



**Name:** Mr. Billy Morris

**From:** Cregboy, Claregalway

**Age:** Over 80

**Interviewers:** Sharon Kearney & Martina Hughes

**Date:** 12<sup>th</sup> November 1991

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**Sharon**      **What size farms were there?**

**Billy**      There were no big farms around here, ours was one of the biggest.

**Sharon**      **What size would they be?**

**Billy**      Oh, we had around 150 acres at one stage. We haven't that much now.

**Sharon**      **What type of farming did people practice?**

**Billy**      All my life, it was more or less mixed farming - tillage, dairy farming some years. But all along, even in my father's time, we used to do mixed farming - tillage and stock. We sold milk to Renmore-Athenry for, I'd say, about ten years.

**Sharon**      **Has machinery and tools changed much?**

**Billy**      Well, we're hardly using any of the machinery today that we used that time. We had a reaper and binder very early on, even in my schooldays.

**Sharon**      **What was that for?**

**Billy**      For cutting the corn. It tied it up and pitched out the sheaves, and we had horse ploughs, harrows - that was in my father's time, he died in 1932. We kept them for a good while until we got our first tractor, about 1960. And then we got tractor machinery, we didn't have an awful lot. We had tractor ploughs and we had a small combine harvester.

**Sharon**      **Where did you buy livestock from?**

**Billy**      In Galway fairs, Galway fairs were held on the street. They went on for a lot of my life and people wouldn't believe you, but you had to get up around 1 o'clock and drive your cattle into Galway. I don't know how they did it, there wouldn't be a lot of traffic on the road though.

**Sharon**      **Was there any other fair locally?**

Billy            There was a fair in Athenry, we attended some of them. There was fairs in Headford and Tuam. I didn't attend many in Tuam. But the Galway fairs were terrible hardship.

**Sharon**      **Why?**

Billy            Well, you could imagine driving cattle out in the dark, and you didn't have great flashlights. From Prospect Hill down to Moons. They had cattle and sheep up against the doors. How the people tolerated it, I do not know, and that changed about 40 years. They changed to the Fairgreen, that was built by the Corporation at the time. The Corporation put pens in it and it was easier hold your stock and then there was lorries, they used to load the cattle.

**Sharon**      **When did people start bringing milk to the creamery?**

Billy            I'd say I got married in 1950, it was some time after that, but you didn't bring it, there was lorries to collect it. We left the cans outside the wall.

**Sharon**      **Do you think, were there many changes before 1960 to now?**

Billy            One of the great changes in my memory was the combine harvester. It cut your corn and thrashed it, and put it into the bag. Before that, you had to bring the corn into the barn and there was a machine driven by horses and you thrashed it in the barn and then you had to put it into a winnowing machine to get the seed away from the chaff. It was terrible hardship. But one of the greatest things that ever came was the harvesters. I used to see it in the pictures. I had it about ten years, it wasn't a big one. It was worked off the tractor, it was very useful.

**Sharon**      **Would machinery be expensive that time?**

Billy            The time I bought it, it was second hand, it was working down in Kerry before that. It cost me about £1,000.

**Sharon**      **That would have been a lot of money those times, wouldn't it?**

Billy            It would, but times were beginning to get good.

**Sharon**      **How did people cut the hay then?**

Billy            I saw it cut with a horse mower, but people cut it by the scythe. Before you went in to cut it with the horse drawn machine. You went in and cut a stripe

all around by the wall.

**Sharon**      **How do they cut hay around here now?**

**Billy**      The hay is all cut by a rotary mower, but the old type mower still works on the tractor. But the rotary mower is another great advantage because you just went in and wheeled it around about and kept cutting, whereas the other mower, if you had any heavy hay, you had trouble with it, it'd be stopping and starting and God knows what. But the rotary mower is a great thing. Nearly everyone has them now. You could buy them that time for 7 or 8 hundred, I suppose they'd be a couple of thousand now, £15,000 anyhow. The horse mower then, you could rig it up for cutting the corn, you put attachments on to it and you'd sit on a seat over the wheel and you had a rake in your hand and you'd lay the sheaves with it. It was hard work. I kept the rake that I used. You want to go on to beet now?

**Sharon**      **Yeah!**

**Billy**      The beet started in 1933 I think, it was hardship that time. You sowed it with a horse machine that you sowed mangles and turnips with before that. There was no weed control or anything like now. And then when summer came, you went down on your knees, singling it and weeding it. That's what I spent my summer holidays at. Imagine down on your knees on a hot day.

