

'ANY SIGN OF THE BREADMAN'

Door to door services in former times

BY JOHN CAMPBELL

Living in a house situated on the main roadside meant, in the years after the war, that there were many callers at our door. Neighbours passing by found it easy to drop in and lots of people stopped to get directions – how often did we have to tell callers where Jim White the local herbalist lived! We had Fisher's coal-lorry drivers who called regularly to have a kettle boiled to make tea and we had a whole variety of parcels or other materials left at our house for collection, by neighbours who lived off the main road. I remember small orders of timber being unloaded from the top of a coal lorry and, on one occasion, I recall Andy McParland, who was a blacksmith on the Belfast Road near Beechill, arriving with a horse and cart to pick up iron rods, which had been left for him at the house. And then we had all the usual callers who brought the essentials to our door either in the form of goods or services. They were the butcher, bread man, the mobile-grocer, the milkman, the coal man, insurance man and, of course, the local postman. These were the regular callers and then perhaps on a less frequent, or occasional basis, there was the fowl-dealer or 'hen man', the herring-man, the pig butcher, the pavee or haberdashery man, and later on, in a similar line, the Betterware man with brushes and kitchen ware.



Pat Canavan at the door of his shop in Railway Street. Also (l-r) Brian Magennis, Tom Canavan and Jim Morrow

Our local butcher was Pat Canavan who owned and ran the business with his brother Tom. He had a butcher's van on the road for over 30 years. An earlier generation of Canavans had established the butcher's business and Pat's uncle Vincent Canavan ran the business from their butcher's shop in Railway Street, Poyntzpass. In those days the Canavans killed their own cattle and had their own slaughterhouse in the yard but new regulations meant

that the animals had to be killed in the abattoir. Pat told me that he started his run at my mother's house in Drumbanagher and finished at her sister Kathleen McEvoy's house in Corcreehy near Sheepbridge, where he, like all callers to the McEvoy household, was always sure of a welcome cup of tea.

The orders were made up in the shop in Railway Street, and did not vary much from week to week but when Pat knew that when a customer ordered lamb's liver, it meant that the stork was probably on the way! Apart from the butchery business the Canavan family have been long-established publicans in the village and Pat found that, from time to time, the two businesses could complement each other. When a customer on his round made a discreet reference to bringing the same again next week, it was just as likely that they were ordering a drop of Power's Whiskey as a pound of steak. Pat called at houses once or twice a week.



Pat Canavan and son Brian ready for Christmas

Other butchers in the village included Davey Allen's for whom Willie Morton, John Gillen and Colman Murphy made deliveries. In later years Pat Courtney ran this business with his son Pat Jnr. who had an extensive run in the general Lissummon area.

Pat Murphy, who lived at Lurganare, worked as a butcher for many years. He had, for a time, a local run but most of his business was in the South Armagh area. Pat, unlike the other butchers mentioned, had a travelling butcher's shop equipped with all the essentials, including a cutting block at the back of the van, where he made up the order. Pat called with his customers on Tuesdays and Thursdays and, although he conducted his business at the height of the troubles, he never encountered any difficulties nor was he ever robbed.

In an area with few opportunities for work at that time, the breadwinner, in a lot of houses, would be off



Pat Murphy in his mobile butcher's shop

working in England. The household income was irregular and Pat allowed credit, which was cleared when an animal was sold, or the husband or father arrived home from England. Indeed he told me he continued to receive payment of old debts years after he had given up the business. In common with most other callers, Pat was called upon from time to time to do messages for his customers - perhaps to get a prescription from the chemist or to take a message to a neighbour - and as one of few callers in the day at a remote country home, he was also expected to have gathered a bit of news on his round.



Pat Courtney

Our bread man for a number of years was John McCann, who worked for McCann's or Victoria Bakeries in Newry. In the days before everything was pre-wrapped, some of us can recall the appetising smells of the fresh bread and buns when the famous 'long drawer' was pulled out. Annie McDonnell remembers a Mr. Rafferty, who was the bread-man on McCann's horse-drawn van the 1920's and told me about a special treat she received on Fridays around 1920, when her mother bought her a meringue bun.

