

FRANK KELLY REMEMBERS

STORIES OF LIFE IN KILDALKEY, CO. MEATH

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Frank Kelly was born in Kildalkey on 14 September 1923. He was one of a family of fourteen children.

Frank is deeply interested in preserving the history and personal stories of Kildalkey and the surrounding areas. He is very active in the Kildalkey Active Retirement Association. He was instrumental in the planning and construction of an enclosure around St. Dymphna's Holy Well outside Old Kildalkey Cemetery. This stunning accomplishment was completed in January, 2001 and is a testament to the dedication of the KARA and Frank Kelly.

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ONE DAY AT KILDALKEY SCHOOL ALMS HOUSE, ATHBOY ROAD

When I was about seven or eight years old I can remember very well the hard times we went through as kids. Maybe you could call them the good times. My first move would be serving Mass. Living near the Chapel, I was always for first beck and call and served Mass for the best part of twelve years. I also served stations in the farmers houses. Rickards and Conlons of Cannisle held stations every year. You were always served two slices of toast and more important the half lavoun - a lot of money for a young grosún in those times - two and fourpence for Mother and two pence for myself.

After serving Mass I'd get a bucket of water from Shunny Well as there were no terrace houses in the barrack field during those times. I'd then grab my bag for school which was made out of a piece of sack. In it were pencil and jotter and it was easy carrying your gear in those days. I was nearly always first to the school gate. The wall ran along the edge of the yard about five feet high with a narrow gate in the centre. There was a stump of a tree cut years before at the back of the wall. Then the Kildakey kids would be first to come and would take turns watching for Master Daly. He was a fairly tall man with a blue suit and always wearing a flat gray cap. The wall around the Priest corner was fairly high so all you could see at first glance was this gray cap bobbing up and down. Once the word went around, cap in sight, everyone ran for the door, lined up and not a word was spoken. We would hear his steps coming to the gate and the minute it was opened we froze. From then on it was a different life, a different world built in fear of school teachers, priests and policemen. And believe it or not, if you happen to go down to the Village late in the evening you would be run home by older people who were having the craic on the Village square. Master Daly would already let us in, naturally enough walking after him to the classroom. Then the fire was lit and the room swept. During that time he would always be pairing pencils. But, the most important item of all was the cane; long and yellow about eighteen inches long with a round handle. Just before he would call the Roll he would always make sure to test the strength of this cane on the palm of his hand to put a bit of fear in you. But when I think of it now the more puzzled I get. He taught us the Penny Catechism. Number one, count your few pennies if you had any, very little Irish and most of all how to read the three Foot Rule. I didn't know how many feet were in an inch or how old I was, sixteen or seventeen until I

thing I was not good at. I will always remember what he used to write on the blackboard: “The Ploughman throbs his weary way Homewards.” And another one was: “Here lies His Head upon this lap of earth, a Youth his Fortune and his Fame unknown.” And all this would be beat into you with this yellow cane. He had a special way for slapping you. He would stand sideways to you, hold your wrist and you didn’t know how many slaps you were going to get. It all depended on the humor he was in. The only way you knew you were getting the next slap was that he would squeeze your wrist, then you just had to shut your eyes and wait for it especially if you were getting two slaps; not one on each hand but the two slaps on one hand. For a child of nine or ten, your hand would be fairly numb. It was nothing to see four or five of us crying at the one time. Kids that misbehaved themselves would be sent to the Headmaster for punishment. Miss Fulham taught the younger ones in the upstairs room. She married a policeman by the name of Mann who was stationed in Athboy and died later on. R.I.P.

CLOTHES AND CRAWLING CRITTERS

The clothes we wore in those days depended a lot on what number you were in a big family. Mother had a full time job sorting out bits of good clothes to patch mostly trousers. There were no belts so you had to depend on the braces and that meant buttons. You would see some grosúns with a mixture of buttons, both black and white, stitched with white thread and white buttons with black thread. Since thread was so scarce, it didn’t matter what colour the thread was as long as it held the trousers up as there was no underpants in those years. Trousers were mostly hard tweed and when you happen to get wet it would burn the inside of the legs off you. You had one special rigout for Sunday. The minute you arrived home, off with the duds as Mother used to call them and on with the rags. The favourite way to spend Sunday was climbing Crab Trees. There would be as many as twenty. Three or four grosúns from the one family always was the best craic. If there had been a buck goat sighted in the area, the hunt would be on in full and we would travel miles and miles across ditches and hedges and when the buck goat was sighted, the craic was to surround him, catch him and see who would stay on his back the longest. Now at a certain time of the year the smell of the goat was very strong and would stick to your clothes for days. Another game we had at school was Running the Gauntlet. There happened to be one very

strong bloke by the name of Mick Quinn from Baskinagh. Between big and small there would be about seventy boys all told. We would line up two rows from the wall down the field when Mick would get the word, he would take off full blast down the middle of the two lines. Everybody would have a leg or an arm out. But when Mick would be getting close to you, you would draw them in fairly quick. I hurled with Mick years after. They had a half Greyhound which nearly everyone had for catching the rabbit for the pot of soup. Mick came home one evening carrying the rabbits and also the Greyhound across his shoulders, went into the old thatched house and they got it hard to get him out. They brought him to the mental hospital in Mullingar where he died years later. He's now buried in Kildalkey Old Cemetery.

