

My Local History

Collected from: my neighbour Donal O'Mahony, Clontaff Union Hall

There was a school on the Myross road in the "square field" before the "old" school was built, this school closed in 1884. Behind where our school is now, there was a soup kitchen during the famine.

Donal told me all about how busy Reen Pier was when he was growing up. There were three traders on the pier, a creamery, a mill and a salted fish business. The salted fish was brought from Reen to Skibbereen by horse and cart to meet the train and the fish was sent all over Ireland. During the War, the trains were powered by coal. Sometimes when there was a shortage and there would not be enough coal to keep the train running so the train would have to be pushed for parts of the journey.

Donal was born and grew up in Reen. His mother would walk to Reen pier very early on a Sunday morning and take the Keoghan's "ferry" which was a small boat to Castletownshend. She would then have to walk for almost 2 miles to the Church in Castlehaven for Mass at 8 am. His dad would stay at home to mind the children and when she came back he would walk to 10am Mass in Union Hall. Donal had to take this trip to Castlehaven Church on his Confirmation Day.

During the war Willie Crowley had the only car in the Parish. There were shops all over the Parish of Union Hall. There was a shop in Cooscroneen, Cahergal, Ardragh and in the village there was Fullers, O'Donovan's, Chrissy's, Dan O'Donovan's and a shop in the post office.

Donal spoke about rationing, he said everything was rationed. No farmer was allowed to kill his pig. There were shortages of Butter, sugar and oil; there were no bicycles as there was a shortage of rubber for tyres. There was no white bread or loaf only black; he said it was made from barley.

He told me this rhyme:

*"God bless De Valera and Sean Mac Entee,
They gave us the brown bread and rationed the tea,
They rationed cocoa and all,
God bless all the men in the Dáil"*

Donal told me about a land mark that he remembered from his childhood, Nelson's Arch or "Peakín" Nelson. It was on the hill over Castletownshend and could be seen from Reen pier. The fishermen used it as a land mark to guide them. It was built in 1805 by a Naval Officer named Captain Wilson and twelve hundreds of his men with eight stone masons in 5 hours; it was destroyed in 1966, just days after Nelson's pillar in Dublin.

