

# Joe 'Jack' Sexton

Male

0:00:00 - 0:03:24

## FAMILY BACKGROUND -

Speaks about his own family background. His grandfather bought the house from the Foxes in Mount Scott after coming from Aghy Bridge. This was in the 1880s. Talks about his mother (from DunÁ<sup>3</sup>gan) and father who were matched despite there being over 20 years between them in age. His father was 42 and his mother was 20 when they were married. They went on to have twelve children who were all born at home.

Speaks about his mother who was a midwife and Dr. Michael Hillery who 'hardly got to go to bed' as a result of big families who often had sick children. Speaks about the nature of Dr. Hillery's work. Speaks also about Michael Hillery coming to deliver babies.

0:03:25 - 0:09:26

## MATCHMAKING AND WEDDINGS -

Speaks again about matchmaking and how it occurred. As part of the process, a few men would 'walk the land' to see was it suitable. There was also 'The pickin of the gander' (hen party), at the house of the future bride. Speaks about Shrove Tuesday which was the principal day for marrying.

Speaks about weddings in the past. A party was held first in the house of the bride and then the bride and groom went to the church with whoever was standing for them. They would return to the groom's house having left from the bride's house. This practice lasted until the 1940's.

Strawboys would have come to the after wedding party at the groom's house. As

there was no honeymoon, the strawboys took place the night of the wedding.

Explains that marrying a farmer was security. The only other option was emigration which wasn't easy according to Joe.

0:09:27 - 0:11:22

SCHOOL DAYS IN COORE -

Speaks about his schooldays in Coore NS. He was there until he was 14 years old. Joe speaks about his memories of school. Speaks about discipline in the school. Recalls that if you did something wrong, you got six slaps with a hazel rod. If you complained at home you would get more slaps.

0:11:23 - 0:12:28

PASTIMES AND CHORES -

Talks about playing football and cricket, pitching and spinning tops.

Pitching was throwing money or buttons at an object to see who come get closest.

Speaks about his chores when he came home in the evening.

0:12:29 - 0:19:51

FARMING -

States that a butter maker, cookery mistress and dancing teacher would come to the school to provide workshops.

This was organized by the Department of Education. The instruction on step dancing cost a penny a week.

Speaks about the agricultural instructor who came to Coore school at night to instruct people how to work the land more effectively.

Seán Talty from Clounlaheen (Catherine Talty's husband) had covered silage with

earth as he had no plastic. It was the first silage pit made in the area.

Joe speaks about haymaking. A neighbour of Joe's (Thady Hurley) would cut hay for hire. He cut three farmer's hay with a scythe even though he was a very small man.

Joe talks about farm machinery and the development of different pieces of machinery.

Speaks about how young boys were sent to help in the harvest to neighbours. The parents would get some money for it but the boy wouldn't. Speaks about making raithiáns of hay. Talks about making trams of hay. Speaks about the slide mower (dumper) which was introduced later.

Speaks about making 'sÁgáns'. Both men and women made the 'sÁgáns'. These were made during the winter with a twisting bow. They were hung up on the rafters for the winter.

Speaks also about making 'sÁgáns' for the chairs.

0:19:52 - 0:22:31

WORKING IN THE BOG -

Speaks about working in the bog in the summer. Talks about the wheelbarrow. Each man had a role at the bog. Talks about 'scattering', 'footing' and 'refooting' (a week later). They would start work at six o'clock in the morning and neighbours would come to help.

Talks about the importance of turf. Speaks about the self-sufficient nature of his time. 'You had to live off the land'. Speaks about weeding the gardens, milking the cow etc.

0:22:32 - 0:27:06

FAIRS -

Joe talks about going to the fair. Young lads were 'mad to go to the fair'. Explains about going early in the morning to the fair in Miltown which was located 'up the Mullagh Road'.

Talks about taking cattle to the railway. Talks about the bargaining that went on at the fairs.

Speaks about 'the Penny Bun' which was sold at different shops and houses. Joe recalls that the dinner at the fair was tea, bread and ham.

He went to fairs in Kilmihil, Kildysart, Kilrush, Doonbeg and Kilkee. Joe recalls walking home at the age of 22 or 23 from Carrigaholt fair on June 1st. He left at 10.00am and arrived home at 9.30pm. He recalled that they were often caused trouble by women rattling buckets that attracted the cattle.

0:27:07 - 0:31:55

#### THE HOUSE, HOME AND MAKING BUTTER -

Speaks about life at home. Talks about the open hearth fire in his own home place. Talks about baking the bread beside the fire on the griddle. When 'the woman' got up in the morning the fire was started and kept going all day.

Speaks about getting up at 6.00pm during the summer on Monday morning to make the butter. Describes making the butter. Refers to the dash churn and the churn with a handle.

Speaks about the pans of milk being left on a shelf. Outlines the process of making butter. In the early 1930's they got a separator which 'was a gift'.