We don't see much lice these days but, by Hell, we had our share when going to school. There was two breeds of white lice; body lice, one on the head was all white but the one on the body had a black spot on his back and they did not mix. Children going to school were crawling with lice. They were even on their school bags. They would stick on anywhere. Some parents would try to control them but others couldn't care, with the result that there was lice all over the place. I remember Mother well. She would have the chair parked inside the door waiting especially for the girls with the long heads of hair. We weren't too bad as Mother always shaved our heads with an old hand clipper. She would run the comb on the lads fairly quick but the girls were a different story. The comb was a fairly strong object about four inches long, real fine teeth on one side and rough teeth on the other. Mother had the knack of combing and when she was finished with you there wasn't many lice left. Mother had a big long nail on her thumb which was grown especially for this job: she should run it along the face of the comb and kill lice and ticks. I will just go back to one incident that happened. Talk about fear of schoolteachers! The word went around that Master Daly and Mrs. Daly were on their evening walk. Everyone disappeared mostly across the ditch into the back field until the all clear signal went out. It was always one of the older ones that was on the lookout. There happened to be oats in the back field at the time and it was all in hand - fifteen acres of stacks. Albert would be seven or eight at the time and when we were all gathered together there was no Albert. We searched and searched still with no sign. Extra help had to be get and we found him way down near the five acres fast asleep under a stack. It gives an idea of the fear that kids had of any kind of authority in those times.

I have told you a bit about lice. Now we will start on the Red Fleas; a very different type of character altogether. In the first place, he was a lot more plentiful and would always congregate where there was plenty of human blood. That was one insect that could suck it out especially around your neck where there would be tight clothes such as a shirt buttoned tight. He was made for the job with two big long legs at the back when he would get in between the neck of your shirt and the skin, there would be hundreds of little red spots for days after. Mother used to make us turn down the neck of our shirts when we would be going to bed. The straw tick was a real breeding place for them. Mother would gather the sugar bags, split them open and re-sew them like a big wool sack. When the thrashing time would come, we would be running with our bags for oaten straw. It was softer and cleaner than wheat straw and good clean oats chaff for the pillow material and for oaten flour bag pillows, the same thing again, opened and re-sewed. We would fill this big tick and Mother would pack it and then stitch it with a big sacking needle and twine. In this cottage the boys slept in one room and the girls in the other. We would haul this big tick up the stairs and would be all going to bed early that same night. But after a while when the oaten straw would get brittle with the weight and the heat, that is when the Red Fleas would be waiting to strike. They would lie low during the day with their bellies full of blood but with the presence of body heat then you would know all about it. Mother, Lord have mercy on her, would wait until the flies would be out. Armed with candlestick and candle, she would squeeze the joints of the bed clothes between two thumb nails, killing hundreds of fleas every night. There was not D.D.T. in those years. People had to use paraffin oil during those years mostly for lice. You could smell paraffin oil everywhere you went in school, Mass and everywhere. D.D.T. came and that put a finish to the lice and fleas. Thank God.

THE DAY OF THE SENNA LEAVES

Now, there was another craic. Mother, God be good to her, was always to make sure we had our compliment of dosage every year and that meant the kneaded Senna Leaves. You could buy them in small packets. They were just like leaves off the privet only very dry. Mother would coddle them in the saucepan on a low fire and when they were well stewed and cooled off, you got your

cup full. What the people believed in those years was that you had to have a least one dose in the spring time during the growth and at the fall of the leaf. The belief was in case there was anything starting to grow and at the fall of the leaf give you a good cleaning out for the winter but that was only the start of it. Twelve of us in the family and everyone with their cup of Senna. About two hours later your guts would start growling and then you might look out. This is where the great saying came about The Long Coat. There were no toilets in those years, only dry toilets. Father had one rigged up at the back of the house with a few sheets of galvanize. Now, anyone that had taken the Senna before, knows all too well that there was no warning. There was a certain area that you were confined to and you dare not go outside that area. From experience you wore no trousers and the girls were no different but this is where the long coat came in. Mother would give you advance warning so that you would have your long coat sorted out. When the final day came, everyone was ready. Now what happened when everyone got the urge together! I can remember it well. When you ran to the toilet there was someone there already. You knew by seeing a long coat hanging from the branch of a tree that the toilet was engaged, but what could you do? You were waiting outside with your knees crossed and squeezing your stomach, trying to keep the Senna from moving. As if that wasn't bad enough, while you were waiting outside, someone else would come flying around the corner past you. By them keeping their knees real tight together, everyone in the same boat as yourself. We often have a good laugh about it when we meet someone. For those of the same age group as ourselves, we will never forget the Day of the Senna Leaves.

THE YEAR OF THE BIG SNOW, 1929

I was seven years old and attending school at the Old Alms House on the Athboy Road. The day started off as usual. Our teacher was Mrs. Bird of Carnisle and Master Daly was Principal teacher. It started snowing early in the morning. Of course, the Master wouldn't send us home, keeping us until about 2 o'clock. By that time we nearly couldn't get out of the gate. There would be about eighty boys and maybe more girls. He let us out too late. We made our way to Paddy McGauley's forge. A bunch of us heading for the Trim Road couldn't catch our breaths. We held on to one another and reached Carrigan's shop at the Canal Gate. Mrs. Carrigan let us

in lucky enough and we stopped there for the night. We had no contact with the outside world. The snow came down from Moyrath forming a huge snow drift of twenty feet high over Hesnan's trees. We were lucky we stopped in Corrigan's or we would never have gotten through the drift. Master Daly was blamed for not letting us out a lot earlier but who were we in those days to say anything. Father and Matty Malone, with the help of neighbours, cut their way, digging with shovels, and when the snow melted down the path they made was along on top of the bushes. If Mrs. Corrigan at the Chapel Gate hadn't taken us in we might have all been smothered. We would never have reached home.

