

INTERVIEW WITH PADDY CASEY
BELVOIR, SIXMILEBRIDGE (AGE 77)

ON

BELVOIR SCHOOL

BY NIALL O'BEACHAIN, SHANNON DEVELOPMENT

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- Q. When was Belvoir School built?
A. 1829 - before the Famine.
- Q. Who built the school?
A. A man called David Wilson Lynch.
- Q. Where did he live?
A. He lived in Belvoir House - he was the landlord. Well he wasn't the best of landlords and he wasn't the worst I suppose as it went at the time. He was a curious kind of man but he could evict a person at a moments notice.
- Q. Why did he build Belvoir School?
A. Well I suppose he had a certain amount of wealth and he also had regard for the tenants. Of course some of them didn't worry about education at that time and were more backward than ever. It seems that in his own way he cared about the tenants and wanted them educated.
- Q. So he started off the school in 1829.
A. Yes he did. He built it in 1829. I don't know whether he got a Government grant or aid. He also built the model farm. The pupils who went to the school had to work on the model farm if they could not pay their school fees.
- Q. When did you first start going to the school?
A. I went in 1915 - just one year after the Great War broke out.
- Q. Where did the children come from to the school?
A. Well they came from the surrounding area - about four or five miles. One child came from Kilkishen on a pony.
- Q. Did they stay long at the school?
A. Until they were fourteen or fifteen. Some of them didn't stay that long but they would have been very few. Most of them stayed until confirmation and then left.
- Q. What exactly did you learn there?
A. We learned reading, writing, arithmetic and we also had drill and physical education.
- Q. Were the boys and girls together?
A. It was the first integrated or co-educational school in Ireland. The girls would be on one side and the boys on the other. The younger boys and girls were with the school mistress up to third class and from third class on the girls and boys were with the school master.
- Q. What would the children wear do you remember?
A. Various rigouts. There were no such things as uniforms at that time. The girls wore pinafores.
- Q. Were the children barefoot?
A. They would be in Summer. When there were fine days in April - the shoes would be thrown away. Everyone would be barefoot.

- Q. What time did school start?
A. Roll-call was at 10 O'clock so you could come in any time up to 10.00.
- Q. Did you use slates?
A. No we never used slates - it was always copybooks.
- Q. What did the master write on?
A. He wrote on the board and at times you would have to go out and explain yourself on the board as well.
- Q. Did he use a cane?
A. Not very freely but he might threaten us with it.
- Q. Had you long holidays from school?
A. They were about the same as now. There weren't so many bank-holidays in those days. St. Patricks Day and Easter Monday were about the principal days.
- Q. Do you remember the Great War?
A. Oh yes I do. I remember the scarcity of bread and everything. Sugar and tea and things like that were hard to get. There were no rationing cards like the last war but there was a scarcity of food generally. Then of course the transport wasn't good and it took longer to get around.
- Q. Who was the manager of the school?
A. The landlord was the manager. The priest came in only for religious instruction.
- Q. What kind of desks were in the school?
A. They were long desks. They would seat ten or eleven pupils.
- Q. How many pupils were at the school?
A. Well when I went to school first - the total count was ninty-five. One of the older pupils would be put over the infants to control them.
- Q. Did you mitch from school?
A. We took a day off now and then.
- Q. What did you do?
A. We went off bird-nesting or if we got a stream running we would go fishing for trout.
- Q. Were books expensive at that time?
A. No - books were cheap but money was scarce. We had some books provided in school.
- Q. What kind of books had you.
A. We had Shakespeare plays - like "Macbeth" and "As you Like It." We also had Dickens "Tale of Two Cities" and a few more like that. They were our school books.
- Q. Had you any Irish books.
A. There were Irish books but they were few and far between.

- Q. Did you have to do English compositions?
A. We would have to write a composition about any subject he'd ask.
- Q. Where did the teacher train?
A. He was ex-Trinity and he was a qualified surveyor as well as a school-teacher. He could measure anything, land or air or tillage.
- Q. Had they heating in the school?
A. You carried your sod of turf to school if you had it and we seldom had it. We used have to gather firewood.
- Q. In the Summer would he take you outside the school?
A. Yes he would and give us lessons on nature. There was a flower garden just in front of the school. He used to tend it.
- Q. Would he teach you the names of the flowers?
A. He would - and the names of the trees as well. You would have to write a composition on the flowers or an oak leaf or beech.
- Q. Did the school equip you for life?
A. Yes there were more successes out of it than out of any of the surrounding schools. You had three or four very successful business men in Limerick that were educated in Belvoir. They were McNamara beside the Sarsfield Bar, James Gleeson and Patrick O'Grady.
- Q. Did a lot of them emigrate?
A. Oh yes - some went to America and Australia - you have people from Belvoir scattered all over the world.
- Q. Where things hard at that time?
A. Well they were hard but everyone was nearly on the same level. There was no great competition. People weren't as much in competition with each other. They were all trying to live.