Newry man John Taggart was a bread man for over 30 years in South Armagh and South Down. He worked first for Bernard Hughes bakery and later for Inglis. John told me how important it was for sales to be working at the back of the van when the customer, usually the lady of the house, came out. Cold weather was good frying weather and an array of soda farls and potato bread placed in a prominent position at the back of the drawer always caught the eye. A good bread man knew a bit about product placement even in those days! John told me the bread man who left a loaf on the windowsill sold very little. Unlike Pat Murphy, John had many unpleasant incidents during his working life, having been robbed seven times and he had vans hijacked and burned on two occasions. As a precaution, John sometimes resorted to leaving part of his takings with a trusted customer for collection later.

The bread man carried a pole and hook for bringing the contents of the long drawer forward. The drawer was, on occasions, put to other uses and I heard of an enterprising bread man who was also a part-time farmer. He brought home a litter of pigs that he had purchased on his rounds, in the long drawer. One rather superior lady chastised her bread man for not keeping his drawer clean but he hadn't been transporting young pigs. We have always been fortunate in the wide variety of breads available to us in this country and some will remember the caraway-seed cake. This lady, seeing some seed in the drawer, told the bread man he should be more careful about cleanliness as there were mouse-droppings in his drawer. The bread man reached forward, licked his finger and picked up the seeds and put them in his mouth saying, "Do you know Mem, I think you are right!"



John Taggart

In the days when we often had heavy snow falls, many of the bread vans were fitted with chains, but in spite of this, I was told about a bread man who, on the advice of a local farmer, filled the long drawer with heavy stones and managed to get to the top of a steep hill. Unfortunately as he arrived at the top the back doors

flew open and the drawer with stones on board shot off down the hill at great speed!

Teasie Hudson told me that on his way around on a winter's evening towards the end of his run a bread man, with a horse drawn van, came across a drunk man lying on the road. Worried that the man might die of exposure, the kindly man lifted him up and placed him in the long drawer. He returned to the bakery, unhitched the horse and the van was taken into the bakery to be loaded next morning. However he forgot all about the man in the drawer. During the night the drunk man awoke and getting out of the van found himself surrounded by the baking ovens in full blast and was convinced that he had truly arrived in hell.

In this area Sam Anderson had, at one time, a horse-drawn van and the horse was stabled in cellars at Hudson's. Among the other bread men who worked here were Tommy Henry, Donald Dawson, Frank Monaghan, Harry Willis, Jackie Murdock, Tommy Graham and Eiver Magennis, who took over the run previously held by Noel Hudson. Eiver Magennis and Donald Dawson had their bread brought to Poyntzpass by train and they loaded up their vans at the station every morning.

Another bread-man from this area although he worked mainly in the Portadown district was Liam Magennis. With his brother Brendan, Liam worked first as a door-to-door green grocer for five years in the early sixties. They purchased their supplies from Boyle and Hanratty wholesalers in Newry. In 1965 Liam went to work as a bread-man establishing his own run and eventually operating on his own franchise. In common with the other bread men I spoke to, Liam was able to tell me about all the other services he undertook for his customers. Most bread men supplemented their income from bread sales with the sale of newspapers, magazines and comics.



Liam and Brendan Magennis and their mobile green grocer's van

For people in rural areas, particularly the housebound, the delivery of the paper at no extra charge was a

godsend. Although in some households the bread man was simply referred to as "*John or Liam the bread man*" without ever mentioning, or in some cases even knowing the surname, they built up a degree of trust between themselves and their customers over the years and they shared with them the happy and sad occasions; indeed sometimes being the first to discover a customer, living on their own, who had passed away. Liam told me that in some cases, he had keys to let himself in to customers' houses and that the purse would be left on the table for him to take the money for the order. It was the practice in some areas, particularly where disability prevented the customer from coming out, for the bread man to place a selection in a large basket and bring it in.



"The long drawer"

While our bread-man, John McCann, was not related to the owners of McCann's Bakery, he was in fact a brother of our grocers Gerry and Tommy McCann. The grocery van called at our houses on Fridays. Gerry and Tommy McCann traded under the name of P.J. McCann and Sons. Their father P.J., originally had a small shop a short distance on the Poyntzpass side of the Fiveways roundabout which, in my young days, was known as '*Whigam's Corner*' or '*The Wayside Inn*'. McCanns brought all the essential groceries for a country household, from flour to shoe polish. In those days shopping was much more straightforward than it is today. In common with other grocers in the area McCanns had a separate meal sales and delivery service for the farmers.