TWO WHEELED TRANSPORTATION

Father had a tough time during the war years. It was hard to keep a bike on the road. First off there was no tyres to be had and no spare parts. The tyres that could be had were a bad type of cruiser tyre that wouldn't last very long. Father worked on the Council for years, mostly breaking stones on quarries. They were put out on the road by horse and cart and his pay would depend on how many loads of stone that would be put out for him. There was a quarry at Cloneycavan outside Ballivor and Father would have to ride there morning and evening. Mother would be watching the clock and when there would be no sign of Father I would have to head off on Mother's high bike. I would see Father coming in the distance. The wheel would be after being blown out. That would be up around Dick Foxes. Again I would get home walking the bike. Father would have his tea drank and then the craic would start when we tried to mend this bike. First, there was no electric so the bike had to be brought into the kitchen and a paraffin lamp set up on a chair. When you would check the damage you would nearly always find out that it was a blow out and that would mean a big tear in the tube which was probably half rotten anyway. From experience you would always keep old tubes and try to cut good pieces of patches out. At that time you could not buy boxes of patches like now. All you could get was a single tube of solution so you had to do with whatever you had. Now, if the tube did blow out that was your hard luck because it usually brought a piece of the tyre with it so you had so other option but to patch the tyre and tube. Now that you had no spare tyre, what you had to do was to cut a piece of old worn tyre, making sure to cut the wire out of it so that it wouldn't cut the tube, patch

both as best you could and hope for the best when you were going or coming from work. When you heard a bang, you just got off the bike and started walking. You knew what was after happening and also what faced you when you got home and tried to mend a bike with the help of a paraffin lamp. If Father failed to mend the bike, he would have to bring Mother's old high bike and it was on it's last legs as well. The Council would never leave my Father around locally. They would always send him to Ballivor or Athboy and send the Ballivor or Athboy Council men around here, no explanation. The little black can was always tied on the carrier five or six months out of the year, frost or snow. Trying to bail your can on the side of the road. Flasks were not heard tell of nor were topcoats or rubber boots. Father always made sure he had the sugar sack. Sugar came in sacks in those days and they had to be real close to keep the sugar from getting through. All the Council men wore them and the rain couldn't get through them. There were no unions, so you worked right through. Father would leave her in the morning on a bad bike headed for Ballivor, spilling rain, complete with sack, two old hats and strips of sacks tied round his legs, work all day, sit on a little bag of straw breaking stones. There were no holidays and you were also paid by the fortnight. Mother had to run the book in Peter Ganny's in Kildalkey and be paid by the fortnight.

WE HAVE A POUND FOR CHRISTMAS

DECEMBER, 1930

One day in my life that I'll never forget was Christmas. The weather was very cold. Snow and ice and real bad fog. Poverty was the order of the day. At that time Father had no work. There was seven in the family at that time and the last job Father had was Ploughman with Andy Brogan of Moatown. Wages at that time was nineteen shillings per week. The time came to give the ploughmen a raise so Andy gave Father a raise of sixpence. That may sound not a lot but it was a lot of money for that time. You could get a loaf, an ounce of tobacco and box of polish for same. Ploughmen weren't wanted during the winter so that is why my Father was idle. A week before Christmas, Kit Crooks, a small Portanob farmer, pulled up with pony and cart. Kit being

around eighteen stone (about 250 lbs.) needed transport. Complete with pork pie hat, double silver watch chain across his chest, he rested on the small gate in front of the door. I happened to be not far away and he shouted “Is your Father in, Grosún? Tell him I want to see him.” I contacted Father and they talked at the gate for a while. When Father came in, the first thing he said was “Jane, we will have a Pound for Christmas. He has a field of turnips and he wants them snigged for Christmas.” For two or three days after we could not move with snow and frozen fog hanging from the trees and bushes. Three days to go and no break in the weather. That evening in the shed Father was making something with the light of a candle. He looked at me and said “I’m making a snigger for your brother, Kevin”. By the way, a snigger was made out of a short piece of the blade of an old scythe and piece of elder stick of which you could push the soft centre out. Kevin being around ten years of age at the time was a couple years stronger than me. I was around seven. Lastly, Father said “I will call you in the morning, hail, rain or snow. There is nothing to eat in the house and we will have to go.” I didn’t sleep too well that night, huddled together in a big straw mattress. Coming early morning, Kevin would say “I think I hear Daddy below trying to light the fire.” Eventually we got the shout at half six. The clothes we had were easy to put on. Definitely no underclothes. They weren’t heard tell of at that time. We wore a little jersey with the three buttons at the neck, short legged trousers and you couldn’t figure out which was the original trousers with the patches that were stitched on by my Mother. Kevin was in the same boat as me. We eventually made our way down the stairs. Father had tea ready and a couple of slices of wheaten bread off the big griddle cake. Kevin was the first to speak. He said “What is the morning like?” There was silence for a minute and then Father said “Not too good - bad frost and the fog is hanging off the bushes as icicles.” We togged out as best we could, not having much clothes on any of us. Having no bikes, we headed across the fields about three miles to go, still dark and the Black Lake River to cross. Father would go in front as he knew where all the gates and gaps were. At that hour of the morning with the countryside frozen stiff, my Father with two little Grosúns. When we got to the river, the only way you could cross was by way of a length of Bog Oak and it wasn’t even flat. Father went first and carried me and then came back for Kevin. There was a little bit of light starting at the time so after about ten minutes walk, we arrived at the field and the sight that greeted us was one mass of frozen turnips. I

