Bishop Willie Walsh

Male

0:00:00 – 0:07:06 File 1
EARLY LIFE –

Bishop Willie Walsh was born in the parish of Roscrea in North Tipperary in an area three miles from town. He says that his childhood as a very average one. His father was a farmer that dealt mainly in the production and distribution of milk. This was their main source of income.

He began schooling in a two teacher school in Corville which was three miles from his home. He was born into a family of six, with him been the youngest. He had two sisters and three brothers. At first they walked to school and then began to cycle to school.

Bishop Willie was sent into the Boys National School in Roscrea for third class.

Bishop Willie was invited back to his home Parish a week prior to the interview to commemorate his retirement. While he was there he reflected on the things they did without motorcars and television.

One memory that Bishop Willie Walsh has is of the first time he saw the sea. He talks about his mother going to Tramore for a week in June and his father going to Lisdoonvarna in September when the hay was saved. When Bishop Willie was 7 or 8 years old he went to Tramore with his mother and he can remember seeing the vast ocean.

When Bishop Willie was growing up they would go to mass every Sunday after which they would spend several hours playing 'pitch and toss'. Another activity that occurred after church was hunting rabbits. He goes on to talk about this activity and selling the rabbits they caught.

0:07:06 – 0:24:14
SCHOOL –

There was no day Secondary School in Roscrea when Bishop Willie was growing up. He finished primary school at the same time as his older brother who had missed a year of school due to illness. They were booked into the Cistercian Monastery in Roscrea for a Secondary level education. The local tutors approached Willie's parents and convinced them to send the boys to St. Flannan's instead. Bishop Willie began his time as a boarder in St. Flannan's when he was 12 and he spent five years in the school. He goes on to talk about some of his experiences while been schooled in St. Flannan's. At that time corporal punishment was still in effect and Bishop Willie says it was the Dean of the school that mainly inflicted this however there was an occasional example of it happening in the class room. One of the teachers gave Bishop Willie a beating in class because he was absent from previous evening study. The food wasn't great because there was still rationing after the war and Bishop Willie still has his ration book.

One activity that was present in the school was hurling. Prior to going to St. Flannan's, Bishop Willie had played very little hurling which changed while he was a student at that school. Bishop Willie says that he was playing with the junior team and a sub on the senior team when he lost his place to his brother and the team went on to win the Hearty Cup. Here he says his brother's name was John.

Jimmy Smyth was at school in St. Flannan's at the same time and Bishop Willie says he was revered as a fantastic hurler. First years could only look on Jimmy Smyth from a distance and as the years went on Bishop Willie ended up developing a close friendship with him.

Bishop Willie says that most of the other students he met while studying in Maynooth came from a similar boarding school background. He mentions a

handful from around the country and outlines where there emphasis would have been.

The school year at Flannan's began in September and the students wouldn't get to go home until the Christmas holidays. The students had a half day on Saturdays and they rarely left the grounds and one reason for them leaving would be going to a film. The cinema at that time is where the Town Hall is now. Then a new cinema was opened with the entrance been on O' Connell Street where the entrance to Dunnes Stores is today. There were very high walls around the school grounds so the students were very cut off from the outside world. This didn't upset the students too much and they used to hang out in their own groups. Tipperary lads used to stick together because there used to be a big rivalry between Clare and Tipperary. At that time there was about 200 boarders and 60 day students.

0:24:14 – 0:26:30
HURLING –

Bishop Willie mentions two Ryan's that were from Cappamore, County Limerick, one of which was very good at hurling. His name was Seamus and he joined to Priesthood which meant he had to give up the hurling.

Note: Interview interrupted with doorbell ringing.

After the interruption Bishop Willie goes back to talk about the Ryan's from Cappamore. He says that both of them played hurling for Limerick in later years. Both of them became priests. Liam became a lecture in Maynooth and his brother Seamus was ordained as well. Seamus played centre back for the Limerick hurling team in the 1955 Munster final against Clare.

0:26:30 – 0:30:04
POLITICS –

Bishop Willie talks about another friend from his Flannan's years, Michael O' Kennedy, who got involved in politics. He was a minister in a number of Fine Gael governments and represented North Tipperary. Bishop Willie says that Michael, who was very bright academically, showed several leadership qualities while at St. Flannan's.

Bishop Willie talks about how events can shape our lives. He says that if he ended up going to the Cistercians in Roscrea he doesn't know if he would have become a priest. And even if he did he defiantly wouldn't have become the Bishop of Killaloe.

0:00:00 – 0:20:59 File 2
EDUCATION AND THE PRIESTHOOD –

Bishop Willie says that his parents were very keen on education and out of the six kids, five went on to secondary and four then continued on to third level. This would not have occurred frequently in the '60s. Willie's mother stayed in school up to her inter cert and his father left school when he was 14. Bishop Willie then says that out of his primary class of 30 students, maybe five would have gone on to Secondary School. When Bishop Willie was sitting his leaving cert there was a total of 55 students and out of that around 20 went on to study for the priesthood.

