

# Chris Droney

Male

File 1 0:00:00 – 0:03:39

INTRODUCTION –

Chris was born in Bellharbour House on the 21/12/24. He was the eldest of five boys. He says they would warm themselves before they went to bed by dancing for a few tunes. Their father would play concertina. Chris left school at fourteen. He went to the Tech in Gort for 12 months. He would stay in Gort for four nights of the week.

0:03:40 – 0:14:29

FATHER-HERDSMAN FOR JOYCE –

His father was a herdsman. The man who owned the land was a bachelor called William Joyce. Chris says Joyce was a catholic and always went to mass. The farm he owned in Bellharbour had about 330 acres and he also owned land in Corgary near Ballinasloe. His father would drive cattle by foot for him to Corgary. He says no one had time for this landlord. He says the landlord bought one cow once at a fair in Kilkee. He says a man called Slattery from Ennis bought nine and he was bringing them back to Ennis on the West Clare Railway and he offered to take Joyce's one cow on the train too to Ennistymon or Corofin and the landlord turned around to him and said, "what do you think I am paying a herdsman for?" and he made Chris' father walk home with the cow, which took him two days. It was 55 miles. He says he was the same with the people on the farm in Corgary. On the 6th January 1922 he was shot and killed on the doorstep of his house in Corgary. The Land Commission took up his two farms and leased them until 1936 and then they decided to divide the land. Chris' father only got 25 acres. The land commissioner was Mr Grace. All the farmers were told to meet at their gate on a certain day. You weren't supposed to get land if you lived over one and a half

miles from the land. They had to clear the land they got of stones and briars. His grandfather had 16 acres and gave them to Chris. He also got another 10 acres from The Land Commission.

0:14:30 - 0:17:45

THE FARM -

Chris talks about the work he did on the farm. In 1939 his father decided to buy a threshing mill from Ransom's in Ipswich in England. He collected it by lorry from the docks in Limerick. His father then bought a tractor from Sheils in Ennis. The threshing mill was there for 30 or 40 years. Chris and his brother would thresh all the corn of the parish and beyond. He recalls the night of the threshing especially in Finavarra they would dance a few sets. Chris was able to play some tunes at that time.

0:17:46 - 0:20:50

MUSIC -

Chris started playing concertina at the age of eight. He remembers sitting in front of a mirror imitating his father playing. He mentions John Linnane, Miko Linnane and Joe Maher and they would play at Johnston's hall in Kinvara. They got a half a crown each to play there. Chris was asked to join them when he was about fourteen. He played there for four or five years. He says it cost two and sixpence to get into the dance. It was about a seven or eight mile cycle from his house.

0:20:51 - 0:24:12

MUSIC IN THE GLEN -

Chris recalls the story of him and Miko Linnane playing the tune "Music in the Glen" near a lios/fort and a local farmer thought it was fairies playing in the lios.

0:24:13 - 0:25:44

## BELLHARBOUR CÉILÍ BAND -

They started up a band called Bellharbour Céilí Band and they would play in places like Gort and Lisdoonvarna. Joe Maher, Miko Linnane, Tom O'Loughlin, Jack Daly and sometimes his father played in it. He recalls John MacNamara from Kilnaboy driving them to Kilrush to play in a minibus. They would get £1 a man to play and they would give John £5 for the bus.

0:25:45 - 0:27:34

## EMIGRATION -

He speaks of tillage, corn and sugar beet. One of his brothers, Gussy, decided to go to America to an aunt in 1947. His other brothers Frank, (Jet), Joe and John went soon after that. They all went to Hartford in Connecticut. He says it was the rule that the eldest of the family, (Chris) had to stay at home.

0:27:35 - 0:50:23

## FLEADH CHEOIL/MUSIC -

Chris says the first Fleadh Cheoil he went to was Loughrea in 1955. He came third. The following year the fleadh was in Ennis in 1956. He recalls that the county competition was on the Friday. There were 17 in the competition and he came first. The Munster and All-Ireland was on the Saturday. He recalls Connie Hogan from Woodford playing in the All-Ireland. Chris won the All-Ireland that year. In 1957 it was in Dungarvan and he came second. In 1958 he was sick with kidney stones two days before and couldn't go. He won again in '59/'60 and '61. He says there were two people in Boston Massachusetts and they would bring out a winner every year to play in a concert in the Intercolonial Hall there. He was invited out there in 1961. He says that when they were walking up near the hall in Dudley St he was surprised to see a large picture of himself outside. There were 2,200 people in the hall that night. He recalls the band who were supposed to be playing with him didn't know how to play Irish music. He was asked to come back