could walk in front of them baiting the ice off the leaves. Kevin could pull them but pull and snig were two different things. We worked as best we could, Father going up on two rows then coming back again to help us out. Dinner time came and we had brought bottles of tea wrapped in old socks along with long slices of griddle cake. We ate standing up on a frozen headland, nobody saying a word. Still a lot of turnips to be snigged, we kept plugging away. It wasn't very bright during the hours of daylight but it looked as if dark was falling. What made things worse was there was a big ash tree at the far end of the field and that's where we would be finishing if we were going to finish. I still kept knocking the ice off with my ash stick. Father working like a machine and Kevin feeling the terrible frost. When I got near enough to the shade of the tree, the leaves were that badly frozen that I couldn't beat the ice off them. I stood for a minute and started crying. Father never said a word but lifted me into his arms, carrying me to the headland, turned around and Kevin was standing frozen. He carried Kevin over and put him standing beside me and said "Try to keep yourselves warm, Grosúns. If there is a God above he will have to help me." We stood for a long time not seeing him. But we could hear him every time he would pull a turnip there would be the sound of ice breaking on the leaves. For what seemed like a long time the noise stopped. Next thing Father was standing beside us. "Thanks be to God that day is over." We thought we had nothing to do only go over to the farmer's place nearly a mile away and get our Pound. Father thought different. We made out way down along the Headland out on McMahan's Boreen. Father was carrying us at this time as we were almost crippled with gluriocs. Because of this, Father said "I will leave you here under this tree and I will carry on as fast as I can and be back to you." That was alright. Half an hour went by and there was no sign of Father. Must be nearly an hour, no sign. We were that cold that we couldn't cry but we couldn't stop our stomachs from jumping. At last we heard someone walking when Father came near to us. He just said "This is one day I will never forget." He lifted the two of us in his arms and started the long walk home trying to get two frozen and hungry Grosúns across the River, the black dark and the frozen fields. When we came to the top of Moyrath Hill he could see the light of the paraffin lamp in the window. We were not too bad with the heat of my Father's body carrying us all the way but when he let us down to stand on the kitchen floor we collapsed. What we hadn't realized was our feet with bad footwear and bad socks, were ringing wet all day.

kept my Father when he left us standing under the tree: Years after, when Christmas would come around, and when I was a lot older, Mother said to me “Son, do you want to know the real truth? Well, sit down there and I will tell you. When your Father left you under the tree that night down the Boreen out on the road and on to Crook’s house. He knocked at the door and the wife came so he said ‘we have the turnips finished. Could we have our Pound.’ Mrs. Crooks said, “O, Jack, you have come at the wrong time. The boss is at his tea. You will have to wait.” It took him an hour to eat. He just couldn’t give the pound and let my Father go so we had to wait. That was the type of farmer you had at that time in the 30’s. Thanks be to God we had a great Christmas. With the money, Mother bought a big round brack with the ring in and most important was that we never had a pound of rashers. She fried them Christmas morning in the big cast iron pan. She put them standing round the edge and when she said “go” everyone snapped what he thought was the long one. Father was a tough man otherwise he couldn’t have survived.

Written in December - 1994.

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CHRISTMAS COUNCIL GRANTS

I am writing about Christmas Grants, something that people have never hear of. I am probably the only one left around here who has worked on them.

In the last thirties and early forties there was no work and people couldn't get work. Six weeks before Christmas, you went into the Council Office in Trim and signed on. A couple of days later, you would get word to be at such-and-such a place to commence cleaning a small river or boundaries. The work had mostly to do with drainage and there would always be some local person that would be in charge. There no money and naturally when there was no money, there was nothing to eat. The wages for this work would be about three Pounds per week and it was just those few pounds that would bring us through Christmas. The workers were not supplied with any kind of footwear nor work clothes and we had to simply carry on with the few old rags that we had. I'm sure you can well imagine what the weather would be like in these weeks before Christmas and what it was like to stand in a ditch of water from eight o'clock in the morning until half four in the evening.

I was only seventeen years of age at that time. You were supposed to be over eighteen, but I got the job anyway. We'd get the word to be at a particular place on a certain morning so nobody actually knew who was starting until the bikes began arriving. The first job I was on was at the Black Lake River which was started at the back of Patsy Vaughan's where Hughie Kelly is living now and followed it right through the Fans through Curraghmore on to Paddy Molloy's, then through Rooney's, and on to Higgins' of the Factory Road. We always started at the far end and kept the water running away from us.

The poor unfortunate men, some of whom where in their sixties and some older, had applied and gotten the job. Who could blame them, as they had to get something to eat.

I will give you a run-down now on the others in the gang whom I worked with. I'd thought that I was the youngest but there was one slightly younger than I. His name was Billie Devine from Frayne. He got the job because his father was an invalid. Billie's job was what they called 'breasting the ditch' which was cutting all types of bushes and anything that was in the way. My job was with a long handle drag and I used it to pull out all the bushes on the river bank. Dick Davis, a very lame man, would make a pile for burning. Before going any further, I should tell

you that our ganger was Billie Mulvey, originally from the Wood. He had stopped in at Joe Clark's from Athboy Road at the time but had no previous experience. He'd put our names in a book and keep the time. The men who shoveled along the bottom of the River would be in the water nearly all day; Bill Masterson and Tom Harmon, both well on in years, as well as Matt Smyth and Jack McDaniel. Jim McDaniel was the tea man and, of course, I cannot leave out Paul Madden who lived in Johnny Rooney's house.

As soon as we arrived in the morning, the 'tea man' would collect all the bags to have them near when he would be making the fire. The reason that it was done this way, was to be as near as possible to the men in the river as there was no way that the workers in the river could get up and out of the water as they were all disabled men.