**Sharon**      **That was very hard work!**

**Billy**      It was horrible work. The improvement came year by year, there was some improvement all the time. My son has beet sown, and yesterday all that was in the field was the operator and 2 tractors and trailers, taking it out and putting it out on the road.

**Sharon**      **Did you send beet into Tuam Sugar Factory?**

**Billy**      Tuam, yeah, but he sends it to Carlow now, since Tuam closed. When we grew it first in 1934, a lorry used to come and collect it and there wasn't a beet fork. There's a beet fork now. It was by hand we filled it that time. Hard work too and the lorry might come anytime. You didn't know when he'd come. But we brought it to Oranmore Station, tipped it down and forked it into the wagons again. The price was very small that time, it was only about 32 or 35 shillings a ton. But you got pulp back and farmers always had great value in pulp. A lot of them used to nearly sow the beet in order to get the pulp out of it. During the war years, you used to get a permit from the sugar factory to buy sugar, but if you were from the town you wouldn't get it. The beet grower used to get this permit for so much sugar, 100 weights or 4 stone.

It was appreciated.

**Sharon** Was it like a voucher for sugar?

Billy Something like that.

**Sharon** What was the pulp for?

Billy It was for feeding calves and sheep, it was worth about 3 pounds a tonne, if you were to see it, it would be worth over £100 now anyway.

**Sharon** There was a co-op in Claregalway at one time. Did you ever hear anything about it or do you know why it closed down?

Billy The co-op, years and years ago is it?

**Sharon** Yeah, the 1920's.

Billy My father was a member of it and when it closed, I remember going to meetings when I was a gasuir. There was debts in the bank left after it that had to be paid, but with a bit of tangling anyhow, they got them reduced to a small bit. Pdraig's father now, Tom Rafferty had a lot to do with that. He had a lot to do with the selling up with the bank of the debt.

**Sharon** Who would have set up the co-op?

Billy A teacher named Carter. I think he was the starter of it, and my father and other famers became members of it and shareholders. I know one of the things they bought was a reaper, a binder and I suppose that was hired out among the people. It finished up with my father buying it.

**Sharon** What was the main sport you used to play?

Billy Hurling.

**Martina** Were you on a team?

Billy I was on a junior team. I have one medal. I think I won it in 1931.

**Martina** Did you win many other games?

Billy No, I got a cup for a ploughing competition - horse ploughing. It was presented by the Parish Priest, he was Canon o'Dea (Paddy). He was a great athlete in his young days. It was a cup he got somewhere and he presented it

to the ploughing society here and I won it outright. I won it down in Hession's field. You know when you pass Hanleys now, after that on the right.

**Martina**      **Was there many others involved in it?**

Billy            Well, they were nearly all local, but there might be 2/3 competitions, but this was confined to the senior cup. There was 4/5 involved in it. Reilly, famous ploughman and his brother and Paddy Moran, Lakeview. It used to be a great day out, there'd be a dance in Hanleys and we'd take the cup to the pub and fill it.

**Martina**      **Who started the GAA in Claregalway?**

Billy            I don't know, it was started well before my time. There was the two Hessions over here, were very involved in it. And Ross. Do you know the public house is closed now, Moylans. They were very involved in it.

**Martina**      **Do you know anything about the ball alley?**

Billy            I never played handball, but when it was built, we used to ramble around, we'd go over looking at it. I know my father was involved in it, in the committee and the Kemples. They were famous players. It was the centre of sport at one time, the ball alley.

**Sharon**        **Did people come from outside parishes?**

Billy            From Athenry.

**Martina**      **Did you have any competitions?**

Billy            There'd never be a big competition. They'd play for the pure fun of it. They played single hands, one against the other, and doubles, two against two. It was hard work too, I'd say. I was talking to a man the other night now, John Glenane, in Waterdale. He's a man that has his hand lost. He told me the first match he ever won was in handball.

**Martina**      **Was the land owned by a landlord called Galbraith?**

Billy            The only one that owned it, was ourselves. It was our own land all my life.

**Sharon**        **Is there any lisheens on your land?**

Billy            No.

**Sharon** Did you know anything about the fife band?

**Billy** There's a building over there where the curate's house is now, and in our time, it was always the band room. That's where they used to play and practice. The instruments were found in it by Seamus Concannon who owns it.

**Sharon** Was there a Martin Samways?

**Billy** There was, next door neighbour here.

**Sharon** He would have been in the band, would he?

**Billy** He would, I think, I'm not too clear on that. He was a postman at one stage. I never heard that name before. I think his mother was a Kilkenny woman. He was very interested in the GAA, very fond of hurling.