Other grocers on the road included Fred Hanlon's and Joe Hall's, here in Poyntzpass; McGovern's in Newry. Griffith Wylie, trading as E. Griffith, employed a number of people in his shop and vans. These included meal-lorry men Johnny Huddleston and Hugh Harshaw, and John Kennedy and Phil Watters on the grocery van. In addition to delivering groceries and meal, the Griffith's van-men also bought eggs on their round, which Graceys collected at the shop. All grocery transactions were in cash and those supplying eggs were paid the following week, thus helping to pay the grocery bill. For a time, in addition to

the groceries and meal, Griffith's had a hardware van on the road, driven by Johnny Huddleston, and they supplied gas, gas fittings and the usual hardware essentials for a country community – yard brushes, saws and saw blades, billhooks, brush shafts etc. Phil Watters told me they also carried a tank for paraffin oil, and in the days before all houses had electricity, oil lamps provided lighting and in some cases heat inside and out. Lily O'Brien told me about Chuck Buchanan from Loughgilly who went around her area with a donkey and cart supplying oil. He measured it out with a quart measuring-can. His famous catch phrase was *"I have a run for every day"* and he would announce his arrival by blowing a whistle.



Griffith's mobile grocers

Our milkman when I was growing up was Joe McParland who worked for Armaghdown Creameries. Our house was the last on Joe's run and this meant that customers in the Poyntzpass side of our house or down the Crack Bridge Road toward Dromantine, did not have their milk delivered to their door. The result was that a crate or two was left at our house and our neighbours in Demoan or Dromantine came to our house to collect their milk.

Collecting the milk was, I suppose, as much a social gathering and provided an opportunity for a chat among friends. Joe McParland and his helper got part of our fry breakfast on a Sunday morning. On the same subject I heard about a bread man who had the reputation of coming into houses at meal time and going around the table picking pieces of food from the childrens' plates. They got wise to him and when the cry went up, *"Quick here comes Harry!"* the children hid their plates in the table drawers until he left. In Poyntzpass at one time Eddie Magill supplied milk directly to customers, who called with their cans, or his daughters delivered milk to houses around the village before they went off to school in the morning. Of course for many years the local milkman was the very popular Bim Rafferty who had a large run in the Poyntzpass and Tanikey district and performed innumerable other services for his customers, including bringing their papers, collecting their prescriptions and

groceries for them. Many of his customers depended on him for much more than milk and in reality he was not just their milkman, he was a social worker.



**Pat McCourt (left) & Bim Rafferty (right)
Local Milkmen**

When Joe McParland retired, his milk run was taken over by a neighbour, Pat McCourt. Over the years Pat and his sons built up an extensive run in the Glen-Saval area.

We continue to enjoy a good postal delivery service but it is no longer the local service it once was, for the mail is sorted in Newry when at one time the post would have been delivered to Poyntzpass or Jerrettspass Post Office in bulk. It was sorted there and the local postmen would set off out on their bicycles to deliver. I remember Davy Little delivering the post in our area and also Seamus Savage.

The team of postmen at Jerrettspass included two brothers Tommy and Willie Forsythe. Tommy delivered around Barr and included in his run the townland of Knockanarney an area known as the *"Barracks"*, where my grandmother, aunts and uncle lived. If you stand at Drumbanagher Church gates and look towards Co. Down you can see the continuation of an old road going over Knockanarney or Barrack Hill past McAnulty's.

The part beyond McAnulty's is I am sure completely overgrown now but at a time locals walked that lane on their way to chapel in Barr. Tommy Forsythe on his rounds was a regular user of this lane when he had post to deliver to the Barracks people – the McAnultys, Murphys, O'Hares, McCreeshs at the locks, the Thompson's and later O'Rourke's at the railway crossing. As he travelled along Tommy was famous for talking to himself, mostly grumbling about the trials that the job put him through.