Every morning, it was the job of myself and Billie Devine to hold each man by the arm in order to slide them into the river. When tea time came, it was our job, once again, to get each man's bit of bread and mug or whatever he had, and hand it down to him in the river. The poor unfortunate man would prop himself against the bank, hand up the mug when finished, and carry on until black dark at four o'clock. We could feel the grass crunch under our feet when making our way back to where the bikes were. We never had to hide the shovels or tools after the day's work was done. When we arrived for work the next morning they'd be frozen to the river bank.

All told, I believe that I worked three Christmas Grants. We did a ditch between Potterton's and Tyrell's with nearly the same gang as before except we had an extra man, a bloke by the name Paddy Carroll who lived opposite Potterton's Battalion Gate along with his sister, Helen, and his brother Dinnie. Dinnie was the head gardner in Potterton's and Paddy had a big lump on his neck from roaring when he had no tobacco. He'd be roaring up and down the road at three or four o'clock in the morning and he used to keep shouting "all 'round here is mine, field after field!" He would never sit near when we would be having the tea. But one evening, coming near quitting time, he was walking up and down the field. Billie Mulvey said to him, "Paddy, did you loose something." "I did. I lost my pullover." Billie looked at him and said, "You are wearing it, Paddy." "Well, only that you told me, I would have went home without it." says Paddy. Naturally, he had a nickname. It was 'Plugger Carroll'. When Paddy got a few weeks wages, his sister bought Paddy a pair of hob-nailed boots. It was a different carry on in those

But you had to hold on to them as there was no such thing as bringing them back since you might not get another pair. We were going along a field in Tyrrell's by the name of 'Widows Pasture'. As we were having tea in the corner of the field, Paddy was sitting a bit away from us. Some of the boys said to Paddy, "Them are a great looking pair of boots, Paddy." He said nothing for a few minutes and then all of a sudden he came out with this, "I was wearing them for three weeks before I could get my feet into them."

Another job I'd done under the Christmas Grant program was across Rathcarn and finished up at Meathstown Cross. There were mostly Athboy men working on this job: Larry Mitchell and Arthur Holland, both of Athboy; Big Mick Sullivan and Butty Sullivan of Rathcain, Matt Smyth of Athboy Road and Tommy Masterson who was the ganger. We used to cross Clifton to the Athboy Road which is blocked off now. Jim lived down Clonmore Boreen.

Although we had rough times, there was always a bit of craic. Jim's wife was named Nellie and they had but one hen. When the hen would lay an egg, it would take 'pride of place' on the dresser. When breakfast time came, Jim would shout, "Nellie McDaniel, head or harp for an egg!" All these people had a sense of humor which is sadly missing today.

I short time after these events, I joined the Free State Army and unknown to me at the time, Billie had joined as well. He was posted to the Second Battalion, Collins Barracks and I was posted to Portobello, Second Motor Squad. I met Billie one night on O'Connell Street. Nearly the first thing he said was, "Frank, will you ever forget the FFF Black Lake?" They were hard times. I hope all those people are gone to God.

A true story by Frank Kelly

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RED JIM KELLY OF PORTANOB AND THE BLACK & TANS

Uncle Jim Kelly lived at Portanob, nick-named Red Jim, brother of my father. Mother would always say that when the Tans were mentioned they didn't catch Red Jim or my brother Jack

Sometimes she would tell me stories about them for it seemed that Red Jim was a runner who would carry messages as well as guns and ammunition. Every area had its own special runner and they would transfer news about Black & Tan movements from one area to the other. Red Jim covered the area round Ballivor, Delvin and Kildalkey. There was also another runner in the Athboy Fordstown area by the name of Bradley, nicknamed Diver Bradley. I even have a photo of Red Jim and Bradley taken together.

Well now, this is where Uncle Jack came into it. Jack was a bit of a brain box so he got himself the job of making the explosives. Most of it came from the cordite taken out of live bullets and where he set himself up was under the old hospital at Clondore Delvin. There was a cellar in the basement of the hospital and that's where Uncle Jack worked making the explosives and also where the runners met their contacts. Red Jim hardly ever went home to Portanob. He was too well watched not so much by the Tans but by local spies that were government-paid and they were well known and they were not far away from here.

But Uncle Jim had one great friend, a half greyhound. Not only was he Red Jim's bodyguard but he was also his source of food. He would move from one haybarn to another, on the move all the time during the day. When he would get a chance, he would hunt for the rabbit. He also had his safe houses, people who he could trust, where he could cook the rabbit and then he was off again. He spent almost three years on the run and it took its toll due to the wet and the long cold nights he suffered through.

Granny Ellen Kelly died from T.B. on 24th August 1934 at the age of 87 years, R.I.P. Myself and Kevin and Father went to Portanob for the removal. Uncle Jim took Granny's death very badly. When they brought Granny out in the yard, there was a big scuffle inside and Uncle Jim went for the gun that was over the fireplace and they eventually did take it from him. He died on 15th April 1935, one year after Granny.

There were three men in this area who got divided land from the Land Commission: Luke Sherry, Trimblestown, Tom Potterton, Kildalkey and Red Jim. I think there was about fifteen acres in the field across the road from Carnisle Old School. It was passed on to Pat Kelly, (Uncle Pat) and Mick Bird bought it from him.

