John Joe Conway

Male

0:00:00 – 0:06:04
FAMILY BACKGROUND –

John Joe begins the interview by saying the house he grew up in originally belonged to his grandfather who came from Miltown Malbay. His name was Michael Conway and John Joe then spends some time discussing his family's roots.

Note: Interview pauses here as the phone rings.

John Joe describes farming during both his fathers and grandfathers time as a tough way to live. Farmers during these times always had good gardens growing different types of vegetables which would feed them.

0:06:05 – 0:12:17
THE BOG –

John Joe was born in 1935. He says that while he was growing up it wasn't uncommon for people not to know their own age. There was no such thing as big parties for particular birthdays like the ones which occur today.

As a child, John Joe's family had an open hearth fire in the house which was fueled with turf from a bog seven miles away. He says that when you were going there to collect turf it would have to be 'cut, turned and footed', before bringing home. John Joe talks about this process briefly and describes turning and footing to be physically demanding jobs.

They would travel to the bog with a horse and cart which was also used to carry home the turf. The creels that they used were made by Tom Hogan in Ballinacarra. John Joe talks about the process involved in creating the wheels for

this contraption which would be done by a blacksmith. John McCormack was the smith in their area.

0:12:18 – 0:18:34
THE FORGE –

John Joe talks about some of the other blacksmiths that operated in the area, mentioning two more forges. He continues to talk about these forges and how musical the hammer and anvil could be. He remembers both Morgan's forge and Pa Joe Curtis' forge in Killinaboy. John Joe tells a story he heard when he was younger that involved the Curtis forge.

0:18:35 – 0:19:33
CULTURAL TRADITIONS –

It was very common for people to tell stories around the fire when they were on 'cuairt'. John Joe regrets not been able to remember the vast amount of stories he heard on these nights when he was growing up

0:19:34 – 0:27:58
BLACKSMITHS –

John Joe says that he can remember the blacksmith Pa Joe Curtis. He talks about the time he brought a horse to his forge. He describes what he can remember of this man and some of the stories he would have told. He also talks about some of the jobs Pa Joe would have done within his profession.

John Joe never heard of blacksmiths been paid a lump sum for the year but instead were generally paid per job. Building gates was another duty of a blacksmith.

0:27:59 – 0:32:38
TRADES –

John Joe talks about carpenters and the skill of creating wheels. He mentions Dinny Costello who is still carrying this skill on today. He remembers going to a seminar one evening where he talked about his skill.

The tradition of passing a skill down through the family was generally how people were educated in a trade. Apprenticeships with tradesmen could last up to three years according to John Joe. Wages wouldn't be very high during these apprenticeships because the tradesman simply couldn't afford to pay.

0:32:39 – 0:38:09
CURES –

Cow doctors were a commonly seen on the rural landscape while John Joe was growing up. He talks about one that operated out of Kilfenora who was known as Haulie Burke.
He talks about a cow having twin calves which were joined together. He carries on to illustrate the process that resulted in them been separated.

0:38:10 – 0:46:45
CATTLE AND FARMING –

John Joe dealt with Shorthorn cattle his entire life. He talks about going to the fairs and the qualities of a good short horn cow. John Joe explains farmers would stay away from white cattle because they would carry white heifer disease. This belief is no longer accepted in the farming community.

John Joe mainly milked Shorthorn cattle but mentions briefly some of the other cattle he worked with over his lifetime. He stayed milking the Shorthorn because he believed that they produced better quality milk.

0:46:46 – 1:06:20
KILLING THE PIG AND THE ENNIS MARKET –

John Joe talks about some of the methods used by a local man named Willie Mac to kill the pig. Pigs would have their own out building on John Joe's farm. His father would go to the market in Ennis to buy pigs. He would generally buy pigs from Ballynacally because it was believed high quality pigs came from this region.

John Joe talks about the market that took place in Ennis. He would travel with a creel which was used to transport the bonabhs.

People would generally start to kill their pigs on St. Martins Day.

1:13:48 – 1:20:32
CULTURAL TRADITIONS AND FOLKLORE –

John Joe talks about people going on 'cuairt'. He mentions people from the locality along with some of his relations.

Biddy Early was commonly discussed on these social evenings. People would talk about the different cures she had when they were telling stories about her.

The 'cÃ³iste bodhar' was frequently mentioned in ghost stories.

John Joe says that there was always a strong belief in the Banshee when he was growing up.

John Joe explains the 'fear gortach' as when a person gets stricken with a sudden hunger.

1:20:33 – 1:40:28
KNOCKANEDEN HILL AND TOWN LAND –

John Joe talks about Knockaneden hill and tells a story about some women that used to live on it in a now abandoned village. It is claimed that Michael Cusack was born in this area.

John Joe talks about forestry.

John Joe talks about Pat Mac's grand aunt. Other old people in the community included Dan Cusack. John Joe can remember him playing music. His instrument was the concertina. There wasn't a very strong tradition of music in the town land of Knockaneden. It was instead known for tug of war. John Joe talks about some of the men that took part in this sport. He outlines the training that was involved in this sport.

1:40:29 – 1:52:44
CHRISTMAS –

According to John Joe, Christmas was an event that everyone looked forward to. The youngest member of the family was always given the responsibility of lighting the Christmas candles. The first candle was lit using flames from the fireplace and then this candle was used to light the remaining candles.

John Joe never heard of people leaving their doors open on Christmas Eve in Knockaneden but did hear of it in other parts of the county. The reason for this been done was to allow the Holy Family entry in case they were passing.
Mass was held very early in the morning when it was still dark. During these times people would walk to Church with their flash lamps and lanterns.

The expectation of Santa Claus was present during John Joe's younger years but the presents received weren't as flamboyant as today. They could include a bit of chocolate or some fruit.

1:52:44 2:10:14
CHANGES IN SOCIETY AND THE MUMMERS –

John Joe explains that society changed at such a slow rate that nobody really recognised it occurring. He remembers playing handball with his friends during his younger years which slowly died out due to lads emigrating or getting

married. Refers to hurling in the townland and that hurleys were called 'spaks'.

John Joe says he misses the social events which would take place especially during Christmas. He talks about the mummers and how much fun this would be. He explains how people would get dressed for this event. He sketches a verbal map of the route the mummers would take. He explains that the mummers were the same as the wren boys. Every community referred to them as one of these names, in Knockanedan it was mummers. The mummers would go around different town lands playing music in people's homes and they would receive a small bit of money in return. The group that John Joe travelled with could change slightly every year. He talks about some of the musicians he would travel with on these evenings of music.