

MEMORIES OF GROWING UP IN CAHERGUILLAMORE

By Father John Donworth, PP

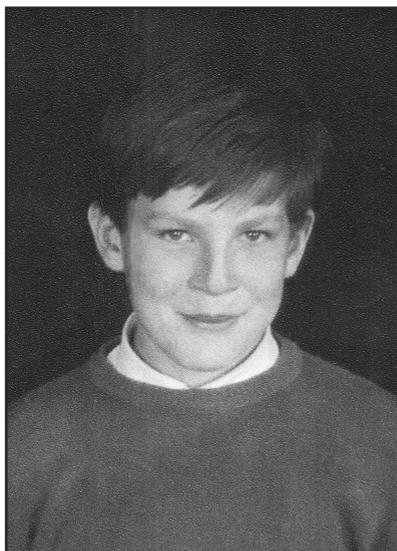
I was born in the late 1940s into a farming family at Caherguillamore. I have passing memories of the old world, which remained in place for the first few years of my life. There was a big open fire in the kitchen where all the cooking took place. Irons hung from a crane over the open flames from which kettles, pots and bastible hung. I remember the oil cloth on the mantelpiece.

I also remember the oil lamps being lit each evening; they had wicks that needed trimming. These wicks soaked up the paraffin and when touched by fire, they lit up.

All work inside the house and outside in the farmyard was very labour intensive. Clothes were washed by hand using bars of soap and a washing board that had glass panels – clothes were rubbed up and down to remove dirt.

The old sheds were there for the cows; they were long narrow buildings. Cows were held in place by two long pieces of timber that came together at the animal's neck and which were held in place by a piece of iron clasped on top. During the wintertime, hay was put in front of the cows; they could stand up and lie down at their places. All milking was done by hand.

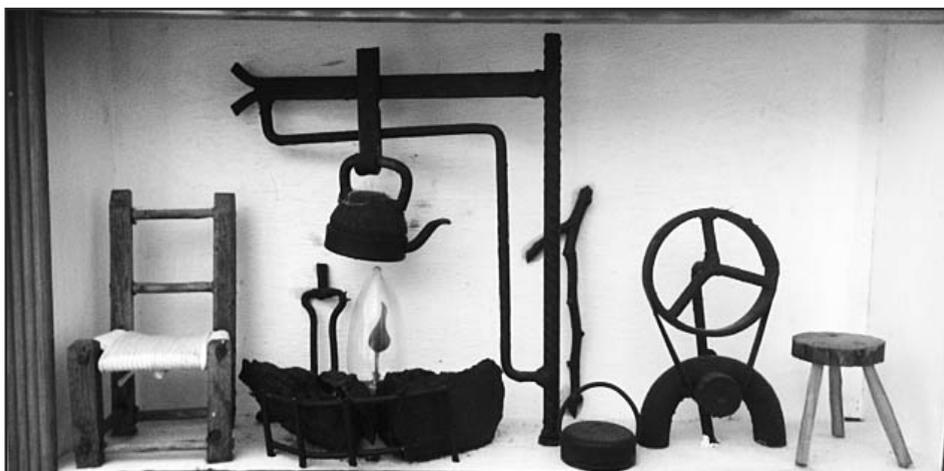
Summertime was for saving hay that was cut by the mower; the hay was turned and tossed by turner. I remember the machinery for collecting the hay and making rows of it. Wynds were stacks made by forking hay into large cone-shaped piles. The bottoms of the wynds had to be pulled out by hand and often thistles with their spikes were a problem. Bringing the hay from a meadow to the hay barn



A youthful John Donworth.

was always fun. The wynds had to be pulled by thick ropes onto a hay float – a long cart that could be dropped to the ground near a wynd – and then the hay was pulled by ropes attached to levers, onto the hay float. The best time on the meadow was when the tea arrived in the afternoon which was brought in boilers (they were containers for boiled sweets) with bread and jams. The tea never tasted so good. In those days, the meadows were full of wildlife: frogs, grasshoppers and corncrakes were abundant and so were pheasants.

Things changed suddenly when I was about four with the installation of electricity. I remember the first night the electric light was turned on in the kitchen when everything looked much brighter, and the dirt that we never noticed before was now very evident. All things electrical followed: the washing machine, the cooker, the kettle and the iron. Now – no more need for open fires, paraffin lamps,



A typical farmhouse kitchen in the 1940/50s.

washing boards and big bars of soap! Soon the pony and trap gave way to the motor car. A new era had arrived.

Grange School was about a mile away from home. I followed my older brother there the first day with no one holding my hand. The classroom was a big room with four windows in it. Mrs O'Donnell was the teacher who taught us all the basics. We children were afraid of her, but she had a gentle side to her that remained nearly hidden. I remember one autumn when Mrs O'Donnell made Christmas toys out of felt – the toys were stuffed with white material. She was gifted with her hands, and those toys were given to each child that Christmas.

The source of heating in the classroom was a big open fire and all the older children were asked to bring some wood for the fire at the beginning of the school year. It was stored in an empty room. Just before lunchtime, the children were invited

to bring their glass bottles filled with either tea or milk close to the fire to heat the contents. Sometimes the bottles exploded from the heat.

A visit from a mouse or even a rat to the classroom was not unusual; they were regular visitors too to most homes. You would need to be desperate to pay a visit to the toilets; they were definitely ‘third world’ – beyond description. The playground for the children was on a steep slope and if children ran down too fast, they would fall over the wall onto the roadside. Health and safety did not exist anywhere in those days.

A little bit of mischief often occurred going home from school. Sweet ripe apples were always a target in an orchard raid. Cattle and donkeys often grazed on the roadsides. The cattle would be driven over the ditch, and there would be a challenge as to who would get up and ride the donkey, usually an awkward and stubborn animal that would dump you off as quickly as you got on board. I remember another incident involving eels. Coming home from school we saw a long pipe sticking out of a river and we decided to pull it out. I was dressed for the summer, wearing shorts, tee-shirt and sandals with no socks. An eel slipped out of the pipe and managed to wiggle in between my foot and sandal – “Michael Flatley” could not hold a candle to me with the dance I did in horror, thinking it was a snake.

I feel very blessed to have been raised in Caherquillamore – we had good parents and we always got along with our immediate neighbours. Our family farm was more like a zoo with all kinds of animals and birds. The dawn chorus was a regular feature of the early morning and in springtime, birds nested in every tree and shrub. I know the sound of every bird and can identify every wild animal. Sadly, over the years there has been a dramatic decline in all wildlife and farmyards today are rather dull and boring places.

The Church was part of the life of every family; there was weekly Mass and weekly Confession for the children. Holy Week ceremonies were held in Bruff and if you were not there in time, you would not get a seat.

At thirteen, I started to live life away from Grange, and thirteen locations later I still pay a weekly visit home. It has remained and will continue to be very close to my heart.

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