Well, about Uncle Pat Gilligan: Pat went walking to Delvin to see where his brother, Jack, was

questioned him. Pat didn't budge so they threw him into the back of the tender and brought him outside Mullingar. They put a rope around his neck, dragged him along the road and then let him out. They fired a few shots into the sky over him and he had to walk all the way back to Woodtown Carnisle Road. The tans were in the barracks in Athboy and there were a lot of Kildalkey boys drinking in John Miggin's Pub in Kaldalkey. When they got a few extra they were mad looking for tans so someone suggested that they attack the barracks in Athboy. The arrangements were made and seventeen blokes volunteered. Pat Gilligan played the war pipes out in front and they were doing great. Pat would look back to see if everything was alright and when they got as far as Waldron's Wood there was a few missing. The route was Ballyfallon and when they got to the road to turn off, Pat had one bloke left. Not much good going with only one bloke.

Mother told me that some of the boys that took to the woods joined the Free State Army and one of them became a Commandant. Corrigan was his name. Harry Brien from down the Wood Boreen, well over six feet tall, engaged the tans from the back of the Piers the Chapel Gate Kildalkey when they came around the bend where young Noel's is now. He let them down the road near our gate and fired. Naturally enough, they pulled up the fenders and fired back. I heard my mother say the crows went mad here at Hesnan's and over at the Abbey Old Graveyard, bullets flying through the trees.

Building time of the year, there was a big ash tree here in our garden and it was always called the Soldiers Tree. Harry Brien wounded one of the Tans and he was supposed to fall in under the tree. Time and time the Tans raided Jimmy Tyrrell's down Clonbarron Boreen but never got anybody until the spy started working. Tyrrell's was a safe house. There was only one way in, at least, that's what they thought. There was a good few of the boys ceiling that night. Mrs. Gerrard used to always tip the boys off when she would hear the Tans tenders coming. But this night they came in across Barber's, across the Trimbletown River. The dogs barking off Tyrrell's bog warned them. The Tans followed the boy up across Clonbarron but were very lucky to escape. A Tan officer was courting a daughter of a well known cloth shopkeeper in Athboy. A certain Kildalkey woman was going in and giving the game away. They were drawing her out and she didn't cop on.

OUR FIRST WIRELESS WITH MICHAEL O'HEHER

The first man to have a wireless set around Kildalkey was James Tyrrell away down in a place called the Curragh at the very end of Clonbarron Borren. It was one of the old round Echo sets driven by wet batteries and you had to get them charged every so often.

What remains of Tyrrell's house is just four walls sticking up out of the grass but it was a very busy house during the time of the troubles. More details about that subject can be found in my story about the Tans.

It was in Mullingar when Michael O'Hehir made his first broadcast and if you wanted to hear the broadcast, you had to make your way to Tyrrell's. It would begin with about 25 or 30 of us heading down the fields at the back of the house. Father always came with us as he always liked to hear the broadcast. When we would eventually get there and there were a lot more people as well who came from all directions. Jimmy would put the wireless outside on the sill of the window so that everyone would have room. There could be as many as a hundred down in Tyrrell's. Sometimes we would go down the back field across the stick between Cloneylogan and Clonbarron, then make our way down along the end of the Gallop's from the end of the Gallop's to the Athboy Kildalkey Road which was called the 'straight mile', the straight where they used to clock the horses speed on.

The next person to invest in a wireless was Peter Ganny from the Pub in Kildalkey. It was a great gimmick to draw the boy to drink the beer. He would put the wireless outside as well. A whole crowd of us would gather across the road at Dick Slevin's, behind the pump where Betty Kelly's house stands now. Peter also bought a Mounis car, the first one around Kildalkey. Someone else bought another wireless with the result that it was a full time job running to get batteries charged especially when there would be All Ireland's coming up. When I previously mentioned Clonbarron, I should say that the people who were living there at the time were: Sir James Nelson and Lady Nelson who had a horse called Poolgowran. This horse won the Irish Grand. I think it was in 1933. A lot of local lads worked in Barber's across the Athboy River. I would also like to mention about brains in those years. Not only had Jimmy Tyrrell the first wireless, but he was also the first person around Kildalkey who had the first camera. He also

could develop his own films. I happen to have one or two very old snaps that were found down in that area. They had to be taken by him but sorry to say, no one knows who the people are that are in them. One very good one with seven or eight people, taken at a threshing mill.

Johnny Tyrell, a brother of Jimmy Tyrell, was accidentally shot outside Tom Potterton's on the Square in Kildalkey. It seems that there were two or three people messing around with an old shotgun. Tom Potterton was one of them. The gun itself wasn't very serviceable according to accounts, it was tied up with wire. It went off anyway and young Johnny Tyrrell lay dead.

The present Johnny McGurl inherited Jimmy Tyrrell's place and in the process of tidying the place, put all the old photos, old gramophones and precious paper work in the loft of the old house in boxes and trunks as James was a very well self-educated man. Cattle made their way in and the house fell down, destroying anything that was left.

A lot of people have no interest in this type of stuff. Drugs now and a new way of life have put an end to any little hope that is left. One in a hundred kids just might have an interest in our heritage which is left.

THE LOVE OF DOGS AND FERRETS

During the war years, there was not a lot to eat so you had to more or less provide for yourself. Almost everyone around here had ferrets, half greyhounds or terriers, all to get the one animal, the rabbit.

You could get a half crown which was good money at that time, with the result that everyone was hunting them, including farmers' sons. My first introduction to hunting was Garret Ward himself and son, Johnny who went every Sunday. They always kept at least two half greyhounds. We would walk half the countryside and carry rabbits all day. Clothes weren't so good in those days and footwear were hob-nailed boots. You were never short of something to eat when you had the pot hanging on the open fire with a few onions, carrots. Mother was a great believer in the pearl barley, good for the kidneys. Father would come along with us and most times he would carry the rabbits or do the digging out of the rabbits. Myself and Johnny Ward ferreted full time during the day time and set snares during the night. Poor old Katie

Ward, Johnny's mother would always have the two cuts of wheaten bread and the rabbits leg for our sandwich. Johnny would say, "Mother, we don't need it...we won't be hungry." But by half three or four o'clock in the evening, we would be glad to have it.

