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Address: Carrowreagh, Milltown, Tuam, Co Galway
(Originally from Pollavaddy, Balla, Co Mayo)
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Interviewer: Pauline Connolly
Transcription by: Pauline Connolly
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Pauline: Hi Bridie, Thank you for agreeing to this interview today and signing consent form on the 10th May 2015. Just to start off, you are a Mayo woman, what brought you to Milltown?

Bridie: Well, I met a Galway man in the Maple ballroom in Balla 40 years ago so that's how I arrived in Milltown. That was the time of the dance halls and the dance halls were one of the best social occasions that were in rural Ireland at the time and I honestly believe that they're sadly missed this day and age and I feel sorry for the young people that they had to grow up without them, because we had the best time ever in those dancehalls.

Pauline: So, has your lifestyle in Milltown changed to that of what your lifestyle was in Pollavaddy?

Bridie: Well, it would have changed somewhat because I'm now in Milltown 40 years but we got piped water which was a great asset and that changed most people's lifestyles. Now, there's television, there's email, there's skype, there's all those things that people have nowadays, we certainly didn't have those when I was growing up. We had to do without them. There was not many motorcars, a lot of transportation was done on the bicycles and walking from place to place but now everything is gone much more modern, much easier to get from place to place and much easier to do your shopping and the world is gone a much smaller place because we can get from place to place much much easier, I must say.

Pauline: What was life like before piped water came in?

Bridie: Oh, life before piped water, I can tell you, there was plenty of hard labour. The drinking water for the tea and for the cooking was taken from a spring well

in your land / maybe in the neighbour's land and that had to be walked to the well, carried home in a bucket a few times a day maybe. Then the water for the cattle in summer time in particular. When the water was collected from the roof quite a bit in barrels and tanks and when that went dry for livestock, you might have to get the ass cart and go to a waterway and team the water in with a bucket into the barrel and that'd be transported home with the ass and the ass cart, the donkey, god bless the little donkey, but they were great, all the work they did in their time. We had a lovely little donkey. He was a real pet, well looked after, his name was Neddy and that water then, when it was brought into the barrel, it was used for the livestock, had to be taken out in a bucket and put into a tub a few times a day. The piped water has got rid of all that now. Cattle out on the land now have got drinking troughs so they're gone modern now like the people.

Pauline: You were busy when were you younger, did you have any time for pastimes?

Bridie: Yes, even though we were busy, the extraordinary thing about it, which I can never understand is people always had time and even when my mother, the lord rest her went to the well, she always went in and had a little visit with the neighbour and they always seem to have plenty of time and we seemed to have ran out of this time, I don't know why. As a child, I would have played quite a bit with dolls. I did love dogs and cats. We did have cats and dogs and kittens and we had ducks and geese and chickens and goslings. I always liked to do a bit of sewing. Sewing was a hobby of mine as well. I also read comics, I used to like Buntie and Judy and I read quite a bit in my time.

Pauline: And what about these days? Do you have time these days for pastimes?

Bridie: Well, I have to make a certain amount of time. I go walking. We have a beautiful park in Milltown with a beautiful river walk, very nicely developed and it's so scenic and so peaceful down there and it's lovely to go there in the morning and you can hear the birds singing and we have ducks down the river as well. There's no traffic so you don't have to worry about traffic and you can meet quite a lot of people. There's a picnic area in it and there's often people stop in that's going from Galway to Sligo and they might have a picnic or a snack and sometimes you meet people of different nationalities that's on their holidays, they come in and we have a beautiful playground in it that children play in. The children have a sandpit, they have a slide, they have a swing. Our children played there very much when they were young, we used to bring them down there and

they all enjoyed a great time and they used to paddle and swim a bit in the river. Now the river is known for kayaking and fishing, so you'd meet fishermen there from time to time as well. It's amazing all the people you'd get to talk to down there, it's as good as going visiting somewhere.

Pauline: So, you are probably one of the generations that have seen the most changes. What's the best change you've seen?

Bridie: One of the best changes I would have seen would have been piped water. I was 7 years old when the ESB came to our area and as children, we were fascinated with it and the big conversation going to school in those days was how many lights did ye get? Well, most people, that time, could only afford two lights and one plug. The plug was one big yoke. It was on a piece a wood and it was generally, I don't know why, situated near the window but that was probably to accommodate the first radio. I remember the first radio coming as well and the first radio we got was a Pi radio. Even though the ESB came, that's all people could afford, cooking was generally done on the open fire. It was a good while after before people got electric cookers and that kind of thing so the cooking was done. There was a big huge open fire in most houses and on that fire, there was a few pots and there was a big iron thing, a crane that swung in and out over the fire and on the crane there were pots with pot hooks that was to hang the pot on the crane. Potatoes were cooked on the fire. Cabbage and bacon and turnips were cooked very, very often on the fire as well. Bread was baked on the open fire. There was a pot oven, 3 legs on it and that could have been left beside the fire and there would coals put on the top and coals underneath to bake the bread. Herrings were grilled on a tongs, the tongs that would put coals on the fire with and toast was made on a fork, slice of loaf, hold in front of a well kindled fire, mind you it needed to be well kindled and when one side was cooked, you stuck the fork in the other side and turned it round and did the other side. Porridge, it was commonly known then as stirabout. Stirabout was cooked in a saucepan as well beside the fire with what they used to call flake meal so the diet was plain enough in those days but vegetables and those were all home grown and people had their own supply and their own garden and everything in it.

My father was a beekeeper and we had 3 beehives as well so I was fairly familiar with bees and their antics growing up and he used to have his own supply of honey that he sold. It was known that time and I still believe is to be good for asthmatics so he used to sell a certain amount of honey but I'll tell you there was plenty of fun, if you'd call it fun the day the bees swarmed. We weren't supposed

to let them go.....and if he went to the bog.....but there was a certain technique in capturing those swarms. They generally went up and sat on a tree but if it was a dark day of raining, inclined to be raining, the bees didn't go but if there was bright sunlight which there often was that time ago, the bees would take off but if you went out and got a twig, a twig was a brush, well a brush I suppose, you'd call it for sweeping the floor so you could put that in a bucket of water and dash of water at them and the bees would think it would rain and they would wait and then you had to get a canvas bag and a butter box.....ah you probably wouldn't know what a butter box is...well a butter box was a yoke, it was a timber box for holding butter and if you turned that upside down and put it up on the tree and put a bit of honey inside on the bottom of it....but it'd be upside down or melted sugar....the bees would go in so then there was a certain skill of removing this box as well so then you have to be careful, put it on the ground with a bag underneath and a little stick underneath that and then someone might come to buy the bees if they wanted to get into bees. You had to pull out the stick very carefully and wrap the thing, the bag around the box and they in turn would be put into the hive and they would start up their beekeeping.

Pauline: Thanks very much Bridie Connolly for taking the time out for our interview today.

ESB = Electricity Supply Board / Rural Electrification