**Sharon** Did you hear about the ghostly train?

**Billy** No.

**Sharon** What were the main crops that you used to sow?

**Billy** Oats and barley, the barley used to be sown for malting to Guinness'. The oats for home use and some for sale. It wasn't the same oats that time. It was black oats. They improved the crops and the returns as time went on. You'd get way better returns out of them now, than you would that time. It was all hay that time, there was no talk of silage at all.

**Sharon** Where would you sell the oats and barley?

**Billy** McDonagh's in Galway, used to buy a lot of things. But barley, I remember, my father had a lot of it one time, and it went direct to Guinness' in Dublin.

**Sharon** What crops do you sow now? Is there much difference?

**Billy** The barley we sow is feeding barley, we don't sow malting barley and all you don't want you can sell it over in Flynns. And the smaller farmers buy barley off us.

**Sharon** Years ago, when you were selling barley and oats, would you have to bring it into town?

**Billy** Yes, I went into Galway with the horse and cart many times selling oats, potatoes and turnips. It was another hard part in our lives. And you wouldn't be sure even if you sell them, but somehow we always managed to sell them. You had no guaranteed market for them. That was one good thing about beet - there was a guaranteed market for it. One of the first things that we got a guaranteed price for. Well you get more or less a guaranteed price for barley, but there's no guaranteed price for oats even today.

**Sharon** **Would you bring them to the market in Galway to sell them?**

**Billy** Yes, you'd stand across from where the American hotel is. There was a weigh bridge and you weighed the load of hay on it and then you pulled down opposite the bank, and you waited there until some buyer came along and he bought it and you might have to go 3 miles out to Ragoon to deliver it, but McDonagh's bought the most of the oats and Palmers, they were the 2 biggest buyers, Bushy Park Area. Other smaller merchants used to buy the oats too and they'd sell it out again in stones. But Palmers and McDonaghs were the big buyers. They don't do them at all now, I think.

**Sharon** **Did you cut turf?**

**Billy** No, we cut turf one year/2 in the war years, but we buy now from Bord na Mona in Attymon. Before that, I bought turf from people down Curraghmore Road, a good number of years.

**Sharon** **Montiagh was more a turf area?**

**Billy** It was, they used to bring the turf to Oranmore from there and locals used to buy it. There's terrible changes.

**Sharon** **Changes for the better?**

**Billy** Oh yes, without a doubt. Another big change that came was when we got the ESB. It was formed in the late 20's, I think in Limerick, but we did not get the electricity until maybe 10 years after that. The first line went through our land. They drew the big poles up with a horse, there was no machinery that time. It was one of the big things in this country.

**Sharon** **It brought a lot of things?**

**Billy** Oh, it did. I remember my mother, from dinnertime on, she'd be getting the lamps ready for the night, cleaning the globes and cutting the wicks. That's the light we had, which was a bad light, even the best of them.

**Sharon**      **Were there other fairs?**

Billy            We used to go a lot to Turloughmore Fair.

**Sharon**      **What was sold there?**

Billy            Cattle, sheep or horses. It was a big fair, it used to be a great day.

**Sharon**      **Was there a dance in Turloughmore as well?**

Billy            There was in Ballinvogher, Murphys dance hall. The one down the Tuam Road was the main dance hall that time - Keaveney's. I was involved the time the first dance hall was opened here. It was opposed, and one of us had to go into court.

**Sharon**      **Why was it opposed?**

Billy            I don't know was it Liercardy or who, but he got the licence anyhow. Some of us and my friends went into the court. Hanleys owned it. It was very successful.

**Sharon**      **How much would it be to get in then?**

Billy            About 2 bob.

**Sharon**      **What is 2 bob?**

Billy            2 shillings.

**Sharon**      **About 10p?**

Billy            10p now. Oh, the half crown was a great coin, it was more value than the 2 bob. The half crown was 30p or 26p. The 2 bob coin was 20p or 10p.

**Sharon**      **Do you know anything about the Flail?**

Billy            It was 2 sticks bound together by a leather thong and they would lash the corn on the floor and they'd get the seed off it. Would you believe, I was talking to a man not so long ago and he used to do it himself, that's Tom Lohan, up above Mattie Boyle's place. I was amazed when he told me. And no way is he as old as me. I'm over 80 now.

**Sharon**      **Did he use it recently?**



Billy

Ah no. They used to give the crushed straw into the cows, but he told me he used it before he went to school. He'd be a very interesting man to talk to, John Lohan.