Good ferrets were hard to come by. There were two different breeds: polecat and greyhound. The greyhound was a yellow colour, polecat black and white. I remember myself and Johnny bought one from Phil Fearley down the Athboy Road. It was a greyhound ferret which cost a half crown. He turned out to be one of the best ferrets we ever had. He would break a rabbits neck with one snap. We often got twenty rabbits a day with him.

We also had a dog to match, named Rover, half Collie and half greyhound. When the Ferret would be working in a Burrow, the dog would always catch anything that would come out and stand guard as well when we'd be digging at the back of the ditch.

We had good times and hard but we were happy.

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THE KELLY FAMILY OF PORTANOB

As far back as I can remember, Portanob was where my father was born and reared. Mother would send myself and my brother, Kevin who was two years older than I was, off after school with the three quart can for buttermilk. It was alright going up the Carnisle Road and on to Portanob but the job was carrying the can back. We had the piece of stick about the length of a broom handle, with the nick in the middle so the can couldn't slide. Granny Kelly was still alive during this time. Granddad was dead.

I also remember Uncle Jim, Red Jim, that was on the run from the Black & Tans for years. After a while when I got a bit stronger, I used to go to Uncle Pat to pick potatoes and also quarry gravel with him. He drove gravel and sand with two horses and drays to the Catholic Church in Trim for years. On the way home we'd stop at Cis Coyles Pub in Trim where Loughans Garage is now. Jimmy Kelly, nicknamed Rusty, who is Uncle Mick's son from Ballivor spent years in the Free State Army and when he came out he spent a long time with Uncle Pat at Portanob as there was not a lot of work around at the time. Uncle Pat suffered with arthritis and I remember him in the bed, wound up in a ball. Time went on and he got very bad.

Thomas Elliot Potterton, auctioneer and an old man, who was also stricken with polio, was on this way home from Trim in a pony and trap. I remember it well. He had only one daughter and she was with him in the trap. He pulled in at our gate and came to the door looking for John Kelly. Mother said that he was working on the Council so he said, "Tell him when he comes home to go over to Portanob and take over as he was the second son. There are few bob owed on it but that can be sorted out" and that he was sending Uncle Pat to the home in Trim. Now this is where Uncle Kit's family came to be in Portanob. Who above all people happened to be at our house at the time, none other than Aunt Bridie, Mrs. James Clarke of Ballyboy and they were after getting divided land at Woodtown at the time. So when she heard Mr. Potterton mention Portanob, the jealousy set in straight away. I can remember this exactly the same as the day it happened. The very first thing Aunt Bridie said was, "Janie, you will do no such thing as take over that place. Hasn't poor Johnny Kelly enough to do to hold on to his job besides trying to manage land in Portanob!" And she kept on and on and eventually Mother gave in, getting pen and paper and wrote a letter to Mr. Potterton. I can still see May getting up on this big high bike,

following after Mr. Potterton and Mother not thinking twice to wait for father to come home and see what he had to say. The auctioneer had no option and sent for the next oldest brother and that was Kit Kelly of Crowenstown. He was in Portanob inside a half a day, bag-o-baggage from Crowenstown. Word had it that Kit Crooks gave the few quid to pay the rates, paid back later on. There was a good piece of land with Portanob, big field at Carnisle School sold. The field is where John Davis' house is now at Black Lake corner sold. The field in front of Pat Kiernan's, Margie's corner where Stephen Kelly's home is now gone. Also the gravel pit where Martin Kelly's house is now another field. Paddy Kelly's house also May's, the daughter, and three more fields as well so it wasn't a bad take after all if Aunt Bridie hadn't been there at the wrong time and Father got home in time it might have been a very different story. The only thing Father got from Portanob was a half an acre called Castle Meadow near Moyrath Castle. He got it for a wedding present and believe it or not never got it registered in his own name so it still belonged to Portanob. My father cut the meadow and we used to have a cow in it before the war. But when it came to Father to hand over Cloneylogan, makes his will Malone & Martin Solicitors, Trim where is this Castle Meadow? So they found out it never was registered. They asked me what I was going to do if we have it for over 60 years. They gave a form for Paddy Kelly to sign and everything would be alright. I approached Paddy and he said no, that Castle Meadow could be the gateway to divided land in Moyrath for some of his sons. Solicitors said you can fight him for it and it cost me two thousand pounds. Younger brothers and sisters have grown up and want to know what happened in Portanob. It hope this enlightens them.

Frank Kelly, 1995

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CHRISTMAS EVE AT MARGIE'S CORNER DECEMBER 1941

One thing is always hard to forget and that is when you work in bad conditions. The time I remember most is the pulling and crowning of the sugar beet when it came out. First every small farmer grew so many acres but the labour with it was very hard on the person who actually had to do the pulling and crowning, throw it in rows, fill it into horse drays in wet fields, bad footwear and bad clothes. It then had to be heaped on the side of the road, reloaded onto a lorry with beet forks. The workers have to ride by bike to the train station at Navan, unload again onto the railway carriages, and ride back by bike with the beet fork tied on the crossbar, arriving home around twelve o'clock at night. All of this happening around Christmas time when the weather is real bad.

