

## **Rural Wakes – Funerals and Wakes**

But one thing I do recall and what you don't see now at all are clay pipes this brings me to the question of wakes in the country wakes were a very big thing as they were social occasions when a person died and a wake was being held we would have had people coming into the shop relations of the deceased who would have bought clay pipes clay pipes came in wooden boxes small wooden boxes of a dozen and they were wrapped up nicely with tissue paper or something to keep them from breaking because they were quite delicate the people who bought them would order say five or six boxes say dozen depending on what they estimated would be the crowd at the wake the reason being they were disposable people smoked a pipe and took it with them and got broken. That was the end of it. Just on that question of smoking which is a taboo subject now in places, everybody smoked and smoking pipe tobacco was probably starting to go out in the nineteen fifties. Instead of buying clay pipes you bought cigarettes.

Now, when you were going to a wake one of the first things you would have been offered you would have been offered tea maybe a drink you would also have been offered a cigarette the cigarettes were laid out on plates as if they were a delicacy of some kind. They were the old style cigarettes. That's a habit that is dying now is smoking also the drinking at wakes and the games at wakes, I personally don't remember any of the games which they played but very shortly before I was talking to someone not very much older than myself and he remembers the games they played a stick young men would play games of strength, they would sit down on the floor or across a table like this arm wrestling a stick between them and whoever could pull the stick and move the other or pull the stick out of the others hand would win the contest. Now you would wonder what this had to do with a wake or honoring the dead of course it is a very old pagan custom where when a person died noise and games and sport and amusement were evoked so that the evil spirits would be kept away from the dead person, an old pagan custom that the Celts had it, but it came down right through the ages. It doesn't happen much now other cultures do like the Chinese have very noisy funeral possessions the whole idea is to keep away evil spirits also during wakes you would have drink much drink was taken on social occasions people would there was cues to get drink at wakes what actually happened was the relations or someone closed to the family of the deceased would come to the town and buy the amount of drink that was required as they estimated for the wake usually bottles of whiskey while they were there they would

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consume some drink on the premises. I have seen this on accounts books of my grand uncle who kept a shop in Carrickmore also bottles of whiskey dozens of stout and then there would be half pint of whiskey consumed on premises by such and such who would come to get the drink great for social occasions as well as being comforting I suppose to the relatives of the deceased everyone would have gone to wakes even children I remember going to wakes around about the village or within half a mile and we would have been used to seeing dead people in the bed or in the coffins I have heard of people my own age who said they haven't seen a dead person until they were in their twenties or thirties but we were well accustomed to it and hence we had no fear or problem with it we were reared to it if you like it was common place it was a matter of form it was a social custom wakes were a great social occasion funerals were generally very serious and dark occasions if you like a lot of people obviously wore black and there was a certain solemnity about funerals that was totally different than what went on an wakes I think the Church had a lot to do with this because funerals were part of their realm than suppose the wakes which were run by the people themselves and they took control they were very ordered one of the things I do remember about funerals which was when you were at the grave side there was no nice gentle way of dealing with the business of sowing soil onto the coffin it was the priest would have been handed a shovel full of clay and stones and it was just thrown on and gave a great rattle which was very effective to everybody standing around it said this was the end of a man dust to dust thou shalt return this really was the high point or the low point whichever way you want to look at it of it and at that time also I do remember some people got very emotional at the grave side I seen this happen where people would where people would want to throw themselves in the grave and would have to be restrained this was genuine but although it was genuine it was also part of a ritual that would take place to dating back earlier times that the person was so grieved that he or she wanted to go with the departed now it doesn't happen nowadays because people behave in quite a different manner at the grave side it was all very solemn and the other thing was that nowadays they have a very nice way of putting a green cover over the grave so that people can talk to the relations and shake hands and leave the grave yard as soon as the priest is finished praying as the ceremony is finished the neighbours would grab shovels and start filling in the grave you would hear the stones falling down and the grave would be filled in immediately it still happens I've seen it happen in some parts of the Country

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