Speaks about his mother putting down the big pot over the fire and other jobs she had to do in the morning. She had to take the butter to the local shop (Looneys). Looney's was like a creamery. He would take all the butter from the local farms to the railway station.

Note: Interview is interrupted by a visitor

File 2 0:00:00 - 0:05:42

THE OPEN HEARTH FIRE -

Describes the importance of the chimney being built correctly. Recalls a neighbour of his building a house for £5. It would cost £2 to build a chimney at this time. Describes the open hearth fire and the crane that was in some fires.

Joe recalls that when the butter was being made and someone came in the visitor would have to put the sign of the cross on the butter. This was so as to ensure the visitor would not take the butter.

There was also a concern that a man come in with a pipe and take a bit of coal. This would 'break the butter'.

Joe recalls storytellers from the area. He recalls his uncle and father who were good storytellers. His uncle Tadhg McMahon was a great story teller. He used to tell a story about 'The Black Dog and the Wild Forest'. It was about a king's daughter who was taken and the King's efforts to get her back. Tadhg would also tell stories about fairies and ghosts.

Joe says that he heard the banshee.

He recalls hearing the banshee. There was a woman dying who was friends with the family. He called his sister in law who also heard the banshee. Joe was approximately 30 years old at the time.

Speaks about the older people and their beliefs in the supernatural.

Joe says that he wouldn't like to elaborate on pisreáigs as 'it might interfere'.

0:13:23 - 0:15:20

FÁ%oAR GORTACH' (INSATIABLE HUNGER) -

Joe recalls that his father was an old man. He states that when his father was a young boy he would be sent to neighbours to dig spuds. The breakfast that his father got was 'stirabout' (oat and meal). His father recalls coming from the fair of Kilmihil when they got the 'féar gortach'.

They had to go into a house to a woman and ask for a bit of food.

0:15:21 - 0:18:44

CORN MILLS -

Joe states that there was three corn mills in the parish in Dunogan at the burial ground in Kildimo and near St. Joseph's Blessed Well. He speaks about the importance of his mills to the locality in the past. He describes the workings of the mills.

Recalls the rationing and its impact locally. Recalls how they would make use of the limited food they had. They would make 'stampy' from potatoes.

Speaks about the Cornmarket in Ennis in the 1930s and 1940s.

File 3 0:00:00 - 0:02:31

BLACK AND TANS AND FIANNA FÁIL -

Speaks about 'a man in Miltown' who they threw in a fire. States that the man was pulled out and saved but that his face was badly disfigured.

They didn't talk much because it wasn't stable. Speaks about de Valera and Fianna Fáil's early elections. Speaks about the dole. If you were caught working on the dole you got a month in jail.

0:02:32 - 0:05:44

CALENDAR CUSTOMS -

Joe outlines the precautions taken on May Eve. All cabins were locked. The May

Bush was brought in on May Eve and put up in the rafter. The water also had to be brought in.

Joe speaks about St. Bridget's Day there would be a timber cross. In old houses you would see about 50 or 60 in the rafters.

Describes November as a 'terrible lonesome month'. Recall black vestments during the month of November. He recalls envelopes being sent around and recites the psalm that was written on it.

Speaks about Halloween but says it was not a big deal

0:05:46 - 0:08:35

JOE SPEAKS ABOUT OLD PEOPLE AND WAKES -

He states that they were great to help. They would always be interested in babies being born. Speaks about their role in the family. Joe recalls his memories of the wake.

0:08:36 - 0:11:41

CHANGES -

Joe speaks about the changes that occurred in his life time. Speaks about electricity but states that the running water was the most important change for the house in his life.

Single burner to double burner and from the double burner to the Tilly lamp. He describes how it was used.

State that the vet was hardly heard of in his early life. Speaks about the local people who were able to help with sick cattle.

0:11:42 - 0:17:00

THE WREN -

'Cher there's nothing now'

Joe describes his memories of the 'Wran'. He speaks about the 'soirée' which would be paid for with the takings from the Wran. Joe never danced but went to lots of dances.

He recalls the country dances and the gambling dances.

Joe recalls a story from the 1930s about a man called Mick Gallery. He was once told by an old woman that she saw a 'red car' passing and he replied that she 'should have gone out and quenched it'. Gallery met a returned American who told him that 'I'm Whelan' and Gallery replied 'Well I'm walking!'. He was known as 'Coola Gallery'. He was from Dunogan.

0:17:01 - 0:17:46

FOOTBALL -

States that there wasn't much around his area of Mountscott. Recalls going to matches between Quilty and Miltown.

0:17:47 - 0:19:21

THE SEA PEOPLE' -

He recalls 'the sea people' going around selling fish, sea grass and other items from the sea. Joe recalls an old woman who used to go to Coore mass every Sunday on a donkey and car. She used to sell fish. She was from Miltown and was known as 'The Cook Reidy'.

0:19:22 - 0:23:40

REFLECTIONS -

Joe reflects on his life and laments the passing of the old days. Speaks about the way of life and how strong the community was. Recalls people dancing sets in each other's houses after mass.



