

The Local Shop

My first recollection of the bread man coming to deliver bread to the shop rather than to individual houses, was of a horse drawn by Inglis' bread vans, and a man who ran that was a man called McComb, who lived in Dungannon, and this was a tall van, and he used to sit right up on the top of it. I often wondered in the high winds the thing would blow over, well anyway, it didn't happen. Now, that was my oldest recollection of the bread delivery.

The door to door delivery, well there was a certain amount of it, except Bertie Marshall, who later became a rent collector in the area, for the Rural Council. He ran the bread van and that went around different individual houses, all around the whole countryside, not so much, there were occasional, regular deliveries of vegetables, that sort of thing. Different things that would happen on the farm, there was a pig, the farmer would kill a pig. There was a man Steenson up here, who specialised in pig siking, or pig killing if you like, near where Pat O'Neill lives in Kilnaslee, in fact there were two brothers, Andy and James, I think, well anyway, a farmer out in the country would kill a pig and would cure it, put the side of pig into a creamery can, an old fashioned creamery can and then there was a whole mixture of, I've forgotten the preservative, there was salt was used in the preserving of this beautiful, and it would keep for six months or more in those conditions.

There was no refrigeration of course in 1929 in that part of the world where I was growing up. At the time, bacon, things was delivered in sides, there was huge sides of bacon and the bacon then had to be sliced in a slicer, which was a great mechanism, fascinating as far as a young lad was concerned. The sides of bacon that might have been in the shop, there might have been six or eight different sides of bacon, and that had to be preserved for maybe a fortnight, the only way it could be done actually was my father had constructed at the back of the premises, a great, was a cold store, a little store with no windows just a door and plastered floor, cement floor and walls likewise, and a little tiling, it was really

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very cold and kept that cool temperature throughout the year, and the stored bacon, butter, margarine, lard that sort of material was all stored there. Most shops that would deal in food at all, would sell confectionery, maybe not as extensively as some others. There were very few shops specializing in the sale of confectionery. You would have a shop like the one at Backford, they sold food stuff, bread, tea, sugar, confectionery nails, hammers, everything you understand, and then outside they sold galvanized iron, you had cement, iron, coal and artificial fertilizer.

There was always a tremendous circulation of people, continuous, and shop closing hours, shop closing hours were eleven O'clock at night, every night, the only holidays that my father had were Sunday's, no opening strictly on Sunday, no trading on Sunday at all and Christmas day and the 12th of July and Sundays, that was the only time they broke, and any other, and eleven O'clock at night. So my mother for instance, she ran the book keeping side of the business.

She had a little office in the back, and a desk and she, the poor women used to have herself killed, she used to stand at the desk, she didn't sit, and the notice said, unlike today, cheque stores were unheard of. She had a whole system of barter and exchange and credit. One of the big differences today from then is that a lot of farmers wives used to maintain a flock of hens, say maybe a couple hundred head of hens, and these would produce eggs, these eggs would be brought along to the like of my fathers shop. The collection point was Backford. These people would bring the eggs along, the eggs were all counted and stored in egg boxes, specially designed egg boxes, account was kept of them and then they were tested at the station, and if everything was right, the account, the persons account was credited, they would buy foodstuff, it was a brilliant barter system. I often wonder how my father and mother ever kept the thing going.

People would come along and their favorite remark would be 'put it down in the book', 'put it down in the book', of course there was always sort of money coming in across the counter. Old Canon

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Finnegan used to come down, in with a collection from the Chapel in Donaghmore, and he use to come along say once every fortnight or once every three weeks and this whole collection of coins, my mother would count this out, and she was always glad to get the change because she was using the change in the shop, and she would give him notes in replace of that, the Canon notes in replace of it. During the war, being a Co Meath man, he said: "would there be any chance of a wee crumble of butter?"

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