another night. Chris says he won nine solos and a duet with Gus Tierney in All-Ireland Fleadhs over the years. He says when he was in Boston he was invited by Paddy Killoran, (fiddler), to his house which was about 120 miles away. He says they played music for two hours. Paddy asked him to pick out a tie and every time he wore it he was to think of him. Paddy died six months after that. Chris played for Cardinal Á“ Fiaich in the church in Cavan when he was unveiling a plaque for Michael Cusack, the founder of the GAA. He says he played music with former Irish President Mary McAleese. She was visiting friends in Ballyvaughan and she saw him getting ready to play at a mass rock and she asked could she play bodhrán with him. He also played for the Crown Prince, (now Emperor) of Japan when he was on a state visit to Ireland about 25 years ago. He visited Mount Collage in Kinvara and Chris was collected by police escort to play for him. The Crown Prince wanted to know why he was tapping his foot. He sent Chris a silver spoon. He played a Caledonian set for four nuns in Lourdes. He also played in the Basilica in Knock. He recalls going to London, to Wheatstone in Islington to get a better concertina. He paid £64 for a concertina. Seamus Ennis had a program in the BBC and he asked Chris to play for 15 minutes and he got a cheque for £20. He played with the man in Wheatstone and he couldn't believe how Chris could play without reading music. He recalls teaching his daughter Ann.

0:50:24 – 0:54:27

CONCERTINA –

Chris says when he was about 12 a man from Kilfenora came to buy a bullock for £4.10 and his father had to deliver the bullock. His father then sent to Lachenals of London for a concertina which was £4.15.

0:55:57 – 1:00:00

FARMING –

Chris was threshing until around 1970. Then he sold it and went to Sherwoods in Glanmire and bought a combine harvester. It took him over 13 hours to drive it

home. He had that for seventeen years. He was cutting corn one day and a root got caught in it and it went up in flames. He says it was all hay in his time and now it's all silage. He recalls one day making cocks of hay with his father and he was humming a tune all day so he came in home and got his concertina and started playing it. He says his father was angry. They would have to get up at seven in the morning and go to the shore to cut seaweed to fertilise the land. He says Glins in Kilrush would buy seaweed.

1:00:01 - 1:04:42

ELECTRICITY -

Chris says they got the electricity in 1952. Before that they had a blue lamp which was a double burner. He recalls playing music in the dark. He says people were scared of it-they thought it would come on in the night. He remembers playing outside Tuam one night when two old people came up to him and said they had heard of him before they got the electricity in 1952.

1:04:43 - 1:13:24

HOUSE DANCES/CÁILĀ BANDS -

Chris says the house dances were usually after the threshing or at Christmas time. When his band played in Kinvara there could be as much as 200 bicycles outside. He remembers one 27th Dec he saw a car pulled up near his house with people asleep inside and he saw in the boot a drum with Ballinakil CéilĀ Band written on it. They told him they had a flat tyre. He brought them in and his mother gave them tea. Eddie Moloney was the flute player with them and he asked Chris to play and then they brought their own instruments in and played all day. After that every time they were passing they would take him with them to play. He also played with the Aughrim Slopes CéilĀ Band. Joe Mills was the accordion player and Danny Trassy was the flute player. He recalls playing with the Kincora CéilĀ Band. Mrs Harrington was the one who ran that. She had a sister in Ardrahan, Mrs Roland. Chris went to Ardee in Co Louth with them. He

played with the Four Courts for eighteen years and with the Kilfenora for 12 years. He mentions Kitty Linnane, Paddy Mullins, Gus Tierney, Tommy Peoples and Frankie Mahoney. He recalls playing with a céilÃ band in America while on holiday. He mentions playing in Springfield and Holyoke, Massachusetts. With the four courts he played on some cruises in the Caribbean. One of the last places he has played abroad was at the Catskills Music Festival, New York.

1:13:25 – 1:16:14

HOW HE MET HIS WIFE –

Chris met his wife playing music in the Pavillion in Lisdoonvarna. He saw her dancing from the stage.

1:16:15 – 1:22:17

CDS/MUSIC –

Chris says he made some recordings in the States in the 1960s. Peggy Tabb accompanied him on the piano. He has also some CDs, one the ‘Fertile Rock’ and another called ‘Down from Bellharbour’. He says there was a man in Fanore, John McNamara, who had retired from the navy. He went on a holiday to Australia and he met friends out there. They decided they would go on a trip to the Cocos Islands and they were invited by the Governor to his house and he asked them if they would like to hear some Irish music and he played them ‘The Fertile Rock’. He had bought it while on holiday in Ireland.

1:22:18 – 1:28:49

FAMILY EMIGRATION –

Chris says that his maternal grandfather had four brothers and one sister and they went to Australia at the time of the famine and were never seen again. He speaks of the boat tragedy in Bellharbour and the grotto that is there in honour of those that drowned. Chris was on the committee that erected it and some Australian visitors saw his name on the back of it. It turned out they were his first

cousins, his aunt's children. He says his mother's two sisters and brother emigrated and never came home. On his father's side there were nine in the family and he thinks six of them emigrated and only one ever came back. An uncle of his, Michael, was a great fiddle player but died of pneumonia at age 21.