Speaks about how on Christmas night young and old men would go to the pub for a pint.

Speaks briefly about the wakes. His own mother (Ellen McMahan) would lay out the dead as well as being a mid-wife for the area. She delivered eight children from one generation of a family locally and ten from the next generation.

He describes the laying out process. Speaks about the habit which every house had after a person reached the aged of 70.

0:23:41 - 0:26:11

TRADES AND EMPLOYMENT -

Speaks about the trades locally. Farmers and blacksmiths were very important. Patrick Fitzpatrick and Micheal were the smiths at Aghy Bridge.

He speaks about the weaver and states that in his parents times every farmer kept two or three sheep for their wool for clothes. The wool would be brought to Ennistymon for carding. Refers to a term called 'pleiche' (sic).

States that there were a lot of weavers locally.

0:26:12 - 0:30:24

HEALTH -

Joe speaks about the breastfeeding of babies and states that no young boy took any notice of it as it was seen as natural.

Speaks about general health of people and states that TB was rampant at one stage.

Speaks about local cures. Refers to Tom O'Connor who could a charm or cure for a pain in your head. Also refers to Tom Mee who had a cure for ringworm. Refers to a man he met once who couldn't find a cure for his ringworm. Joe sent this man

to Tom Mee and he was cured.

There was also a charm to stop blood. Joe's uncle John McMahon had a charm for stopping blood.

0:30:25 - 0:33:24

ECONOMY OF RURAL CLARE -

Speaks about rural life. Refers to the thatch. Speaks about the economics of the farm. The rent was paid twice in 'two mightys' and the rates were also paid twice a year.

He refers to the various hospitals and how they were run in the older days and contrasts it with the fact that 'we can't run now!'

Recalls going to the Ennis Horse Show on August 15th

0:33:25 - 0:43:05

SCHOOL DAYS AND EMIGRATION TO ENGLAND -

Joe speaks about his school days and the emphasis of religion. Recalls learning 'The Nine Choirs of Angels' and recites them.

Refers to learning Irish and states that 'you had to like it'. Recalls that his parents and uncles would speak in Irish when they wanted to speak about anything private.

States that the downfall of the Irish language and states that emigration to England in the 1950s was a big blow. Recalls agents coming from England after the war looking for tradesmen.

Joe contrasts the education of today and his time. Everything in his time was learnt in English and Irish.

Joe recites a poem in Irish (0:38:14 - 0:38:40)

Recalls a speech given by Brian Boru from the Battle of Clontarf and recites it (0:38:40 - 0:39:40)

He recalls all the towns of Ireland which he learnt in school.

He also recalls learning the baronies of county Clare and recites them all.

Recalls the diocesan Inspector coming to Coore school which was a big day. Recalls confirmation also.

Joe recalls a priest dying in the 1930s. They got the day off from school and went to the parochial house to see him laid out. Joe states that this was Canon Glynn.

File 4 0:00:00 - 0:17:57

WAR OF INDEPENDENCE/POLITICS -

Joe speaks about Irish history and the British Empire. He outlines the impact of landlordism. Speaks about boycotting and cattle driving. Lord Lickenfield was the local landlord in Joe's area. Speaks about the 1916 Rising in Dublin. Refers to the Black and Tans and the Irish War of Independence. Refers to the Rineen Ambush. States that in May 1921 Fr. Gaynor and Fr. McKenna were arrested for involvement with Irish Volunteers (IRA). Refers to the 6 December 1921 became known locally as 'The night of the bastards'.

Joe speaks about the killing of 'two fine boys'. He is referring here to McNamara and Shanahan who were captured and shot dead by the Black and Tans. States that they were dragged along the back of lorries. He also refers to Captain Lendrum and that his maid dreamt he was going to be shot. States that his car was driven into Dubhlough Lake and refers to the folk belief that his car would be heard passing years later.

States that the Black and Tans were released from jails in England.

Refers to the Killeens, Gleesons and McGuanes who were active locally in the IRA.

Didn't hear about Patrick Hennessy.

Speaks about the Irish Civil War.

Recalls the day that Fianna Fáil were first elected. Dunsallagh was the local polling station. States that everyone on the register voted including people who were long dead. There was a Fine Gael man who was in charge of the polling booth but he didn't say anything.

Speaks about the Economic War which followed.

Speaks about Martin Sexton from Miltown who was elected for Fianna Fáil. His uncle had flu but he was dressed up and put out to vote.

Recalls the Government offering a grant to repair the roofs of houses which led to the slating of houses.

Speaks about Michael Doherty who used to introduce de Valera when he came around locally.

Recalls his father telling him about marching with Charles Stewart Parnell in Miltown with pitch forks and turf on fire.

Joe tells a story about Daniel O'Connell and the attempt by England to poison him. An Irish maid spoke to O'Connell in Irish and told him that it was poisoned.