It wasn't until the leaving cert did Bishop Willie started to think about joining the priesthood. He goes to talk about his decision to join the Priesthood. His parents would have been pleased with his decision as it was an accepted cultural belief that the best thing you could do with your time was become a priest.

Bishop Willie talks about starting his education in Maynooth in September of 1952. When he started his education there, there were approximately 600 students there with roughly a hundred starting with Willie. The students were from all across Ireland and it was here that Bishop Willie met someone from the north for the first time. He talks about their accent and studying with a man from

Armagh.

At that time in Maynooth each class had a football and hurling team. There would have been several inter county hurlers and even more inter county Footballers studying there at that time. Bishop Willie talks about one student who played with the Mayo minor football team and couldn't go to play in the All-Ireland Final with his team. This was because once you joined to seminary you were encouraged not to play for Parish or County.

Bishop Willie explains that in order to study theology you had to do 2 to 3 years of Philosophy. This consisted of Psychology, epistemology, ontology, history of philosophy etc. After this there was fours years Theology and that was the normal training for priesthood. Bishop Willie goes on to talk about his studies saying that there was a big influence from Aristotle and other Greek philosophers. This is because early Greek philosophy had a big influence on the Church. Bishop Willie then goes on to talk about a few of his Professors while in Maynooth.

0:00:00 – 0:22:14 File 3
STUDYING IN ROME –

After finishing his studies in Maynooth, Bishop Willie discovered that the Bishop wanted to send him to an Irish College in Rome. There were approximately 60 students at it so most Diocese had 1 or 2 students attending the college. The evening of the All-Ireland Football final several men would arrive at DÃºn Laoghaire and get a ferry to Holyhead. They then got a train first to London and then on to Paris. While in Rome, Bishop Willie got to see the Pope for the first time which he describes as an amazing experience. He had several lectures in different ecclesiastical colleges all of which were in Latin. He goes on to talk about some of his experiences while studying in Rome. Bishop Willie was ordained in February 1955 and his family travelled out to Rome for the occasion. There were eleven been ordained that year and they hired out a plane for family members to travel out on. They were ordained in the Basilica of St. John Lateran.

Bishop Willie explains that St. Peters isn't the principle church in the Vatican. Instead it is St. John Lateran's because it was the original seat of the Pope.

Bishop Willie talks about communicating with Ireland while he was in Rome. He mentions hearing about the shooting of Sean South in January 1957. He also talks about a plane crash in Newmarket on Shrove Tuesday. Since the plane was Italian, there were full reports on all the local newspapers.

While Bishop Willie was living in Rome there was a cycling race on with Irish cyclist Shay Elliot racing in. Bishop Willie talks about going to meet him with some of his class mates.

Bishop Willie remembers watching the World Cup quarter finals in 1957 where Ireland played France.

After he was ordained Bishop Willie returned to Rome to do a post graduate in ecclesiastical law for three years. He talks about some of his experiences during this time.

When Bishop Willie returned to Ireland he was told he was going to be teaching in Flannans so he was sent to Galway to do a Higher diploma. He ended up teaching at Flannans for the next 25 years.

0:00:00 – 0:23:57 File 4
TEACHING –

Bishop Willie talks about returning to his school to teach alongside some of his old teachers. He mentions a few of his old teachers and briefly talks about them. After this he goes on to talk about some of his experiences he had while teaching at Flannans. He also got involved in the hurling and training teams. When he started training the team they hadn't won a Hearty Cup since 1957 and they finally won it again in 1976. Bishop Willie talks about a few players that were on that team and what it was like winning the cup. He continues to talk about hurling

not only in Flannans but also in Clare Senior team. He mentions a few players that played on the senior team from the early 90's and talks about Clare winning the Munster Final in 1995 and going on to winning the All-Ireland.

0:23:57 – 0:33:53
RELIGION –

Bishop Willie recollects getting a call from the Papal Nuncio who would do the investigation on who should be the next Bishop. He said that all the other priests wanted him as their Bishop so it was offered the position and he accepted. At this stage Bishop Willie had two brothers and two sisters living and he describes them been happy at his new position.

0:00:00 – 0:10:52 File 5
GRANDPARENTS –

Bishop Willie knew his grandfather who died in 1944 at the age of 94 and Bishop Willie was only 9 years old. He lived three hundred yards away and his grandmother lived three miles away. When she was 75 she moved in with Bishop Willie and his family.

Tomas asks if his grandparents told him any stories from the famine as they would have been around when it happened. Bishop Willie answers no and continues to talk a little about his grandparent's background. Here he talks about how his grandparent came into possession of the farm that he grew up on.

