

I started teaching in Arklow in 1967 having spent the statutory two years training in St Patricks Training College Drumcondra, Dublin

I remember the first journey up from Kerry to my teaching position in Arklow very well. In the first instance we had to travel up on a Saturday with my brother-in-law and sister driving me. The Rose of Tralee Festival was in full swing that same weekend and I was a very reluctant traveller. As we travelled along the weather was atrocious with persistent storms and rain. As it so happened the festival activities had to be cancelled that night due to adverse weather conditions, so I did not feel too bad.

I had been appointed to this position after meeting Fr Connolly who had travelled up from Arklow in the month of June to St Pats wondering if anyone would like to teach in Arklow as he had two teaching positions vacant in Arklow B.N.S. I told him that I was interested, and I was thus appointed with one other who pulled out on the Saturday pre-school opening because he got a job in Dublin. He rang a friend who had no job. He in turn rang Fr Connolly who told him to be in Arklow on Monday morning and he was. And he too was appointed. Those were the days.

It was fantastic in those years to be appointed to a teaching position on July 1<sup>st</sup> because then you were paid for the summer holidays. Most people took the boat to England for a summer job to supplement the paltry teachers' pay at the time. We were paid eleven pounds a week. We paid five pounds for digs and ten shillings for laundry. We were poor and we knew it. We had all read the Department circulars of the time and we knew that at that time you were entering the teaching profession for the love of teaching and not the pecuniary rewards.

The published salary rates at that time were derisory

Trained Men Married – Principals and Assistants £770 -£1490 while single people were paid from £620-£1190

Trained Women Principals and assistants were paid from £620-£1190

Before we hit the road for Arklow we rang the principal, Mr Mick [The Kid] O Connor, a good Dingle man, enquiring about accommodation, and he told us that all teachers stayed in digs in Lamberton Hall, a most suitable venue for teachers.

When I refer to the afore mentioned digs, I must give you a bit of background. There were 3 lovely old ladies named Oonagh, Sarah Anne and Rita O Byrne. They were referred to locally as the Miss O Byrnes . They owned the lovely Lamberton House on the outskirts of Arklow. It was situated in the middle of their farm. They had a farm hand named Aidan whom they looked after well

They told us that there once was a cockfighting arena on their lands. They also said that their farm was the last stop for the Wexford Pikemen on the way to the battle of Arklow in 1798.

These ladies only took in gentlemen lodgers, and they also had to be school masters who were willing to obey their rules of the house. This was a well-run operation with Sarah Anne being the overlord manager and bursar. Oonagh was in charge of all food servings and general cleanliness and laundry collection and distribution while Rita was cook and farm duty manager . It was a well-oiled machine.

Every Friday Sarah Anne appeared with her ledger, and we paid up. She then dutifully marked paid in full in that famous ledger. There was no credit or back payments in this house. We paid up half our wages for this great standard of living and cleanliness

Celtic laundry in Wexford did all their bedclothes and we each sent off our ten shillings worth of clothing to be washed and starched with the house laundry

None of the three sisters were married so we were their children. We were fed to the best with fresh eggs and fry up if you wanted it. There was always a plentiful supply of cereal while all bread and jam were home-made, and the milk was fresh cream milk from the cow.

When we went downtown, we were always told to be home early and not to make too much noise. We generally obeyed.

When we came home at night we assembled in the big kitchen where the women left out a full bucket of full cream fresh milk and we drank what we wanted. They had home-made marmalade and jam all year round. We were spoiled rotten in our earlier years. When they retired, they went to live in a bungalow close by and it became a pilgrimage venue for all who had stayed in Lamberton House over the years to visit them in their retirement. I along with a sizeable number of other teachers from near and far attended their funerals. They were a rare breed, the last of the old stock.

Now that I had the job and the digs it was off to my first summer job in England. I was working at Barton's Bakery in Basildon, in Essex. I started off making bread and slicing them into Bartons Happy Weekend Pan loaves. This involved filling the equivalent of a concrete mixer with flour, yeast, and liquid, mixing it, and then disgorging it on to be filled into loaf tins. They were baked up and started flying down a chute to be wrapped up and be ready for the first delivery vans which would be hitting the street of London at 5am. I managed to survive this for two weeks.

Sunday morning was free morning so every Paddy around the place went to mass and met up for a chat or a jar. There was always someone looking for labourers. It served as a recruiting agency as well as a religious site. In church I was sitting beside a man I recognised from the bakery, and we had a little natter after mass. I told him who I was without telling him that I was only there on summer work. Any way the upshot of it all was that he offered me promotion to the confectionery department.

My first duty day was in spraying the sausage rolls as they were put on this massive steel conveyor belt going into the oven. I was called, Hey Paddy we are running out of eggs, go get some. No matter where I looked, I could not see an egg. Eventually the gaffer pointed me in the right direction. The eggs were liquefied and stored

in a huge barrel with a spray gun attached so I was very egg cided and off I went spraying.

The following Sunday I met my good Catholic foreman at Mass again and he asked me if I would like to move to the fresh cream Danish section and I dutifully nodded assent

Now here I am three weeks in the job and I am jumping up the promotion ladder with a rise in wages. Next week he shifted me on to the van distribution section as they were looking for someone totally new here. This was the nightmare section with vans coming and going and some drivers had got accustomed to getting a few extra bits and pieces put on their rounds as a wee perk for themselves.

I was glad to have such a complete change in employment while at the same time being able to hand in my notice and return to teaching. The gaffer assured me that I could always come back to Bartons. It was a great big welcoming place, and I gained some great working experience there which stood me for life.

I was happy to return to Arklow BNS and Lamberton House and go back to my secure pensionable teaching job. After working late night shift work averaging 12 hours a night for seven weeks, I valued my shorter days and a more regular sleep pattern. I was doubly happy in the knowledge that my unopened pay cheques would be lodged in my bank account and give me a healthy positive balance for the year ahead.

It enabled me to refurbish the wardrobe with new slacks and jackets. It also allowed us to have a few drinks and a bit of a social life without having to scrimp and scrape if we had not taken the boat to England.