In that lane he was once heard addressing the briars *"maybe yis are satisfied now that you have the cap off me."* On another occasion he noticed a letter addressed to my

aunt in her own handwriting (she had been asked, I presume, to send a stamped addressed envelope), and aware of the lane he had to travel to get to the house remarked “*It’s not bad is it – they are writing to themselves now to give me more work!*” As well as delivering letters, postmen were occasionally asked to take letters for posting. I remember seeing a piece of cloth tied to a gate at the road end of a long lane and when I asked was told “*that’s for the postman to call down, it means ‘I have a letter to post’*”. Mind you this was a postman on his bike with a run of 30 miles a day. I can imagine some of Tommy Forsythe type comments when he would see the rag on the gate!

I have already mentioned the welcome source of income eggs brought to the country and which were collected by Griffith’s grocery van. Another caller associated with this activity was the fowl or hen-man. In our case a regular caller to our house was Dominic Toman from Bleary, Lurgan. As far as I can remember he called every Tuesday morning, for if anyone in the area wanted him, they would have left word with my mother. John Trainor worked closely with Dominic and they were good friends. John, according to his sister Annie, bought hens mostly in the south Armagh area. The hens were then taken to McConvilles, fowl dealers in Banbridge. Charlie Davis also bought hens in the area and travelled around on a bicycle. He has been described as having the gift of the gab, always singing and knew a trick or two about securing a good deal. One was that he had the habit of chewing a bit of parsley or grass, he would lift a hen spit on its rear end and advise the woman of the house “*Mem that hen has the green scour, and if you don’t get rid of it will have the entire brood infected.*” One unfortunate fowl dealer met with a tragic death as he walked along the railway track near Jerrettspass in 1956. Joseph McCullagh had just bought some hens from Mrs McCreech at Knockanarney level-crossing when he was struck by an express train.

BANBRIDGE POULTRY DEALER WAS MAIN LINE VICTIM

KILLED BY BELFAST-DUBLIN EXPRESS

“**A**S the train was about a yard from the man I saw him step into the middle between the two lines but the engine lifted him and carried him a distance and all I then saw was something like a coat hanging from it,” was how Mrs. Mae O’Rourke of Knockanarney, Jerrettspass, described the death of Joseph McCullough, 48-year-old poultry dealer of Pound Street, Banbridge, at Saturday’s inquest.

The fatality occurred on the main Belfast-Dublin line on Friday afternoon and was witnessed by Mrs. O’Rourke.

Newspaper report of death of Joseph McCullagh

A number of drapers and ‘*pavee men*’ travelled around selling their wares. They included Paddy McAleavey who lived at Cloughrea near Bessbrook and was a regular sight in the area on his bike with a suitcase. When he arrived at Lily O’Brien’s he had two suitcases. He made her home his base and the larger case was left there while he went off on his rounds with a smaller one. The large case would remain there for perhaps two months and he would return from time to time to stock up.

Paddy sold, among other things, threads, elastic, shoelaces, shoe polish and brushes, elastic, buttons, combs, clips and pot menders. A man called Leo Boyle from Killean also came round on a bicycle with a suitcase and he carried samples of suit cloth from which you could choose – he would then take your measurements and have a suit made up for you, or he would supply the material and you could go off to your own tailor. He also carried threads, needles, thimbles etc.

There were a number of mobile drapery shops, which brought their wares to your door including Lennox’s who sold menswear including shirts, overalls, and boots and in the Lissummon area Tommy Leitch from Fountain Street in Bessbrook sold ladieswear and bed linen.



Pat Campbell and Paddy Savage

In the days before abattoirs or pig factories the pig butcher carried out his functions on each farm and on larger farms pigs were salted and retained for home use. At our house Paddy McCourt killed pigs, which were then taken to Newry by Peter Gribben in his pony and trap. It was a brutal business and on the last occasion I got the impression that it was no longer strictly legal. When killed, the pigs were scraped, all bristles removed with boiling water, hauled up onto a beam in a shed and their innards removed. As children we were dispatched around the neighbours with little parcels of pig’s liver. Owen Connon was the pig butcher around Poyntzpass – he killed pigs for Canavans; John Burns and John Craig were also pig butchers in the area. A man from Omeath came round occasionally selling herrings from a flat cart and Paddy Dobbin from Banbridge sold herrings around Poyntzpass.

