retrieved. However the walls of one Leitrim dwelling obliges by letting us in on a mother and son chat by the fireside in the 1990s.

I called into Christy Tiernan in the Post Office and got your pension and the few things.

How is Christy keeping, he's a grand man. He is still young enough, not as old as me yet. I often think back and say to myself, wouldn't it have been great if I had some of this pension when I was rearing ye. I have lots now, but money was scarce back forty years ago. Did you see any turkeys for sale on your travels?

There seemed to be a good trade in Mohill yesterday, cocks were making 90 pence a pound and hens were as high as £1.30.

God be with the days when I had the turkey farm. Three of us from this townland, Anne Reynolds, Baby Burbage and myself got into them back in about 1956 to try and make a few extra pounds. We sent the turkey eggs over to Elmbank in Cavan. You weren't paid for them until they were hatched. The poultry instructress would call to pick out suitable turkey cocks for sale. One year I had four that made the grade, which was great. I sold and delivered them and got a cheque for £20... £5 each. It was great money because I had nothing. Oliver had the knees out of his trousers so I went to Mohill and bought him a new pair of corduroys.

Things have changed a sight down the years. I used to send to Clerys for clothes during the sales years ago. I bought my wedding coat there. At that time I was thin and easy fitted. I remember the coat was navy blue with them big shoulders and it cost *ninteen and eleven pence*. I got a pattern and made my wedding dress. It was petrol blue–a greenish blue and it was lovely. Severals borrowed the pattern after.

Where did the men get the suits back then?

Well they couldn't buy them off the peg so they went to the local tailor and got measured up and got the suit made. There were several tailors around the country. Back in the twenties and thirties tramp tailors came to work for John Joe McGarry in Drumhass, that's Michael's father. John Joe and the father before were tailors. John Joe would have several books of patterns for suits, all of different material which he could order for his customers. The tramp tailors used ceili in our house in Annaghoney and would go fishing with your Uncle Phil.

You mentioned there about your wedding. How would it compare to today?

It wasn't as big a deal in my time. Now sure they're planning it for two years in advance. We got married at 8 o'clock in the morning and there wasn't a word of getting anyone to give the bride away. That's a new thing. It was a double wedding, me and Pakie and your Aunt Annie and Pat Flynn. My father didn't come for there was no one to mind the house. Granny here didn't come either. When we came back here for the wedding breakfast she was putting in the cows to milk.

How did the honeymoon go, or was there any?

We went on our honeymoon to Barry's Hotel and this is the interesting part. We got a taxi to Longford and got a bus from there to Dublin. Fuel was so terrible scarce that the bus ran out of petrol in Mullingar - that was in 1942. We had to stay in the local hotel. When we got there they had only two vacant rooms, one had a double bed and the other had a single bed. The debate took place as to who was going to have the dou-

ble bed. Well it was left to the men because we were a bit shy and didn't know what to say. We ended up with the double bed because Pakie was too fat and him and me wouldn't fit in the small bed. I often laugh when I think back. That wasn t bad enough, but when we got to Dublin the Germans had bombed the North Strand and put the fear of God in us.

You mentioned the other day about flitting.

In my own time the flitting was gone out, but I remember seeing a man from this townland bringing his sister's flitting to Ballinamuck before she got married. He brought it on an ass and cart, quilts, pillows, sheets, bed clothes and it had a stick standing up on the cart with a white rag on the top of it, which let people know it was a flitting. You never flitted on a Saturday–'Saturdays flitting was a short sitting' I don't know why this was because no one left that time.

Did you hear anything from Mel, or how is he?

God help him he's getting lots of it. He broke the chest bone in that accident. I promised to give something to St. Vincent de Paul in Mohill if he comes alright but Anna says I was better sending thc money to the nuns in Drumshanbo. They live on donations from the public.He isn't that well, getting it hard to breathe. Mary Gaffney tells me they cannot set the chest bone or ribs either. Is it backwards and forward that these hospitals are going. When my father broke his ribs back about 1924 he went down to Crafty Bohan, the bonesetter at Cloone and he made up a plaster of pitch and burgundy and put it on the ribs and he was better in no time.

What happened your father that time?

He was in Mohill with the ass and cart and was hit by a car and upset the cart and broke the ribs. If that was now he'd get thousands, but them times weren't like now and sure it wouldn't be lucky anyway. When I broke my leg I went down to Kate Doherty, Guard Owen's mother, and she set it.

How did you come to break the leg?

I broke it the year your Granny died, God rest her, that was 1947. Well I was down in the back house behind the shed. There was an auld wet dunghill outside the door. When I came out I saw one of my little chickens drowning in it and I ran like hell to save her and the ground was rough and I came down.

Were you listening to the deaths today?

There was no one dead from around. I heard on Shannonside that the teachers might be going on strike over class sizes. When I was in Drumgownagh School Master Dominic had about 60 boys in the room. I don't know in God's name how he managed that crowd. His wife Mrs Higgins taught me. We learned as much that time in the National School as they learn in the secondaries now. A half-hour a week was set aside for dressmaking, breadmaking and science. We were taught History and Geography through Irish. She was a very conscientious teacher. She told me years after I left school that she felt responsible if any of her pupils went wrong in later life.

Can you make the stuffing for the turkey?

I will, you might bring me into Mohill to get the Christmas shopping, the whiskey is far cheaper in Sean Beirnes than in Longford. You're falling asleep there in the chair, you better go home and go to bed. Mind yourself on the road and wait till I get the holy water. God Bless you.

Successful Year for Carrick-on-Shannon

Padraig Glancy, President Carrick Chamber of Commerce, Shane G Flynn, Vice President MBNA & Liam Farrell are pleased with the progress in Carrick-on-Shannon.