One evening that I will never forget was pulling beet at Margie's corner which is now where Pat Kiernan's bungalow is now. McMahan's owned the field and nearly always tilled it. They put beetroot in it this particular year around the forties. Myself, Jack Kelly, first cousin Mattie Malone, next door neighbour, and Tommy Harmon worked at the pulling and the crowning. We worked Christmas Eve morning at Margie's corner and all day coming on to dark around four o'clock. We kept going, thinking that someone would give us a shout to quit, seeing that it was Christmas Eve. Five o'clock came with no sign of anyone. In those days you had to keep going until someone shouted to you. We could hear the McMahons across the field in the year rattling buckets, feeding calves and milking cows but still nobody came. The woman doing the year work at the time was Bernies McMahan's sister who later married Joe McGauley and who died in middle age. We got the shout at five thirty. Cold and wet, nobody cared about the human being at that time. Get all the work they could out of you and pay you as little as they could. Mattie Malone, now dead, also Jack Kelly, seventy-one years of age. Myself with two hip replacements.

Frank Kelly, 1994

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ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF FRANK KELLY CATCHING TURF, COOLRONAN BOG

It was 1933, early morning, around the middle of April. I was 10 or 12 years old at the time. My day would start at six o'clock in the morning. Naturally enough, my Father would call me. He, himself, would have been digging in the garden, sowing plants or trying to get a few potatoes down.

My first drive would be out of the big straw bed; oaten straw taken from the back of the threshing mill, put on the few rags of clothes. Mother used to say that anything at all was good enough for the bog. A mug of tea, usually the old marmalade jar with no handle - when you broke it, it didn't cost you anything for another one - then eat a slice of wheaten bread and away with you across Moyrath fields about two and a half miles into McMahan's farmer's yard. There is where all the hustle and bustle was going on. The first thing that would catch your eye would be the big white faced pony under a spring cart, probably one of the first spring carts around the area. They were still solid wheels so the springs took the shock out of it. There would be the farm workers also, the extra bog help: Mattie Malone, R.I.P., Jack (Duggan) Kelly, R.I.P., Tommy Harmon, Bernie and Kit McMahan. The dray would be loaded with the slanes, shovels, spades and the fresh cut bag of grass for the pony. But the most important part was the cardboard box with the two big wheaten griddle cakes along with the homemade butter in a big round ball wrapped in a big white tablecloth, and of course, the fresh farm eggs, not forgetting the kettle and the black saucepan for boiling the eggs. Bennie was the driver, the pony being a strong animal of 15-16 hands high. She would trot the whole road, the best part of seven or eight miles to Canlontown Coolronan. But there was one thing we always watched out for: the time on the clock passing by Ballivor Chapel was never later than a quarter past seven and where do you think myself would be sitting...on the back of the dray on a sack of hay with my two little legs hanging over the tail board.

One morning that always sticks in my mind was the gate we used to go into the bog was right in front of Perry's old house. Tom and Jack, two brothers nicknamed Whitey and Black Bernie,

him, alright, the lad that rung the tail out of our ass.” People were great for the craic in those times, trying to frighten young lads.

We would make our way into the high bank. The pit that we would be cutting on there would be three floors off it from the evening before. The order of the day was two big bog slides that Bernie made himself. The ones with the high back held exactly 208 sods every time. Mattie Malone was sliding so it was his job to turn the slide every time. There would be no stopping except for tea at one o’clock and wouldn’t we be ready for the homemade bread and butter. It was the same hard going for five days that would be enough to supply the house and out houses for the year.

Now the craic comes how much a day was I earning? Well, the truth is one shilling and eightpence a day during the year the year that I went from one farmer to the other. It was hard work and also hard times. I started on Kildalkey Bog with my father around the age of six or seven so I was well used to filling barrows. We had no ass and dray in those days so I used to wheel the wooden barrow to meet my Father in the evening. He worked on the Council for a lot of his life mostly breaking stones in the quarries. I would meet him on the bog with a bottle of tea and the usual homemade bread. He would work on cutting till dark, same carry on the next day again. Farmers in those days exploited the big Catholic families. They would go to the labourers cottage where there would be strong Grosúns for thinning and weeding turnips and marigolds. The usual craic was a penny a drill or if they were a bit long you might get a halfpenny extra. Usually Mother gave a hand to try and get a few pennies extra. Hard times.

MEMORIES OF CHRISTMAS 1928 WHAT DID SANTA BRING IN THOSE DAYS?

Actually there was no Santa for what he was worth but you cannot explain that of the youth or today. This year, 1944, one pound is not even sufficient pocket money. One pound in 1928 would have been a week’s wages and you have to work hard for it, from early morning to late night and what was more, you walked to work no matter how far the job was from where you lived. But, getting back to Santa, we had a Santa in the person of a Mrs. Hubert Potterton of

Road. The church was been taken down now but the site is where Paschal Carr is living now. There was the first big Wolsay car around and Mrs. Potterton would always sit in the back coming home from Service on Christmas Day. She would stop at every house on her route and in those days everyone had big families. One o'clock would be they're time for going home and we would be watching the clock and listening for the noise of the car when she would stop outside the big gate. Mother would keep us down along a table that was under the window. There was only four of us born at that time and discipline was strict. When the car was well gone we were let out and then race for the big iron gate. Hanging on the bars would be something for each child. The older ones got the old Christmas stocking made with mesh and inside the little tin in the toe whistle that would run in and out when you would blow it. There was also coloured chalk and a small draft's board, the favorite drum stick which was a piece of round stick with a round piece of toffee on one end. The Christmas stocking of that time was in the shape of a boat much like the ones of today only there is a lot more in them today. Memories of Christmas always come back to me this time of year.

Francis Joseph Kelly

December, 1994

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