0:14:55 – 0:15:49
THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE AND THE CIVIL WAR –

Bishop Willie would hear the occasional story of the Bland and Tans and during the Civil War his father took the side of the Irish Free State side but was not active in it. When Bishop Willie was growing up two men that weren't liked in his house was de Valera and Christy Ring.

0:15:49 – 0:20:21
THE ECONOMIC WAR –

Willie's father was around during the Economic War he blamed de Valera for the harshness that was experienced at that time. He made it very clear that he was a supporter of Cosgrave and Fine Gael.

The baking Co-operative in Roscrea was the first of its kind in Ireland and was set up by a Priest named Cunningham. Willie's father was very heavily involved in it during the 40's. Roscrea got a reputation for sending cows there and the Co-Operative employed up to 200 people even during the Economic War.

The big thing during the Econmic War was the price of cattle dropped and they were giving away cafes.

0:20:21 – 0:24:05
FARMING TRADITIONS –

While Bishop Willie was growing they kept a few pigs because milk production was their main focus. They used to kill the pigs themselves. Bishop Willie explains that in each locality, there was generally one man recognised for killing the pig. In Willie's locality this man was his uncle, Pa Maher. He goes onto explain the process that would occur when the pig was killed.

0:24:05 – 0:30:14
CULTURAL TRADITIONS –

Bishop Willie says there wasn't much emphasis on May Eve when he was growing up. He did hear about some 'pisreogi' such as stealing another mans butter. If you called to a house and they were churning and if you didn't take part in the churning then you would steal his butter. Another one he heard was based on wells and if you took some water before the owner then you would cause some damage to the well. People would shake the Easter water on the fields.

The tradition of going on cuaird. During the winter time they played a lot of card games such as 25 or 45. Other times they would simply have a chat. People would generally go to the same houses.

Most houses at the time had an open hearth fire however Willie's home had a range. When he was growing up they would always say the rosary and this was taken very serious and was part of the every day ritual. Mass was part of the Sunday ritual.

0:30:14 – 0:33:30
DANCES –

Every Saturday night Willie's mother went to town with the pony and trap. When the kids reached their teenage years they were allowed to go to town with her. This was considered to be a big treat.

By the time Bishop Willie did his leaving cert he had only been to 1 or 2 dances. You had to be at least 17 or 18 to be let go to a dance. They used to take place in the town hall. Bishop Willie remembers going to a dance in Dublin when he went up for the All-Ireland Final.

Bishop Willie explains that they used to have a loft over a stable. One year, at the end of the thrashing, a dance was held there. Everybody that was involved in the thrashing was invited to it. There was a barrel of Guinness present at the dance and Bishop Willie explains that you wouldn't get a drink if you were under 20.

0:00:00 – 0:03:42 File 6
WAKES –

You had to have drink at the wakes along with clay pipes and tobacco. Bishop Willie recalls the wake of his grandfather. Most of the men would stay all night. Tomas asks if he ever heard of the clay pipes been referred to a 'dÃºidins'. Bishop Willie says that he normally connects 'dÃºidin' with a clay or ordinary pipe with a

broken stem.

At that time the priest wouldn't be present at the evening funeral. The coffin was carried to the local church and some man would read a few prayers. The priest wouldn't arrive until the following morning. Bishop Willie explains that the priest was 3 or 4 miles away from Roscrea so that is the reason for him arriving when he would.

0:03:42 – 0:05:40
CURES –

Bishop Willie talks about one man in the locality that was associated with a cure for Ring Worm. He also acted as a vet and his name was Ben Lawler. He had no academic training as a vet but he was always called.

0:05:40 – 0:13:47
FAIRS –

Bishop Willie used to go the local fair with his father when he was younger and he recalls some of the memories from this time. There was an informal argument that every farmer would have the same Stall area. Bishop Willie explains the haggling process that would occur on Fair days. Whenever a deal was made it would have to include the luck penny. When the pubs opened his father went in for a drink while Bishop Willie looked after the cattle. Fair day would also give his father a chance to go to the bank

Bishop Willie talks about the change of focus from Fairs to Marts. He says the reason it happened was because the people believed you were more likely to get a bargain at the Mart.

0:13:47 – 0:23:51
CHANGES IN SOCIETY –

Bishop Willie talks about changes in society on the rural landscape. He says the big change was 'knowing your neighbours'. When he was growing up everyone was very friendly with their neighbours.

Next, Bishop Willie talks about electricity coming to his home area in Roscrea. Before this they had a system of charging batteries off the milking machine. The light from this method was very low. A good bit before electricity came into their house they got running water which was vital when working in the dairy business.

Willies talks about how people used to go to church every Sunday but these days it no longer happens.

Note: Interview Ends.