Among the coal men operating in the area were Billy Dempsey, Billy Watt, Tommy Henry, Mickey McAteer and in more recent times Dessie Dempsey.

The insurance man was at one time a regular caller to our homes before the advent of direct debit and among those in the district were Bill Moody, Brendan Loughran from Whitecross, Nicholas Doran, who travelled from Warrenpoint, and Harry O'Hare. For many years our 'man from the Pru,' was Walter McClean from the Fourmile. In some cases they collected as little as a shilling (five pence) a week for small endowment policies – a form of savings for families with not much to spare.

Joe Monaghan from the Canal Bank had the ability to divine for water and he once came to do so at our house. Hugh and James Kennedy from Glen came sink a well at the back door on Joe's instructions and they found a good supply of water at 18 feet.

When we had a field in oats, that meant that one day in autumn Joe Daly's thresher would arrive with all the bustle that involved. Another annual visitor was a constable from the local barracks and like the poet, Seamus Heaney, my earliest memories of meeting a

policeman was on coming home from school and seeing a large bicycle leaning against the railings at the front of the house and inside was this huge uniformed man sitting in a chair at the end of the table filling in the tillage return.

So in those days there was a regular parade of visitors to our homes. The front door was open and there was usually someone at home during the day. The various callers provided much more than the goods they were selling, or the services they provided. They brought the newspapers and in the days when the majority of woman worked at home they brought women's magazines such as *Woman's Own* and *People's Friend* but most important of all they brought news of the local community.

This list is not complete, for there were other callers who cropped up once in a while. Indeed not all the services have gone, but those which have managed to survive, usually come in a much-changed form. For now-a-days the front door is kept closed, the delivery-man or post man changes regularly and as for a mobile grocery or bread van they are just a fond memory, for as they say, 'it simply wouldn't make economic sense'.

THE WORDS WE USE

BY SEAMUS MURPHY

Some years ago, following a conversation with an old neighbour, during which he had used a number of odd words, I remarked to a friend that, "Somebody should write those old words down before they're lost." He replied, "Why don't you do it yourself?"

Well, I couldn't think of a reason why not, so following that conversation I did write down the words the old neighbour had used and a few others that came to mind. From that beginning has developed an interest which has grown over the years. Many of the words I have added to my list, since then, may sound like standard English, but I have included them because they are used locally with very different meanings. I have only included words I have heard used locally. Some of the words seem to be only used by particular individuals. The spellings are as close to the way they are pronounced locally, as I can manage.

VIOLENCE:

bone: to catch quickly, to snatch: "The dog **boned** the rabbit"

coolin': a chastising: "That boy needs a good **coolin**."

creel: to strike heavily usually with something: "She **creeled** him with her umbrella!"

junder: to deliberately bump into someone with the shoulder: "Would you for God's sake stop your **junderin**."

luderin': a thorough hiding; a severe beating: "Oh! He got an awful **luderin**."

shellackin': a beating.

smollocker : a punch. "He hit him such a **smollocker**!"

riser: a kick in the behind. "That boy's lost for a quare **riser**!"

sother: to strike with the open hand: "A **sother** up the jaw!"

trawin': arguing and disagreeing: "They were never done **twistin** and **trawin**."

MONEY MATTERS

bab: bob, the old shilling. "There's not a **bab** in your country". (Johnny Carson's way of describing the depressed state of the economy, particularly the sheep trade.)

badger: pay or wages. "Did you draw the **badger**?" i.e. "Did you get paid?"

buckshee: free. "Joe knew the doorman, so we got in **buckshee**."

cough up: Pay what's due. "Well, did your man **cough up**?"

houl: a large amount of money, usually profit. "He got a **houl** for the field!"

make: a penny or small amount: "I haven't a **make**." I have no money at all.

pony-up: Pay what's owing or due.

roughness: not short of cash, having a bit of extra money: "They had always a bit of a **roughness**."

sponjulicks: money

tight: not generous, mean, tight-fisted.

touch: to borrow money. "Your man's always on the **touch**."

wee: used to denote a person who is mean and ungenerous. "He's very **wee**!"